Creating systems change

Evaluating the contribution of the Fulfilling Lives programme

Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives:
Supporting people experiencing
multiple disadvantage

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Rachel Moreton
Dr Joanna Welford
Chris Milner

With Sophia Fedorowicz
and Elena Gaschino

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This report outlines the key systems changes in Fulfilling Lives areas over the eight years of the programme. It considers the particular contribution of the programme and the mechanisms that facilitated change.

Between 2014 and 2022, the Fulfilling Lives programme supported more than 4,000 people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, including homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, offending, mental ill health, and domestic violence. A core aim of the programme was to create lasting changes to the systems of services and support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The report will be of interest to:

— The National Lottery Community Fund, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), and other funders with a strategic interest in creating systemic change.

— Partnerships and their constituent organisations that deliver programmes with similar aims: in particular, Changing Futures and MEAM approach areas.

— Stakeholders and commissioners working in sectors that support people with experience of multiple disadvantage.

Key messages

As well as changing individual lives, Fulfilling Lives aimed to **change the system too**. Local systems at the start of the programme were described as inefficient, fragmented and inconsistent, which meant that people experiencing multiple disadvantage were moving in and out of services time and time again but experiencing little progress.

There is evidence in Fulfilling Lives areas of **changed attitudes towards, and a greater understanding of, multiple disadvantage**. There is greater recognition of the role and impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma on people's behaviour. The issue of multiple disadvantage is much more visible now, and in several areas it has been included in local strategic plans.

Attitudes towards multiple disadvantage have changed

In addition to local achievements, **multiple disadvantage is now also firmly on the national political agenda**. The Changing Futures programme has adopted much of the learning from Fulfilling Lives; it represents a continuation of the drive to improve systems of support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Coproduction with people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage is now much better understood and accepted in partnership areas, and there is increased recognition of the benefits of working in this way. Established lived experience groups and networks are continuing beyond the lifespan of Fulfilling Lives, to maintain a space and structure for lived experience involvement. However, progress still needs to be made in embedding coproduction as part of business as usual.

Fulfilling Lives has created and developed structures to enable greater collaboration and coordination across agencies and sectors. These are important, as the siloed nature of services is a major barrier to improved support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Many multi-agency groups, boards and networks that have been created are set to continue beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Parts of the local workforce are now better equipped to support people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Partnership staff have now moved on to other roles, and they will take their learning, knowledge and outlook with them. Partnerships have also helped to facilitate the movement of more people with lived experience into the wider workforce.

Partnerships created myriad opportunities to **upskill the workforce**. These included training courses, good practice guidance, toolkits and videos, which were often based on learning from delivering Fulfilling Lives. They were offered to organisations who either work directly or come into contact with people experiencing multiple disadvantage, such as Jobcentre staff, local police forces, healthcare professionals and other statutory agencies.

Fulfilling Lives was in many ways unique, and elements of the programme design helped partnerships to achieve what they did. The system is complex, and change can be slow. **Substantial funding over a much longer period than usual (eight years) was important** in enabling partnerships to get to grips with the challenges. **A test and learn approach without hard targets gave partnerships the flexibility to work in different ways and take risks** to demonstrate what works. This was a welcome change to traditional funding models.

A thread running throughout the Fulfilling Lives programme and our evaluation has been **the importance of personal relationships**. Building trust between the programme staff and other partners, services and commissioners has been essential for engaging people, getting their buy-in to the aims of the programme, and creating change. Cross-agency networks and groups have provided opportunities to build relationships and understanding.

People with lived experience also played an important role in creating change. Their involvement in training, evidence-gathering and influencing has ensured the programme's authenticity and impact.

Much of the work of partnerships has focused on **demonstrating that things can be done differently**, and that building services with the person being supported at the centre can lead to better outcomes. This has been achieved through small-scale tests, pilots and demonstration projects, which have helped to raise awareness by capturing the attention of services. A huge volume of learning and evidence has been produced by partnerships.

Evidencing the impact of working in a different way ensures there are tangible outputs that can be used to generate interest and influence practice.

However, **the system is far from fixed**. Changes and successes are not consistent across all partnership areas or all sectors. Many **big challenges remain**, such as the catch-22 situation faced by people with co-occurring mental ill-health and substance misuse. Partnerships are frustrated that they cannot address systems issues such as siloed and short-term commissioning, ineffective information sharing, and a lack of engagement from some statutory services.

Systems change is a process rather than a destination, and it takes time. Fulfilling Lives partnerships have in many ways planted the seeds of change. The hope is that the Changing Futures programme will take forward the baton from Fulfilling Lives, and continue to progress and spread the good work.
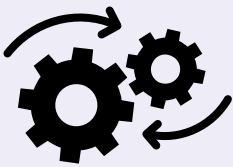
Systems change is a process rather than a destination

Introduction

Why does systems change matter?

The Fulfilling Lives programme has focused on systems change from the start. The programme aimed to change lives, to change systems, and to involve beneficiaries. Local systems at the start of the programme were described as inefficient, fragmented and inconsistent; this meant that people experiencing multiple disadvantage were moving in and out of services time and time again, but experiencing little progress.

Flexible, person-centred support can engage people, but is not the norm

The Fulfilling Lives evaluation has demonstrated that, when support is flexible, person-centred and based on trusting relationships, services can engage people with the most complex and entrenched forms of disadvantage, and can help them to achieve positive changes in their lives.[1] Systems change is required to make this type of approach the norm.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic also showed that greater collaboration between service providers can result in radical transformations in the way support is provided, with positive impacts for many people.[2] As a member of the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) put it:

> **The whole myth of non-engagement is dispelled if [services] take a different approach.[3]**

The pandemic showed what can be achieved when different parts of the system work together with a common aim.

The Fulfilling Lives evaluation has shown that the barriers to supporting people effectively lie not with individuals experiencing complex issues, but with a complex and failing system. For example, our report on access to mental health support[4] highlighted a complex system of services that are difficult to navigate and not always appropriate for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Hence there is a need for systemic change.

What do we mean by systems change?

A system is a set of things working together as a network or mechanism.[5] People experiencing multiple disadvantage interact with or are affected by multiple related systems: health, social care, criminal justice, etc. All of these are arguably *complex* systems, involving many different people and organisations who are trying to address a range of issues that are often interconnected. Complex systems are characterised by unpredictability, in that small changes can lead to unexpected results. Context is also very important – what works in one place or time might not work elsewhere.[6] This makes it challenging to generate and then evaluate the outcomes achieved through systems change. One of these challenges is defining and recognising when systems change has happened.

The 12 Fulfilling Lives partnerships, alongside the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition, coproduced the following definition of systems change:[7]

> **Changes to the people, organisations, policies, processes, culture, beliefs and environment that make up the system. They are beneficial, sustainable in the long term and transformational. They are not tokenistic, doing the same thing under a different name, or overly reliant on key individuals.**

However, as the MEAM year four evaluation report points out, there is a tension in conceptualising systems change as an outcome that can be sustainable in a constantly changing system. They suggest that it is more useful to consider systems change as a trajectory or continuum.[8] In this way, systems change can be conceived as both a process and an outcome.[9]

In this report, we have aimed to capture some of the main changes that have been observed in Fulfilling Lives areas over eight years of the programme, and the processes that partnerships have employed to create change.

What this report covers

This report aims to answer the following research questions:

— How have services and systems of support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage changed in Fulfilling Lives areas over the past eight years?

— What has the Fulfilling Lives programme contributed to the changes observed? How has the wider context affected what has been achieved?

— What mechanisms have partnerships found effective in facilitating systemic change? What learning can the programme offer to others seeking to achieve similar aims?

— What difference does it make having voluntary-sector led partnerships, compared to local authorities or other statutory organisations leading partnerships?

What has changed?

Changed attitudes and a greater understanding of multiple disadvantage

Arguably, one of the hardest but most important aspects of the system to change is its culture. We know when a particular way of working has become embedded, as it is now part of the culture – the norm. The quote, often attributed to management consultant Peter Drucker, that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', highlights the importance but also the difficulty of shifting attitudes, values, and the way that people interact with one another.

It is notable, then, that stakeholders commonly highlighted the Fulfilling Lives programme's impact in changing attitudes to multiple disadvantage. For instance, there is evidence of increased visibility and awareness of multiple disadvantage as a policy issue. Locally, there is raised awareness of the needs and experiences of people experiencing multiple disadvantage among staff whose work brings them into contact with this group.

> " People know what [severe and multiple disadvantage] means a lot of the time, and that's not just people who work with people who experience multiple disadvantage, which I think is testament to the work of [the Fulfilling Lives partnership] in enabling people to understand it.
>
> Stakeholder, Health and social care

Staff and stakeholders interviewed spoke about seeing shifting perspectives and changes in the conversation in their area. They pointed to greater recognition of the role and impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma on people's behaviour. We found examples of greater understanding and less judgement, along with a move away from blame, resulting in reduced stigma. These changing attitudes can be seen to influence the ways service providers respond to people.

