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| **Statutory Guidance on Working with People and Communities 2021****Case study template** |
| **Details** |
| **Title of the case study** | Co-producing Somerset’s trailblazing redesign of community mental health services |
| **Organisation** | Somerset Integrated Care Partnership “Open Mental Health”Case study submitted by Rethink Mental Illness, lead accountable organisation for a VCSE sector alliance within Open Mental Health |
| **Synopsis** | In Somerset, the NHS, local authority and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) partners have worked with those who have lived experience of mental illness to co-produce a new model of community mental health support. |
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| **Content** |
| **The need** | The Community Mental Health Framework outlines NHS England’s vision for implementation of one of NHS England’s key commitments around mental health. The NHS Long Term Plan commits to introducing “New and integrated models of primary and community mental health care will support adults and older adults with severe mental illnesses” (SMI) which includes “access to psychological therapies, improved physical health care, employment support, personalised and trauma-informed care, medicines management and support for self-harm and coexisting substance use.”This commitment and the accompanying Framework reflect the need to modernise and transform mental health support in the community, where too many people with mental health issues had been falling through gaps created by support thresholds and services working in silo.Implementation of this Framework in local areas is designed to support people with mental health problems to:1. Access mental health care where and when they need it
2. Manage their condition or move towards individualised recovery on their own terms
3. Contribute to and be participants in their community.

The Community Mental Health Framework states that the “involvement of service users, families and carers is critical in the co-design and co-delivery of new local approaches.” |
| **Background** | In 2019, Somerset Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) was selected as an early implementer site for the Community Mental Health Framework. In Somerset, Rethink Mental Illness has served as lead accountable organisation for an alliance of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector partners, who have worked with the NHS, local authority and those with lived experience of mental illness (referred to henceforth as Experts by Experience or “EbEs”) to transform community mental health services in the county. |
| **The solution** | The NHS, local authority and VCSE partners have taken a strategic approach to working with Experts by Experience. Their involvement as equal partners has been embedded across the transformation programme from the beginning, and the lived experience perspective they represent has influenced key decisions about the service. They co-designed the Open Mental Health model, and have an ongoing role as partners in the governance, continuous development and evaluation of the service.Open Mental Health provides 24/7 support to adults in Somerset who are experiencing mental health issues. Provision is offered through an alliance of provider organisations from the VCSE sector, NHS and social care, who work in partnership to ensure residents get the support they need. The service provides a range of support that enables people to keep well and live a full life, including a range of expert mental health support, peer support, money, housing and employment advice, volunteering opportunities, community activities and physical health support – by working together, they ensure that there is ‘no wrong door’ for anyone that needs help.Experts by Experience leaders were recruited through community engagement. They participate in board and operational meetings, sharing considerations and decisions with other partners, with their perspectives and lived experience insight valued equally to others. A core group of 8-10 Experts by Experience leaders come together as a group for strategic consideration, as well as participating as equal partners in working groups and teams to influence and deliver transformation work in localities – including community engagement and listening. |
| **Costs** | The process has been supported by funding allocated to the NHS in Somerset to deliver community mental health transformation as an early implementer site for the Community Mental Health Framework.The partnership allocated separate budgets for facilitation and community engagement, and recruitment, support, payment and expenses of Expert by Experience leaders. Resources for the former have allowed for the involvement of a dedicated Co-production Manager and Community Co-production Officers, while the latter has supported the meaningful participation of Experts by Experience in governance, workstreams and community engagement. |
| **Challenges** | It has been vital to build understanding of professionals about how to co-produce and work with EbE Leaders as equal partners. It can be demeaning for people to be seen as their mental illness, and retraumatising to be asked about their own individual experiences rather than respecting the lived experience insights they bring. It is important that background information, agendas and any notes are shared with reasonable notice ahead of meetings, and that use of exclusionary language and acronyms is avoided.Co-producing and working collaboratively with partners outside your own organisation takes culture change and a shift in mindset on the part of professionals. There are additional practical challenges to overcome, such as how to pay Experts by Experience in their roles, without disrupting any benefits they may receive, how to support them effectively, and how to offer personal development opportunities. |
| **Impact** | Expert by Experience Leaders have said that being involved as equal partners is very positive for their wellbeing, as they are using their lived experience to change the system and improve experiences and outcomes for others, building relationships with a wide range of stakeholders and their skills.*“Every single person I’ve met holds the same values and ideals about the enormous value of Expert by Experience input. I have always felt I have had someone to talk to or bounce ideas off of and this has given me the confidence to get involved with more and more projects.”***Expert by Experience leader, Open Mental Health**There are also considerable benefits for systems and services in embracing this approach. Louise Palmer, Co-Production Practice Manager at Rethink Mental Illness who leads co-production facilitation in Somerset said:*“Many misunderstand co-production, they think it’s too difficult or fear getting it wrong so they don’t do it. I think doing it from the beginning is so important, because otherwise you end up with so many mistakes that you have to go back and rectify. Admittedly, you have to be really open to the challenge, but meaningful co-production really is a ‘trump card’… so to speak.”**“Involving people who are going to use a service and their carers in designing and developing a service means that it is simply much more likely to be right for them, and increasing the likelihood that it will be successful, sustainable and produce better outcomes for those involved. It’s a slow process but you’re really investing time early to save it later on.”**“Systems and services shouldn’t hesitate – just make sure you do it properly, budget properly, have role descriptions, a group agreement and clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. And be brave and don’t be afraid to ask questions and find out more if you don’t know how to do it!”* |
| **Lessons** | Success has hinged on a number of key factors. Support and buy-in from senior system leaders has been vital, as has early and ongoing dialogue with leaders in the community. The partnership’s co-production plan was underpinned by a values-based approach and crucially, budget and resource to support facilitation and participation. For professionals tasked with delivering this plan, non-judgmental coaching and training has been essential. |
| **Next steps, sustainability and scaling** | As partners have begun to deliver Open Mental Health, Experts by Experience have been involved in communicating the service and engaging the community – to bring the community in and create an ‘ecosystem’ around the service – which was an idea from the EbE Leaders that has been taken forward, developing a whole system trauma-informed approach and training, whole system peer support approach and roles, crisis support, training for partners in effective approaches to support people around SMI Physical Health Checks - including EbE Leaders delivering training to clinical partners.  |
| **Find out more** | You can find out more about Open Mental Health on the Rethink Mental Illness website: About Open Mental Health:<https://www.rethink.org/aboutus/what-we-do/somerset-open-mental-health/>Webinar: Somerset’s trailblazing redesign of community mental health: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNYnQZvOqGMRethink Mental Illness has also produced a number of reports and resources focused on co-production, including:Co-production in commissioning – getting started: <https://www.rethink.org/media/2256/co_production_getting_started_guide.pdf>Progress through partnership – involvement of people with lived experience in CCG commissioning: <https://www.rethink.org/media/2591/progress-through-partnership.pdf>For further information, please contact Harvey Crawford, Policy Manager at Rethink Mental Illness: Harvey.crawford@rethink.org |
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