

PIE on a Page

Creating a Psychologically Informed Environment

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A Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) “... is one that takes into account the psychological makeup – the thinking, emotions, personalities and past experience - of its participants in the way that it operates.”¹ It’s an approach to supporting people out of homelessness; in particular, those who have experienced complex trauma² or are diagnosed with a personality disorder. It also considers the psychological needs of staff: developing skills and knowledge, increasing motivation, job satisfaction and resilience.

The Key Elements

A PIE has 5 key elements:

1. Relationships
2. Staff support and training
3. The physical environment and social spaces
4. A psychological framework
5. Evidence generating practice

Each element has a number of objectives and these objectives can be achieved in a number of ways. They empower staff to work more effectively with people who have complex and multiple needs, changing the way we understand and tackle the behaviour that leads to homelessness, in a measurable way. The approach focuses strongly on relationship building to promote recovery and can be used by outreach and day centre staff as well as hostel and shelter workers.

Creating a PIE

Some individuals experiencing homelessness seem to have difficulty managing their emotions, appear impulsive and to not consider the consequences of their actions. Others may be withdrawn, isolated and reluctant to engage or exhibit anti-social behaviour. **The purpose of a PIE is to help staff understand where these behaviours are coming from and therefore work more creatively and constructively with behaviours we often find challenging.**

The PIE approach is not about a whole new way of working but provides a framework, language and approaches to communicate, implement, and enhance the good practice that already exists in homeless services. Creating a PIE takes time; it’s not an approach that can be introduced overnight. Reflection and relationships are its cornerstones and these are both organic and on-going processes.

¹ Robin Johnson, co-author of “Psychologically Informed Services for Homeless People – Good practice guide” 2012 Dept of Communities and Local Gov and developer of <http://pielink.net/>

² Complex trauma refers to the psychological problems and linked patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours which tend to result from prolonged exposure to traumatic experience. (Good practice guide 2012)