



Conlig: Service User and Staff Opinions

The results of one to one interviews with service users and staff to discover if the activities at Conlig Work Skills are to their satisfaction.

Jo Wilson

Acting Senior Research Officer

Praxis Care

25-31 Lisburn Road

Belfast

BT9 7AA

Email: joannewilson@praxiscare.org.uk

Ph: 028 90 234 555

Background to Conlig Work Skills

The Conlig work skills project was set up in response to an identified need for service users in Kimberley House to be afforded an opportunity to take part in work skills.

At first Conlig consisted of the Cookie Company that was sited in the Church Hall, Conlig. The Cookie Company makes, packages and sells cookies and other baked goods to local businesses in the community.

Today, Conlig work skills is based over three sites: the Church Hall along with portacabins; a garden project in a site across the road from the Church Hall; and most recently a site at Green Road, Bangor.

Conlig provides work skills for up to 27 service users with learning disabilities and acquired brain injury.

The Way Forward:

Conlig and the Moving Up Project

Service users at Conlig are currently offered the opportunity to take part in the Moving Up Project. This project commenced in April 2012 and involves five Praxis Care work skills schemes for adults with a learning disability.

The aim of the Moving Up Project is to enhance training and employment opportunities for service users through person centred training and to further develop social enterprise schemes within Praxis Care.

Therefore, the Moving Up Project adopts the overall strategic aim of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NI ESF) to 'reduce economic activity and increase workforce skills'¹.

¹ Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2007-2013. Accessed 12/11/2012 from:

The Moving Up Project aims to do this by fulfilling targets set by the Northern Ireland Executive to: 'improve productivity by increasing the skill level of the workforce'; 'tackle barriers to employment and employability'; and improve 'employability and skills'².

Moving Up Project: objectives

The Moving Up Project aims to help services users into sustainable employment by offering up to 94 service users the opportunity to avail of³:

- 💡 Participation at five separate training and assessment centres throughout Northern Ireland;
- 💡 Four separate basic skills programmes four times per year in all sites;
- 💡 Residential – one per annum per five locations to develop social capacity skills and self confidence;
- 💡 Dedicated one to one counselling;
- 💡 Dedicated one to one training and career guidance;
- 💡 Individualised training needs analysis;
- 💡 Personalised training programme;
- 💡 Involvement in four 20 week dedicated training programmes per annum;
- 💡 58 people achieving a recognised NVQ qualification in a range of areas including catering, hospitality, horticulture, food preparation and ICT.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/niesfprog0713.htm>

² Northern Ireland Economic Strategy: Comprehensive Action Plan. Northern Ireland Executive. Accessed on 12/11/2012 from

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/economic-strategy>

³ Economic Appraisal of NI ESF Grant Funding Application: Moving Up! 16 March 2011: Tribal.

Activities of the Moving Up Project

The Moving Up Project uses the Work Star Outcomes Star⁴ to provide baseline and progress assessments of service users' readiness to work. Through discussion during the completion of the Work Star service users and staff complete an action plan that is person centred.

The Work Star action plans are reviewed on a three monthly basis and the Work Star itself is reviewed on a six monthly basis for each service user.

The Moving Up Project gained National Open College Network (NOCN) training centre status in order to provide in-house training to service users. This training is provided in the key areas of: ICT; Catering; Hospitality; Horticulture; Social Skills; and Employment Skills. In addition to 92 units available to service users on attaining training centre status, new courses can be designed to meet service users' needs and goals.

Table One is a timetable that shows the activities offered to service users at Conlig Work Skills via both the scheme itself (garden only activities in red; Cookie Company only activities in blue; and both groups in black) and the Moving Up Project (in green).

The evaluation:

In response to concerns raised by a service user at the main Conlig work skills site (i.e. the Cookie Company and Gardens) the Praxis Care Research Department were asked to carry out an evaluation of the service.

In February 2013 a research officer visited the Cookie Company and Garden sites and interviewed a total of 17 service users on a one to one basis.

