

***“It’s a matter of your personality more than anything else”*: The experiences of seasonal workers regarding challenging behaviour in children**

Abstract

The impact on full-time carers of children with intellectual disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviour has been well researched (e.g. Lach *et al.*, 2009; Shah *et al.*, 2010; Wodehouse and McGill, 2009), however there is to date no published research into the impact of behaviour that challenges on seasonal carers . Five participants who had been employed in summer playschemes for children and young people (up to the age of 18) were interviewed about their experiences of behaviour that challenges. The transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which revealed six superordinate themes; the belief in and sanctuary of temporary work, emotional impact, personality and gender, strength through knowledge, communication difficulties and the belief in integration. Seasonal workers discussed suppressing their emotions in order to stay in control of a challenging situation, using coping styles developed through experience or based on personal skills; it is suggested that formalised training, particularly regarding non-verbal communication, would support playscheme workers in the management of and adaption to challenging behaviour.

Key words: Challenging behaviour, intellectual disabilities, playschemes, seasonal workers.

Introduction

It has been estimated that over one million people are currently diagnosed with severe intellectual disabilities in the United Kingdom (Emerson *et al.*, 2001; Giraud-Saunders, 2011). Intellectual disability is defined as:

‘**Significant limitations** both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18.’ (Luckasson *et al.*, 2002: 1) .

Many of the disorders associated with intellectual disability are biological in nature, for example the chromosomal disorders Down Syndrome, the genetic disorder Fragile X Syndrome, and metabolic causes such as PKU (phenylketonuria) (Comer, 2011; Emerson and Einfeld, 2011). Physiological and intellectual disabilities are often compounded by additional challenging or problematic behaviour (Emerson *et al.*, 2001). Pervasive developmental disorders such as Autistic-Spectrum Disorders have also been associated with behaviour that challenges, largely due to the individual’s inability to express themselves verbally, causing them to ‘lash out’ (Murphy *et al.*, 2005; McClintock *et al.*, 2003). Challenging behaviour has been defined by Emerson (1995, cited in Emerson, 2001: 3) **as;**

‘Culturally abnormal behaviour of such intensity, frequency of duration, that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in jeopardy, or behaviour that is likely to seriously limit or delay access to and use of ordinary community facilities’

The definition of challenging behaviour by Emerson (1995, cited in Emerson, 2001) will be adopted for this study due to its wide usage but also as it includes the consequences of the behaviour that challenges in public environments. Challenging behaviours may include extreme and violent behaviour such as physical aggression, destructiveness and hurting themselves or hurting others (Emerson and Einfeld, 2011).

The prevalence of challenging behaviour in the United Kingdom is approximately 10% (5.5-16.8%) within a population diagnosed with learning difficulties (Emerson *et al.*, 2001; Lowe *et al.*, 2007). The prevalence of challenging behaviour increases in the 15-24 year age range (Emerson, 2001) and with disruptive and non-compliant behaviour commonly cited as leading to social impairment (Lowe *et al.*, 2007). The aggressiveness of an individual with challenging behaviour can cause issues with integration into the community and management by the caregiver (Crocker *et al.*, 2006; McClintock *et al.*, 2003). The prevalence of aggressive behaviour over a twelve month period, as assessed

by carers of one institution, was 51.8% (Crocker *et al.*, 2006). Within that prevalence of aggressive behaviour, five sub-types of aggression were found; 24% property damage, 37.6% verbal aggression, 24.4% physical aggression, 24.4% self-orientated aggression and 9.8% sexually aggressive behaviour with most being mild in severity; positively only 4.9% showed aggressive behaviour which actually injured the victim possibly demonstrating the use of effective de-escalation and management techniques (Crocker *et al.*, 2006). Thus the display of challenging behaviour occurs often enough to warrant academic and practitioner attention.

