



brap

getting off
the merry-
go-round:
customer care

brap is an equality and human rights charity, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and third sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. We offer tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality training, consultancy and community engagement issues.

'Getting off the Merry-Go-Round' is part of a series of papers outlining our thinking on key areas of policy and practice.

The story so far...

- we were talking about human rights in health before it was cool. In the late 2000s, we devised human rights schemes and policies for a number of Birmingham primary care trusts. Our work for one of these, Heart of Birmingham PCT, was showcased by the Department of Health in its publication *Human Rights in Healthcare: a framework for local action*.
- before that we were all over the place – up in Sheffield helping the local health and social care trust develop metrics in relation to BME service delivery, down in London helping to evaluate the Department of Health's approaches to engagement, and then back up to Yorkshire to evaluate the effectiveness of the community development worker role in mental health provision

- not interested in health? Well, we've worked with scores of housing organisations, from homeless charities, to housing associations, to local authority housing departments (in fact, we've trained over 700 social housing staff). We've created human rights schemes and policies for a number of housing associations, and a few years ago developed a pioneering human rights toolkit, allowing associations

to mainstream equality into their day-to-day work

- education more your thing? In the last few years, we've provided training to over 50 early years directors, strategic leaders, and children's centre managers; over 3,000 children's centre staff, community nursery,

and private nursery staff; over 3,500 staff working in FE colleges; and 150+ staff working in adult education provision. We've also advised predecessors to the Department of Education on exclusion rates and behaviour management and supported three universities on their equalities schemes and improving the working environment for Black and minority ethnic (BME) staff

- in 2011, on behalf of Macmillan Cancer Support, we developed a human rights standard to improve people's experience of cancer care. The standard was warmly received by the Department of Health, who highlighted it in their *National Cancer Reform Strategy*.

who
are
brap?

- service 'entitlement' – including quality of outcome and experience – has become part of public discourse
- demographic changes in the UK mean that we live in a society which is increasingly diverse and difficult to typecast. Not only is this the result of superdiversity – according to the 2011 Census there are over 100 languages spoken throughout London – but the increasing recognition that identities within ethnic categories are fluid (the fastest growing ethnic group, for example, is 'Mixed/multiple heritage')
- approaches to service delivery which ask service deliverers to take account of religious or cultural needs are not sufficient. In some cases these approaches reinforce social boundaries by putting people into boxes they don't fit and as a result they don't get the service they really need
- recently many of the centralised targets and regulations for public services have been dismantled. Take housing, for example. Once housing associations were required to meet an exacting set of standards set out by the Audit Commission. However, as a result of government desires to reduce bureaucracy and to 'localise', these standards have been replaced with requirements to expand the involvement of customers

(tenants and residents) in the formulation and scrutiny of services

- the same process can be seen in relation to equality. Schools, for example, no longer have a statutory duty to promote community cohesion. Similarly, the Equality Act, brought into force in 2011, removed the need for public organisations to conduct equality training, compile an equalities policy, and develop an action plan
- as a result of these changes – and the autonomy that comes with it – many

organisations are feeling a bit lost at sea. What should they do? What should they measure?

- there are voluntary standards and frameworks organisations can sign

up to if they want help answering these questions. In our experience, though, many of these frameworks are limited in two crucial respects:

- many of these frameworks still take a paper-based approach to equality (create a scheme! capture monitoring data! conduct an impact assessment!). This approach may have some benefit at a higher, strategic level: it rarely, however, changes the interactions between service deliverer and user. This is the holy grail of equalities work

Key points

- frameworks and standards tend to focus on telling people what they *shouldn't* do. They rarely tell people what they should do. This creates a stifling, punitive environment in which staff, scared of doing the wrong thing, often end up doing nothing at all. A lose-lose situation for everyone. We have noticed that when staff understand what types of behaviours and attitudes are expected of them in their roles this energises them, helps them to be assured they are doing the right thing in terms of equality and human rights. It's particularly powerful when they (and service users) have a meaningful say in what those behaviours/ standards should look like.
- more and more organisations are focusing on ensuring their scrutiny forums – healthwatches, resident associations,

tenant forums – have at least some degree of representation from disadvantaged groups. Yet models of representation are often seen as a magic bullet when it comes to improving outcomes. The danger is that these people are viewed as experts on equality when, in fact, a true understanding of equality is a skill that needs to be developed over time

