

## **Modifying a Group Work Program for People with Cognitive Impairment within a Correctional Setting**

Corrective Services NSW delivered a group program addressing drug and alcohol use and offending behaviour for participants with cognitive impairment. The program was adapted from the standard drug and alcohol and offending behaviour program offered to inmates. The adaptation included content repetition and using a range of visual resources and physical activities to reinforce its messages.

The main adaptation was to simplify the language used. The facilitators spent time exploring with the participants the words they found most helpful to express the key concepts of the program and substituted these words in place of more technical language. The facilitators also made extensive use of pictures to stimulate discussion and communicate key concepts.

Using physical activities, such as having the participants show where they were in the 'Stages of Change' by standing on a large diagram of the model, and explaining why they were standing at 'this particular stage' worked well. Delivery of the program was slowed down, extra sessions focusing on literacy issues included, and the revision of previous sessions happened at the beginning of each subsequent session.

It was vital to have highly skilled facilitators who got to know the participants well before they commenced the formal program. This ensured the facilitators could understand and accept the participants' individual needs (e.g. to move about during session or colour in or draw pictures while listening) and could tailor the program to each individual's needs and learning styles.

### **Case Study: Jimmy**

Jimmy has an intellectual disability and participated in a group program to address his alcohol use and offending behaviour while in prison. Jimmy rapidly became an enthusiastic participant in the group and was very excited to learn about how he could change the way he thinks about his drinking and offending and that this could help him change his behaviour. He was keen to develop a range of strategies to help him resist the urges to drink and offend, and worked with the facilitators to write these strategies in a book, on posters and on a card that he could carry in his pocket.

In the group he practised his strategies with the assistance of other group members. The facilitators and other staff noted that he became less anxious and that his overall behaviour improved. He even volunteered to lead the self-help group that followed the formal program. Jimmy still struggles with his alcohol use and offending but staff report that he is more confident, more able to articulate his thoughts and feelings, more resilient, and more aware of why he does what he does.

### ***Take-away tips from Corrective Services Program adaptation***

- Simplify the language.
- Explore with people the words they find most helpful to express the key concepts of the program, and substitute these for more technical language.
- Use pictures to stimulate discussion and communicate key concepts.
- Include physical activities.
- Slow down program delivery, adding extra time for revising sessions and to focus on literacy.