Challenging behaviour is an area of interest to professionals within psychology due to the desire to design effective intervention methods to improve the management of behaviours that challenge; effective for the individual, their carer and others who may be involved (such as family members or peers). This is especially important for children and young people who may be predisposed to behavioural issues and would benefit from early intervention strategies to contain the severity and frequency of their displays of challenging behaviour and to avoid future placement in a residential setting (McGill *et al.*, 2006). Residential settings have been scrutinised due to reports of bad practice and abuse (Ball, Bush and Emerson, 2004), for example Winterbourne View (Department of Health, 2012). People placed in residential care settings are likely to be given excessive anti-psychotic drugs as a management strategy of behaviour that challenges (Matson and

Neal, 2009). Approximately half of those with intellectual disabilities who show challenging behaviour will be restrained using physical interventions at some point due to the severity and dangerous nature of the behaviours (Emerson, 2003, cited in Banks *et al.*, 2007). Alternative intervention methods include de-escalation, which uses communication and therapeutic intervention skills to prevent, reduce or manage aggressive behaviour; breakaway, which is the defence and disengagement of physical assault (Parry, 2008). The over-use of medication and physical restraints have been considered by professionals as detrimental to the individual's well-being and should be replaced by more person-centred, positive interventions now promoted as best practice in the United Kingdom (Royal College of Psychiatrists *et al.*, 2007). Additionally challenging behaviour has been found to be more likely to occur in settings that have been badly organised (Banks *et al.*, 2007), crowded or noisy environments (McGill *et al.*, 2006) and following routine disruption (McGill *et al.*, 2006); all factors which may be more likely to occur in seasonal and sessional care (such as summer playschemes).

The majority of the literature which investigates the impact of challenging behaviour on carers focuses on family carers (Lach *et al.*, 2009; McGill *et al.*, 2006; Shah *et al.*, 2010; Wodehouse and McGill, 2009). Children who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities which are accompanied by challenging behaviour are likely to impact on the care-givers well-being, emotional state and health (Lach *et al.*, 2009; Shah *et al.*, 2010);

for example, caregivers of children with a neurodevelopmental disorder (such as epilepsy or cerebral palsy) who also exhibited challenging behaviour were less likely to report good health and reported more conditions such as migraines, arthritis and asthma compared with carers of children with neither neurodevelopmental disorders nor challenging behaviour (Lach *et al.*, 2009). Similarly the outcomes for employed full-time carers who work with individuals with challenging behaviour also need to be considered; over a quarter of full-time staff working with individuals with challenging behaviour met criteria for experiencing emotional distress (Robertson *et al.*, 2005). The greatest perceived sources of stress were a lack of staff support and a lack of resources (Robertson *et al.*, 2005). However it has been found that carers working in settings where behaviour that challenged was less common reported greater levels of stress compared with carers working in settings where incidents of challenging behaviour were more frequent (Robertson *et al.*, 2005); possibly due to a higher expectation and awareness of challenging behaviour occurring, resulting in better coping methods and procedures compared with carers having a minority of incidents of challenging behaviours.

The individuals who exhibit severely challenging behaviour in respite services and psychiatric institutions are costly due to high health and social care expenses (Felce *et al.*, 2000). The importance of informal carers who are unpaid (such as family carers), and who consequently save health and social care services billions of pounds every year, is

increasingly recognised (Foley, 2002; Wodehouse and McGill, 2009). Research in the area of carers is important in order for health care services to be cost-effective, as many informal carers claim to use short-term services, such as respite care, due to the stresses associated with caring (Foley, 2002; Wodehouse and McGill, 2009). While **many children and young people with** seriously challenging behaviour may be required to attend 52-week residential schools as their needs cannot be met by family carers and local services, sources of care local to the family should be prioritised (Pilling *et al.*, 2007).

For those children and young people not in residential care, respite care can provide a lifeline to families and is considered an important resource for exhausted carers (Hoare *et al.*, 1998), resulting in a reduction in carer stress (Cowen and Reed, 2002), especially for mothers (Chan and Sigafoos, 2001). The importance of respite care during the summer holidays has been established (McGill, 1996), yet the effects of providing such care has yet to be explored. This is particularly important given that the literature reviewed indicates that incidents of behaviour that challenges may be more likely to **occur as playschemes** are often noisy and crowded environments, will involve a routine disruption, unfamiliar carers and may at times appear unorganised (due to the nature of caring for many individuals with differing needs); these are all factors previously identified as triggers for displays of challenging behaviour (Banks *et al.*, 2007; McGill *et al.*, 2006).

Following an extensive literature search, no published research was found in the area of behaviour that challenges and the effect on seasonal workers (those who act as carers for children and young people who exhibit challenging behaviour over a temporary **period such as a summer holiday**). The current study aims to remedy this absence of research and explore the experiences of seasonal workers regarding challenging behaviour.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of five seasonal workers who had work experience of caring for children and young people with intellectual disabilities who exhibited challenging behaviour; while acknowledging that this is a small sample size, this manageable data set does allow for a rich examination of the participants recalled experiences (Willig, 2008).