> **We've tracked that through some of the legal decisions that get made around clients, where people say, 'A client is making a conscious choice to behave in this way, so we're going to remove them from our books.' And that has shifted. People are more aware of ACEs and early childhood trauma. And that's informing the way that we're working with people more.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Several interviewees also referred to a shift towards greater understanding of the specific needs of women, and the need for gender-informed and female-specific services. There is now increased recognition of the differing needs of women, including women with children or in abusive relationships. This is something that has developed over the course of the programme.

Related to an improved understanding of multiple disadvantage, there is also evidence of greater acceptance of the need for change, and to adopt particular approaches in tackling the issue, such as coproduction, trauma-informed approaches, and systems change.

Increased strategic priority for multiple disadvantage

Multiple disadvantage is on the political agenda

Raised awareness and understanding also needs to be embedded in strategic plans to ensure sustainable change. Influencing decision-makers and commissioners has been an important goal of Fulfilling Lives partnerships, in order to be able to instigate the necessary changes throughout the system. Although change at the strategic level can be a slow process, partnership staff and stakeholders were positive about many of the developments they have seen over the course of the programme.

The issue is much more visible now than it was. There are several examples of multiple disadvantage now being recognised as a priority and included in the strategic agenda, both locally and nationally, in a way that it had not been eight years ago. Local strategies that have developed in some partnership areas – such as for mental health, homelessness, and health and social care – now reference multiple disadvantage and effective models of support.

Opportunity Nottingham's contribution to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Opportunity Nottingham has been at the forefront of shaping policy within the city. In particular, staff drafted a chapter on severe and multiple disadvantage for inclusion in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). JSNAs are local assessments of current and future health and social care needs.

The City Mental Health Strategy and Homelessness Strategy also both reference multiple disadvantage, and it is the focus of one of four workstreams of the Integrated Care Partnership (see page 33 for further information on integrated care).

> Now we've got the Integrated Care Partnership in the city, one of their priorities, and there aren't that many of them, is around responding to severe and multiple disadvantage [...] So there's definitely that appreciation of [multiple disadvantage] and it goes right up to a strategic level.
>
> **Stakeholder, Health**

Read more about how Opportunity Nottingham developed the JSNA chapter and other achievements.

Recognition at the strategic level is also evident in the extent to which Fulfilling Lives partnerships have been invited to contribute to strategic reviews, to be part of expert panels, and to provide evidence and reports. For example, Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham undertook several projects around supporting women, which contributed to the Lambeth Violence Against Women and Girls strategy; implementation of learning from Blackpool Fulfilling Lives is an action in the Blackpool Drug Harm Reduction strategy. This is very different from the start of the programme, when partnerships were too often pushing to be heard at this level.

> " All of a sudden where there was a challenge at the beginning when you go into a forum and talk about system change, actually, we're being invited in, or some of our documentation is being taken forward.

Partnership staff member

The involvement of people with lived experience at the strategic level is a particularly notable achievement. Not only is multiple disadvantage now on the agenda, but people with lived experience are contributing their expertise and ideas, either directly or through coproduced research and projects.

> " We've managed to get a seat at the table. As have our individuals who have lived experience in a lot of areas that wouldn't have had it before. There's a drug and alcohol deaths panel that meets and sits regularly, we've got individuals with lived experience who will go and sit on that panel as an equal member.

Partnership staff member

The National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) – a network of people with lived experience from across Fulfilling Lives areas – has contributed to national policy reviews. These include Dame Carol Black's Independent Review of Drugs; the House of Lords Panel on Drug Policy Change; the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Rough Sleeping Response Team; and the House of Lords inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on public services. Both partnership staff and stakeholders see the lived experience voice in central government work as a significant change.

> " The voice and the role of lived experience in service delivery, and in commissioning and strategy, is pretty well accepted nationally.

Stakeholder, Housing

Fulfilling Lives' impact on central government investment in multiple disadvantage, and on systems change

Perhaps one of the biggest changes to affect multiple disadvantage in recent years has been the Changing Futures programme. This is a three-year, £64 million programme funded jointly by central government and The National Lottery Community Fund, announced in 2020.[10] A clear link can be drawn with Fulfilling Lives, whose evidence base was explicitly referenced in Changing Futures documentation. A case study from one of the Fulfilling Lives partnership areas was also included in its prospectus.[11]

The programme's principles also embody much of the Fulfilling Lives approach and learning, such as the importance of flexibility, trauma-informed working, lived experience involvement, and the need for longer-term systems change.

> The issue has got visibility now, where it had no visibility and no mention before, and the government-funded [Changing Futures] programme, which is brilliant. So, we're in national policy and all our statutory agencies understand the issue.
>
> **Stakeholder, Public policy**

The hope is that through the two programmes, these principles will become embedded in central government strategies. The need for a systems-wide approach to supporting people with experience of multiple disadvantage, rather than dealing with needs separately, is a legacy of Fulfilling Lives that Changing Futures aims to establish in more areas of England.[12] Resources have also been dedicated to a national evaluation of Changing Futures, to ensure that learning and evidence continues to be gathered and fed into central government.[13]

Visit the Changing Futures webpage for more information about the programme.

A move towards meaningful coproduction

Partnership staff and stakeholders reported that coproduction with people who have lived experience of multiple disadvantage is now much better understood and accepted in their local area, with increased recognition of the benefits of working in this way. Coproduction has been at the heart of the Fulfilling Lives programme from the very start, and increasing both the amount and quality of work that is coproduced with people with lived experience was a priority for many partnerships.

> **We've definitely raised the profile around coproduction as well. Certainly in our lead agencies, coproduction wasn't being talked about, service user involvement was, and actually, there's now more about coproduction and really investing in coproduction as a long-term strategy.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

As well as profile-raising, Fulfilling Lives partnerships have created new spaces for coproduction to happen locally, and the success of coproduced work has further influenced the demand for lived experience involvement.

> **We've also established a coproduction network which is jointly delivered with [local council], which will continue, and none of these things existed before. There was nowhere for people to come together, learn together and share practice and things.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

There has been a noticeable shift from consultation or service-user involvement, towards more genuine coproduction that involves people with lived experience as equal partners from the start. There is evidence of organisations building resources into their budgets for coproduction and working with people with lived experience. Fulfilling Lives partnerships have demonstrated that doing coproduction properly takes significant time and resource.[14] One stakeholder outlined how their organisation now has a dedicated staff member for coproduction, rather than treating it as an add-on to someone else's role. Another stakeholder explained how they recognised the need to address power imbalances in their work.

> **[Fulfilling Lives] worked with us around where are our service users when we're doing coproduction, and they weren't close enough to the top at all, because it was always led by us. [...] I think we really changed quite a lot of the way we're doing the service-user involvement stuff.**
>
> Stakeholder, Voluntary sector

A marker of Fulfilling Lives' success in promoting and embedding coproduction at all levels of the system has been the involvement of people with lived experience in the development of Changing Futures.

> **The extent to which people have been involved in the design of this new iteration [Changing Futures], I think has definitely come off the back of Fulfilling Lives.**
>
> Partnership staff member

There are other tangible changes as a result of coproduced work that have impacted the wider system. For example, working with people with lived experience has led to a change in recruitment practices in some services; this will in turn have an impact on who works for organisations and the support offered. People with lived experience sit on recruitment panels, review job descriptions and applications, and have helped shape working practices to make roles more suitable for others with lived experience.

However, stakeholders and people with lived experience acknowledge that there is still some way to go to embed coproduction as the usual way in which services are designed, commissioned, delivered and evaluated. This will be an important issue for programmes such as Changing Futures to take forward, but interviewees felt that Fulfilling Lives partnerships have stimulated progress towards coproduction.

> **There is a move towards improved coproduction. I think we did an okay job at kick-starting proper consultation and coproduction, but Changing Futures is very much about taking it to the next level and beyond.**
>
> Partnership staff member

Embedding coproduction in Blackpool

Blackpool Fulfilling Lives practice has influenced local systems to the extent that both partnership staff and stakeholders believe that coproduction has become a normal part of language, commissioning and strategy locally. For instance, service users have shaped strategy on drug-related deaths and the trauma-informed design of probation reception areas.

> The lived experience team are now a really well-embedded part of our system and they are the voice of reason, they are the outreach to people who can't be reached.
>
> **Stakeholder, Housing**

The partnership established a lived experience-led 'multiple disadvantage friendly' accreditation scheme, which continues beyond the end of the Fulfilling Lives programme. Organisations are assessed and an action plan is drawn up to establish the coproduction of service design.