A short survey was completed at the start of the interview followed by questions to ascertain what changes service users hoped for and have experienced with regard to the Moving Up Project.

Additionally, 11 staff members took part in a focus group. Whilst the main focus of the group was to discover any changes experienced due to the Moving Up Project staff also had the opportunity to provide comment on the issues raised by service users during their interview. For this purpose a draft report of service users' views was provided prior to the focus group taking place.

Staff's response to the comments made by service users at the Cookie Company and Garden sites can be seen throughout the service user section of this report

The rationale for affording staff the opportunity to respond to the draft report was due to a concern expressed by staff that service users at the Cookie Company and Gardens were told what to say by a disgruntled service user who held influence over them. The researcher was aware of this at the time of service user interviews and tried to ensure that real opinions were gained and examples given to support views.

Service users at the Green Road site completed the same survey and were asked the same questions as those in the Cookie Company and Gardens. A total of 6 service users took part in small focus groups rather than one to one interviews as none of these service users reported being influenced by others. A further two service users asked to be interviewed on a one to one basis. The results of these focus groups can be viewed in a separate report.

⁴ Work Star: The Outcomes Star for work and learning. Triangle Consulting Ltd. Accessed on: 12/11/2012 from: <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/work/>

CONLIG: SERVICE USER AND STAFF OPINIONS

Table 1. Winter Timetable of Activities for Conlig Work Skills (Cookie Company and Garden sites).

Day \ Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
am	Horticulture Cookery Skills – Lunch Preparation Baking	Community Access / Research Next Outing Community Access Healthy Living Group	Catering Horticultural Tutoring	IT Social Arts and Crafts Recognising Own Skills for Personal Development Community Access	Week’s Current Affairs Drama Group
pm	Horticulture Baking	Social Community Access Social Skills	Recreation Session Weekly Deliveries	IT Social Arts and Crafts	Personal Care/Grooming Session/Relaxation

In addition to the above a monthly service user meeting is held on the first Friday of each month (afternoon).

SERVICE USER OPINIONS

OF THE COOKIE COMPANY AND GARDENS



The Survey Said...



Most service users were happy with the way that staff helped them and were treated the way they liked to be treated. Comments ranged from: *'I'm really happy 'cause... staffs nice kind to me'* to simply *'fandabidosey'*.

A theme that emerged during interview was that some service users felt that *'staff looks after other people... sick people... [and that the more able] are really just pushed aside cause really [they]... can look after'* themselves.

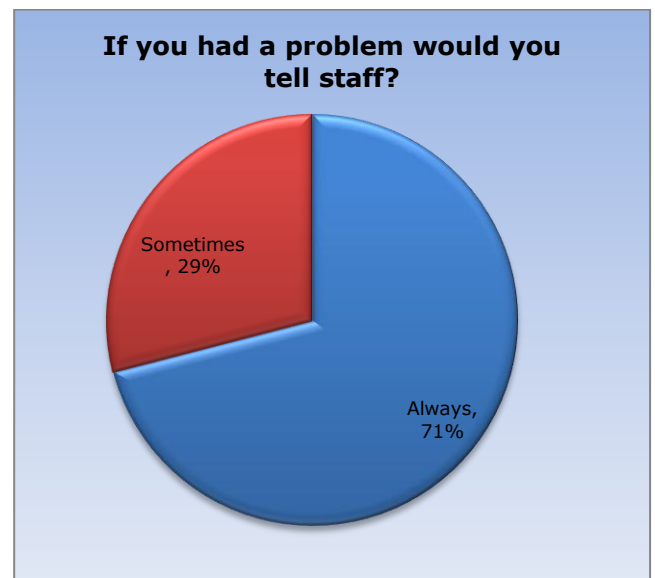
Staff response:

'I can see two sides to that. I can see some service users that I know well who would be very intolerant or people who are mentally ill or they are presenting with challenging behaviours or on the other side there are service users who because of their challenging behaviour get that extra staffing'

