

Homelessness & Covid-19

Including the voice of lived experience in the Covid-19 transition

About

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on how we support people experiencing homelessness and associated needs such as addiction, mental ill health, contact with the criminal justice system and trauma. Throughout this period, an estimated 15,000 people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness have been provided with temporary accommodation. Existing residents of supported accommodation will have seen many changes in how they access and are provided with support, and in how they communicate with key workers.

This document provides examples of how organisations in England are ensuring that the voices of people experiencing rough sleeping are heard, and using collaborative approaches to overcome this health crisis.

The importance of lived experience

Involving lived experience has been recognised within recent years as a key part element in the design, delivery and implementation of services to support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society. People who have direct experience of homelessness provide us with a unique perspective, sharing realities, knowledge and insight about how rough sleeping can affect all areas of a person's life. During the Covid-19 crisis and transition out of crisis, it is more important than ever to hear these perspectives, to educate not only policy makers and commissioners, but also the general population about the complexities of homelessness.

Lived experience can also have also have huge organisation benefits:

- **Service development:** people with lived experience can help us to understand the limitations that policies and procedures may place on our everyday work, challenging what we see as effective, both within the homelessness sector and the wider system.
- **Service improvements:** by understanding anecdotal and contextual evidence, people with lived experience can identify opportunities to challenge and to change organisational culture.
- **Workforce development:** involving people with lived experience in the development and delivery of training can ensure that staff are trained in a psychologically informed way that considers both trauma informed and person centred approaches
- **Decision making:** contextualised evidence provides opportunities for decision makers to consider the realities of what they are planning, by understanding the challenges faced by and imposed on people through policy

Let's end homelessness together

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Lived experience has played a pivotal role in system change approaches. [Fulfilling Lives](#), funded by the National Lottery, have developed robust approaches to involving people with lived experience and have seen the development of the National Expert Citizens Group: <http://necguk.org.uk/>. By having people with lived experience involved in the development of projects within 12 areas of the country they have been able to demonstrate the value of lived experience can have in how the provision of services is shaped by bringing a unique perspective of how all stakeholders need to view engagement and success.

Different ways to engage with people who have lived experience

The way in which we engage with people who have lived experience of homelessness may be dependent on their current situation, but this should not limit the opportunities that we make available to people. Anyone with lived experience, whether current or past, can be asked to provide insight, for example:

- Surveys: these can be developed in a way that not only looks to find out opinions and source direct experiences by people with lived experience, but can also provide an opportunity for people with lived experience to carry them out
- Consultation: many organisations are now involved in direct consultation across many sectors. This enables the voice of lived experience to be present in a range of arenas such as strategic and operational groups, ranging from frontline services to government. Not only does this include advisory roles but also the evaluation of services
- Workforce: many organisations aim to employ people in both paid and voluntary roles. This frequently includes peer specialist role such as peer mentors, befrienders or specialist service roles ranging from direct support to advocacy and research

Not everyone with lived experience may want to be involved in these ways, but may still want their experiences to be shared. Many people choose to share their experiences and remain anonymous, for example:

- Blogs: these can be quick and easy to set up without a lot of technical knowledge and can also be updated to show how people have progressed
- Written accounts: often people like to be able to have a copy of their own experiences to reflect upon now or in future, or to be included within training
- Visual and/or creative representations: this can be in the form of videos or photographs and can allow people to visualise the journey of a person. This may also include poetry, song writing and performance

[LockdownLIVES](#) is a great example of how people were able to provide their own experience of temporary accommodation during the pandemic. This was developed in collaboration with Manchester Homelessness Action Network and Street Support. Each episode would cover various themes throughout the pandemic and aimed to educate the general public on the effects of the crisis on people who are self-isolating in emergency accommodation from the very people who are experiencing this. The project aims to creatively connect people who are self-isolating in emergency accommodation; and help the broader public understand how this crisis affects those who don't have their own homes, through artistic expression and advocacy.

Supporting people to share their lived experience

When asking people to share their experience, it is important to consider how they may feel before, during and after. For this reason we must ensure that, when asking people to share their journey, we are able to support them to do so in a trauma informed way. For this reason we need to make clear what is expected of someone when and if they choose to do so and to provide follow up support by considering the following:

- What support can I provide immediately to help the person share their experience?
- What support or follow up contact may be needed?
- What if the person decides they no longer to participate or have their lived experience used?

It is important that, when seeking to involve people's own experiences to contextualise the barriers and challenges that people face, we are able to provide the right kind of support. Many organisations ensure that there is a single point of contact for people who are sharing their life experiences and will signpost or refer people to other specialist support services. [VOICES of Stoke](#) and [Expert Citizens](#) have worked collaboratively and given people sharing their experience the opportunity to engage with others support networks and also provided solution focused and/or reflective supervision in a psychologically informed way.

Examples of lived experience involvement

Throughout this health crisis, there have been many organisations that have ensured that the voice of lived experience remained a key aspect of their work. Below are links to various organisations that are working continually to highlight the influence that of lived experience supporting the need for systemic change:

Expert Link – Expert Link is a peer led organisation championing the voice of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage

www.expertlink.org.uk/

www.youtube.com/channel/UCDt4xZFqpP-FuHHVGn1McSq

[@ExpertLink2019](#)

Groundswell Homeless Health Peer Advocacy – supporting people experiencing homelessness to address psychical and mental health

<https://groundswell.org.uk/what-we-do/healthandhomelessness/homeless-health-peer-advocacy/>

Expert Citizens - an independent group of people who have all experienced multiple needs – combinations of mental ill health, homelessness, addiction and offending behaviour.

www.expertcitizens.org.uk

www.youtube.com/channel/UCBhZwvL6MuMSsWcDABAbUHq

[@ExpertCitizens](#)

LockdownLIVES: a documentary video series co-created by Greater Manchester residents experiencing homelessness during the Covid-19 crisis

<https://vimeo.com/lockdownlives>

[@LockdownLIVES](#)

KCAH

www.kcah.org.uk/our-stories/

APPLE Collective

www.aplecollective.com/

MEAM

<http://meam.org.uk/>

<http://meam.org.uk/2020/06/04/co-production-in-the-time-of-corona-co-creating-a-new-normal-with-the-new-normal-being-co-creation/>

National Expert Citizens Group UK (NECG): the national board of the 12 regional groups of Expert Citizens providing vital insight and lived experience of multiple complex needs.

<http://necguk.org.uk/>

Co-production Toolkit: The toolkit explains what co-production is, some of the key ideas behind it and how to start applying the principles of co-production to your service.

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/co-production-toolkit>

Crisis: Skylight Birmingham

www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/our-crisis-members/

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle & Gateshead

www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk/experts-by-experience/

Birmingham Changing Futures Together

<https://changingfuturesbham.co.uk/>



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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