> We created the Multiple Disadvantage Accreditation, that got us into services, they began to see the advantage of working with lived experience, giving them tips and strategies to work with people to help them in their roles and make their jobs easier.
>
> **Person with lived experience**

The lived experience team, now run by Blackpool charity Empowerment, continues to work with local systems beyond the life of the programme. For example, Blackpool is a pilot site for Project ADDER, a centrally run programme to divert young people and adults away from offending by reducing drug use. The lived experience team are also involved in supporting individuals at risk of drug-related death.

> " The Lived Experience team is not only independently commissioned outside the Fulfilling Lives budget, but has now become almost like the fabric of the Blackpool service system [... it will] help us drive that legacy about systematic change because they will constantly be pointing out to services what's not working.
>
> **Partnership staff member**
>
> Click here for more information on the accreditation scheme. Read about the lived experience team here and Blackpool Project ADDER here.

New structures for collaboration and coordination

Fulfilling Lives has created and developed structures to enable greater collaboration and coordination across agencies and sectors. These are important because a major barrier to improved support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage is the siloed nature of services. Partnerships have created practical solutions to help bring different agencies together to share information and expertise, and coordinate care and support.

This includes platforms to address the challenge of sharing information, to avoid people having to repeat their story over and over again to different agencies.

> **" We have a multi-agency information sharing system called M Think, which we originally commissioned to work with three of our providers, to stop that siloed working. Everyone had their own data systems, so the partners, we decided, would use the one information-sharing system. That was rolled out back in 2016, but since then it's been adopted by over 20 organisations across Manchester.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

There are also multi-agency groups, boards and networks that Fulfilling Lives partnerships have created to coordinate care and support across services. These have clearly proven their value to stakeholders, and many are set to continue beyond the programme's lifetime.

> **Things I can think of that have been established by Fulfilling Lives that will continue are some multi-agency forums, so for example, the co-occurring conditions steering group [... and] TAAG, the Temporary Accommodation Action Group, which was set up by Fulfilling Lives and will be hopefully continuing.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Groups and boards operate at various levels. Addressing silo working operationally would not be possible without Fulfilling Lives also addressing it at the strategic level, and successfully bringing leaders from different sectors and organisations together.

VOICES' Multi-agency Resolution Group (MaRG)

Voices of Independence Change and Empowerment in Stoke-on-Trent (VOICES) established the Multi-agency Resolution Group (MaRG), which is now hosted by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The group consists of representatives from statutory and voluntary sector organisations, who collectively address barriers in the system for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. MaRG works creatively and flexibly to tackle system-wide barriers and push forward individual cases. Not only does MaRG directly address issues, but it influences the surrounding system. The professionals who come together for each meeting take away learning to their own teams and workplaces. A major impact of MaRG has been the communication it enables between previously siloed services and teams.

Read more about the legacy of MaRG and VOICES.

A particular feature of the direct support provided by Fulfilling Lives partnerships has been multi-disciplinary teams and navigators; these are service-neutral staff who work with people experiencing multiple disadvantage, and support them to secure and coordinate a range of services as needed. Similar approaches have been adopted by other services or built into commissioning specifications. For instance, navigators and multi-disciplinary teams also feature as part of the Changing Futures programme.[15] There is evidence of greater recognition of the need to provide navigator or other specialist services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

> **We've shifted our view about how to improve things for this group, and part of that is recognising that at a point of crisis, a dedicated service is critical.**
>
> **Stakeholder, Public policy**

A better-equipped local workforce

One of the legacies of the Fulfilling Lives programme is its staff and volunteers, who either worked directly for Fulfilling Lives partnerships or got involved through secondments, partnership projects or workforce development initiatives. Partnership staff and volunteers will all take their experiences, knowledge and outlook into new roles.

> **My team is a system change impact. They're never going to go into a traditional service again... without nudging the system and without bringing that lens into that space. And for anyone that's worked alongside us or been in our shared learning, they're going to be doing the same as well.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Fulfilling Lives partnerships have championed trauma and psychologically informed working. Our evidence suggests these approaches are now more recognised in local areas, with several stakeholders describing approaches becoming embedded in business as usual or written into service delivery specifications. Learning programmes (discussed further on page 38) have

Trauma-informed working has been adopted by other services

been integral to upskilling the local workforce to better understand multiple disadvantage more generally, and for working in a more trauma-informed way. Partnerships have also facilitated the movement of more people with lived experience into the wider workforce, where they can also bring their unique experiences and insights to the sector.

> **If I go back to the beginning of the programme, there were very few opportunities for people with lived experience to go into paid employment, and we've really seen a change in [city] over the last two years in how many opportunities there are, and how many different organisations are actively recruiting and asking for lived experience. We feel that we've played a part in contributing to that.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

The job of supporting people facing multiple disadvantage can be difficult and may lead to vicarious trauma and burn-out.[16] An important shift highlighted by stakeholders is a greater recognition of the need to invest in staff wellbeing, such as clinical supervision, reflective practice, and other assistance. This support also acknowledges the complexity of the job and can enable a more professional approach. Staff reported that locally, this is now embedded in more organisations. Partnerships have provided support and guidance on doing reflective practice well, and have demonstrated how different people or roles may need different types of support.

Changes in service delivery

Stakeholders and partnerships reported changes to the ways some services are delivered. As approaches are integrated into strategies and workforce development, these should filter through to practice. But changes in service delivery are most demonstrable through changes to service-level policies and procedures, and in how services are commissioned and contracted.

Changes noted here include the adoption of trauma and psychologically informed approaches, better/minimum standards for services, and use of models of support developed by Fulfilling Lives partnerships. For example, there was explicit reference to working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage when designing specifications for commissioned services, particularly in relation to housing. There are also instances of extra support being commissioned, particularly for specific groups such as women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

> **Other [changes] include the improvement of temporary and emergency accommodation standards. We collaborated with lots of partners to call for better standards, and those standards are now being integrated into formal contracts for the private providers. So, we'll see the translation of our work go into some sort of formal contract management space.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

The NECG reported that peer supporters – both paid staff and volunteers – and navigators appear to have become the norm in most Fulfilling Lives areas and are well established. This makes first contact easier and the system more accessible.

> **I have seen change with people engaging with organisations and services, with better engagement and more signposting of services.**
>
> **NECG member**

Where has there been less change?

The Fulfilling Lives programme has faced many challenges in trying to change local systems of support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Partnership staff and stakeholders were clear that despite eight years of funding and hard work, their systems change work is still in progress and there is much work still to do. In some areas, it was felt that change had not been achieved as rapidly as the partnerships had hoped.

Commissioning

Partnership staff described local commissioning processes as not having changed substantially since the Fulfilling Lives programme started. This was despite additional flexibility in commissioning during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated that things could be done differently.[17] Yet there was also widespread frustration that learning from this period had not consistently translated into longer-term changes to commissioning processes.[18] Commissioning was described as still largely outcomes-driven and not joined-up; it was not responding to evidence of innovative practice, and was focusing too strongly on value for money, which represents little change from eight years ago.

> " [We set up] new innovative programmes and ways of working that worked and reached hidden groups, and which were successful, and which were decommissioned at a minute's notice [...] you're doing something that works and is really innovative, but actually are still just at the whim of the old-fashioned way of commissioners who don't really understand flexible ways of working.
>
> **Partnership staff member**

A number of reasons were given for why changing commissioning is difficult. Partnerships were perceived as service providers and so did not have the influence needed to change commissioning processes, despite in many cases building positive relationships with commissioners. Some partnerships felt they did not engage commissioners in their work early enough, or with sufficient focus. Moreover, local authorities are working with constrained budgets; although Fulfilling Lives demonstrated that small caseloads and intense support to build relationships was effective, this is costly. Local commissioners themselves often lack the time, resources and opportunity to work more flexibly, and are constrained themselves by how national funding streams are configured.

Specialist multiple disadvantage support

Partnerships aimed to change the system locally, so that specialist support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage was not needed. If mainstream services were more joined-up and worked holistically with the individual, there would be no need for navigator or similar services for this group. However, there was some disappointment that by the end of the funding

period, systems had not adapted to this extent. When Fulfilling Lives ceased to directly help people to access the services they need, this left a gap – which is a concern, given increasing levels of hardship in some communities.

> **When Fulfilling Lives ended at [partnership] it was almost like, well, what do we do now? This great service had been put in place and suddenly it had gone [...] there was a gap.**
>
> Stakeholder, Police

However, these views were not universal. There were some positive reflections on the increased flexibility that allowed some services to work better with people experiencing multiple disadvantage following Fulfilling Lives – in particular, substance misuse services and other voluntary sector organisations.

Information sharing

Despite developing shared information systems in some areas, information sharing was another aspect of the system that partnerships felt had either not changed significantly, or that changes they had implemented were not sustainable. In one area, funding was not secured to continue a shared database, which was developed to limit the number of times an individual had to re-tell their story. The lack of influence with commissioners was a factor here, as their support for integrated information systems is crucial. Developing shared IT systems is notoriously difficult, and the Fulfilling Lives programme has also spanned a number of changes in data protection legislation.

