Mental Health TOGETHER

Good Practice Guide

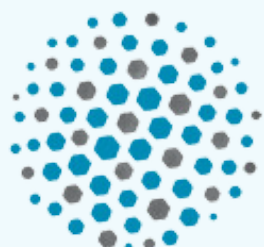## Co-designing services with voices of lived experience

This guide has been developed with advice from our Experts and professionals to give people the courage and tools to co-design services and solutions together

Contents

We acknowledge K A McKercher's "Beyond Sticky Notes" as a valuable reference for this guide

Mental Health **TOGETHER**

Introduction

"Co-design" is a phrase that many of us will have heard of over the past few years. But perhaps we haven't had a chance to understand what it is and what it isn't, and how on earth we go about it together. In this guide we will explore what it looks and feels like for both professionals and people with lived experience. We will consider honestly the challenges that come with it but also the unique rewards of working directly with people who will be using the services.

We have asked several of our Experts by Experience to share what difference it has meant to them to be involved directly in designing services. We've also asked some professionals to share their perspective and experiences of co-design. In the spirit of co-design there is an element of co-design to this Good Practice Guide!

At its best co-design can be a very creative and rewarding experience for everyone involved. Like anything, the more you practice it the more natural this different way of working will become. So, what do we need to understand about the process of co-design and what are the key things that will help us to enjoy its many benefits?

What is co-design?

> "Co-design brings together lived experience and professional experience to learn from each other and make things better - by design." **K A McKercher**

In co-design, people with the relevant skills and experience come together to create a product. These can be things such as:

- training materials
- information booklets
- a new service
- organisational policies
- service specifications

Co-design has a 'co' bit (e.g. community, co-operation) and a 'design' bit. Both parts are important, but neither has all the answers.

When we co-design something together we are saying that we need what each other brings, what each other knows, and we value that.

So, professionals will bring their knowledge and training to the table and people who use services will bring their direct experience and their skills as people. Of course, people can be both professionals and users of services, that is fine, it all helps with the understanding.

The responsibility and accountability do not rest solely with professionals or Experts by Experience. We agree to bring your best to the work, and we share the challenges, the reward and the pride of a job well done.

> "Involving people with lived experience enriches not only the quality and depth of the project, but also ensures that I keep learning and challenging my own views about what is important for people."
>
> **Nurse Clinician**

Why is co-design important?

> "Unless people with lived experience are consulted as part of any service development or change, then services are being created with the best of intentions, but so often miss the mark"
>
> **Expert by Experience**

We expect that the result of our work together will be better because we listened to each other's perspectives. The resulting product or service will be more effective and more suitable for its intended purpose and audience.

We are less likely to miss an important aspect of what is needed. Small details, as well as large, can matter to the overall success of a service, and we are more likely to get them right if we put our heads together.

Experts can tell us about the things that they experience as a barrier to a service, which is extremely valuable. Different communities experience different barriers so try and make sure the most relevant voices are invited to be part of the design team.

The process of designing together offers a great opportunity to learn together, to broaden our perspectives, to learn how to make better decisions. It can free us to be more creative, to think beyond our normal boundaries and imagine things differently.

This is not a 'pie in the sky' philosophy, we know that we don't have endless budgets, timescales etc. It means rather that whatever we do invest in terms of money and time is likely to be put to better use than it would otherwise have been. And hopefully we have more pleasure from doing it!

Co-designing also offers you an insurance policy that whatever the result is, we have designed it together, so we are jointly accountable for the result. It is not all on you!

CO-DESIGN ROADMAP

Making a good start....

Make time to get to know each other and feel safe together.
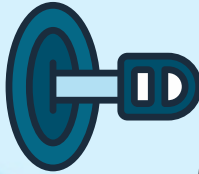
Shared values and understanding

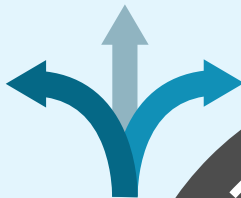Explore each others understanding of co-design and its values.

Mismatched expectations

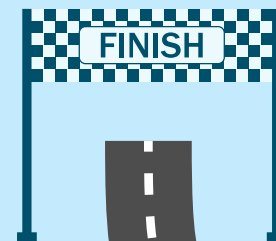Address any concerns or misunderstandings about the process as we go along.

Flexibility to share power

Be aware of the power dynamics in the group. Has anything shifted towards unequal power?

Shared pride in a winning design!

We did it! Congratulations on getting your winning design over the line together.

FINISH

Shared determination

Keep supporting each other to design differently and hold to our agreed values.

Shared knowledge and decision making

Stick to our agreed decision making processes so that everyone has a say.

Before we start

"Despite our best intentions, we often regress to old ways of being and doing when we feel isolated, vulnerable or uncertain" **Nurse Clinician**

One of the first things everyone needs when they are new to co-designing is support and encouragement. This is a different and new way of working together.

Experts by Experience will need support to begin having a genuine voice where they have previously had very little. Professionals who are used to holding responsibility will need support to be open and curious and to share the decision-making.

So, make sure that Experts by Experience have the necessary support in place for them and be sure to find your own supporters. Talk to colleagues and Experts who have some experience of co-design work. You might even ask one of them to help you facilitate the design group. Be open about any concerns you have so you can get advice and not be put off at the first bump in the road.