Seasonal work is based on contingent arrangements set out by the employer for temporary employment due to the seasonal demand of work opportunities (Polivka and Nardone, 1989). Participants' understanding of challenging behaviour was explored by asking them to provide examples of experiences where they had dealt with behaviour that they considered to be challenging. The participants were personal contacts of one of the authors and are described below using pseudonyms:

Table 1: Participant Information At The Time Of The Interviews

<i>Participant name</i>	<i>Participant age</i>	<i>Period employed in playschemes</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Sophie	22	2009 & 2010	Sales and Accounts Manager
James	22	2007 & 2008	Police Officer
Jess	32	2006 onwards	Support Mentor at a University

Mel	25	2007 onwards	Teacher
Rachel	28	2006 onwards	Teacher

There were more females involved in the study than males and while no statistics are available regarding the demographics of seasonal care workers, it is widely evidenced that females are more likely to take on these roles (Alamgir *et al.*, 2009; Eriksson, Sandberg and Hellström, 2013).

Data Collection

The study was given ethical approval by Cardiff Metropolitan University and was conducted in line with British Psychological Society ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2010). The design of this study employed a semi-structured interview schedule to allow data of an idiographic nature to be collected (Willig, 2008). Example questions include: Can you think of a time when you were working as a seasonal worker in which a child was showing challenging behaviour towards you or one of your co-workers? In what ways were the behaviours challenging? How did the behaviour make you feel as soon as it had happened?

Each participant was interviewed once and the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each. None of the participants were working in playschemes at the time of

interviewing and so the data is based upon recollections of previous events; thus while the events are discussed in retrospect, one of the advantages of qualitative research is that it allows participants to engage in a reflective process which can be of benefit to both the participant and the research process (Birch & Miller, 2000).

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis used for this study was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which ‘... represents an epistemological position, offers a set of guidelines for conducting research, and describes a corpus of empirical research’ (Smith, 2004: 40). This allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the nature of the participant’s experiences through the development of emergent and superordinate themes (Forrester, 2010). The double hermeneutic nature of IPA was considered particularly appropriate given the first authors own experiences as a seasonal carer allowing for an informed and reflexive analysis of the data. This position as an ‘insider-outsider’ to the research process is a complex one, allowing the researcher to understand shared knowledges, understandings and experiences (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) which may be particularly useful with an interpretative analysis (Smith, 2004). While there is a risk that the participants’ took for granted the interviewers shared understanding, this familiarity meant that interviewees were encouraged to discuss these shared notions and were understood to be comfortable doing so.

Results

Six main themes were established after extensive analysis of the transcripts: Belief in and sanctuary of temporary work, Emotional impact, Personality and gender, Strength through knowledge, Communication difficulties and Belief in integration.

Belief in and sanctuary of temporary work

The participants focused on the short-term aspect of the seasonal care work, making it easier to manage which allowed the short-term nature of the role to become a sanctuary of kinds. Perceiving the work as a short-term job and detaching from care issues outside of the work hours was positioned as a method of coping adopted by the participants which distinguishes them from family and full-time carers.

“It’s a lot easier dealing with someone short-term uh like as a sort of job...as a full-time carer it’s a case of you can’t walk away” (James).

“I mean at the end of the day we had a way out” (Sophie).

The importance of seasonal facilities for families and full-time carers in order for them to recuperate was highlighted. A lack of support for family carers was acknowledged

throughout the participants' accounts and this emphasised the significance of seasonal care aimed towards children and young people with SEN:

“It is often the only support and just respite that families get you know it's more difficult to find respite places at the moment you know particularly with the current situation you know financial situation” (Rachel).

“It is a comfort to know that what we do is valuable for the parents and carers just to () you know have a bit of a breather” (Jess).

The perception of the seasonal worker's role as being an active support for families of children and young people with behaviour that challenges enabled them to develop coping strategies and make comparisons to full-time carers. For many of the participants the support that they provided for the families added value to their job role and was an underpinning belief that inspired and enthused the participants to the short-term role.

Emotional impact

There was a difference between how the participants discussed their emotional experience immediately following an episode of challenging behaviour and how they reflected upon

the episode; thus illustrating the importance of the reflective process for workers dealing with the emotional impact of challenging behaviour.

When asked how the display of challenging behaviour made the participant feel as soon as it had happened, the participant's initial reactions were often that of distress or frustration:

"Really upsetting and frustrating" (Rachel).