Partnership staff and stakeholders felt that the retraumatising potential of people having to tell their story repeatedly had been highlighted to different services, but that this had not been enough to change the system.

> **There's an issue around assessment still, and time and time again, people with multiple disadvantage tell us that they don't want to be reassessed, and they don't want to be assessed in the way that we assess them in order to get the data that we need to, to submit to whoever it is that we are submitting our data to.**
>
> Stakeholder, Substance misuse

Sector-specific challenges

Some partnerships had more success at engaging with certain sectors than others. This was in part due to the extent to which partnerships perceived that key individuals were buying into the need for systemic change, but also reflected local differences in administrative boundaries, and difficulties of working across these.

Some found the criminal justice system hard to engage, which resulted in minimal impact on the problematic transition from prison to the community,[19] but mental health was most commonly reported as a sector that was difficult to engage. It was recognised that statutory mental health services are stretched, and that staff have limited capacity to engage with any work beyond their primary role. However, not having mental health representation at a local strategic level severely limited any potential for change or more joined-up working with other areas of the system. In particular, accessing support for people with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse continues to be a challenge.

> One of the biggest obstacles or barriers was mental health services [...] They never engaged with the Fulfilling Lives process, never came to meetings apart from one or two, but they never seriously engaged with that. And therefore that was a huge barrier because one of the key challenges that people with multiple disadvantage were facing each day was a mental health service which didn't seem to be fit for purpose to meet their needs.
>
> **Stakeholder, Voluntary sector**

What has driven these changes?

The contribution of Fulfilling Lives

Substantial funding

In total, The National Lottery Community Fund (the Fund) invested £112 million in the 12 partnership areas. When the programme began in 2014, the UK had already experienced four years of 'austerity', which was to formally continue until 2019.

Within this context, the injection of substantial funding from the Fund was welcomed in Fulfilling Lives areas. Throughout the programme evaluation we have highlighted the elements needed to provide effective support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. These include long-term, open-ended support from a staff team with small caseloads.[20] Such approaches require proper resourcing, which Fulfilling Lives enabled. Similarly, genuine coproduction requires dedicated funding.[21]

> **We brought in reflective practice […] which is fearfully expensive, but we had the money.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Longer-term funding

Changing systems and culture takes time, and often progresses at an incremental pace. One of the major factors that many stakeholders agreed to be beneficial was the long-term nature of the funding. The system and its challenges are complex; there is no easy solution. Hence, it has taken time for partnerships to get to grips with the challenges, and to build the relationships necessary to create change.

> **I would say the luxury of time that we had [as part of] the network that they set up to actually just talk, 'What does trauma mean?' […] To begin with I thought, 'I don't know how we can do that,' but I think it's quite easy to embody it after a while.**
>
> **Stakeholder, Voluntary sector**

As we have shown elsewhere in our evaluation, longer-term support for individuals is needed to sustain progress. Beneficiaries who left the programme with a positive destination had stayed, on average, for 14 months with Fulfilling Lives, but it can take up to 48 months to achieve a positive move-on.[22] The longer-term nature of this programme has enabled us to demonstrate the importance of longer-term support for beneficiaries.

A test and learn approach

> **There are no mistakes, there's just learning.**
>
> Person with lived experience

Partnership staff and stakeholders commended the test and learn approach taken by the Fund. They accepted that not everything would work, but recognised this would provide valuable learning. Partnerships delivered a wide range of pilot and demonstration projects (see page 43), and also evaluated, reflected, adjusted and shared their learning.

Related to this, there were no hard targets for partnerships to meet; this was a welcome change from usual practice. Funders' external targets for the number and speed with which outcomes should be achieved presents a barrier when supporting people facing multiple disadvantage.[23]

The test and learn approach and absence of targets allowed areas to take risks and explore new approaches. Staff and stakeholders described how the Fulfilling Lives programme took a fresh look at how things had traditionally been done, and questioned assumptions about what might happen if things were changed.

> **I think it's the fact that these are learning projects. I think there was that culture right from the earlier days [...] that it's a test and learn process, where when you start, you're not target-driven, you haven't got to get so many people through the books in so much time, or force so much change. It's go out and do what you think is right, and stop and review it and evaluate it and learn from it, and change if you need to.**
>
> Partnership staff member

Flexibility

The Fund set clear high-level ambitions for the programme in terms of changing lives, changing systems and involving beneficiaries. There was also a set of programme principles that were intended to guide the work of partnerships (such as coproducing support and taking a strengths-based approach). But beyond these guidelines, partnerships had flexibility in how they used the funding. This meant they could identify local systems blockages or gaps in services and then respond in a creative away. Partnership staff describe how this helped them make progress on specific local issues.

> " The Lottery people in this were very committed, they never took over, they were able to guide and support but allowed [partnership area] and the various systems to really have a look at what needed to happen.
>
> **Stakeholder, Voluntary sector**

Wider programme support

The Fulfilling Lives programme provided regular opportunities for staff from funded partnerships to come together to share experiences and get mutual support. Partnership leads met regularly as part of the programme-wide Systems Change Action Network (SCAN), which included representatives from the Fund and MEAM. These activities provided a boost to local partnership work. The programme supported programme-wide communications activity, mainly in the form of Multiple Disadvantage Day and the See the Full Picture campaign.

The Fund also contracted MEAM to give partnerships independent advice and guidance to support programme delivery.

> " Being able to network with those other programmes, share learning, get a collective evidence base, but also make a bit of noise, I think has been very powerful.
>
> **Stakeholder, Public policy**

Fulfilling Lives as a voluntary sector led programme

Fulfilling Lives partnerships were voluntary sector led. This is in contrast to other similar programmes such as Changing Futures and most MEAM approach areas, which are led by local authorities or statutory bodies. This brought a number of benefits. For instance, partnership staff felt they were able to work with a degree of freedom and flexibility that would be less likely if they were part of a statutory agency. Many partnerships had personal budgets set aside for buying additional support or allowing people to engage in life-enhancing activities. Staff felt that being employed by a voluntary sector organisation gave them greater flexibility in how these funds could be used.

Voluntary sector organisations can often respond more rapidly to changing contexts. The greater freedoms and flexibilities available to these organisations meant Fulfilling Lives partnerships were particularly well suited to making the best of the test and learn approach. Partners were able to plug gaps in support by developing new bespoke services to pilot, and could be creative in devising solutions to system barriers.

> Because [partnerships] were non-statutory, there seemed to be an element of creativity that they had. [... The programme] didn't really feel like some sort of tried and tested thing that had been done and that it was all a bit boring. I don't know whether they would have been able to do that if it was statutory, to have been as creative as that.
>
> Stakeholder, Voluntary sector

Voluntary sector organisations brought with them trusted networks of contacts that they were able to use effectively. They were able to connect with small and grassroots organisations that might not normally be heard. Similarly, staff at voluntary sector organisations felt that they were better placed to develop positive relationships with beneficiaries, many of whom regard statutory services with a degree of mistrust, based on previous poor experiences.[24] Many of the voluntary sector partners already had strong links with people with lived experience, and the skills necessary to work with them; this supported coproduction. Staff also perceived that it is easier to employ people with lived experience in the voluntary sector, as policies on background checks are less stringent.

Some reported that the membership of staff teams in voluntary sector partners was more stable throughout the programme than would have been the case in statutory organisations. Having a consistent staff team can be helpful, given the time it takes to build relationships, although changes in staff can sometimes also be a catalyst for change.

> **The voluntary sector staff have probably been more consistent through the lifetime of [the programme] than the public sector staff, where there has been much greater churn in their presence, and that has had pros and cons. Sometimes somebody good [who] really got it and pulled along the local authority is gone, sometimes they were replaced with someone with a bit more of a benign view of what's going on.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Being voluntary-sector led did have some limitations. When it comes to creating systems change in particular, voluntary sector organisations are at a disadvantage. Individuals who are best placed to make changes in the way statutory services operate were not accountable for the programme, and it was sometimes difficult to get influential people from statutory organisations on board. This slowed the pace of change.

> **The fact that we were voluntary-sector contracted was perhaps a challenge to try and influence statutory bodies.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Voluntary sector organisations were less involved in shaping the priorities of statutory agencies. As priorities shifted, the partnerships had to react. Particularly in the early stages of the programme, Fulfilling Lives partnerships sometimes felt they were not taken seriously by statutory agencies and local authorities, and that they lacked some of the power and influence of statutory organisations. Some reported resentment that so much money had been given to the voluntary sector, particularly at a time of massive reductions in public sector funding. As part of the voluntary sector, Fulfilling Lives was seen by some, particularly in the early stages of the programme, as 'just another project' that sat outside statutory services.

