

# The Likewise Model

Likewise provides support and care to those living with mental ill health, social isolation, homelessness and drug abuse. Our approach is based on the principles of acceptance and belonging, continual and active learning, genuine human relationships, and practical support. We have a unique workplace culture that allows these principles to flourish at the frontline, and as a result are able to support our clients make the changes in their lives that matter to them. Below, we outline the model of this approach, highlighting the features we think are key to our success: our fundamental aims, the tools we use to achieve these, and the structures necessary for those tools to flourish.

## OUTCOMES AND AIMS

At the heart of our model is acceptance. When we struggle to accept ourselves and the realities of our situation, we struggle against the inevitable – a struggle we are bound to lose. As such, acceptance is a vital first point for change. It is a fluid process rather than something to be achieved: we change alongside our ever-shifting circumstances, unravelling new layers of ourselves that can either be fought against or worked with. As such, acceptance is a continual journey and a vital one – without dealing with the realities of ourselves and the world, we are stuck in a painful stasis.

The most important facet of supporting this that we provide is an accepting, human-to-human relationship. When we engage in such a relationship, value is seen in who we are regardless of our past or the labels given to us. Such relationships see our challenges or struggles honestly, but do not see them as problems with us – instead, they become things to be worked around, worked with, or managed, and we remain of value regardless.

This is a space of belonging in which we are not paralysed by a sense of being broken, by self-doubt, or by fear of losing value: an accepting relationship provides a basis from which change and opportunity becomes safer. The mutuality of these relationships

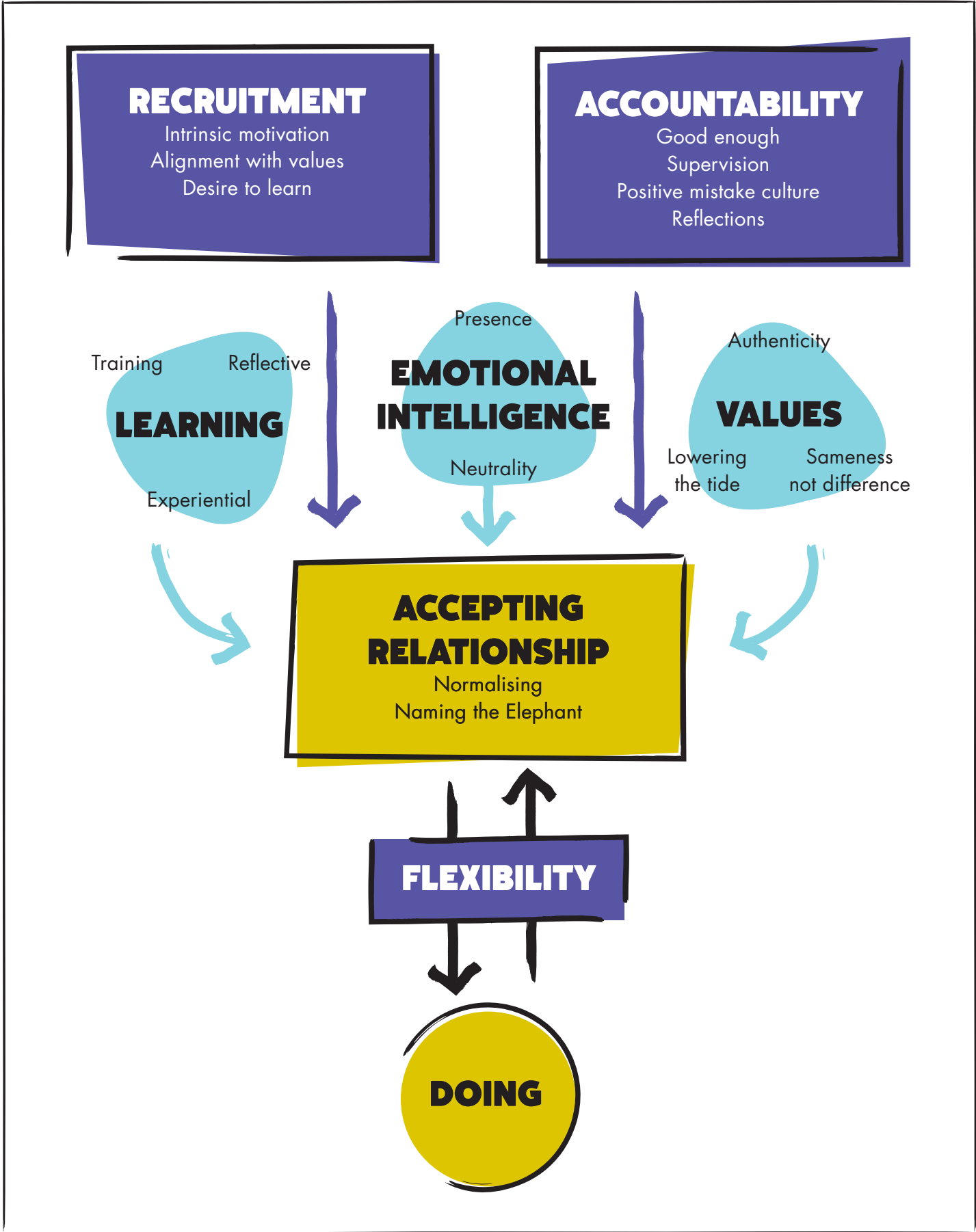
is vital – for people to be able to see themselves of value, they need to be active rather than passive in the relationship. Accepting relationships view people as their own instigators of change.

