

# Changing Futures Sussex Impact Briefing 4 Lived Experience



A report outlining the transformational impact of Changing Futures Sussex on Lived Experience in design and delivery of services

# The Changing Futures Programme Sussex has enabled the embedding of lived experience in service design, commissioning, and delivery

**Through sustained advocacy, partnership working, and engaged leadership, Changing Futures Sussex has influenced how local authorities and voluntary sector partners embed lived experience in their work with people who face vulnerability or exclusion, including those with Multiple Compound Needs (MCN).**

In practice, by placing people with lived experience at the centre of the programme's delivery, it has raised the profile and demonstrated the impact of paid Peer Worker roles, supporting their sustainment across Sussex. The programme has also modelled meaningful co-production and involvement of those with lived experience across the design, commissioning, and delivery of services through its work within local authority teams and its partnerships with VCSE organisations.

There are 2 main ways that individuals with lived experience have been involved with the programme; providing direct support to clients, or in an advisory role.

### **Peer Worker / Peer Support Worker / Navigator**

A person with lived experience of, for example, mental health challenges, substance use, homelessness, who is employed (paid or unpaid) to support others currently experiencing those challenges. They use their personal experiences to provide empathy, share coping strategies, inspire hope, and build trust as well as advocate for people within professional settings.

### **Expert by Experience (EBE)**

A person who has lived and/or living experience of needing to access /accessing services such as those around homelessness, domestic violence or MCN, and who works alongside services or projects to advise and consult from the perspective of their lived/living experience. Most EBE's are volunteers but may be paid for their time and expenses.

# 1. Lived experience now shaping and influencing services, strategy, and commissioning

Changing Futures Sussex led a sustained programme of co-production activity, engaging with a wide range of services to promote and embed lived experience involvement. This has resulted in greater prominence of lived experience input and tangible influence in key evaluation and commissioning activities.

As a result of this sustained engagement, many statutory and voluntary sector partners now involve lived experience voices in recruitment, service evaluation and redesign, needs assessments, and the development of Peer Worker and Expert by Experience roles. Further details on how Changing Futures Sussex influenced this implementation are set out in the [Peer Support Evaluation Report](#).

*“There's lots of informal peer support going on, which is amazing, but there was nothing more formal. So I think one thing that Changing Futures has done to help lived experience roles and the lived experience perspective is to really put it on the agenda. By introducing these roles ... it just means that each department [is] talking about it a little bit more and there's been lots more conversations about [having] a lot of staff with lived experience ... So we need to be thinking about that in all of our support for staff.”*

**Changing Futures MDT worker**



**Achieved  
Silver Award  
in the Lived  
Experience Charter  
(2024)**

**120+**

Changing Futures Sussex-led  
co-production activities per year -  
consultations, conversations,  
presentations & discussions

- **Lived experience has influenced strategic commissioning and recommissioning processes**, including the East Sussex Drug & Alcohol Services Recommissioning and the West Sussex County Council Housing Support Services.
- **Improved domestic abuse responses** by supporting the development of a new MCN refuge in East Sussex, in collaboration with the Sussex-wide Voices of Lived Experience Board (VOLEB).
- **Coordinated the establishment and resourcing of a Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)** with Peer Researchers to inform the West Sussex Homelessness Health Needs Assessment.
- **Strengthened recruitment**, co-designing lived experience-focused interview questions for partner organisations such as Hastings Borough Council Housing Department and facilitating Lived Experience Interview Panels for Changing Futures Sussex central team posts.
- **Piloted Reverse Mentoring**, pairing an Expert by Experience with the Programme Lead. This work was later adopted by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), who have since launched a Mutual Mentoring scheme, demonstrating the potential for lived experience to inform senior leadership practice and governance culture.
- **Contributed to the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG)**, informing national work on MCN. Information about the NECG can be found [here](#).

*“One of the host organisations had not had paid Peer Workers before. However, because of the success of these positions as part of CFS [Changing Futures Sussex], they are now implementing their own paid peer support roles.”*

**Peer Support Evaluation Report**

## 2. Strengthened collaboration, partnership working, and sharing of good practice across Sussex

Changing Futures Sussex has held the role of neutral broker for meaningful lived experience involvement, co-production, and Peer Support work across Sussex. This role has brought together partners, stakeholders, services, organisations and, most importantly, people with lived experience in spaces where learning, collaboration and the sharing of best practice, challenges, and creative solutions for this work can occur.

### Established Sussex-wide lived experience and peer networks

Changing Futures Sussex has enabled, established, and facilitated a lived experience and peer network infrastructure of over 200 individuals that now underpins co-production across Sussex. These networks have supported the growth and embedding of co-production and meaningful lived experience involvement in spaces where it had not previously existed or where these voices were not being heard. These platforms for collaboration and shared learning will continue beyond the life of the programme sustaining a culture of co-production across the system.

### Lived Experience Network

A community of practice supporting shared learning, problem-solving, and service development through meaningful lived experience involvement and co-production.

### Sussex Peer Support Network

A community of practice for Peer Support Workers, and organisations who utilise Peer Support (or would like to), promoting networking and the sharing of good practice around peer support.