The impact of the wider context

In a complex system, the 'cause' of change will rarely be the intervention alone (in this case the Fulfilling Lives programme). Fulfilling Lives did not operate in a bubble, but was embedded within a wider system and affected by external pressures and changes. Some of these influences will have helped and others hindered the programme in achieving its aims. Staff and stakeholders highlighted some key influences that are also likely to have contributed to the outcomes observed.

COVID-19 pandemic

Probably the most seismic event mentioned by many interviewees was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, related lockdowns, and social distancing measures posed real challenges for partnerships and the people they supported.[25] However, the period also created opportunities and forced change. This undoubtedly helped to speed the progress of change by creating a sense of urgency, and loosening-up service specifications and bureaucracy to provide what was needed.

> " The pandemic period. It's really helped in a weird way. I think that's because of the urgency that came with it [...] there was a real spirit and willingness, 'we're in an emergency. We need to do what we can. We need to drop some of the controls we've got on the very tight, narrow service specifications and just do what's needed right now for those people.'
>
> **Stakeholder, Healthcare**

The response to the pandemic, including Everyone In,[26] demonstrated on an unprecedented scale just what could be achieved when partners worked together with a common goal. Such collaboration as part of the COVID-19 response helped to accelerate the partnership working for which Fulfilling Lives areas had been pushing.

However, the pandemic also created challenges for the delivery of systems change. Activity that had been planned or was in progress was suddenly curtailed or had to be significantly altered. The need for many staff to work remotely was also a major barrier to delivering some support.

The response to the pandemic showed what could be achieved

Other related programmes

Programmes such as the national Housing First pilots and the Rough Sleeping Initiative were cited as having an influence on the system of support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Some of these programmes contributed additional resources to the system; also, in the case of the Homelessness Reduction Act and Domestic Abuse Act 2021, new statutory duties were created for local authorities, which signalled the importance of these policy areas.

Running alongside Fulfilling Lives has been the MEAM Approach. From a few initial pilot areas in 2010, the approach has grown to encompass over 30 partnerships across the country. The MEAM approach shares key aims and principles with Fulfilling Lives, including an emphasis on coproduction, flexible services and systems change. Having another successful programme operating simultaneously and giving similar messages is likely to have helped to move multiple disadvantage up the political agenda.

Integrated care systems (ICS) are partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and deliver joined-up health and care services.[27] In 2016, NHS England asked all parts of England to begin planning together, and two years later the first ICSs were named.[28] In the 2019 NHS Long Term Plan,[29] the intention for the whole country to have ICSs was outlined, and by 2022 these became statutory. This movement towards joined-up planning of services means that Fulfilling Lives' systems change activity was working with the prevailing trend in thinking in health and social care; indeed, staff reflected that this has supported their work in establishing multi-agency working practices.

> " I think without the Integrated Care Partnership, I don't think the [Fulfilling Lives] programme would have been in the consciousness of the system as much.
>
> Stakeholder, Healthcare

Austerity

While the Fulfilling Lives funding was welcome, the context of austerity arguably made it harder for partnerships to create systems change, due to the lack of resources for mainstream services. Austerity policies saw substantial reductions in public funding; in particular, central government funding for local authorities fell by almost 60 per cent between 2010 and 2020.[30]

Staff and stakeholders suggested that this made it harder to engage other organisations in systems change activity and trying something different. One stakeholder described the impact of austerity as 'trauma in the system' – the fact that there are staff shortages and high demand means people feel exhausted and unable to contribute.

One stakeholder observed that it was easier for services to disinvest in some areas because the Fulfilling Lives partnership was available to pick up cases.

> **Just the head-space of the leaders, I think, is hard to get these things through when they're wrestling with so many other issues at the same time.**
>
> **Stakeholder, Healthcare**

Local changes

Changes in senior leadership and political representatives can result in sudden shifts in emphasis or priority. The restructuring of statutory and other bodies, such as the introduction of ICSs and changes to offender management services, can be disruptive to progress, or mean that attention is diverted elsewhere. New personnel means building relationships again. Such changes can be positive too – for example, when someone new brings their own ideas and drive to create change.

> **I think there have been key milestones that have helped accelerate change and that's often been when there's been a change of commissioner [...] I think some of those moments helped accelerate change and brought about changes in commissioned service contracts and staffing. I think otherwise change can be a slow burn.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

Mechanisms for change

In addition to helpful programme features, staff and stakeholders identified specific activities and mechanisms that they perceived to be effective in facilitating systemic change.

Personal relationships

A thread running throughout the Fulfilling Lives programme and evaluation has been the importance of personal relationships – whether between frontline workers and the people they support, or between services and sectors. Building trust between the programme staff and other partners, services and commissioners has been essential for engaging people, getting their buy-in to the aims of the programme, and creating change. Being able to build alliances was particularly important for Fulfilling Lives as voluntary-sector led – partnership staff did not automatically have access to the necessary strategic meetings.

Building strategic relationships requires people who have these skills, but also sufficient time and resilience. Staff spoke about taking a pragmatic approach to creating change – such as working with willing people, and building allies where they could. Creating trust in the programme has proved to be hard-won over time, but the stakeholders we spoke to clearly had a high opinion of the Fulfilling Lives programme and staff.

Relationship building also requires tact and diplomacy, to avoid services feeling that they are being criticised or told how to do their jobs.

Building alliances with partners gave access to strategic meetings

> There's an implicit suggestion, or sometimes it's overt, that the system's broken, and if you're going to a group of individuals who work in the system, that can be taken as a reflection on their own work and skills and experience. Getting that initial development of relationships with organisations right in terms of the tone and who you are and what you want to do, and how you want to work with people, I think is critical.
>
> **Partnership staff member**

The importance of having 'the right people in the right roles' can mean that change and progress are fragile; if particular champions move on, then it can be necessary to start building relationships again from scratch. However, once strong relationships have been built, they can survive beyond programmes and roles, providing access to support and expertise. Again, having longer-term contracts and funding increases the likelihood of maintaining a stable team over time.

> **Most of the people on that board, I still have their personal mobiles and I'm talking a few years later. We still text. If I have a problem [...] I will ring that person in that area still.**
>
> Stakeholder, Police

A central role for lived experience

Along with relationships, the role of people with lived experience runs throughout Fulfilling Lives, and this has played an important role in creating change. The involvement of people with lived experience in training, evidence-gathering and influencing has ensured the programme's authenticity and impact. Such individuals provided a vital perspective on changing the way services are designed and delivered.

> **I do think that [lived experience input] is a big part of what's happened and I think they have contributed in a really important way. This is worth investing in [...] You make them part of the plan. There's definitely stuff that we wouldn't get at if we didn't have those people helping us to explain what it's like.**
>
> Stakeholder, Healthcare

Stakeholders often recognised Fulfilling Lives coproduction work as being a step up from what had gone before. As a fundamental feature of Fulfilling Lives from the start, lived experience groups developed over time to provide a source of expertise on not just the need for change, but what a better-functioning system might look like.

It is important to have infrastructure in place to facilitate the involvement of people with lived experience, so that they feel safe and supported and able to contribute as equals. Lived experience groups in all areas helped to get the voice of lived experience onto local boards and into meetings. In addition, the NECG (which also included regional subgroups) provided a national resource that is easily accessible to central government and can summarise common themes from local discussions.

> " Having the voice of experience and supporting it and having a mechanism in place to enable people to feel safe enough to be in those spaces has been really invaluable.
>
> **Partnership staff member**

As highlighted in our recent report on coproduction,[31] an involvement coordinator can play a crucial role in managing requests for input and providing support. Coordinators can also ensure that when organisations seek input from lived experience, they understand coproduction and how to best engage with people.

People with lived experience were also recruited into roles within teams and engaged on a paid basis as consultants, so that their expertise was integrated throughout the programme. Some partnerships created formal structures for people with lived experience to get training, work experience and, importantly, progression pathways (for example, Inspiring Change Manchester's Getting Real Opportunities of Work (GROW) programme). Such programmes not only support individuals, but also help to create a pipeline of talent for embedding lived experience within the workforce at all levels.

Expert Citizens CIC

Expert Citizens CIC is a community interest company built by and for people with lived experience. It was originally set up with funding and support from VOICES (Stoke-on-Trent Fulfilling Lives partnership).

Through service evaluation, awards and learning opportunities, Expert Citizens has recognised and supported good practice and raised awareness of multiple disadvantage. It has collaborated with academic partners to produce evidence on topics including rough sleeping and access to GP services.

Expert Citizens has codesigned and delivered impactful training to a wide range of staff supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage in the city.

> [VOICES] bought somebody with them from Expert Citizens, who had actually been in this emergency department many years ago, whilst he was suffering with mental health and addiction issues. It was really, really powerful. It created a bit of a buzz where people wanted to do something different.
>
> **Stakeholder, Healthcare**

Expert Citizens CIC is now independent of VOICES and has a key role as part of the Changing Future programme.