To enhance the acceptance and mutuality within these relationships there are specific processes staff learn to use. In particular, 'naming the elephant' is a process that ensures honesty about concerns or challenges in an optimistic, supportive way – it stops staff hiding behind a professional veneer and encourages them to open up their thinking and decision making to their client. This provides transparency to the power dynamics of a relationship and gives clients the opportunity to influence or take control of that decision making. Staff also use normalising to re-assure people that whatever they are feeling, it is okay. Given the stigma and anxiety around the issues we work with, this reassurance is powerful for many of our clients. Further processes such as 6-monthly reviews – in which staff and clients reflect together on how the relationship is going and decide where they want it to go in the future – further embed the genuine mutuality of those relationships.

Once acceptance is in place, people are able to take advantage of opportunity – that is, they are able to start doing. The relationships provide the foundation for the kind of action that brings purpose, meaning, and a sense of growth and achievement. These cannot be specified in advance – whatever is done is a direct result of who that person is, and staff work hard to make sure they take the fullness of a person into account and respond to the diversity of the people they work with.

Rather than specify the kind of work we do in advance – as is typical of many services – we instead do whatever it is that can be done. This relationship between accepting relationships and doing is not one-way – sometimes it is in the act of doing things together that relationships have the chance to build organically and naturally, which reinforces the opportunity for more 'doing' in the future.

Figure 1: The Likewise Model



## FUNDAMENTAL TOOLS

The above, however, can only take place with particular supporting mechanisms already in place. The next layers of the work are the primary tools for enabling staff to develop and act on acceptance and develop the qualities and ways of thinking about the work that create the conditions for accepting relationships.

One of the most fundamental of these is emotional intelligence. Feelings drive much of our lives, often without our awareness. For staff, developing this awareness is central. Rather than seeing what happens as 'good' or 'bad' and responding with avoidance or attraction, checking on feelings allows for a more neutral presence – one which allows clients to be themselves without judgement, and for staff to respond to often difficult circumstances with a calmness that allows for reasoned decision making. This is not about avoiding feelings, but being aware and open about the role they play and how that influences us. It catalyses honest conversations, allowing for difficulties to be opened up sensitively and tackled not from a position of authority but supportively and mutually. We have found this approach is contagious – many clients respond to staff emotional intelligence with more acknowledgement and awareness of their own feelings.

Emotional intelligence is supported by key words such as 'neutrality' and 'presence' – words that remind staff about how easy it is to get pulled into the emotional mire, and of the importance of sitting outside such a state in order to be the best worker possible.

The other vital tool for those relationships is the concept of learning. Unlike experts, learners are constantly aware of their own fallibility and of the ever changing landscape. As such, they actively seek out the contexts of each situation. Given the complexity of human lives, this is a vital skill to adapt to the realities of a person's situation: to stop learning and to start 'knowing' is to switch off to the unique complexities of each person. Being a learner also shifts power dynamics in support relationships to being far more mutual – people we support become sources of knowledge and value who teach us about the world. Learning this world is fundamental to accepting the wholeness of a person.

This perspective also applies to the development of staff – such development must be attuned to what they bring to the work environment, and so each learning journey is based around the strengths, interests, and idiosyncrasies of that staff member.