"That really upset me" (Mel).

There was an acknowledgement that frustration was felt by many of the workers when dealing with displays of challenging behaviour. The frustration described by the participants may be due to a lack of outlet following a difficult situation as, for the majority of the time, workers are unable to deal with these emotions until the end of the day when the children and young people have left. One participant, Sophie, described how an incident with someone who was deaf led to her being unable to suppress her frustration.

“I told her off...I knew she couldn’t hear me but I got quite angry...I got quite annoyed but you can’t get annoyed with children like that...partly because I knew she couldn’t hear me why I snapped at her” (Sophie).

The event recalled by Sophie highlighted how the suppression of frustration may lead to stronger emotions, such as anger, to feel uncontrollable. If continued over a long period of time these feelings of anger and frustration could be detrimental to the relationships between the seasonal worker and the young people.

The importance of concealing emotions during difficult situations for the sake of the child and in order to regain control of the situation was discussed. The descriptions of the participants highlighted that the work, although seasonal, is highly emotional with most participants stifling their immediate emotional responses. It was also noted that being externally calm in a challenging situation would sometimes conflict with internal emotions.

“I think you need to be patient and you need to be calm” (Sophie).

“I mean it’s only human if you’re being lashed out at you know to feel a little bit anxious and scared but try and you know keep yourself as outwardly calm as possible” (Jess).

The concealment of emotions was also expressed by Mel when dealing with one child's inappropriate sexual behaviour:

*“Just trying not to make him feel () like I was repulsed by it even though I I really was”
(Mel).*

It was generally expressed that their emotions, which were often negative, were not long-lasting; reflection also allowed the worker to realise that the behaviour should not be taken personally and allowed for a continuation of the care that could be provided with a child, even after a difficult episode.

“When I reflected upon it I thought () don't be so stupid... it wasn't me I had to keep thinking it's not just me” (Mel).

“It's more about reflection and how to deal with it better next time and um I think you know once you get over the initial shock uh I think it's then time for reflecting” (Jess).

The role of supportive co-workers was also discussed by the participants. Having support available during and following challenging situations allowed the participant's to gain confidence in their abilities and be able to lean on others to share the burden.

“Everybody sort of pulls together you know everybody is () aware of the the needs of the child” (Rachel).

“When um that young person is known to be challenging that there's always someone with you you know” (Jess).

It was perceived as an important coping strategy during challenging periods to have a team of co-workers coming together to de-escalate the situation and to provide support for one another. Thus although these work teams were coming together for relatively short periods of times (perhaps just a few days) the collegiate experience of the work was described as the most important support mechanism available to the participants.

Personality and gender

All participants identified the importance of certain personality traits as being important and advantageous to the experience of working with young people with behaviour that

challenges. They suggested that certain types of people may be better suited to working with **people who challenge** due to their personality, despite any other taught skills.

“It’s a matter of your personality more than anything else and something the kids will relate to” (Sophie).

“I think you need to have quite a big personality” (Mel).

The need to be authoritative was also identified as being an important factor. This was associated with receiving a higher level of respect from the children and a better ability to reason with particularly challenging individuals. One participant, Sophie, considered male workers to have more authority than female workers due to their presence.

“Even if they’re as little as you are (h) they’re just that more that bit more likely to be listened to.” (Sophie).

There was a distinction made between male and female attributes in another interview, which focussed on a male worker’s ability to physically restrain young people and a female’s ability to calm a situation down through communication.

“...you want a male there with you so you can restrain them safely...other times when a child’s kicking off it’s a lot easier to have the calming wit of a female rather than a bloke stood there” (James)

Although restraints were only used in situations where the young person could be a danger to themselves or others, the presence of a male worker in a setting may have been seen as comforting for female members of staff due to their physique.

The importance of personal attributes was highlighted by participants, particularly the ability to remain calm during difficult situations, touching once more on seasonal workers’ coping strategies. The physical differences of male and female workers in relation to skills and attributes are also important to consider, particularly within a setting where the distribution of genders may be disproportionate due to the short-term nature of the employment.

Strength through knowledge

There were found to be a number of ways in which participants developed an understanding of, and so learnt to deal with, displays of challenging behaviour during their seasonal work. Although all of the participants received some form of initial

training, many felt that this training was not useful in giving practical advice regarding how to manage behaviour that challenged.

“Um training was very short and it wasn’t really based on dealing with kids with challenging behaviour at all” (James).

“I don’t think any amount of training would have prepared me for that to be honest” (Mel).

