

SUMMARY

Workforce development and multiple disadvantage

Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives:
Supporting people experiencing
multiple disadvantage

February 2021

CFE Research and
The University of Sheffield,
with the Systems Change
Action Network



Rachel Moreton
Dr Joanna Welford
Beth Collinson
Chris Milner
Dr Jatinder Sandhu
Michelle Hansel

Providing effective support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage requires a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. This report summarises the key messages from our four briefings on different aspects of workforce development and multiple disadvantage.

The briefings draw on evidence and learning from the Fulfilling Lives programme. They will be of interest to: organisations that provide support to people experiencing multiple disadvantage; employers seeking to involve people with lived experience in their workforce; organisations whose staff regularly come into contact with people experiencing multiple disadvantage; and funders, commissioners and policy-makers.

The Systems Change Action Network (SCAN – a group representing the programme leads from each of the Fulfilling Lives partnerships) have developed a series of recommendations based on the findings, and these are included in this summary.

These recommendations are the collective view of the SCAN members and not of CFE Research, The University of Sheffield or The National Lottery Community Fund.

Since 2014, the Fulfilling Lives programme has supported nearly 4,000 people with experience of multiple forms of disadvantage, including homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, reoffending and mental ill-health.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all interviewees and focus group participants, including members of the National Expert Citizens Group, who gave up their time to share their experiences and perspectives. Thanks are also due to staff at The National Lottery Community Fund, members of the Systems Change Action Network, the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) Coalition and the Evaluation Steering Group for reviewing and commenting draft briefings.

Involving people with lived experience in the workforce

People with lived experience have a **huge amount to offer the workforce**, both within services supporting people facing multiple disadvantage and elsewhere. In support roles, people with lived experience act as role models and rapidly build trust with beneficiaries from the perspective of someone who has been in a similar situation.

Employment can be a **benefit to recovery**, in creating a sense of purpose and providing a daily structure and routine. Yet people with lived experience **face numerous barriers** that need to be overcome in order to move into, and progress within, the workforce.

Volunteering opportunities can help provide vital experience that can lead to employment. However, a **progression pathway out of volunteering** is essential to help make what can be a difficult jump into paid work.

The opportunity to **develop particular skills and gain qualifications** can also help enhance employability. Partnerships assist beneficiaries to access relevant courses and employability support. Some also provide in-house training programmes, such as in peer research and peer mentoring, supporting people to use their past experiences positively.

Adjustments by employers to working practices and policies can help people with lived experience transition into and maintain paid work. These include flexible working hours, enhanced inductions, pay flexibility, reflective practice opportunities and a strong package of support.

Choice is essential – not everyone with lived experience will want to move into frontline support roles or to work in the support sector more generally. However, employers in other sectors are not as familiar with recruiting people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage, so supporting the individual applicant to have the confidence to frame discussions about their past in positive ways is important.

Progression within the workplace can be challenging for some. Lived experience may be considered as less valuable in more senior roles.



Employment can help recovery and create a sense of purpose

Yet it is a useful resource that individuals in leadership positions can draw upon alongside their professional experience. Having people with lived experience in senior positions is important so that those earlier on in their journey can see what is possible.

Recommendations

There should be a commitment from public and voluntary services to support people experiencing multiple disadvantage into employment, with support for organisations to do this.

Public services include local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), probation, healthcare providers etc., as well as those with strategic oversight, for example, Directors of Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Systems to name a few.

This commitment should recognise the benefits people with lived experience can provide to the workforce and the important role they can play in bridging the gap between services and the people who use them.

This should include the provision of both work experience and permanent roles. Where work experience is offered, this should also focus on the meaningful development of skills and be remunerated where possible. In some cases, permitted voluntary or part-time work can help overcome the financial concerns in moving from state benefits to employment.

Consider the use of entry-level opportunities that allow for skill development and the transition back into employment.

Employers should develop flexible policies and working practices to support staff with lived experience into the workplace.

This should cover both the recruitment process and ongoing support and guidance once an individual is in post.

An open and honest recruitment culture could include pre-disclosure of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) details.

Ongoing support could include the use of individualised safety and wellbeing plans to support mental and physical health needs and minimise the risk of burnout or relapse.

Employers should provide opportunities for people with lived experience to develop the skills and experience to achieve career progression, including into leadership roles.

This may mean taking less of an emphasis on professional experience and academic qualifications and a greater focus on the merits of lived experience itself.

Mentoring can be a successful way of supporting career progression for those with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.



Read more about involving people with lived experience in the workforce here: tinyurl.com/lived-workforce

What makes an effective multiple disadvantage navigator?

A **navigator** is a **service-neutral staff member** who works with people affected by multiple disadvantage and supports them to **secure and coordinate a range of support** and services as needed. Some navigators have lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

Navigators work with people over an **extended period** (it can be several years) to develop **trusting relationships**. They navigate systems on behalf of beneficiaries and support them to achieve their own goals. Their work is focused on the needs of the individual and not led by service targets. Navigators are tenacious and persistent and have **small caseloads**, ideally between six and ten people.