'I value what the service users are saying, for a period of ... months we had a period of about four or five hours of challenging behaviour ... the focus was not on the groups but certainly one individual managing [their] behaviour and, getting [them] through [their] day'



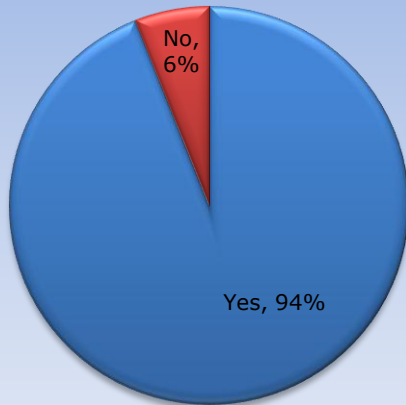
All 17 service users indicated that they would tell staff if they had a problem either sometimes or always.



Service users *'talk to staff when [they] have problems'* and pointed out that sometimes they would *'go to [their] key worker first and if she needs a manager she can' go to them*. Others *'go straight to the person in charge'*.

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Have you any goals?



One service user did not believe they had any goals. Others talked about their goal to find work placements or jobs: *'I'm working... going out to get a part time job'; 'maybe get somewhere em working in the shop or something'; 'I'd like to work in the charity shop in Newtownards'.*

Others described how they worked toward their goals each day: *'I typed in my own... typed in my own story'.*

Some service users in the garden expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme and reported that *'I'm just really saying I'm hoping to get out of here and really it's that for me'.*

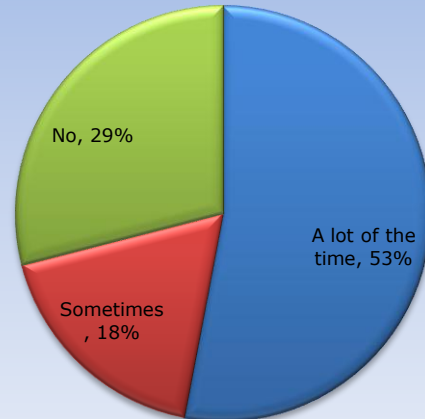
In the main staff were reported to help service users work toward their goals.

Do staff help you to make your goals happen?



Opinion was somewhat divided when asked to think about whether Conlig work skills had enough of the things that service users liked to do.

Does Conlig work skills have enough of the things you want to do?



Whilst some service users were *'just happy with what [they are]... doing at the minute'.* Others expressed concerns with Conlig work skills during the interview.

Some service users in the gardens felt that *'we're really just sitting here looking at each other and really doing nothing' but 'sitting over there drinking tea waiting for like half three'.* Recognition was paid to the fact that *'winter time [is a] difficult time of year' whereas 'at least you got something to do' in the summer.*

Staff response:

'You also have service users who refuse to do anything'

'The gardens this time of year is difficult 'cause the weather's not great so they can't be out...'

Also, some would *'like to try and do more catering jobs' and 'baking a bit more'.*

Most service users indicated that there were other activities or things that they would like to do at Conlig work skills. As summed up by one service user: *'We do*

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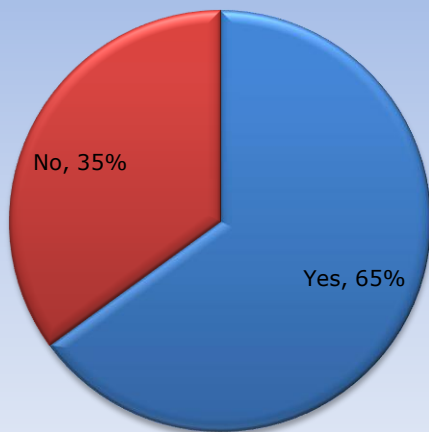
some activities but not really enough, I don't think there's an awful lot going on here at the minute'.

