1. Background

Some people with learning disabilities (LD) have difficulty regulating their emotions and are thought to be susceptible to emotional and behavioural problems to a greater extent than the general population. The ‘Coping with Feelings’ skills group programme was developed and delivered to help reduce psychological distress and teach emotion regulation skills.

2. Aim

To evaluate the effectiveness of an adapted Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) informed six-week ‘Coping with Feelings’ group for people with LD in reducing psychological distress and improving ability to manage their emotions.

3. Project Design

The programme was adapted from the ‘I Can Feel Good’ Training Manual (Ingamells and Morrissey, 2014) based on Marsha Linehan’s DBT Skills Training Manual (Linehan, 2015). Based on the needs of the clients in the LD team and to increase feasibility, we created a shorter programme, focusing on Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation.

The group consisted of six two hour sessions which were delivered weekly by the Psychology team.

The group was attended by 8 clients (age range = 20 to 62). All clients had an LD and 4 clients also had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

4. Outcome

We measured psychological distress using a 10-item self-report questionnaire (CORE-LD).

Psychological distress was significantly lower after completing the adapted DBT-informed group intervention, $t(5) = 2.83, p=.03$ (see figure 1).

Figure 1. (below) shows the scores of psychological distress pre-(week 1) and post-(week 6) group intervention as measured by the CORE-LD.

We measured goal attainment using a 5-point scale (GBO) measuring progress towards personalised goals of managing emotions (1 = ‘I can’t do it”, 5 = “I can do it”).

Six out of seven clients reported moving closer towards their goal relating to managing their difficult feelings better (see figure 2).

Figure 2. (below) shows the scores of progress towards goal attainment pre-(week 1) and post-(week 6) group intervention.

5. Lessons Learnt

Results are promising with regard to providing efficacious, short-term psychological interventions to adults with LD who are struggling to regulate their emotions. However a lack of support from the clients wider network impacts on re-referral rates. Future groups will look to increase carer and family engagement. The group will continue to run depending on demand; it is currently running twice yearly.

Having run the programme three times to date, we have improved accessibility of information each time following reflective practice discussions.

Qualitative Feedback from clients and carers:

- The group has really helped with coping with anger, and being happy and not angry. Client
- It helped calm down my thoughts and made it a lot better. I feel a lot better and confident. Client
- I enjoyed meeting people and making friends. It helped calm down my anxieties and made it a lot better. I feel a lot better and confident. Client
- [client] has learnt new insight and understanding to their feelings and emotions and is able to employ the coping mechanisms that best suits them to help maintain a level mood. Carer