



Struggle to Strength 2023
Fife's Lived Experience Team & Peer Support Network
Year 2



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Background

About This Work

Struggle to Strength supports people with lived experience of poverty, trauma, mental health challenges and/or unemployment. It builds confidence and skills, transforms difficulties into strengths and, in turn, aims to improve mental health and employability service design and delivery for countless others in Fife.

The project comprises two interlinked components: the Lived Experience Team (LET) and the Fife Mental Health Peer Support Network (PSN). Both offer a combination of 1:1 support, training and social connections within a community of interest where all are treated as equal.

In 2023 Struggle to Strength was supported through a combination of funding from the Robertson Trust, Fife Council No One Left Behind and Fife Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP).

In March 2023 the team expanded significantly due to funding for work on the Fife HSCP Mental Health & Wellbeing in Primary Care and Communities Redesign (MHWPCCR). Over the course of the project, the team included:

Peer Support Network Coordinator	Lived Experience Team Coordinator
Struggle to Strength Project Officer	3 x Lived Experience Team Facilitators for MHWPCCR
Lived Experience Team Facilitator for Employability	Lived Experience Team Support Facilitator (March – Sept only)

The team was supported, and line managed by Fife Voluntary Action, Employability Development Manager.

The whole project has been overseen by a Steering Group which meets quarterly and includes representatives from Fife Council Employability Division, Fife Health & Social Care Partnership, SAMH, Fife Employment Access Trust, Fife College, the Scottish Recovery Network and members of both the Lived Experience Team and the Peer Support Network.

This report covers the second year of delivery for the Struggle to Strength project, January to December 2023.

Aims And Objectives

Struggle to Strength aims to help Fife design and deliver mental health and employability services which: build people's resilience and skills; reduce stigma and discrimination; and improve access to appropriate advice and support when it is needed.

The Lived Experience Team (LET) provides supported opportunities (volunteer and paid) where people use their lived experience to inform and improve relevant policy, service design and staff skills in Fife. The LET aims to support approximately 20 individuals/year of which 6 would be new. The Team aimed to engage with around 20 different opportunities in 2022 and 2023.

The Fife Mental Health Peer Support Network (PSN) focuses on growing the capacity for individuals and organisations' to deliver peer support in clinical and community contexts. The PSN aims to engage with approx. 25 individuals; and extend its membership and engagement with relevant services over two years. The team also aimed to deliver training on Understanding Peer to 16 services. Plans to develop peer work placements were put on hold after the Year 1 evaluation.

In addition, the whole project is structured to create strong networks of support within the lived experience community and beyond. It aims to ensure people have access to financial support should they need it; that volunteers are appropriately remunerated for their activities; and people are able to gain and sustain work when they are ready.

With support from both teams, this collaborative project actively worked with senior partners and stakeholders to improve the design and delivery of mental health and employment services and systems for people in Fife.

Context For Delivery

Both nationally and locally there is a growing interest in understanding how to meaningfully bring the voice of experience into public service policy design and delivery. Scottish Government are placing increased expectations on public services to evidence meaningful engagement with service users through models such as the Scottish Approach to Service Design and Health and Social Care Patient Voice.

The Local Outcome Improvement Plan (the Plan 4 Fife) also commits to meaningful community engagement across all policy areas and leaders in the Mental Health division of Fife HSCP and the Opportunities Fife Partnership (our local employability partnership) have actively supported the role the Lived Experience Team can bring to this conversation.

This has been helped by the fact that Struggle to Strength is building on established local relationships and the success of previous FVA led co-production projects through Delivering Differently (2017-2019) and No One Left Behind (2019-2021).

This positive context means that Year 2 of the Struggle to Strength project has seen a huge change and move forwards in people wishing to support lived experience work in multiple settings.

In particular, the Scottish Government asked that local HSCP's undertake a review of how mental health and wellbeing services are being delivered in primary care and community settings. This led to a significant commitment from Fife HSCP to take a co-production approach and to fund multiple paid roles within the Lived Experience Team to support the Mental Health and Wellbeing in Primary Care and Community Settings Redesign project (MHWPPCS).

This opportunity also presents challenges: those pioneering this work feel a little like they are learning to fly a plane, while it is in the air, and possibly with a wing missing.

At the same time, we have been aware that ideas originally intended to fundamentally change 'business as usual' can unintentionally get co-opted to the mainstream.

To address this the team have adopted a values-based approach to doing co-production where *all* are treated as equals, and we endeavour to embody humility, curiosity and compassion in how we work with one another.



Methodological Approach

The work shown in this report has been carried out using a theory-based approach to outcome monitoring and evaluation, learning and improvement that builds on contribution analysis. We have worked closely with our evaluation partners Matter of Focus (MoF) to achieve this. In Year 2 we have refined our:

- Theory of change for the project informed by an understanding of the context in which we operate.
- Outcome maps that show how our activities contribute to outcomes, and what needs to be in place to make this happen.
- Understanding of change mechanisms by which our project works.