Staff response:

'their timetable... is constantly reviewed in their... monthly meetings'

'they do get involved in the baking, yeah sometimes where there's big orders on like there was this time last year it's not possible for every single one of them to be in the kitchen at one time... it's too small'.

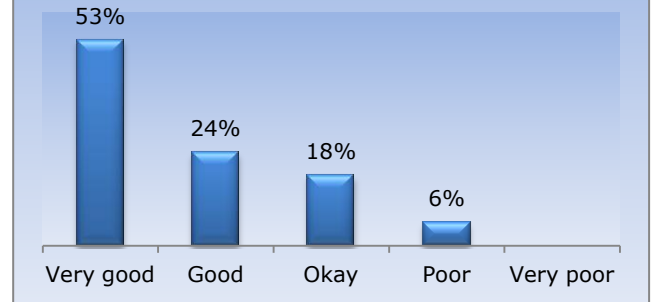
Are there any other things that you would like to do at...?



When asked what other activities they would like to do at Conlig work skills service users responded that they would have liked: *'more days there'; 'to go horse riding'; 'do bowling sometimes'; and 'go out for walks.... day trips... sports'.*

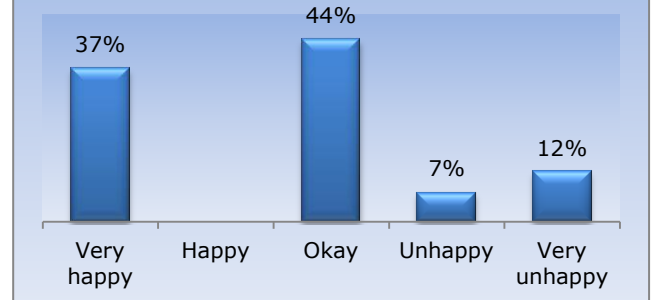
Others felt that there were enough activities and they were also supported to do enjoyable leisure activities: *'I'm the pool king me'.*

What do you think about the help you get?



When asked about the help they received it was commented upon that the help was *'very appreciated'.*

How happy are you at Conlig work skills?



Most service users reported being *'okay'* or *'very happy'* when asked about how happy they were at Conlig work skills. However, nearly a fifth was not happy.

Friendships developed at Conlig work skills were valued and added to happiness there: *'Love it love the ones I work with.... They're all good friends'.*

Moving Forward? – The Moving Up Project and Conlig Work Skills:

Prior to the Moving Up Project:

During interview service users were asked to describe what a normal day was like at Conlig work skills before the commencement of the Moving Up Project.

CONLIG: SERVICE USER AND STAFF OPINIONS

Service users indicated that they were all *'in a crowd... together... in that big main hall'* and took part in activities to learn about *'gardening... cookery and stuff like that'*.

Service users also reported that *'before Moving Up we used to go to the college'* where they undertook various courses: *'computers'; 'web design'; 'a bit of writing'; 'English and maths'* for which they received certificates/qualifications.

Staff response:

'Tech would have happened before the Moving Up Project'

'I think tech was a bit repetitive'

'They did like media skills and photography, web design, that sort of thing'

Furthermore service users reported going on frequent *'outings'* such as to do *'horse riding and swimming'* and other activities within the Conlig site such as: *'arts and crafts'; 'relaxation and all that'; 'healthy eating'; and 'woodwork'*.

However, not all the service users liked all of the day activities provided before the Moving Up Project: *'they'd have you doing papier-mâché and that's childish I don't want to do that'*; the same service user stated that papier-mâché is no longer an activity at Conlig work skills. Another corroborated this viewpoint and stated that before the Moving Up Project Conlig work skills was *'easy... no challenge'* and that it was *'sometimes boring'*.

Hoped for Changes:

When asked what they hoped would change for them due to taking part in the Moving Up Project many service users felt *'ready to move on'* toward a work placement, work experience or job: *'hoping to get a job outside. If I get paid I get paid, if I don't I'll do it voluntarily'*. Through this they believed their *'way of life'* will change and they will gain more independence.