- being fair doesn't always mean treating everyone in the same way: different needs require different responses. Changes in equality legislation have encouraged organisations to think about the needs of a wider range of protected groups. Yet, currently, many organisations lack the ability to make reasoned and transparent decisions about how to prioritise support for different groups

The findings in the preceding pages have a number of implications for the way organisations should promote equality for customers.

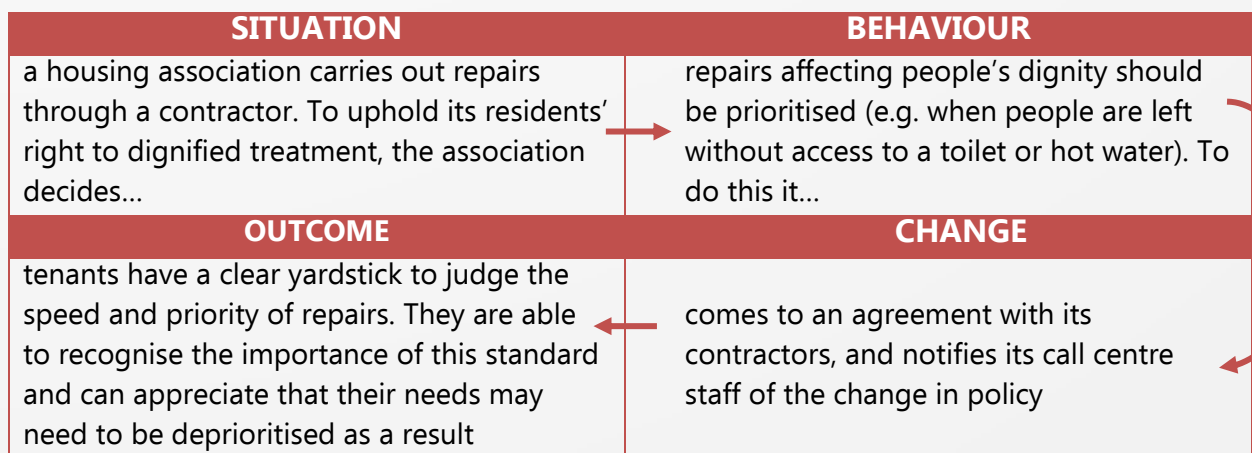
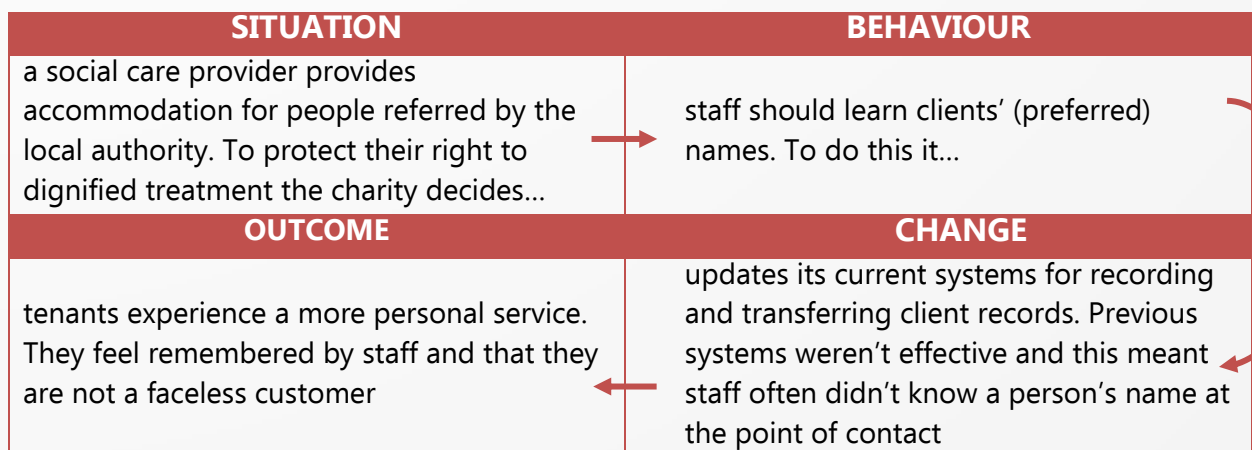
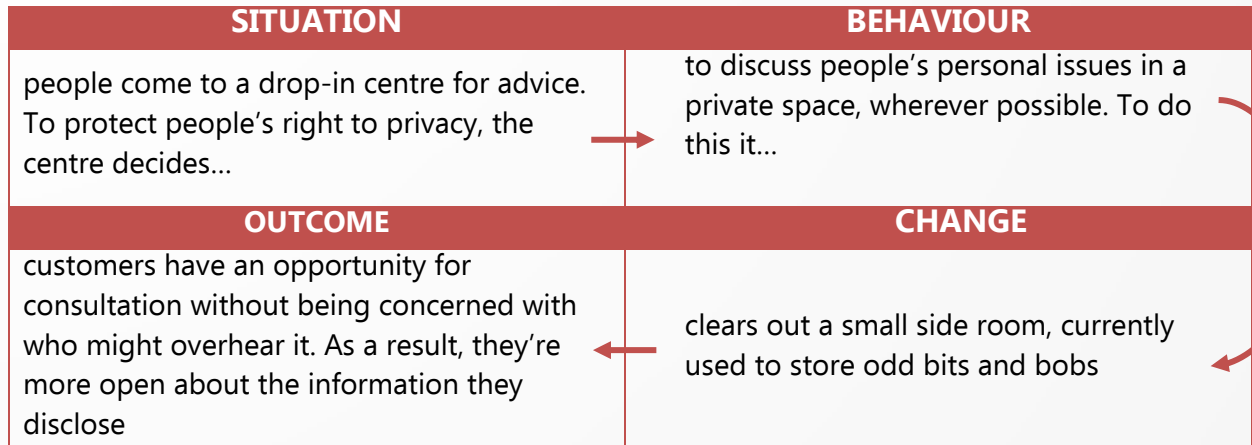
- previous monitoring and accountability mechanisms have been overly bureaucratic. This has stifled staff motivation to act positively: faced with the possibility of doing the wrong thing, staff often opt to do nothing at all – a kind of professional paralysis. Internal accountability mechanisms around equality and human rights should help create a permissive, ‘can-do’ culture where people feel they have the permission to take calculated risks and innovate to improve equality at work (without feeling they will be blamed or punished for ‘getting things wrong’).
- as an alternative, organisations could explore human rights models of customer care and delivery. These are standards of service developed in conjunction with customers. As such, they are more related to the impact of services – not about ‘what is nice to do’ – and more in line with what needs to be delivered to create good services. They also have the potential to respond to issues of discrimination and exclusion that affect a wide range of vulnerable groups (rather than developing numerous strategies for different groups)

ways forward

- these service standards – examples of which brap has developed in housing and health care – make it crystal clear to staff what behaviour they need to enact to promote equality. We’ve highlighted some examples over the page.
- because these standards outline behaviour which can be observed and measured, they can be created in ways that screen out discriminatory behaviour
- clearly this type of engagement and service development process requires support for those involved. Tenants and local community organisations may require support to understand how this process can be used to address previous approaches to equality and to meet regulatory requirements. They will require facilitation to engage in discussions about equality and human rights issues that affect them and they will require support to engage in negotiation about which of these issues should be prioritised in new ‘service standards’. Similarly frontline staff and managers will require support to engage in a similar process and to understand the ongoing application of human rights principles to issues of equality and service design in housing.

human rights in practice

Ultimately, we're all concerned with ensuring that services are of high quality and produce good outcomes for tenants. In the examples below, tenants have clear guarantees about standards of service and their experiences will improve as a result.



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making equality work for **everyone**

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