Notes on using the *Discovering Potential* model

The *Discovering Potential* model (Nightingale and James, 2004) is an action planning approach to working with individuals to support them to achieve their potential in employment, learning and skills. Working through the stages of the model is of itself a learning journey, which helps to build the person’s confidence and self-esteem as it supports them to learn how to exercise choice and control and develop resilience skills (DWP, 2009b).

By recognising and using their own resources to set goals, plan how to achieve them and find solutions to any problems along the way the person makes decisions as they make changes in their life. The support provided is time-unlimited and the person may need to move back and forth between stages. They are able to change their mind as they learn about what it is they want to do, what is available, and how they can to achieve and maintain their goal.

We have produced these notes to support you in using the *Discovering Potential* side of the *Take Ten People Skills Wheel* with your clients. They offer a summary of the process, describing what you are trying to achieve at each stage, and some additional prompts for things to think about and perhaps explore with the person at each stage. Please do not be tempted to use them as a checklist of questions to be worked through. The ‘How can you help?’ questions on the *Take Ten People Stories* provide you with some examples of how the approach might be used when working with someone as their personal story of their aspirations, achievements and circumstances unfolds. We have also included signposting to other *Take Ten People* resources that might be particularly helpful at each stage.
In your conversations with each individual, it is important to bear in mind and explore with them the following three personal dimensions and how they impact on each other for that person.

1. Their personal social and economic circumstances, which may be complex and/or present emotional and practical barriers or supports to employment, learning and skills that you may not readily think of or be used to supporting individuals with but which can have a profound bearing on the person’s aspirations, motivation and progression.

2. Where they are at now in terms of their mental health recovery and wellness and how this changes over time and in response to different experiences and situations.

3. Where they are at in terms of their personal journey to learning, skills and employment.

**Thinking**

The ‘thinking’ stage is about giving the person time and space to think about themselves and the changes they are considering. It is a conversation – not another ‘assessment’ with a checklist of set questions – that usually develops over more than one meeting. The process helps them to acknowledge the achievements they have made so far; to challenge negative thinking and any self-imposed restrictions or
limitations on what they can or cannot do and to build their self-esteem by recognising and using their own resources to think about what they want and how to get it.

**Things to explore in the ‘thinking’ stage**

**Who am I?**

- What am I doing with my life now?
- What do I want my life to be like?
- Do I want to work/get into learning?
- What would it be like to work/learn?
- What have I tried before?
- What can I see myself doing/enjoying?

**What**

- Opportunities are there for me to do it?
- Skills do I have and what other skills do I need?
- Is it that worries me about work/learning?
- Effect would it have on my money?¹
- Practical barriers will I face and what can I do to overcome them?

**Where can I get help and support?**

**How can I get from where I am now to where I want to be?**

**Getting**

This stage is about what the person needs to do to achieve their goal. It involves providing emotional support (to help

¹NB. Explicitly offer a ‘Better off in-work calculation’, benefits counselling and repeatedly make an offer of help with debt (DWP, 2007; DWP, 2009a; Money Advice Liaison Group, 2009; Fitch, C. et al., 2009)
them stay motivated and able to handle any knock-backs) and practical support (as they go through the maze of things to do and arrangements to make: phone calls, applications; interviews; travel; childcare and money). In the Individual Placement and Support approach, this is the stage where rapid job search takes place and any pre-employment training (DWP, 2009b).

It is a time to help the person look at things they want to bring together, for example telling family carers their plans or other workers who support them. The support the person needs from other workers may need to change and it may be helpful to share, combine or amend any written plans the person has developed with different agencies for managing their mental health.

This stage includes support to plan ahead and anticipate the next stage. It should include helping the individual to begin planning for how they will maintain their wellness and recovery in work or learning. This includes deciding whether they will declare their mental health difficulties to their employer/learning provider and how they will continue to develop their resilience and other skills.

The process involves working alongside and in negotiation with the person – without taking over – so that they can learn about what to expect, what is available, how to overcome barriers and what they need to do. Providing support to overcome barriers has a positive impact on self-esteem as possibilities become more apparent, the person finds solutions to problems and sees themselves moving closer to their goal.

**Things to explore in the ‘getting’ stage**

**Being clear about what to expect and planning ahead:**

- What is work/learning like these days?
- What would an employer/course expect from me?
- What can I expect from an employer/course?
- What situations would I struggle to cope with?
• Do I need help to be able to manage my own condition better?

• What about social situations – can I handle mealtimes/breaks/talking to people/conflict?

• Would I (or my employer) be able to cope with fluctuations in my mental health?

• Where am I going to get a reference from if I need one?