Others indicated that they would like to change their *'attitude'* through taking part in the Moving Up Project to gain more confidence and also would like to become better at *'budgeting'* and other life skills.

Perceived Changes:

Whilst some service users reported no change since the Moving Up Project commenced, or that they were *'repeating the stuff'* they had previously completed, others reported an increase in independence: *'I feel that sort of we have more independence'* and skills: *'I'm learning more skills now'* and *'doing different things, work and stuff'*.

Staff response:

'I would say it has developed their IT and catering skills... yes, definitely'

'...and building their confidence as well'

'I think it's carried on to their home life they become more independent then'

The main change for service users was that they no longer attended college: *'there was tech we used to go to but that was all stopped'* but now *'people are coming in and they're showing us how to do things'*. Many *'enjoy doing'* their courses on site at Conlig work skills and *'like the way it is now'* *'instead of travelling down to the Tech all the time'*. Class sizes at Conlig work skills were also valued: *'I enjoy this wee group I don't like being in with a big crowd'*.

However, a minority of service users would *'rather be at tech... instead of work skills'*.

Changes to the benefits system were also touched upon during the interviews: *'I'm worried about benefits at the moment'*, when questioned about this further it was reported that staff from the Moving Up Project explained the benefits system to service users.

One service user felt that they were not able to take part in the Moving Up Project because they only attended Conlig work skills two half days per week. Therefore, they reported that they *'don't see anything happening'* and being a part of the project *'doesn't make any sense'* to them.

Lastly, it was pointed out that service users thought the Cookie Company had become busier since the Moving Up Project commenced as more orders had been received: *'the staff are getting more people wanting more baking'*.

Other Comments about Conlig Work Skills:

Making the Cookies

A recurrent theme found during interview with service users who worked in the Cookie Company was that service users did not believe that they took part in the baking of the cookies. For example, it was reported by a service user that *'the ones that cooks... does the baking... they work really really hard'*. What is of interest is that although this service user worked in the Cookie Company they did not include themselves as one of the bakers. Rather they went on to state that there was *'good teamwork and we do different days some do the walls and keep it all clean'*.

The idea that service users in the Cookie Company's main activity was cleaning permeated many of the interviews. Some service users viewed this as a positive thing and took pride in telling the interviewer that they *'do the tables and mop the floor and keep the sinks nice and tidy em make sure your hands is always clean'*.

Others reported *'I hate cleaning'* and *'I was taken off the buns, it was only the cleaning jobs.... Cleaning the fridges, cleaning the windows em making tea and coffee... that really bored me everyday'*.

Staff response:

'They do have cleaning duties, it's part and parcel of cleaning and hygiene too'

Choice:

Most service users reported that they did have a choice at Conlig work skills with regard to what activities they wanted to do: *'If you don't feel... you want to do it then they won't make you, you just do what you can do'*.

Inadequate Facilities:

Most service users who used the gardens at Conlig work skills reported that *'there's two polytunnels down in the gardens and they're ripped and they haven't been replaced'* which led to *'cats getting in'* and toileting in the plant beds.

Staff response:

'The reason the polytunnels weren't recovered last year is because we were supposed to move... it was too expensive and we weren't going to keep the gardens on, now the gardens is being kept on ... so it will be recovered'

Additionally, the presence of rats and mice was reported. For example, *'we were all in the cabin one day and a mouse ran out from the hole in the wall', 'people are just saying there is mice running around'* and *'down the back [on portacabin or shed walls] there was like claw marks'*.

These reports were not limited to the gardens but included the kitchen portacabin as well: *'em we found a rat in the cupboard in the pots cupboard'*.

Staff response:

'... one mouse found One mouse in the whole time I've been here'

'There is pest control in straight away [if droppings are found] and it's deep cleaned'

'At the end of the day there is a reservoir behind us'

Additionally, those service users who ate lunch in the main hall reported it to be 'freezing' and that they were made to 'sit up [t]here in the cold'.