Find out more about Expert Citizens CIC.

Learning programmes
Partnerships created myriad opportunities to upskill the workforce. These included training courses, good practice guidance, toolkits and videos, which were often based on learning from delivering Fulfilling Lives. Themes covered include understanding the impact of trauma and trauma-informed ways of working, psychologically informed environments, coproduction, understanding multiple disadvantage, and the needs of women. These activities appear to have been influential in raising awareness and developing the skills and confidence of the wider workforce to support people.

The training has found a ready audience from across sectors, who are eager to understand more about how to work in a trauma-informed way but where there appears to be limited provision.

One partnership in particular spoke of the importance of becoming a learning organisation itself, as a necessary precursor to creating change elsewhere.

> **In order to do system change and be innovators, you need to have those learning cycles. We need to be a learning organisation. And we didn't have those skills to start with because it's not embedded into a system at all to have safe, critical, honest feedback that is given and received in a grown-up way.**
>
> **Partnership staff member**

As well as more traditional training courses and resources, partnerships provided opportunities for learning through communities of practice, where people can come together to share experiences and discuss common challenges (see the boxed example on Opportunity Nottingham's Practice Development Unit on page 40). More informal opportunities to share experiences and knowledge also seem to have had an impact.

> **We did workshops and everything and we had a working group, but the members of the [Fulfilling Lives partnership] team would come and sit in our team meetings and just talk about working with people with multiple disadvantage, different ways of working.**
>
> **Stakeholder, Voluntary sector**

Involving people with lived experience in both the design and delivery of training and learning activities adds authenticity and impact to training.[32] Stakeholders valued the opportunity to engage directly with people with lived experience. Creating learning opportunities with flattened hierarchies, and reducing power imbalances, help to create safe spaces where people can share their experiences and learn from one another.

Another way to create longer-term systemic change is to embed new approaches and understanding of multiple disadvantage in professional training at an earlier stage. Several partnerships have worked with higher education institutions to include training on multiple disadvantage for social workers and healthcare professionals.

Partnerships have shared learning widely

Opportunity Nottingham's Practice Development Unit

The Practice Development Unit (PDU) was created by Opportunity Nottingham to promote and facilitate collaborative learning among those who work with people experiencing multiple disadvantage. It has disseminated learning and insight from the programme and further afield through workshops, a community of practice (CoP) and an online hub. Participation has grown from 164 attendees in 2017/18 to 385 in 2021/22, with a notable increase in representation from statutory organisations in recent years. An evaluation of the PDU found it was supporting the understanding of services, joint-working, and organisations' adaptability to be more responsive to the needs of people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The PDU is set to continue beyond the Fulfilling Lives programme.

> One of the things I think has been amazing and I think every city should have one, is the Practice Development Unit, which is a kind of learning resource but it works like a community of practice. [...] It's been one of our mechanisms for culture change and it's something we've written into our successor programme [...] that safe space for learning and sharing experiences, and keeping on top of the research and shaping that knowledge base, has been absolutely phenomenal.
>
> **Stakeholder, Public policy**

Join the PDU hub and read the evaluation of the PDU.

Cross-agency networks and groups

Repeated opportunities to learn and hear key messages are important for embedding learning. We highlighted in the previous section some of the wide range of cross-agency structures set up by partnerships. In the course of the evaluation, we often found that the benefits of these structures go beyond their immediate purpose. They provide a forum, formal or informal, for people to get to know colleagues across the system (building those all-important relationships), to understand each other's roles, priorities and pressure points. These networks and groups often provide a basis for more collaborative working. For instance, multi-agency meetings about one issue sometimes provided a springboard for people to work together on other things.

There are indications that multi-agency groups and partnerships also help to create an important sense of community between workers. Members feel more able to share information and ask for help as a result. Mutual support between practitioners from different sectors and/or parts of the country can be helpful when members are all wrestling with the same challenges. Established relationships developed through Fulfilling Lives partnerships provided a sound basis for quickly mobilising expertise, such as when the pandemic hit and there was a need for rapid action.

Setting up and maintaining networks requires effort and coordination. The resource provided by Fulfilling Lives made this possible. Stakeholders commented on the good sectoral mix and senior-level involvement in partnerships as important ingredients in creating change. Getting such input and buy-in to meetings helped create kudos and attracted interest from others, as senior leaders championing the agenda and approach are seen as effective ways to model desirable behaviours. Not all specialisms were involved in all partnerships and groups – for example, many areas struggled to engage with mental health. A particular strength of Fulfilling Lives was that it effectively brought together voluntary and statutory sectors.

> **Creating networks which I think will stay, [the] trauma network, peer involvement network and the coproduction network. They have been really good models for working across the system, bringing together statutory and voluntary and all the different bits of system, that's been really positive. They don't just happen by themselves, they need resource to bring them together and make them happen.**
>
> Partnership staff member

The Camden and Islington Trauma-Informed Network

In 2021, Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden set up the Trauma-Informed Network with the aim of connecting and synthesising the different trauma-informed approaches used locally into a shared approach. The network consists of:

— a working group, bringing together people with lived experience, trauma specialist therapists, commissioners and frontline staff, to learn from each other and discuss shared approaches, and

— an open network, hosting learning events every other month to share learning to anyone who wishes to attend.

The Network has been involved in creating a multiple disadvantage learning module for Mental Health and Social Work students at Middlesex University, and delivered training to local healthcare professionals, including the Central London CCG.

> I think the Trauma-Informed Network has been absolutely critical […] it has brought people together to agree a set of principles and provided a space for practitioners from a variety of sectors to come together and talk about what it means to be trauma informed, and that's [not] only with our service users, but also with each other as colleagues, and within a system.
>
> **Stakeholder, Voluntary sector**

Ongoing spaces for reflection are important in embedding cultural change. As an ongoing initiative, the Network has helped members develop a depth of understanding that would not be possible from a one-off training course.

The work will continue, as the local authority has given a strategic commitment to advance the Network's aims beyond the end of Fulfilling Lives.

Pilot and demonstration projects

Much of the work of partnerships has been about demonstrating that things can be done differently, and that building services with the person at the centre can lead to better outcomes. This has been achieved through small-scale tests, pilots and demonstration projects, such as specialist support for women, Housing First, psychological support and case conferencing approaches, as well as the direct support provided by navigator teams.

Pilot and demonstration projects have helped to raise awareness by attracting the attention of services, particularly if they provided new ways of effectively tackling issues of concern, such as high levels of visits to A&E (see the Liaison Psychiatry Pilot Service example on page 45). Stakeholders saw for themselves the results of Fulfilling Lives approaches, leading them to consider how they might change their own practices or question assumptions and understanding. Even if projects have not always led to the replication or adoption of approaches, they can help to stimulate conversation and draw in new partners.

> I think the women's work was perfectly timed. I think there was the blossoming of conversations going on in the council around things like domestic violence. And I think it gave the whole conversation collectively a bit more weight.

Stakeholder, Healthcare

Embedding new approaches within services may be an effective way to demonstrate to others first-hand how different methods can work, as well as bringing support more directly to people who need it.

> Fulfilling Lives and the police, they had pathways where the navigators would be in the police station and when people come in and they go into the cells, so right at the beginning they're there and they're helping the police. [...] And the relationship with the police has continued really positively.

Stakeholder, Voluntary sector

Several partnerships undertook small-scale Housing First pilots. Housing First is an evidence-based approach to supporting people experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantage to live in their own homes.[33] While there is good-quality evidence of its effectiveness, much of this comes from

outside the UK context.[34] Fulfilling Lives pilots, and the resulting evidence and learning – not just about impact, but also on how to deliver the approach – appears to have been influential for other Housing First programmes.

> **We were only supposed to do a two-year pilot and then [university] did an evaluation on it, but we ended up continuing it until programme end, because of how valuable it's been. And I do believe that a lot of our learning has influenced the [City] Housing First programme.**
>
> Partnership staff member

Providing opportunities for small-scale experimentation and creativity – trying different things to resolve challenges – can lead to successful outcomes, or at least useful learning. It can also help build confidence in the possibility of change. It is important to recognise strengths and celebrate successes, particularly when working under difficult circumstances.

> **Action experimentation has been a tool that we've used to help people who are a bit stuck psychologically [...] So, if you can just try little things, you get little wins, and then it encourages you to do more, and then people start having hope. I think you start building hope into the psychology of the system.**
>
> Partnership staff member

As well as formal demonstration projects, partnerships have aimed to model better working practices that they want to see spread throughout the system. This includes coproducing services and providing supportive working environments for staff.

> **The importance of reflective practice, the importance of peer support, the importance of good supervision, the importance of wellbeing [...] I think we've modelled that, but we've also shared that more widely in the local sector and encouraged workers to be more open about asking for support, and using opportunities for learning and developing peer support activities.**
>
> Partnership staff member

Birmingham Changing Futures Together's involvement in the Liaison Psychiatry Pilot Service

Learning from Birmingham Changing Futures Together highlighted the need for support within A&E to help people experiencing multiple disadvantage to access more appropriate services for their needs.

