

**Birmingham Changing
Futures Together**

Navigating complexity: learning from Navigators across Birmingham

Revolving Doors Agency / October 2020



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About this resource

The information included in this resource has been compiled following research conducted by Revolving Doors Agency as part of the independent evaluation of Birmingham Changing Futures Together (BCFT). It draws on interviews with over 30 individuals involved in service design and delivery in Birmingham, including clients, frontline staff and commissioners.

The primary aims of the research were to better understand the views and experiences of those undertaking a Navigator role across a range of services in Birmingham and to learn more about the impact of Navigators, on clients, delivery organisations and the wider system.

BCFT is due to end in Summer 2022. Therefore, this resource aims to highlight learning and good practice from the programme and wider services for this group, to inform future service design and delivery of support for people with multiple and complex needs.

Who is this resource for?

This resource is aimed at commissioners and staff designing and delivering support for people with multiple and complex needs (including managers and frontline staff).

About Birmingham Changing Futures Together

BCFT is a *Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People with Multiple Needs* site funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The BCFT programme aims to improve the lives of people experiencing multiple and complex needs, across Birmingham.

BCFT defines multiple and complex needs as people experiencing two or more of the following:



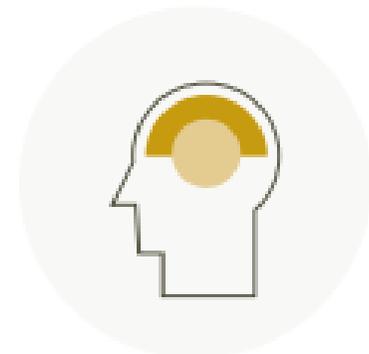
Homelessness



Problematic substance use



Risk of offending

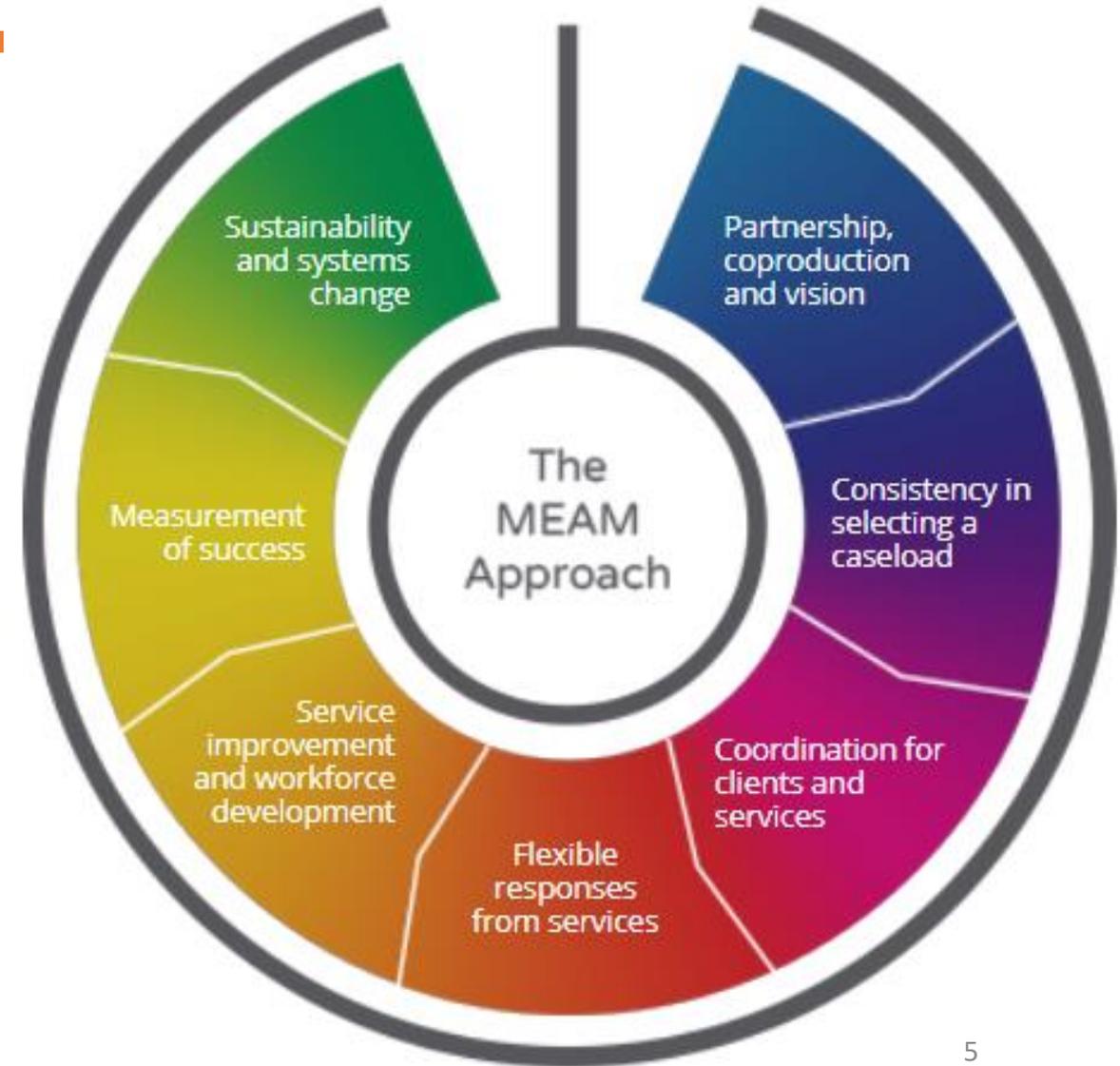


Mental ill health

Background

The implementation of Navigator roles in Birmingham has stemmed from learning about how to effectively support people with multiple and complex needs, generated through the BCFT programme, including the Lead Worker Peer Mentor service, plus other Fulfilling Lives sites and the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) Approach – a framework for local areas to work with people with multiple disadvantage.

The MEAM Approach graphic clearly shows that coordination for clients and services (i.e. a Navigator-type function) forms part of a wider approach. Navigators are most effective alongside other ways of working and ambitions.



What is a Navigator?

What is a Navigator?

Navigators do:

- Work with people with multiple and complex needs.
- Accept referrals from a range of organisations in Birmingham, as well as self-referrals.
- Support clients to access support and maintain engagement with services.
- Aim to empower clients and increase independence and/or resilience.

Navigators do not:

- Work with individuals with low-level needs that are able to access support independently.
- Have a strict eligibility criteria.
- Stop working with clients if they do not immediately engage or become difficult to contact.

The Navigator function in Birmingham

Several roles across support services incorporate similar functions and have similar aims. However, they do not all have the same name and different job titles have been used. According to the MEAM approach, a Navigator role is unique because these staff support clients to access and engage with a range of different services that can support their needs and overcome (individual, service and systemic) barriers preventing progress. They are not bound by the remit of one organisation or only focus on a certain need.

Current examples:

- No Wrong Door Navigators.
- Housing First Navigators.
- Roles at organisations delivering the Birmingham City Council (BCC) rough sleeping and vulnerable adults contracts.

Previous examples:

- The Inreach Outreach engagement worker pilot in Soho and the Jewellery Quarter that was match funded by West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner between March 2019 - June 2020.

Birmingham Navigators

No Wrong Door

- No Wrong Door (NWD) Navigators work with people 18+ with at least two of the complex needs who want support with certain issues but have trouble accessing and engaging with services.
- NWD Navigators provide access and engagement support as well as on-the-day stewardship.
- They offer time-focused support for between 8-10 weeks.

“I’ve worked in the profession a really long time and it is one of the best services I have ever come across... just because of how responsive the staff are...Everyone on that project has always been very motivated, very adaptive.” (NWD organisation)

“They’re really good at getting hold of them, taking them and supporting them while they’re there. They’re more likely to go and more likely to stay.” (NWD organisation)

Birmingham Navigators

Housing First

- Housing First Navigators provide coaching, support and advice to Housing First clients.
- They support clients to remain in stable accommodation by providing practical support and guiding clients to services and professionals that can support them to address their needs.