Many of the participants focussed their acquisition of knowledge away from formal training and concentrated more on what they had learnt through their practical work due to the spontaneous nature of displays of challenging behaviour.

“I think I () more learned on the job if you know what I mean?” (Mel).

“I think you were basically thrown in at the deep end” (Sophie).

“Perhaps experience is a good strength uh skills-wise I think you’ve gotta have like um kind of problem solving skills be able to think on the spot” (Jess)

One participant, Mel, expressed particular dissatisfaction with the lack of provided training in communication aids, such as forms of sign language. She expressed the importance of training workers in this area in order to better assist the children who are showing challenging behaviour.

“I really have a bit of a hang up about this actually...I really needed to have um () sign language...that would have really helped me...they tend to revert to that because they can't 'cause they're so angry or panicked” (Mel).

The participants' acquisition of knowledge seemed to centre on practical experience rather than formal training. Many felt dissatisfied with the lack of focus on challenging behaviours and with a lack of formal training in the use of communication aids. However, their experience of dealing with episodes of behaviour that was challenging was positively enhanced by confidence acquired through their practical knowledge.

Communication difficulties

Communication difficulties were considered to be the most common factor which triggered challenging behaviour in children. Communication difficulties ranged from deafness, limited or no verbal communication skills and foreign language speakers who had limited English skills.

“A lot of the time communication is the barrier and communication is what is needed and so it makes life difficult sometimes when you’ve got to try and get through to someone but it’s not the conventional way of getting through to them” (Sophie).

“You know that he needs something and because he isn’t able to tell you in the conventional way () then you it it’s a sort of trial and error” (Rachel).

“Also foreign children who’d come across from the it wasn’t only the barrier of not being able to get across what they wanted but not being able to understand what was being asked of them” (James).

Compassion was expressed by the participants towards the children and young people as a result of a lack of communication skills, as they considered this behaviour to be demonstrative that the child was struggling to express themselves. It demonstrates a level of understanding and empathy required to work in this care setting.

“They may not be able to express themselves to you then they are likely to get frustrated and lash out and I think a lot of times it is frustration () and you just accept that you know it comes with the territory” (Rachel).

“That’s you know part of their challenging behaviour but there’s other aspects to them as well” (Jess).

The impact of a child having communication or language difficulties was evident throughout the discussions with participants, leading to seasonal workers attempting many de-escalation techniques before finding something appropriate. Although this could have been perceived as time-consuming and frustrating, the seasonal workers instead largely adopted an empathetic attitude towards displays of challenging behaviour when considered as an expression of communication.

Belief in integration

The importance of integration and socialisation of children with SEN and behaviours that challenge within a seasonal setting was identified by four of the five participants. The potential benefits of children with complex needs interacting with one another were also emphasised. The interactions of children with different **conditions** and needs at seasonal respite care could lead to an improvement in knowledge and the formation of friendships.

“They’re with children like them” (Rachel).

*“It just gave them a chance to meet different people and interact with different people”
(Sophie).*

The positive outcomes of integrating mainstream children and children with SEN in a seasonal setting were identified as an improved awareness of behaviours and improved confidence for both groups of children. It was also thought to give the children the message that everyone was to be treated as equals.

*“Confidence in themselves I think that’s the big thing that we do don’t judge anybody (.)
anyone can join in we’re all equal it’s a great message for them to have in life” (Mel).*

“The children will have integrated with children that haven’t got special needs who when they’re in school you know a lot of them tend to be in units or in special schools...it benefits children who haven’t got special needs you know ‘cause they get to see these children” (Rachel).

One participant, Jess, even showed a lack of awareness of working with mainstream children in a playscheme in which mainstream children and children with SEN were well integrated.

“Working with the playscheme company...they like to uh integrate...mainstream children with SEN children so yeah I probably have but not realised it.” (Jess)

The importance of integrating children was considered to be an important aspect of the seasonal setting, as it provided an opportunity to interact in a way that they may not be able to do in other settings, such as in education.