The Liaison Psychiatry Pilot Service (LPPS) was a six-month pilot, led by mental health charity Birmingham Mind, the local NHS trust and Birmingham Changing Futures Together. The pilot placed navigators within the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to help patients build alternative pathways to services. Alongside an existing Liaison Psychiatry Team, navigators helped patients to address some of the factors contributing to their presentation at A&E. Many people were experiencing issues such as social isolation, financial difficulties and risk of eviction/homelessness. Patients were supported in accessing various types of secondary services, visiting foodbanks, registering with a GP, and claiming Universal Credit.

In total, 137 people engaged with the pilot. Following widespread positive feedback from medical professionals and positive patient outcomes, the pilot was further developed into a fully fledged intervention that will be delivered in four Birmingham hospitals.

Read more about the pilot and the achievements of Birmingham Changing Futures Together.

Production of evidence, learning and guidance
An important element of generating change from the pilot and demonstration projects has been evaluating them and capturing process learning. Being able to evidence success was seen as key to bringing stakeholders and partners together, which could then lead to more joined-up working.

> **We had to prove something worked before you could actually really push the system change [...] As we started to see any early successes, everybody seemed to be on board.**
>
> Partnership staff member

Evidencing the impact of working in a different way ensures there are tangible outputs that can be used to generate interest and influence practice. A huge volume of learning and evidence has been produced by partnerships. They have commissioned their own local evaluations and research, and supplemented these with in-house outputs. As well as reports, partnerships have produced data analysis, case studies, briefings, blogs and short films, which together form an extensive evidence base covering different interventions and ways of working.

> **We constantly churned out learning and therefore good practice, which was evidence-based, which people have listened to and not been able to ignore, and has therefore informed decision-making and strategy.**
>
> Partnership staff member

The JSNA chapter on multiple disadvantage provided by Opportunity Nottingham (see page 13) enabled other changes. Having clear evidence of the scale and nature of need in the locality was described by stakeholders as an enabler of change. Even if research or evaluation findings were not new or surprising to people working in the sector, having timely, well-evidenced research that is easily accessible can help services to present a case for making changes.

> **[Fulfilling Lives partnership] did a report about women accessing drug and alcohol services, which we're going to take the learning to adapt our new service model. It's been really helpful just having someone who's doing the work and then publishing it, it's real-life current observations. I can't say I'm amazed by the findings, I've been [working in] drugs and alcohol since 1994 so you know it, but it's really helpful to have something like a well-researched report as evidence to say this does work and here's the evidence.**
>
> Stakeholder, Healthcare

Briefings and reports produced at national level, drawing on evidence and learning from across partnerships, have also been used at the local level in pushing for change.

Partnerships worked in collaboration with lived experience groups, peer researchers, universities and other local organisations to gather evidence and insight. Delivering lived experience stories in a creative way (for example, through short films) had a resounding impact, leaving a lasting impression of what the day-to-day experience of multiple disadvantage is like, and how services and the system contribute to this.

Well-evidenced research has led to service level changes

Fulfilling Lives South East and the Intermediate Care 'Step Away' programme

In 2021, the Brighton Homeless and Inclusion Health Specialist Service set up the Intermediate Care 'Step Away' programme. This was a multi-professional approach to supporting homeless people in the community for 12 weeks after hospital discharge. Fulfilling Lives South East used its expertise to support the programme through a steering group, and by collecting and analysing data on the 'frailty scores' of participants.

The Edmonton Frail Scale, a tool for assessing dimensions of frailty including cognition, general health status, social support, nutrition and mood, was used. Fulfilling Lives South East noticed that many patients were considerably more frail than the average population in the same age group. This work has attracted attention beyond Fulfilling Lives, as the frailty scores provide a way to communicate people's health and care needs to different parts of the system without the need for excessively clinical language. The hope is that frailty score assessments will become more common practice.

Read more about the programme and Fulfilling Lives South East's systems change impact.

Discussion and conclusions

In this report we have summarised changes observed in Fulfilling Lives areas, over and above changes in individual beneficiary-level outcomes. These changes are wide-ranging and varied, and are cause for celebration. Partnerships are rightly proud of their achievements, and the stakeholders we spoke to hold the programme in high regard. There is a clear legacy from the programme, in terms of individual knowledge and experience gained, as well as a substantial bank of resources and evidence.

What is also clear is that the system is far from fixed. Changes and successes are not consistent across all partnership areas or all sectors. In particular, there appears to be greater engagement from and openness to change in the voluntary sector; changes in statutory services appear to be slower and harder to achieve. Although at the time of writing, there are numerous examples of infrastructure that looks set to continue beyond the end of the Fulfilling Lives funding, the longer-term sustainability of the programme's impact is yet to be seen. There is already concern from some areas that learning and progress may be lost, that staff are beginning to default to former ways of working, or that change is still too reliant on key individuals who 'get it' and work tirelessly to maintain momentum.

Many of the major challenges highlighted in our thematic studies remain: people being released from prison to no fixed abode, a lack of appropriate accommodation, and the catch-22 situation faced by people with co-occurring mental ill-health and substance misuse which prevents them from getting support. There are systemic challenges that partnerships and the NECG feel frustrated about being unable to change. Siloed and short-term commissioning that often focuses on the achievement of prescribed and narrow outcomes remains a problem. Information is not always shared and used effectively, so people are still repeatedly asked to tell their story. Frontline staff feel burnt out, particularly after the intensity of working through the pandemic. The NECG sums up the current status neatly:

> **Pockets of excellence exist and age-old problems remain.**

While new services are to be welcomed, the fact that dedicated support is needed to help people 'navigate' the system and gain access to services demonstrates how complex the system is. A key role for Fulfilling Lives navigators has been advocating beneficiaries' rights and entitlements, and fighting for access to services on their behalf. Small-scale victories in changing the attitudes of some staff or services aside, there appears to be just as much need for this type of work. There is concern among some that providing navigation and similar support is addressing the symptoms of systems failure, not the cause. There is a danger that navigation services could divert attention away from creating more radical or ambitious improvements in the system and end up creating yet another siloed service – just one dedicated to people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

> **Are you just helping people navigate a system that doesn't function properly, or is your role to highlight where the system doesn't function properly and use your experience of this to institute change within those systems? […] I suspect what [our navigators] did was provide another bespoke service. Which in and of itself was great. And I'm sure those people appreciated it, and they did really skilled work. How much that was just a sticking plaster over the existing system versus something that highlighted change thatthen was addressed?**
>
> Partnership staff member

> **It feels like they are patching the old system up rather than systems change overhaul.**
>
> NECG member

Stakeholders, partnership staff and NECG members often talked of Fulfilling Lives in terms of building foundations, planting seeds of change, or getting the ball rolling. So, do the changes highlighted in this report – new services, changed attitudes, new structures, more coproduction in some areas – constitute systems change? Taken individually and set against what has not changed, we might argue that they do not. But taken collectively, and if we conceive of systems change as a journey rather than a destination, we might more confidently say that systems change is underway, with Changing Futures taking the Fulfilling Lives baton and progressing work in this area. Although

more sustainable, widespread and transformative change is needed, what has been achieved has made a difference. All those small-scale, piecemeal or service-level changes collectively amount to something important and with potential to grow and influence further. As one stakeholder expressed it, in relation to changes in individual practice:

> **The changes in workforce practice are absolutely fundamental to system change, they'd probably have a more direct impact. The commissioning creates the environment but it's what happens day-to-day that matters. And, I guess [...] the staff that have been directly involved in providing the service can't see that they've had a role in system change [...] I think it would be sad if, as the programme's closed, it got labelled as something that was about decision-makers and not day-to-day activity.**
>
> **Stakeholder, Public policy**

Useful resources

Impact on systems

Evaluation Report Year Five. *Blackpool Fulfilling Lives*

Final report: Addressing Multiple Disadvantage. *Fulfilling Lives in Islington and Camden*

Impact Report. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham*

Legacy Evaluation. *VOICES of Stoke*

Opportunities Fulfilled. *Opportunity Nottingham*

Phase Four: System Change Case Studies. *Golden Key*

Programme impact and learning report. *Birmingham Changing Futures Together*

Ripple Effect: The systems change impacts of Fulfilling Lives South East project. *Fulfilling Lives South East*

Systems Change for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham*

Systems Review: How ICM has influenced systems for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. *Inspiring Change Manchester*

WY-FI: Effectiveness, outcomes and impact. *West Yorkshire – Finding Independence*

Doing systems change

Evaluating Systems Change – Webinar recording. *National evaluation*

A Practical Guide to System Change. *Golden Key*

Ripple Effect: The systems change principles and methods of Fulfilling Lives South East project. *Fulfilling Lives South East*