“It is like trying to manage seven chaotic people’s lives all at different stages... with all of the ups and downs....it’s got nothing to do with recovery, it’s to do with general life.” (HF Navigator)

“One minute you’re just there to listen...you sometimes you feel like a little bit of a therapist and then you’ve got to give advice and signpost in order to help that person with the work, or to deal with issues. We as the Navigators for Housing First ensure that a property has the basic living equipment and that it will be comfortable for that person. And then it helps to support and then to transition from rough sleeping into indoors...” (HF Navigator)

Birmingham Navigators

Lead Worker / Navigator roles

- The new Vulnerable Adults and Rough Sleeper Initiative contracts commissioned by Birmingham City Council include Lead Worker and Navigator roles.
- Such roles are intended to be different to 'traditional' support workers.
- Staff are expected to coordinate support and take a strengths-based approach to supporting clients.

"The best way to describe it is like the navigating role is that you are there to build a relationship and to help your customer to navigate their way around the weave of statutory issues. You know, system issues. Their own family and their cultural issues." **(BCC contract holder)**

"So, we really wanted these Lead Workers and Navigators to be much more about empowering that individual and making sure that actually at all stages it is about putting that person at the centre of resolving their issues, but just being there to guide them through." **(Commissioner)**

Birmingham Navigators

Inreach Outreach engagement worker pilot

- IROR involved two engagement workers with lived experience going out in the community to provide information and guidance on getting help, to those requiring support.
- Staff spoke to people who were rough sleeping and worked with local organisations to identify people who could benefit from being referred to No Wrong Door organisations as well as other services within Soho and the Jewellery Quarter, where the service was delivered .

“Because they were so on the ground in that area they were able to link up with lots of local services, which were able to then provide very local targeted support.” (IROR manager)

“They referred quite a few people in the area who have then gone on to take up that support which has meant that they haven’t continued to offend.” (IROR partner)

“We can follow up and make sure that everyone’s getting what they should be getting. We’ve worked really hard to make those links and I think we’ve been really valued in this area.” (IROR engagement worker)

“The team made a big impact...there is a gap now the service has finished.” (IROR partner)₁₂

Why are Navigators needed?

Why are Navigators needed?

Service barriers

The way services operate creates barriers to clients engaging independently. Barriers include:

- A lack of flexibility.
- Long waiting lists and delays between the referral and being supported.
- That it is difficult to contact organisations.
- Staff sometimes come across as unfriendly.

“Three strikes and you’re out...” (NWD Navigator)

“There’s all these questions and you’re going to be assessed. Then you’ve got to wait for a support worker to be allocated to you. Then you’ve got to wait for an appointment. The whole process is quite a deterrent. It’s like, ‘Oh, it’s just long and I can’t be bothered.’” (NWD Navigator)

“You can be met by people that are not very friendly...they’re a bit off.. frontline staff, they might just be a deterrent straight away...” (NWD Navigator)

“Mental health appointments can be intimidating” (NWD organisation)

Why are Navigators needed?

Service barriers

Other service barriers preventing clients from engaging included:

- That organisations have limited capacity to try and engage clients with complex needs.
- That organisations have a strict eligibility criteria which means that people with multiple complex needs are not able to access support.

“Clients don’t engage and services don’t have capacity to engage...people have been thrown from pillar to post and lost faith” (NWD Organisation)

“We had one organisation that said if there is an offending history or substance issues then you can’t come in No Wrong Door network. I know there have been talks to move away from that [misconception] and get training for staff and stuff, as that would obviously cause barriers.” (NWD Navigator)

Why are Navigators needed?

Individual barriers

Clients also face individual barriers to engaging with services, such as:

- Previous negative experiences.
- Not being aware of services.
- Not remembering appointment details or having the means to get to appointments.

“Some of the clients, they’ve been through the services before and they’ve felt they’ve been let down. And that could keep them away for a considerable amount of time before they build themselves up and then things start to happen.” (NWD Navigator)

“When I was in active addiction or suffering with mental health, I wouldn’t have gone to the appointments unless I had somebody trying to advocate for me and hand hold...” (NWD Navigator)

“I think some people feel like they’re being looked down upon...they’re not going to get the best out of somebody if they’re not comfortable around you.” (NWD Navigator)

Why are Navigators needed?

