A study of the training and development needs of Support Time Recovery & Health Care Support Workers

BACKGROUND
The study is funded by HEECE through the Hampshire / Isle of Wight Health and Social Care Curriculum Group of the Lifelong Learning Network (Hi-LLN). A partnership group of local universities, colleges and employers work together to create flexible, work-related educational opportunities that will benefit learners and facilitate progression. This project is jointly managed by the University of Southampton with Project Leads based in two local mental health NHS Trusts.

CONTEXT
The Mental Health Workforce Action Team identified the goal of recruiting ‘people into the workforce to provide imaginative support to service users in partnership with health and social care staff’ (MH WAT, 2000). The subsequent introduction of STR workers (DH, 2004) and the general increase in numbers of Support Workers employed by the NHS and Social Care suggest education, training and career progression continue to be pivotal in delivering a quality service. National frameworks such as The Ten Essential Shared Capabilities are aimed ‘primarily at influencing education and training provision within the mental health community’ (DH, 2004) and more recent government backed initiatives such as New Ways of Working acknowledge the fact that ‘more must be done to develop staff and ensure that teams have the right mix of skills to meet the needs of patients’ (CSIP/NIMHE, 2007).

PROJECT DESIGN
The project is in two parts. Following a literature study, a scoping exercise of all available learning opportunities (and constraints) was carried out and is now in its final stage. The growing database will be available to all staff through both Trust’s websites. The second part is an interview-based inquiry into the experiences and self-assessed needs of current STR and SW staff who volunteer to share their experiences. Its goal is to learn more about both the context of learning and personal experiences, in order for the Trust education teams to access more effectively existing provision, and to develop innovative and valued methods of learning. This may be in partnership with external providers but may be in-house, utilising existing expertise and work-based learning approaches.

METHODS
A qualitative method was used to collect primary data by means of face to face interviews, each with a structured and discursive component, with two, self-selecting cohorts of STR/HCSWs, one from each NHS Trust. Findings will be triangulated at a later stage in the research by means of interviews with key stakeholders. Ethical review and approval was through the School of Health Professions and Rehabilitation Sciences Ethical Approval Committee, UoS, October 2008. All aspects of confidentiality and anonymity are respected in line with Data Protection Act (1998). Interviews are being recorded for transcription purposes prior to data being coded by means of the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Thematic analysis is now in its initial phase, as emerging themes are identified and explored.

WEB-BASED DIRECTORY

EMERGING THEMES

- Support workers represent a rich source of experience, skills and knowledge in mental health care
- Training opportunities vary between and within Trusts
- Support workers rely on self-access to further internal training opportunities following mandatory/statutory induction
- Factors affecting self-access to training include, confidence, motivation and relationship with supervisor / line manager
- Support workers are keen to access Band 4 opportunities
- Appraisals with line managers offer a useful forum to discuss individual training needs and opportunities

FUTURE
What we hope to achieve:

- Comprehensive, costed, web-based directory of learning opportunities available for SW/STR workers in Hampshire & the Isle of Wight
- A clear and well informed range of training opportunities within/out with each Trust linked to support workers’ career pathways & personal appraisals
- Information with which Education Leads can plan / commission / develop future provision, new courses & innovative education developments

REFERENCES
Mental Health Workforce Action Team Newsletter, Vol 1, Issue 1, Dec 2000