Choose a small project which is as free from tight deadlines and time pressures as possible; these are the enemies of co-design so give yourself a fighting chance! Make sure everyone in the team understands why you are choosing to co-design so there are clear intentions from the start.

First things first

"Knowledge speaks but wisdom listens."

Jimi Hendrix

Relationships

To co-design well together we need to put relationships at the very top of the agenda. Make sure we prioritise getting to know each other as a team. We don't have to become best buddies, but we do need to develop a sense of mutual respect and of really valuing what each other brings to the process.

Power Dynamics

It's important to recognise that everyone's experiences of power and authority will be different in the room. In theory, there should be equal power, but some people will feel much less confident and powerful than others. So be honest about it and talk about how everyone can help each other to feel they have an equally valuable voice.

Make sure the important issue of how the time and skills given by Experts by Experience will be valued – payment and reward are important when people are devoting much needed time and expertise.

Openness and Honesty

Is there any previous history that we need to clear away before we can work happily together? Sometimes Experts have felt very let down in the past and need reassurance that this experience will be different. Professionals may also have had negative experiences and need to feel safe to share honestly.

Make sure everyone is clear about the scope of the co-design project. If there are valid reasons why it's not possible to co-design the entire service be honest about that from the start. Then bearing in mind what we've learnt about each other, we agree our guidelines for being able to work comfortably together.

What do we already know?

> "People currently receiving services, and their carers, are our most precious resource and will absolutely have the most relevant stories to inform the way we do things."
>
> **Nurse Clinician**

Before stepping into any design work, we need to be very clear about what the issue is we are trying to solve or the need we are trying to meet. It is important to share knowledge from the start because it may change the focus of the design work.

We may realise that the problem isn't what we thought, or the need is different to what we thought. In co-design we need each other as a sounding board to test out the team's assumptions, which is really valuable.

We do not want to lose valuable things about a service in the co-design process, so we need to know what is already working well for people. Too often things are redesigned in ways that remove some aspects of a service which people had found valuable and helpful. Also, does anyone have examples of how other people have created solutions to a similar need or challenge?

> "It gives me confidence, purpose and a sense of achievement to contribute back to services that I have benefited from."
>
> **Expert by Experience**

Being creative together

> "Others have seen what is and asked why, I have seen what could be and asked why not"
>
> **Pablo Picasso**

We need to make sure we work at a comfortable pace for each other and agree where and how often we will meet (see our Good Practice Guide for meetings). Try to free yourself from the mindset of your normal working environment which may require us to be certain and decisive. Instead, this is a chance to be deliberately uncertain, to operate 'in the grey', to be actively curious about different options and viewpoints.

We are mining for the hidden treasure of lived experience that will shed new light and ideas on service challenges. Between us all we can come up with ideas we would never have thought of on our own.

We can think creatively about what design methods we might try out together. Be open minded about trying different ways to get the maximum benefit from everyone's ideas.

Remember we are trying to create and maintain a level playing field for each other so we can all give our best. As a design team we all need to work together throughout the process, from beginning to end. This is where it differs from engagement and participation which might be just one-off events.

Keeping each other on track

"There is no map, we make it together."

K A McKercher

Help each other as a team to work in line with your agreed guidelines. Don't rush the process and be willing to sit back in uncertainty together until some new piece of information or insight takes you forward again.

Many of us work, or have worked, in a culture which rewards fast answers, assertive views, certainty and compliance. But this does not help us in co-design work. We need to look deeply into the issues at stake and resist the urge to come up with a quick fix, or a one size fits all approach. Keep setting each other free to explore things fully until we understand them fully.

Check in with each other and take time to resolve any misunderstandings or concerns. Do not try to make things simple if they are complex and keep asking each other questions like "Please explain what that feels like from your viewpoint", "Tell me a bit more about why this (service, information etc) hasn't worked for you in the past".

Celebrating the result together

> "I'm pleased, and a little proud, that I've been able to contribute to essential change in practice that will help others in the future" **Expert by Experience**

Just as we share the challenges, so we share the satisfaction and pride in designing something far better because we have worked side by side. Try and write up your experience together, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute their perspective. Celebrate what you have learnt together in whatever way you choose.

As your final service or product design starts to be used make sure we agree how we will evaluate it and give the whole team a chance to be involved in the evaluation. That way everyone continues their learning and hopefully has the joy of seeing their design work making a positive difference for both clients and staff.

"I feel invigorated when I'm asked for my thoughts and opinions about service design"

Expert by Experience

Summing up

Co-design can:

- Deliver a better product or service change
- Save money
- Provide valuable learning and experience
- Develop bonds with communities of people
- Develop mutual empathy and compassion
- Improve self-confidence and self-worth
- Give a sense of satisfaction and achievement
- Increase understanding of health & social care system
- Improve mental well-being
- Give a sense of hope for the future

Co-design will need:

- More time
- More patience
- Flexible thinking and attitude
- Curiosity about each other's experiences
- Respectful and encouraging relationships
- Budget to offer Experts expenses/payment/reward

Co-design is not:

- Having separate workshops with different stakeholders
- Holding focus groups
- Consultation events to ask people's opinions
- Workshops with senior staff
- Management meetings with residents or patient representatives

While these are all examples of participation, they aren't co-design when used as standalone activities because they aren't bringing stakeholders together continually across the whole design process.

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