Individual barriers

Other individual barriers to clients engaging with services include:

- A fear of professionals.
- Not understanding “what professionals are saying to them.”

“They [clients] don’t know how to talk and act with professionals.” (NWD Navigator)

“You are dealing with a client group who are traumatised and a lot of them will suffer with mental health such as anxiety...I have got people who are afraid of professionals and specialist people, who they perceive to be a bit more powerful.” (NWD Navigator)

Why are Navigators needed?

System barriers

Navigators help to address numerous barriers, and therefore are able to engage people deemed 'harder to reach'.

Navigator caseloads have shown that vulnerable adults in the city face a range of challenges, that are often interlinked. Addressing an individual's complexity of need often requires interacting with a range of statutory and voluntary services and going through numerous different processes. Navigators help people to do this.

"We have lots of problems around health interactions particularly between dual needs around mental health and substance misuse alongside longer term debilitating illnesses as a consequence of vulnerable or street lifestyles. So when you put all of that together and then expect individuals to go through a level of intervention to navigate through that, it is nigh-on impossible." (Commissioner)

Why are Navigators needed?

System barriers

Services working with this group do not always work together to coordinate support, therefore the role of the Navigator is key in helping people to make sense of the different information, advice and guidance being provided.

“People were that complex that they weren’t getting the support that they needed within traditional services. They [receive] very disjointed support from our services, mental health teams, the support provider because there was not one person coordinating staff so that’s why Navigators work really well.” (BCC contract holder)

How do Navigators support clients?

How do Navigators support clients?

Navigators support people to address their needs and help with practical issues, for example by:

- Referring clients to services and provision that can support them.
- Reminding clients of their appointments and checking in to see how they are.
- Going with clients to appointments to provide moral support and/or advocacy.
- Helping clients to set up bank accounts.
- Helping clients to complete forms and make applications (e.g. when registering at a GP surgery).
- Providing support with accessing food banks, bus tickets and clothing.

How did support change during the lockdown?

Providing practical support became more common in context of COVID-19. Navigators were not always able to refer clients to services, so provided more hands-on support to bridge that gap. In particular, this has included supporting clients to access food (e.g. through food banks and hot meal providers), supporting clients to access prescriptions and supporting clients to apply for, or address issues in relation to Universal Credit .

Navigators also provided emotional support through telephone contact, which was especially valued. Clients were grateful to have someone that was checking in and seeing how they were, especially as the lockdown increased social isolation amongst many people we spoke to.

“It was nice to know someone cared about my welfare.” (NWD Navigator client)

**What difference do
Navigators make?**

What difference do Navigators make?

Impact on clients

Navigators helped increase client's motivation to engage with services, and overcome fears caused by previous negative experiences. Clients appreciated working with someone who 'cared', was understanding and was able to address their needs.

"I needed a kick up the backside, I was in such a low place, people try and help and then nothing happens." (NWD Navigator client)

"I wouldn't have done any of it without [Navigator]. I'm not good at sorting everything out." (NWD Navigator client)

"I'd had terrible experiences with services, organisations using their authority, it was the opposite of being supportive, they were accusatory." (NWD Navigator client)

Someone I can turn to that understands how it feels to be stuck." (NWD Navigator client)

"They were relentless, I felt cared about..." (NWD Navigator client)

What difference do Navigators make?

Client case study: Michael*

Michael* approached the No Wrong Door Navigator service when he was homeless after outreach staff had recommended that he get in touch. He initially required support with filling out forms to access welfare benefits.

He had tried to access housing support in the past, but struggled because he was not from the local area so was told he was not eligible. He also explained that he felt safer on the streets than the shared accommodation that he was placed in when he first came to Birmingham. Michael's previous negative experiences of trying to get help had put him off accessing local services.

"My stubbornness got in the way and meant that I didn't ask other organisations for help because one fobbed me off..."

