



Good and bad help

How purpose and confidence transform lives

February 2018

Key messages

What is good and bad help?

How we help each other matters. Some help - what we call 'good help' - supports people to feel hopeful, identify their own purpose and confidently take action. Other help - which we call 'bad help' - does the opposite, undermining people's confidence, sense of purpose and independence.

Ryan's story demonstrates the difference that 'good help' can make. He was on and off the streets for 12 years and felt misunderstood by the people trying to help him. He explains how people *"Always tried to rush me. Telling me what I've got to do."* Ryan experienced 'bad help'. He was given advice and solutions that felt impersonal and irrelevant. He wasn't asked about his own motivations or what else was going on in his life. It wasn't until Ryan met Aisha from Mayday Trust that he started to understand what 'good help' was. Aisha found out what motivated Ryan, what he cared about and what he felt confident doing.

Whether people want to find work, improve their health or get the most out of education, 'good help' involves understanding what matters to each person. It is about supporting people to build the confidence they need to take action. This kind of work is core to many community and voluntary organisations, yet despite decades of research and good practice, remains absent from many mainstream services.

Why does it matter?

The simple truth is that we cannot afford to keep providing 'bad help'. Too much is at stake. Too many people are unnecessarily trapped in negative cycles and lost opportunities perpetuated by 'bad help'. These negative cycles have acute and obvious consequences, such as homelessness or addiction, but also chronic and subtle effects which erode confidence and mental health, making activities such as parenting and healthy eating much harder, and sometimes impossible.

In addition to the tremendous personal and social costs involved, there are the significant financial costs of 'bad help'. For every person trapped by 'bad help', who believes that they cannot find work or maintain a healthier lifestyle, there are also avoidable ongoing costs. When 'bad help' affects millions of people, as we believe it does, the financial costs are huge.

'Good help' provides a practical contribution to breaking out of these cycles. It is not the only solution, but we cannot ignore it any longer. We urgently need to make 'good help' a priority in how we design and deliver mainstream services and social programmes.

What helps people to take action?

We focus on three critical factors that enable people to take action:

- **Sense of purpose.** We are more likely to take action and sustain change if we have a clear sense of what we want to achieve and why it is important to us.

'Good help' is all about helping people to identify and achieve their own sense of purpose. It recognises that when a programme's purpose is aligned with a person's purpose, both parties are more engaged and motivated to work together to take action.

- **Confidence to act.** In order to take action, we must believe we can achieve our goals. The psychologist Albert Bandura identified four sources of confidence:

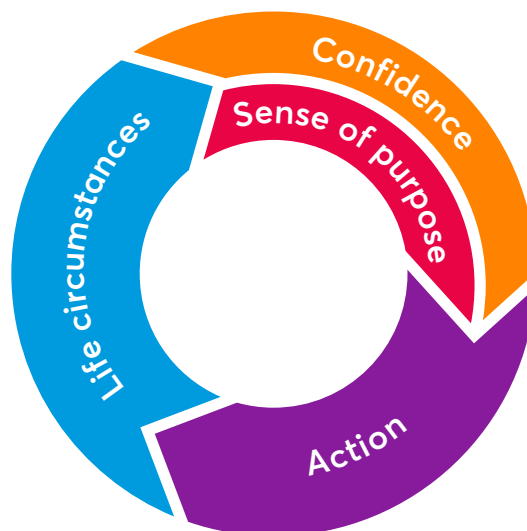
1. **Achieving:** personally experiencing some success related to the goal in question.
2. **Witnessing:** seeing or hearing about others, especially 'people like you', achieving a similar goal.
3. **Encouragement:** being supported by people to believe you can achieve your goal.
4. **Positive association:** experiencing a positive emotional or physiological state when seeking to achieve your goal.

'Good help' is focused on helping people develop their confidence. It recognises that individuals will find these different sources more or less helpful at different times and in different contexts.

- **Life circumstances:** Our ability to act is powerfully shaped by the opportunities and barriers that arise in our lives. This includes the environment in which we work and live, how much money we have, the people around us, societal laws and the wider economy.

'Good help' can support people to create a positive cycle of action that helps them move towards their goals. In time, this can lead to transformational changes in their life circumstances.

These three factors combine to form a cycle of action:



How do you provide 'good help'?

We highlight seven characteristics of 'good help' that can be built into public services and social programmes:

1. Power sharing

The relationships between professionals and people should allow power to be shared rather than 'directing' people to do things. An adult-to-adult relationship needs to be established, in which each person's knowledge and ideas are considered equally.

2. Enabling conversations

The way that conversations are structured and that questions are asked can help people to think through what's important to them and to come up with their own solutions. These conversations build a sense of safety, trust, ownership and motivation for action.

3. Tailoring

For help to be transformational, it needs to be personalised. This can be achieved by helping people to define their own purpose and goals. This might sound obvious, but many programmes offer a standardised approach that can feel impersonal and mechanistic.

4. Scaffolding

Practitioners can start to step back as the people they help build enough confidence to take action alone. This ensures that

change is sustained. Help may need to be ongoing for some people, but should create opportunities for people to take action themselves where possible.

5. Role modelling and peer support

Positive relationships expand our sense of what is possible and help us do things we wouldn't attempt alone. Often the most powerful relationships are with people we consider similar to ourselves.

6. Opportunity making

Sometimes opportunities need to be created or barriers need to be removed to help people take action. This may require help from an external source. Examples include brokering relationships which lead to new voluntary or paid work, or other health creating or educational activities.

7. Transparency

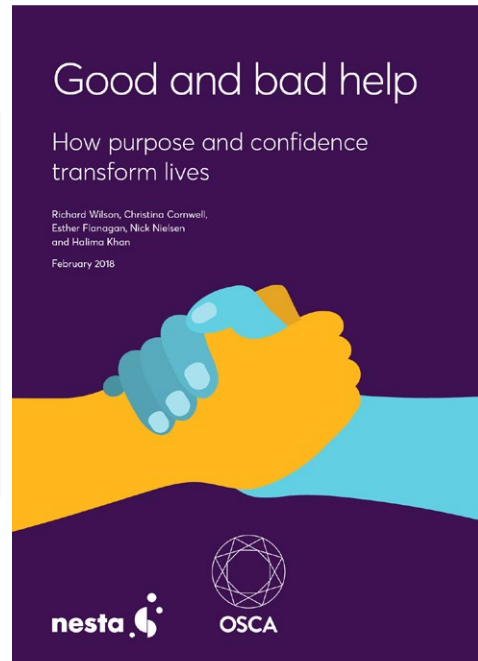
Professionals (and their organisations) often have access to information about people that is not routinely shared with people themselves. Having open and shared data is an important part of building an adult-adult relationship and supporting people to make informed decisions.

If you are involved in the design or delivery of services, you might want to consider these characteristics to get a sense of whether you are offering 'good help'.

Building a 'good help' community

We hope that we can help bring together a community of people who are committed to the 'good help' agenda – people with first-hand experience, as well as practitioners, researchers, policymakers and service providers. Together, we can develop a collective understanding of 'good help' and how to spread it across our mainstream public services and social programmes.

To read the full publication and get involved, please go to:
www.nesta.org.uk/project/good-help



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