A third fundamental driving much of what we do are the values and concepts that directly support acceptance. These act as tethers, keeping us grounded in the principles and processes of good support work whilst being flexible to the contexts in which they operate. We have already explored the core values – learning, doing, and acceptance and belonging – but these are supported by a range of concepts to help us do the work. One such concept is 'lowering the tide' – the awareness that what a person presents is not the whole of that person, and that there are always commonalities and things to value beneath the surface. This helps staff look beyond immediate appearances, diagnoses, or dramas into the wider picture, finding that common humanity and value in a person. Similarly, the concept of 'sameness not difference' helps staff focus on commonalities and checks against the inclination to categorise as 'other' – the cultural weight and stigma of terms like mental illness, addiction, and homelessness make it easy to fall into such a trap. Another is 'authenticity.' Whilst the notion of a singular authentic self is impossible, the concept acts as a check on those impulses and desires we have to avoid our feelings and present a facade based on a sense of what we 'should' be doing. Human-to-human relationships require honesty and transparency – authenticity acts as an aspiration towards such goals. There a host of such concepts that we are currently compiling in our Values Curriculum.

## FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURES

The next layers of our model are the structural features of the work that limit the risk and maximise the potential for such tools to flourish – they are thus the foundations necessary to build towards those accepting relationships.

The first structural step to support these relationships is recruitment. Quite simply, if people do not support these fundamental values and do not have some interest and capacity to engage people as equals, they will struggle

with the nature of this work. We have deliberately recruited outside of sector to avoid the biases that such work can bring (that of 'expert' and 'patient,' that of illness or problem over potential), and our process is rigorous – we are not afraid to repeat recruitment drives if we feel the candidates don't fit the organisation. Whilst costly, many people we work with have already been badly effected or frustrated by services that do not treat them humanely, and our staff do a great deal of independent working – the risks of getting this wrong are high. Furthermore, with the right people the fundamentals of the approach are already in place. What we do is not rocket science – if people are nice to be around and have an intrinsic motivation to learn, to provide excellent human-to-human relationships, and to develop emotional intelligence, then we can trust that the support given will be a high standard.

The second pivotal structures are the accountability mechanisms we have for ensuring work is continually being checked against values. These include:

- Consistent supervisions: These are an opportunity for staff to step back from their work and have a values-laden mirror held up to it. Supervision agendas are lead by staff themselves to ensure they are adaptable to their own personalities and learning styles, with the supervisors role to be questioning, reassuring, and challenging staff on their framing and decision-making. It is an opportunity for staff to step back from their work and look at it from different perspectives, reducing the emotional weight and enable bigger-picture thinking.
- Reflections focus predominantly on checking in on one's own feelings and their impact on the work and their actions. The distance this allows from such feelings allows staff to think differently, be calmer in their decision-making – it is a core facet of developing emotional intelligence. As group activity, reflections also contribute to a culture of emotional awareness and encourage an honesty and openness about feelings that allows for people to continually explore and question their working.
- A positive mistake culture encourages the sharing and analysis of perceived failures to provide a safe space for people to be honest about and learn from their mistakes rather than hide them away. This allows for more positive risk-taking and creativity and a fuller, truer understanding of the reality of the frontline for line managers. It also mirrors the approach to clients – mistakes and failures are a positive part of learning rather than defining character or value.
- The last tool for accountability is the concept of 'good enough.' This recognises the imperfections and challenges of working with humans in systems where we have little control of the variables, evaluating staff performance not based on ways of working rather than outcomes. It releases the stressors of issues outside of our control whilst ensuring we are doing everything we can to provide quality care and support according to our values.

Thirdly, staff require significant structural flexibility. Responding to people humanely and in their wholeness requires diversity and adaptation – acceptance and doing look continually different as people themselves change and diversify. Staff are given the autonomy, freedom, and responsibility to act based on who their clients are at any particular time and in ever-changing contexts. A supporting concept is 'change the lightbulb' – a phrase used to encourage the common sense approach to getting things done that need doing, something that stands in contrast to traditional service approaches of having particular remits or areas to focus on.

Together, these aims, tools, and structures form the basis of our work. This model is itself a floating one – we will adapt and amend it as is needed for continuing and developing our frontline work. For now though, the above is our blueprint for doing what we do – providing high quality, genuinely person-centred care that supports people to make changes meaningful to them.