Michael was struggling with drug addiction, so his NWD Navigator found him a place at a local rehab. He did not think he would have attended the initial appointment without his Navigator as he lacked motivation.

"They got me a place in a treatment centre where I wanted to go...I wouldn't have gone if [Navigator] wouldn't have been there, I have to be prompted...I can't motivate myself...I couldn't believe how quick they got me in treatment...I know there is waiting lists."

What difference do Navigators make?

Client case study: Michael*

They also put him in touch with CGL so that he could access a script, which he had recently lost, and put him in touch with Trident for support with accessing benefit payments.

“That [the script] was through [NWD Navigator]...I would never have known about CGL.”

Overall, Michael was very positive about his experience of working with his NWD Navigator and this gave him hope about accessing support services in the future.

“They reassured me that there is light and I can get help...I’ve either been looking in the wrong places or not approached it right.”

What difference do Navigators make?

Client case study: George*

George had past experience of offending, problems with drugs and alcohol, homelessness and mental health issues. When he was receiving support with his ADHD, a staff member suggested that he get in touch with the No Wrong Door Navigator service.

George originally met his Navigator once a week, and they also came with him to appointments including with his GP and when he had a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessment.

“It was more relaxed [than other services]...it felt like I was meeting up with a friend...he understood where I was coming from.”

George found it helpful to learn about his Navigator’s past experiences, as this gave him insight into how he could turn his life around. For example, his Navigator took him to a local boxing club where he used to train. George credited his Navigator with motivating him to not drink and take drugs.

“I haven’t been drunk probably about seven months and I haven’t touched any drugs whatsoever for about that same amount of time. I do feel that part of that is by [Navigator]. It has to come from me. But being able to talk with him and learn things from him...”

What difference do Navigators make?

Client case study: George*

The most useful thing about the support from his NWD Navigator was that he referred George to courses in construction, which is an area he wanted to work in. Since completing these courses in February 2020, George has had agency work on construction sites.

“He put me on a path to speak to them and I ended up obtaining a dumper licence, a roller licence...Which is now what I am doing for work. So that was you know one of the best things that has happened to me...quite a few things he helped me with have made a big difference to my life.”

What difference do Navigators make?

Impact on services

Large caseloads mean that staff cannot always attend appointments with clients and have regular check-ins (e.g. with Jobcentre Plus, probation, the council and GPs).

Navigators therefore enable clients to receive more intensive support than an organisation is able to provide.

They can attend appointments with clients, provide advocacy and feedback appointment details to support workers.

“Because we’ve got a caseload of 50 or above, it’s really hard to book out [time] to take someone to their mental health appointment... and then they’re good at feeding back on what happened on that appointment. Because a lot of the time, you talk to your client and they’re like, ‘Oh, I don’t know, she said something about medication but I can’t remember what she said.’ So, because they’re there, they can feed back exactly how it went.” (NWD organisation)

What difference do Navigators make?

Impact on services

- Helping clients to rebuild trust in services.
- Ensuring that clients attend appointments and access critical support.
- Bridging the gap when clients are on waiting lists to access services, for example by checking in and keeping clients motivated in the interim.

“Like they’re really good at getting hold of them, taking them and supporting them while they’re there. They’re more likely to go and more likely to stay.” (NWD organisation)

“We make the referrals but Navigators take on the leg work that we wouldn’t have time to do.” (NWD organisation)

**Good practice and key
learning**

Good practice

Involve staff with lived experience

- There was agreement that there were benefits of having staff with lived experience of the issues that they were supporting clients with.
- This helped with engagement and understanding of what could help clients.
- However, staff highlighted that it was important that team members with lived experience were supported appropriately.

“They certainly would not have got the level of engagement, the successes and the continued relationships that they built with clients...without the lived experience...that was the absolute key.”
(IROR engagement worker pilot manager)

“Telling their stories made it easier for people to relate, and they felt more comfortable opening up...having positive story shows that there is a chance to turn their life around.” **(IROR engagement worker pilot partner)**

“It puts a lot of clients at ease because they can be so fearful of professionals.” **(NWD Navigator)**

“The person supporting them had the right understanding of what they were actually going through. There was no judgement or anything”
(NWD organisation)

Good practice

Professional experience is important too

- Where staff did not have lived experience it was felt to be important that staff had appropriate professional experience, in particular experience of working with the client group, good knowledge of the local support landscape and were well connected.
- Diversity in the team meant that knowledge and ideas could be shared.