Caseloads of between 6 and 10 ensure navigators can offer a personalised service

Excellent **interpersonal and communication skills**, including the **ability to show empathy**, are essential for effective navigators. They need to be able to build relationships, not just with beneficiaries, but with professionals too. **Advocacy skills** are required in order to ensure the beneficiary's voice is heard. Navigating a complex and often fragmented system requires resilience and a **positive attitude** to support beneficiaries through challenges and set-backs. In supporting individual needs, navigators need to be **flexible, spontaneous and resourceful** and may find themselves doing things other support workers would consider unorthodox.

Navigators require knowledge of local services, referral pathways and legal entitlements, as well as a network of contacts, to help secure the services and support people need. However, not all navigators will have a detailed knowledge of all aspects of the system so the **ability to collaborate and share learning** with colleagues is also important. Knowledge of **trauma-informed approaches** is also important for navigators as there is a strong association between trauma and multiple disadvantage.

Navigator teams should include a diverse range of work experience, skills, knowledge and **lived experience**.

The navigator role is intensive and demanding. They need a **supportive environment** in order to protect their wellbeing and avoid burnout. This includes providing a clear job specification, creating a culture of self-care and ensuring there are opportunities for sharing experiences with colleagues.

Comprehensive **training and development programmes** are also needed. **Regular reflective practice** helps to build resilience, allows staff time to work through challenges and avoid depersonalising beneficiaries.

However, navigators are not a panacea; merely employing navigators will not resolve all the challenges of an often fragmented system of support.

Recommendations

Local areas that adopt the navigator model should draw on learning from the experience of Fulfilling Lives and other multiple disadvantage programmes, noting how the navigator role differs from a traditional support worker.

These differences must be acknowledged within commissioning requirements, recruitment practices of providers and the system-wide support required to enable navigators to be effective.

The benefits of lived experience should be considered in the recruitment of navigator roles and made explicit within recruitment processes.

Multi-skilled teams with the capacity to support people experiencing multiple disadvantage will have a mixture of people with and without lived experience.

The navigator role is intensive and demanding and there should be adequate time and resource for wellbeing, reflective practice, training and career progression.

This should be considered both within commissioning decisions and how providers design and deliver their service.

Investment should be made in the time and ability of navigators to support wider systems change.

Navigators cannot work in a vacuum. They have a key role to play in highlighting barriers and working with local partners to develop long-term sustainable changes to local systems. Local partnerships, including commissioners, should create a connected and collaborative system in which navigators are supported to play an active role in identifying and addressing “system blocks”.



Read more about what makes an effective multiple disadvantage navigators here: tinyurl.com/effective-navigator

Upskilling the wider workforce

People experiencing multiple disadvantage come into contact with staff in a wide range of roles, such as paramedics, GPs and their receptionists, pharmacists, police officers and Jobcentre staff. It is important that staff, who are not necessarily specialists in supporting people facing multiple disadvantage, **have the skills, experience and confidence needed to effectively provide services** for this group.

Frontline staff providing services for people facing multiple disadvantage need to be **comfortable having open conversations with people about their needs**. They need to **understand how trauma may affect behaviour** and have good knowledge of local support so they can refer people on to this.

Engaging and supporting the wider workforce to work differently can be challenging. A **shift in organisational culture** may be needed and change is often feared. Where staff have high workloads, finding time to invest in training may be difficult, particularly if understanding multiple disadvantage is not a priority.

The experiences of Fulfilling Lives partnerships show **longer-term commitment and collaboration** with service providers is key to developing effective workforce development programmes. A programme is more likely to succeed if **all partners have ownership** and none feel that another organisation is imposing their way of working. **Raising awareness of multiple disadvantage at a community level** may be a good way to generate initial interest in workforce development among key stakeholders.

Involving staff at all levels is also vital. Without both senior manager and frontline worker buy-in, workforce development programmes will be harder to implement and less likely to be sustainable.

The **voice of lived experience is crucial** to any work of this kind. Experts by experience can help identify workforce development needs through peer research and mystery shopping. Involving experts in delivering training adds an authentic voice and can help motivate staff.



Staff need an understanding of trauma and how it affects behaviour

In order to ensure the impacts of upskilling are sustained, **training and learning needs to be embedded** in job descriptions, staff recruitment and induction and development policies.

Recommendations

Public services must invest in the knowledge, skills and behaviours of its wider workforce to effectively engage with people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

This should encompass all areas of the local system that an individual experiencing multiple disadvantage is likely to come into contact with. For example, DWP, probation, housing options, healthcare professionals etc., as well as those with strategic oversight, for example, Directors of Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Integrated Care Systems.

Multi-agency workforce development programmes have been developed within some Fulfilling Lives areas, with independent evaluations and recommendations to guide replication of these models elsewhere.