New Building:

Nearly all of the service users interviewed mentioned the new premises that Conlig work skills intended to move to.

Whilst service users were happy to be moving to new premises they reported 'we're getting told different stories and everybody is getting fed up with it'. Also with regard to the time frame for the move: 'they keep telling us we're getting the building in March and its changed again another 10 months'.

The interviewer asked service users if they would rather not be informed about the new building until a definitive date had been set for moving. They affirmed that a definitive date would be much better since they were 'getting very unsettled cause we don't know where we are at'.

Staff response:

'I want to keep the service users informed about what is happening. I'm not going to be behind closed doors as we would say, "Oh I haven't heard anything"... because I want to be open and honest with them'

'Well let's be honest, this was temporary accommodation for 17 years or so'

'We have been moving from time immemorial'

'It is frustrating that the goal posts are being moved every time... there's nothing we can do'

Staff:

Service users reported that Conlig work skills was 'short of staff all the time' 'so they [(staff)] can't do all the things they wanna do'. Also, 'there's not enough staff to get round everybody and everybody needs the staff there'.

Furthermore, service users reported that staff asked other service users to help their peers across the main road between the two sites: 'a staff member from the gardens asked another service user to take another service user across the street, you just don't do that'.

Staff response:

'[The service user] has mobility issues' 'there is always a staff member beside [them]'

STAFF OPINIONS



Perceived Changes:

Staff reported that 'not much has changed for us' apart from 'helping with work books'. The fact that the Moving Up Project took place on site was welcomed as 'it is easier... that the Moving Up facilitators come here'.

However, concern about the Moving Up Project's plan to move classes to a central base were expressed: 'I am not happy about that'... 'we can't transport service users'... 'we'd never get them there'... 'logistically it just couldn't happen'.... 'Six people in the bus. How many runs would you be doing to get them there?' 'Transport would be a massive thing' that would affect staffs ability to facilitate the Moving Up Project.

The Moving Up Project was reported to have been adopted into the scheme without issue 'there's been no scheduling conflicts or anything like that'... 'we worked round it, we changed out timetable through discussion with the service users'.

'The only benefit is when some of them are in the group then you have more time to spend with the service users because it is a smaller group that's left who don't take part in the Moving Up [Project] and you spend more time with them'... 'they get a bit more attention really'.

With regard to the Cookie Company initial 'teething problems' were reported where 'initially there was a lot of orders, but they were bitsy and messy'... 'it wasn't very economical... orders were small'... 'one pack this and one pack of something else'. Problems with the costing of cookies was also mentioned as a concern 'it was the Moving Up Project that done the costing but they need to be reviewed because they are not making anything'. This is something that is currently being re-evaluated by the Moving Up Project.

Hoped for Changes:

'There would be a couple of service users up here would be quite able to work and you know are really willing to work and

really want placements and I think they felt that when the project started that would help them overnight for them and it hasn't and there are some who are really disappointed in that but there's nothing... it's no fault of the Moving Up Project... it's just the way things are at the minute'.

Staff would 'like the focus to be on employment especially for the service users... that can do it but you just have to... I suppose everything just takes time'.

Overall Impressions of Moving Up Project:

Staff reported that service users 'enjoy that they are achieving something'. The Moving Up Project staff were also praised: 'the Moving Up facilitators are brilliant and you know they are very approachable and they work well with the service users... they are very flexible, very accommodating'.

Concerns at Scheme Level:

During the course of the focus group staff expressed concern over the staffing levels at Conlig and stated that it is often 'full of agency workers [who] are not covered correctly... not covered by the Managing Violence and Aggression so that's when issues do happen... they are preventing you doing what you're supposed to do'.

Worryingly staff reported being 'constantly in a heightened state of anxiety' and worried about their 'own safety'.

A Day in the Life of a Service User

A PHOTO DIARY OF THE COOKIE COMPANY AND GARDENS