“I think it’s more about the compassion and understanding that they bring, and their wider knowledge of the client group. So on the professional aspect of processes and referral pathways and all of that sort of stuff, and then from the lived experience side of that kind of engagement.” (HF team leader)

“So, I can inform myself when I haven’t got much knowledge say on the housing situation. I can ask my colleague about legislation. What’s right, what’s not right. So, within the team we’ve got a broad knowledge of all the complex needs.” (NWD Navigator)

“I found it really useful to have that mix – coming at things from different angles” (NWD Navigator)

Good practice

Recruit for the right skills & attributes

The following skills and attributes were associated with being a good Navigator:

- Empathy and honesty.
- Somebody who is able to think on their feet and be adaptable.
- Good people skills.
- Good communication skills.
- Resilience.

“You’ve got to help people, whatever their story is... to be adaptable...to know that no one approach is going to work for everyone.”(BCC contract holder)

“A good knowledge. A good attitude and a fighter attitude like you’re not giving up. Understanding, non-judgemental...good people skills, good listening skills. A solid kind of person, you can’t let things get to you. You’ve just got to keep on going.” (NWD Navigator)

Good practice

Recruit for the right skills and attributes

- A good understanding of people with complex needs – to understand circumstances and what could help.
- Collaborative – able to work well with both clients and other professionals.
- Being friendly and approachable.

“Somebody who can maintain professional boundaries, [and] look after themselves, [in] a self-care way. I think people who are able to build up relationships, be personable...approachable. To be able to liaise with other professionals...to work within the team and on your own and to work in collaboration with other agencies.” (NWD Navigator)

Good practice

Co-locate Navigators in delivery organisations

- Co-location of Navigators and delivery organisations was felt to work well to increase awareness and understanding of the Navigator service being offered.
- There were examples of No Wrong Door Navigators being based at other local organisations for one day a week, which helped to encourage referrals and make staff aware of the support available.
- Having staff from other local organisations based at Shelter – where Housing First and No Wrong Door Navigators were based - also helped to increase referrals and improved working relationships.

“I think when people know – when people sort of see us working I think they get it” (NWD Navigator)

“Recognising somebody walking around the office and having a chat with them, talking to staff. They would always make more referrals if they know the person, they can put a face to the organisation. So that’s always welcome.” (NWD organisation)

Good practice

Keep referral processes simple

- Having a simple/straightforward referral process helped to create positive impressions of the service.
- It also made staff more willing to use it, as referring clients did not prove too burdensome.
- This was important considering the time and resource pressures delivery organisations face.
- In addition, Navigators could deal with urgent referrals – and making the referral with the client present helped with engagement because of the warm handover.

“The Navigators are brilliant at on-the-day referrals. You can send them in to a referral and they will come, pick the client up, take them on the bus to the appointment.” (NWD organisation)

“To me it’s a simple process as in you do the referral form. Speak to them if you need to. We’ve done handovers before, met clients with the Navigator.” (NWD organisation)

Key learning

Communication activity is vital

- A delivery challenge for many Navigator services has been maintaining awareness of the support available. This is exacerbated by staff turnover which means that understanding of the service is getting lost.
- Therefore communication activities were felt to be important to improving awareness and understanding of the service.
- Examples of activities included putting posters and leaflets throughout the city, presenting information about the service to local organisations and Navigator attendance at team meetings to explain more about the service.
- Local organisations emphasised the importance of highlighting the 'selling points' or factors that made the service unique and good quality to increase attention.

If you have any questions about the Navigator services mentioned in this document, please contact BCFT:

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If you want to know more about this research or the BCFT evaluation more generally, please contact Lauren, Evaluations Manager at Revolving Doors:

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