A Guide to Systems Change with Fulfilling Lives South East – Webinar Recording. *Fulfilling Lives South East*

System thinking: How to think differently. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham*

Other useful resources

Severe Multiple Disadvantage in Nottingham: A summary document based on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Nottingham City. *Opportunity Nottingham*

A Systems Map: Thinking about the system as a whole. *Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham*

References and notes

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2. CFE Research and The University of Sheffield (2022) Learning from the Crisis: Reflections two years on from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic CFE Research

3. National Expert Citizens Group and Revolving Doors (no date) Flipped, turned upside down – How COVID-19 improved services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage Revolving Doors

4. CFE Research and The University of Sheffield (2020) Improving access to mental health support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage CFE Research

5. Oxford University Press (2008) *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* Oxford: OUP

6. Davidson Knight, A, Lowe, T, Brossard, M and Wilson, J (2017) A Whole New World: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity Collaborate

7. The National Lottery Community Fund (2019) Fulfilling Lives: Changing systems for people facing multiple disadvantage

8. Cordis Bright (2021) MEAM Approach evaluation: Year 4 report MEAM

9. Forum for the Future (no date) Navigating systems change [online] [accessed 11th July 2022]

10. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) Changing Futures [online] [accessed 11th July 2022]

11. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2020) Changing Futures: changing systems to support adults experiencing multiple disadvantage MHCLG

12. See Fulfilling Lives national evaluation conference, 16/06/22 – Afternoon session for an overview of Changing Futures and the learning from Fulfilling Lives by MP Kemi Badenoch, then Minister of State for Local Government, Faith and Communities, and Minister of State for Equalities

13. CFE Research, with partners, are leading the evaluation of the Changing Futures programme

14. CFE Research and The Systems Change Action Network (2022) Coproduction: Principles into practice CFE Research

15. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) More vulnerable adults supported through 'Changing Futures' programme [online] [accessed 11th July 2022]

16. Ipsos MORI, NEF Consulting, Revolving Doors Agency and Hopkins Van Mil (2019) Literature Scan: Staff Wellbeing in Crisis Support The National Lottery Community Fund

17. Moreton, R, Welford, J, Collinson, B, Hansel, M and Lamb, H (2020) Challenges and Opportunities: Evidence from Fulfilling Lives partnerships on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic CFE Research and the University of Sheffield

18. Moreton et al (2022) *Learning from the Crisis*

19. Welford, J, Milner, C and Moreton, R (2021) Improving service transitions for people experiencing multiple disadvantage: Prison release CFE Research and The University of Sheffield, with the Systems Change Action Network

20. Lamb, H, Moreton, R, Welford, J, Leonardi, S, O'Donnell, J and Howe, P (2019) What makes a difference CFE Research

21. CFE Research and the Systems Change Action Network (2022) *Coproduction*

22. Lamb et al (2019) *What makes a difference*

23. CFE Research, The University of Sheffield and the Systems Change Action Network (2021) Working with commissioners and policy makers: Workforce development and multiple disadvantage CFE Research

24. CFE Research and The University of Sheffield (2020) *Improving access to mental health support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage*

25. Moreton et al (2020) *Challenges and Opportunities*

26. The 'Everyone In' initiative provided emergency accommodation to people who were sleeping rough or in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate. See Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers (England) for more information

27. NHS England (no date) What are integrated care systems? [online] [accessed 4th July 2022]

28. NHS England (no date) The journey to integrated care systems in every area [online] [accessed 4th July 2022]

29. NHS (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan

30. Local Government Associate (2019) LGA briefing: Debate on local government funding, House of Commons, Tuesday 15 January 2019 LGA

31. CFE Research and the Systems Change Action Network (2022) *Coproduction*

32. For an example, see the RESPOND training developed by Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead

33. Homeless Link (2017) Housing First in England: The Principles Homeless Link

34. Public Health England (2018) Evidence review: Adults with complex needs (with a particular focus on street begging and street sleeping) Public Health England

Methods

Research questions

We sought to answer the following research questions in this study:

— How have services and systems of support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage changed in Fulfilling Lives areas over the past eight years?

— What has the Fulfilling Lives programme contributed to the changes observed? How has the wider context affected what has been achieved?

— What mechanisms have partnerships found effective in facilitating systemic change? What learning can the programme offer to others seeking to achieve similar aims?

— What difference does it make having voluntary-sector led partnerships, compared to local authorities or other statutory organisations leading partnerships?

Desk review of partnership material and wider policy changes

We undertook a review of evaluation reports produced by partnership areas. We identified suitable material by systematically working through the publications database of the Fulfilling Lives evaluation website and any remaining partnership websites. We selected final evaluation reports and reports on systems change and legacy for review.

We created a framework, using the latest MEAM evaluation report[*] as our starting point. The framework was used to capture summary information on different types of systems change observed in partnership areas. The MEAM evaluation identifies six types of systems change activity as follows:

— **Leadership:** for example, strategic-level buy-in from partners such as adult social care.

— **Approaches to coordinating support:** for example, adoption of the navigator model.

— **Infrastructure, pathways and processes:** for example, introduction of new specialist services.

— **Strategy and commissioning:** for example, multiple disadvantage built into strategic plans.

— **Coproduction:** for example, people with lived experience involved in redesigning services.

— **Culture:** for example, trauma-informed approaches embedded in services.

We also recorded details of mechanisms involved in achieving the systems-change examples. Examples were grouped together by type and included a category for factors external to Fulfilling Lives: e.g. the pandemic, change in political leadership.

Policies across the different relevant sectors, as well as central government, were reviewed for the duration of Fulfilling Lives, to understand how changes over this time period were associated with any systems changes reported by partnerships.

*   Cordis Bright (2021) *MEAM Approach evaluation: Year 4 report*

Primary qualitative research

Primary fieldwork was undertaken between December 2021 and May 2022.

Systems Change Action Network (SCAN) workshop

A workshop session was held with 10 members of SCAN (seven partnership leads, along with two representatives of the Fund and one from the NECG) as part of a face-to-face away day. Using the MEAM evaluation typology, the group brainstormed examples of changes evident in local areas. This helped us to test the typology and consider what other categories could or should be included. We then focused the discussion on cultural changes, and in small groups, mapped out the factors that were felt to have influenced changes.

Depth interviews with partnership staff

We explored partnership perceptions of systems change and related mechanisms in depth interviews with 11 staff members from the nine remaining partnership areas. Interviewees included partnership leads, systems change leads, and evaluation and learning leads. We also incorporated findings from final interviews with leads from the three partnerships that had closed prior to this study.

Joint workshops with MEAM area and Fulfilling Lives staff

To explore the impact of the programme being voluntary-sector led, we undertook two online focus groups with representatives from both Fulfilling Lives and MEAM area partnerships (in contrast to Fulfilling Lives, MEAM areas were largely led by local authorities). The two focus groups consisted of 11 participants in total: four from MEAM areas and seven from Fulfilling Lives.

NECG consultation

NECG members have lived experience of multiple disadvantage and related systems that began before the Fulfilling Lives programme. We worked closely with Revolving Doors to agree key questions for the group to investigate.

Reflecting on services since the start of Fulfilling Lives (2013):

1. What has changed?

2. What still needs to change?

3. What role did coproduction play in achieving change?

Members were briefed, and then discussed the questions with lived experience groups across the country. Each area reported back at three regional NECG meetings. Three further regional meetings were held to discuss follow-up questions and summarise findings. The results of the consultation were presented at the group's national meeting in March 2022.

Stakeholder interviews

We undertook qualitative in-depth interviews with 16 stakeholders from four of the Fulfilling Lives areas (Blackpool; Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden; Nottingham and West Yorkshire). These four represent a range of geographic areas and experiences: two had closed their programme before the study (Blackpool and West Yorkshire), and two have secured Changing Futures funding (Blackpool (as part of Lancashire) and Nottingham). Stakeholders represented a range of roles and sectors, including the voluntary sector, public health, social care, housing and homelessness, commissioning, policing, and public policy. These individuals were identified on our behalf by partnership leads or through National Lottery Community Fund contacts.

Data analysis

All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed in full. Transcripts were reviewed by research staff and coded in an Excel framework using the same themes as for the desk research. Additional themes were created relating to the research questions and as new themes emerged.

Limitations

The sample of interviews undertaken with stakeholders for this research was purposively sampled and relatively small. Not all partnerships were still running at the time of the research, and those that were had limited staff left, who were very busy towards the end of their funding period. We were reliant on remaining partnership staff and colleagues from The National Lottery Community Fund to identify and broker introductions to stakeholders. Many had been closely involved in the Fulfilling Lives programme; for example, as members of partnership boards or multi-agency groups. While stakeholder interviews were secured from only four areas, staff interviews covered all partnership areas, as did the NECG consultation and review of documentation.