There should be a deliberate cultural shift that encompasses all elements of the workforce and not just those within frontline service provider roles.

This should include a commitment from all sectors within a local area to dedicate time and resources to building multi-agency relationships.

The wider workforce should be equipped to take a gender and trauma-informed approach to all aspects of its work and to acknowledge the specific needs of marginalised groups.

A system in which all parts understand the role of trauma, gender and discrimination, will be more effective in supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage and more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Trauma-informed training should be delivered by people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage and with the recognition that training itself is not enough. Its principles must be embedded within all elements of the local system.



Read more about upskilling the wider workforce here: tinyurl.com/upskill-workforce

Working with commissioners and policy-makers

Policy-makers and service commissioners are a crucial part of the workforce as they play a key role in shaping support for people affected by multiple disadvantage. They require **good knowledge of the range and complexity of issues** that people face, including the role of trauma.

Commissioners also need **access to high-quality evidence** about effective practice in order to inform their decision-making. Commissioners and policy-makers are often time poor, so evidence must be presented in succinct and accessible ways and tailored to the target audience.

Engaging with people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage is a powerful way to raise awareness of the issues people face. Co-production is a vital element in ensuring services are responsive to people's needs. It is therefore essential that commissioners and policy-makers **understand the value of co-production** and have the skills and resource to undertake it.

The nature of multiple disadvantage means those affected need to engage with a wide range of services. This requires commissioners to understand how different parts of the system interact and take a system-wide approach to commissioning decisions. A **focus on the interfaces between services** is important, as this is often where people experiencing multiple disadvantage are failed.



**Co-production is key
to responsive services**

Fulfilling Lives partnerships and stakeholders have found **multi-agency meetings, programme boards and cross-sector strategic committees** useful mechanisms to develop and strengthen relationships between delivery organisations, commissioners, policy-makers and other agencies.

All approaches outlined need good communication, **a shared vision** for cross-sector programmes in a local area and agreement amongst stakeholders on what success looks like. These are important aspects of ensuring 'buy-in' from all interested parties and that **risk and responsibility are shared** across different sectors.

Recommendations

Commissioners and providers need sufficient knowledge of the range and complexity of issues faced by people experiencing multiple disadvantage, and the level and extent of need, in order to commission a system that delivers the right kind of support in the right way.

Commissioners are in a position to build local systems that can operate with the culture, attitudes and flexibility required to effectively support people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Working within local partnerships, they can commission a system that supports multi-agency collaboration and learning with a shared understanding of risk and responsibility.

In order to offer more personalised and flexible support, focus should shift from traditional forms of performance measurement to one which considers the health of the system as a whole.

Commissioners and policy-makers should co-design effective systems with people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

This will encompass lived experience involvement in both the commissioning process and the subsequent design and delivery decisions made by providers, as well as the review and monitoring of services once contracts have been awarded.

Individuals with lived experience may wish to engage with decision-makers in a number of ways and in whatever ways feel accessible to them. Offering a range of ways in which to develop relationships and share evidence and good practice will ensure ongoing collaboration and learning.

A clear communication loop should be developed so that people with lived experience know what has happened with the input they have made and are informed why some suggestions are not possible to deliver. This will ensure an ongoing collaborative relationship based on mutual trust and learning.

Commissioners and policy-makers need access to evidence of what works and why people experiencing multiple disadvantage are in need of a different approach to support.

Commissioners can work with local partners to model the benefits of longer commissioning cycles and contracts that can be renegotiated periodically without the need for tender.

They can see first-hand why contracts and funding must make provision for smaller caseloads that give the time and resource for ongoing support both for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and the people supporting them.

Commissioners and policy-makers must take a system-wide approach if they are to improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

To do this, commissioners and policy-makers will benefit from an understanding of the principles of systems thinking.

People experiencing multiple disadvantage require holistic support based on a whole system approach. This ensures collaboration and coordination during a number of crucial transition points where individuals currently fall between gaps in services (for example, between hospital discharge and housing, between prison release and drug and alcohol services, etc).



Read more about working with commissioners and policy-makers at: tinyurl.com/commissioners-policymakers

About Fulfilling Lives

The National Lottery Community Fund is investing £112 million over 8 years (2014 to 2022) in local partnerships in 12 areas across England, helping people with multiple needs access more joined-up services tailored to their needs. The programme aims to change lives, change systems and involve beneficiaries. The programme is not a preventative programme, but instead aims to better support those with entrenched needs who are not otherwise engaging with services. The programme uses coproduction to put people with lived experience in the lead and builds on their assets to end the revolving door of disjointed care for adults. The programme also has a strong focus on systems change, so that these new ways of working can become sustainable.

Further information

For more information about this report please contact Rachel.Moreton@cfe.org.uk

For more information about the Fulfilling Lives programme visit www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/multiple-needs

For more information about the evaluation of Fulfilling Lives, including partnership-level evaluations, please visit www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org

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