Summary

The experiences of behaviour that challenges in a seasonal work setting were perceived by the participants to be different from that of family carers and full-time carers. This was due to the short-term nature of the employment and the strong belief that it was providing respite for the families, which enabled the participants to develop a coping strategy. In addition the comradeship that existed was an important part of the seasonal work experience and also provided a source of strength and support for the participants. However, they were not immune to experiencing strong emotional effects, particularly following the initial challenging episode: these included frustration and distress. A lack of training in challenging behaviour management methods and communication aids was described by the participants; however participants identified increased strength and confidence through knowledge gained through managing episodes of behaviour that were challenging. The importance of integration was discussed in terms of acceptance and

equality; additionally the benefit to children and young people with different needs coming together to socialise was emphasised by many of the participants. Thus it appears that the short-term nature of the work and the belief in its importance provided the participants with coping strategies and motivation to continue dealing with the more emotionally laborious aspects of the role.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of seasonal workers regarding behaviour that challenges in children and young people, an area not explored in research literature thus far. The perception of the participants' role as a seasonal worker was an important factor which was explored in the study due to the limited research in the area of temporary work, when compared with family and full-time carers (Robertson *et al.*, 2005; Shah *et al.*, 2010). The emphasis on the importance of a suitable coping style to avoid negative consequences described by seasonal workers is **in line** with previous research based on family carers (Shah *et al.*, 2010). However, the way in which seasonal carers cope appears to be different from that of family members, as seasonal carers perceive the challenges to be manageable due to the short-term aspect of employment. The participants also noted the lack of support for family carers (McGill *et al.*, 2006; Wodehouse and McGill, 2009); however this was identified as motivating the seasonal workers in helping to provide support for the families, consequently highlighting the altruistic nature of the role.

The emotional impact on seasonal workers who work with children and young people who display challenging behaviour was of significance to the aim of the study as it provided a comparison to the large amount of research on the well-being of family carers (Lach *et al.*, 2009; Shah *et al.*, 2010). The seasonal workers described the importance of

concealing emotions during a challenging episode, which could lead to them holding onto negative emotion. Although the seasonal carers reported no detrimental effects on their well-being or health, the emotional burden of caring for a child or young person with behaviours that challenge long-term with no outlet could potentially lead to the health and social problems associated with being a family carer (Shah *et al.*, 2010). Gender differences were perceived by the participants as being influential in challenging situations and therefore may also need to be considered when providing caregiver support: male and female workers have been found to respond differently to support services with females responding more positively to counselling services than males (Chen, 2014). The significance of support in dealing with the emotional burden of care work was also highlighted by seasonal workers; thus the camaraderie experienced by playscheme workers may have acted as a protective factor against the many negative aspects reported in family carer research (Shah *et al.*, 2010).

Although the majority of the past literature has focused on formal training in restraints and intervention methods as being necessary in a challenging care setting (Parry, 2008; Emerson, 2003 cited in Banks *et al.*, 2007), the current study found that most training was perceived as being inadequate and the majority of participants learnt through practical 'on the job' experience. The lack of useful, formal training was attributed to the complexity and variety of situations which occur when working with challenging individuals. The

majority of the participants had gained practical experience of these situations over a number of years and as a result, it is possible that they may have minimised their concern over the lack of practical training. To less experienced seasonal carers this lack of training may be of greater concern, because they would not be able to call upon the same experience gained through practical exposure.

An area of formal training which could be improved upon, however, is the teaching of skills to aid communication. Communication difficulties were most frequently reported as being the cause of the challenging behaviour. A lack of training in communication aids, despite being the main cause of challenging behaviour, is consistent with the findings of Kevan (2003) who has described a tendency of care services to focus on the observable challenging behaviour, rather than the promotion of expressive language.

To conclude, the current study has been successful in highlighting positive and negative aspects of working as a seasonal worker with children and young people who exhibit challenging behaviour. The emotional impact of seasonal work and the importance of a suitable coping style were described, while the importance of supportive co-workers was highlighted and the altruistic elements of the job were perceived as a source of pride. Personal attributes may be involved in a higher level of coping for some individuals rather than for others and the differences of gender were discussed by the participants in terms

of behaviour management. The participants tended to develop strategies to cope with contingent practical situations; they felt that formal training lacked useful application, particularly in the area of communication aids. Finally, the importance of integration was highlighted as providing support for the children and the families: integration with mainstream children and with other children who had complex needs was seen as an essential feature of the seasonal care provided by playschemes.

It is clear that the participants involved in this research were proud of the role that they play in reducing stress for families and providing a safe respite for the children and young people involved. However, it is hoped that improved training, especially in communication techniques, for seasonal workers (and perhaps other non-traditional carers such as short-break respite providers or bank/agency staff) will mean that managing the more difficult aspects of the work would result in response and resilience to behaviours that challenge being less of a chance matter of personality.

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