### 4 in-person Co-Production events

(2023-2026) Co-designed and Co-facilitated with people with lived and learned experience from Possability People, Capital, and SPFT

Through these networks, a wide range of co-production activities have taken place that would not have been possible without this shared infrastructure, including co-designing Peer Worker roles, resources, training, and involvement strategies, and strengthening best practice around inclusion and the employment of people with lived experience. The networks have also enabled lived experience contributions to shape local government strategies across East and West Sussex and Hastings, influencing work on homelessness and drugs and alcohol treatment.

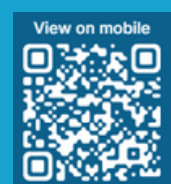
## **Promoted and supported ongoing participation in co-production forums and system spaces**

People with lived experience now actively contribute to a wide range of engagement spaces, co-facilitated by Changing Futures and external partner organisations. These spaces embed and model co-production across Sussex, including the Lived Experience & Peer Support Network meetings, the monthly 'Let's Talk Co-Production – Sussex' forum, and other co-production working groups, advisory groups, and workshops.

## **Produced practical tools and resources to embed co-production**

Changing Futures Sussex, alongside external partners, co-produced practical guidance to help organisations embed co-production, strengthen partnership working, and ensure lived experience remains central to service design and delivery. This includes Co-Producing Co-Production Ideas and Suggestions, Co-Production Poster, Keeping Co-Production Trauma Informed, and Experts by Experience Rewards Framework.

These and other resources are available at <https://linktr.ee/sussex.copro>. All these activities have significantly elevated the importance of co-production and meaningful involvement of people with lived experience across strategic, local, and service level agendas.



### 3. Peer Workers as equal partners in the MDTs

Changing Futures Sussex elevated Peer Workers as equal partners within the programme's multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), ensuring lived experience informed discussions, planning, and interventions with the same weighting as other professional expertise. This approach modelled meaningful lived experience involvement and influenced organisations across Sussex to adopt and expand paid Peer Worker roles, strengthening the case for peer working to be commissioned as an integral part of service delivery.

*"It's one thing to have someone tell me about recovery and change, it's another thing to see it in action in my peer worker. To see the life beyond addiction, a gratitude and joy that is possible in a life in recovery. There's a completely even playing field, someone that has experienced the same traumas, has the same scars. We see each other fully, the whole person."*

**Changing Futures client**

Peer Workers provided practical, direct support to clients, including attending appointments, facilitating access to medication, and helping connect with other services. This improved clients' engagement with services and contributed to positive health and wellbeing outcomes, including improved mental health, reduced drug and alcohol use, and increased self-esteem and motivation. Further evidence of Peer Navigators' contribution in engaging clients with the programme and helping build trust with other statutory roles within the MDTs and beyond is set out in the [Peer Support Evaluation Report](#).

*"With [Peer Worker] I don't go into fear and guilt and shame and rejection because she understands and knows."*

**Changing Futures client**

Peer Workers also led training and development for Multi-Disciplinary Teams to increase empathy, awareness, and understanding of the client group. Training themes include experiences of recovery, 12 Step Recovery Models, the effect of addiction in the brain, working with shame and supporting moments of change. This training has also been delivered beyond the Changing Futures MDTs to wider adult social care and VCSE organisations.

*"We've seen clients really open up to them [Peer Navigators] in a way that they haven't been able to do with their other paid workers, their social worker for example. And so we've seen clients come on in their journey quite quickly as a result of direct peer intervention."*

**Changing Futures worker**



# Enablers / Optimised Conditions

Below is a list of enablers and optimised conditions that have allowed the impacts to be achieved:

- Peer workers with lived experience as equal partners in MDTs
- Embedded co-production
- Trauma-informed Framework
- Dedicated lived experience co-ordinator providing the 'Neutral Broker' role. This established and facilitated networks, partnerships, joint working and collaborations, acting as a 'safe sounding board' for organisations and individuals to discuss all things lived experience and co-production without judgement.
- Resources, including dedicated time and budget, within Changing Futures Sussex for sustained engagement to support work across Sussex without creating competition among partners



# Risks / Red Flags

Below is a list of risks and red flags that highlight a return to practice before Changing Futures:

- Loss of funding for peer support roles
- Co-production becoming tokenistic
- Lived experience voices sidelined
- Erosion of trust among clients
- Loss of the 'Neutral Broker' role and dedicated budget



# Links for further reading

## Changing Futures Sussex Impacts Reports:

1. [Introduction & Summaries](#)
2. [Service Transformation](#)
3. [Governance & Commissioning](#)
4. [Data & Evidence](#)
5. [Co-Production](#)
6. [Trauma Informed & Reflective Practice](#)

## Impact Reports Supporting Data

### Area Data Packs:

- [Brighton & Hove](#)
- [East Sussex](#)
- [West Sussex](#)

### [Pressure Maps Insight & Learning](#)

## 'Voices of Changing Futures Sussex' - Client voice Project

### [Voices of Changing Futures You Tube Playlist](#)

## Further Learning & Resources

### [Changing Futures Sussex Learning Archive](#)

### [Changing Futures Sussex System Resources Archive](#)

# Changing Futures Sussex

[www.changingfuturesussex.org.uk](http://www.changingfuturesussex.org.uk)



Ministry of Housing,  
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