• Can I afford to do this?

• How is it going to affect me financially?²

**Bringing things together**

• Am I going to tell people about my mental health difficulties?

• Do I need support? (type and level – from none to intensive)

• What sort of support am I already getting? Is it helping? Would a similar approach work here?

• Do I want support in work/learning or support outside of work/learning?

• What sorts of things definitely wouldn’t help me?

• Are there things in my care/recovery/action plan I need to include in this plan or are there things I now need to change in those plans?

• Who else needs to be involved?

• Would Access to Work help (for people who are eligible)?

• Would direct payments/a personal budget help (for people who are eligible)?

² NB. Explicitly offer a ‘Better off in-work calculation’, benefits counselling and repeatedly make an offer of help with debt (DWP, 2007; DWP, 2009a; Money Advice Liaison Group, 2009; Fitch, C. et al., 2009).
• Should I get the different people supporting me together in some way?

• Will they think this is a good idea and support me?

• Are there other people who have been through this already who could tell me what it is like?

**Keeping**

Getting on a learning programme or into a job is only the beginning. The next challenge is retaining, and succeeding in, learning or employment. The model for discovering potential provides continuity of time-unlimited emotional and practical support beyond the ‘getting’ stage in order to enable the person to ‘keep’ what they have achieved. This supports the person to deal with new feelings and any unanticipated concerns or challenges that they did not anticipate before they were actually in the situation.

The aim is to enable the individual to maintain their motivation and continue to plan ahead to maintain their wellness and recovery. They may need support to put well-being and self-management strategies into practice, develop their resilience skills and plan how they will prevent, solve or minimise any uncertainties for both themselves and/or their employer/teachers.

**Things to explore in the ‘keeping’ stage**

It is useful at this stage to support the person to review how things are going and begin to look forward to their next goal. This might include:

• What is their sense of well-being and confidence like?

• How are relationships developing (in work and with family or other workers who support them)?

• Are things working out financially and with accommodation?

• Is their support for learning/work effective and flexible enough to accommodate any fluctuations in their mental health?

• How are they managing their learning in this new situation?

• Have they identified any new skills needs?
• Is there anything they are avoiding dealing with or think may make them become unwell?

Part of this review of how things are going might also include whether the person’s teachers/employer needs any support and how best to offer this.

• How are my well-being and confidence levels doing?
• How are my self-management strategies holding up?
• Do I need help to learn more or different strategies to deal with a particular situation I am worried about?
• How are my energy levels? Am I doing too much or too little? Should I do more hours or less hours?
• How are my relationships going (in work and with family or other workers who support me)
• Are things working out financially and with accommodation as well as I expected?3
• Is my support working out?
• Is it flexible enough (in case my health fluctuates)?
• Do I need any more/different adjustments?
• Am I confident about negotiating these or do I need help?
• If I decide I don’t need support any more, how can I restart it if I need it suddenly?
• What other skills do I need to help me ‘keep’ what I am doing?

3 NB. Explicitly offer a ‘Better off in-work calculation’, benefits counselling and repeatedly make an offer of help with debt (DWP, 2007; DWP, 2009a; Money Advice Liaison Group, 2009; Fitch, C. et al., 2009).
• What am I learning in this situation?
• Am I avoiding dealing with anything?
• What (if anything) is there in this situation that might make me unwell?
• How do I get more support to start quickly if I need it?
• Who will help me to be able to come back if I have a crisis?
• What could I be planning ahead for?
• What support does my teacher/employer need to be able to stick with me?

Remember that the *Discovering Potential* model is not a linear process and the support provided is time unlimited. People may need to move back and forth between the different stages and/or start the process all over again in order to realise the changes in their lives that they are trying to make.
Concluding notes

On the CD-ROM you will find a blank version of the Discovering Potential wheel that you can print out and use, so that if, as you work through the process with a client, they can use it if they wish to capture things they discuss or decide on, or their thoughts and progress in-between meetings with you.

You might want to consider capturing your own clients’ stories of their aspirations and achievements as they discover their potential through employment, learning and skills. You can then use them as additional resources for future reference and/or in training activities. The stories that we have included in the resource provide some examples, but we would encourage you to add to them. Co-training with people who were ‘Experts by Experience’ drawing on their personal experiences of mental health difficulties, in some of our Take Ten People pilot projects we found that many were keen to contribute their own stories and see them ‘published’ as similar resources that could help people to improve service delivery. You will find a stories template on the CD-ROM, so that you can produce stories in the same format as those in the pack.
Bibliography


Money Advice Liaison Group (2009) *Good Practice Awareness Guidelines for Consumers with Mental Health Problems and Debt*. MALG.