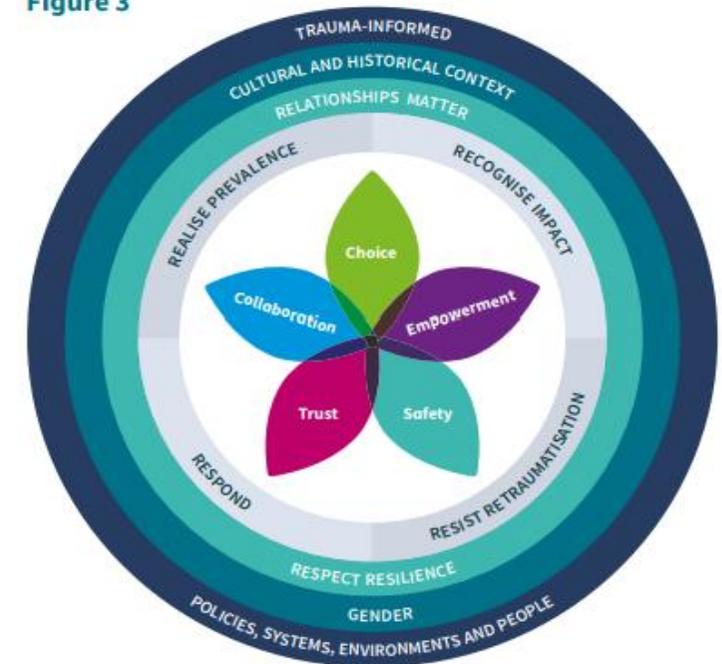
In Year 2 we have used the principles of trauma informed practice in Scotland and the CHIME model of recovery to map what matters in supporting this kind of work and in creating a supportive and empowering change journey for all involved.

Trauma informed principles for Scotland

- 1. Safety:** Efforts are made to ensure the physical and emotional safety of everyone we work with.
- 2. Trustworthiness:** Transparency exists in our policies and procedures, with the objective of building trust.
- 3. Choice:** Everyone we work with has meaningful choice and a voice in the decision-making process.
- 4. Collaboration:** We recognise the value and experience of staff *and* people who use their services in overcoming challenges and improving the system as a whole.
- 5. Empowerment:** Efforts are made to share power and give clients and staff a strong voice in decision-making, at both individual and organisational levels.

Trauma informed principles, values and leadership

Figure 3



We also worked with MoF to:

- Develop a data gathering plan to understand if we are making progress towards the outcomes we hope.
- Systematically review this data against each of the stepping stones for each pathway in the outcome map.
- Summarise key findings against each of the stepping stones to tell our contribution story.

In writing this report we have provided a selection of case studies to exemplify the work that goes on behind the outcomes and to achieve these goals.

This report has been produced in OutNav. This is a software system developed by Matter of Focus that supports organisations to take a collaborative and outcome focused approach to evaluation planning, implementation analysis and reporting.

Our pathways

1. Building the capacity of individuals to do co-production and lived experience work

2. Influencing others through co-production and lived experience

Risks and assumptions

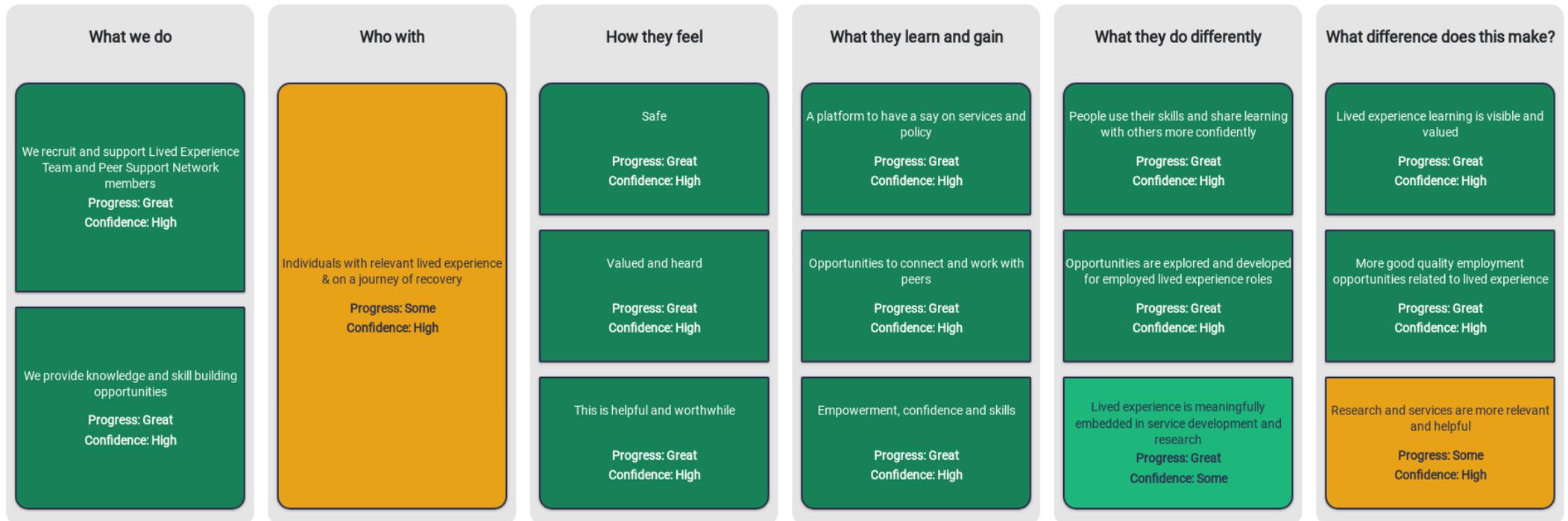
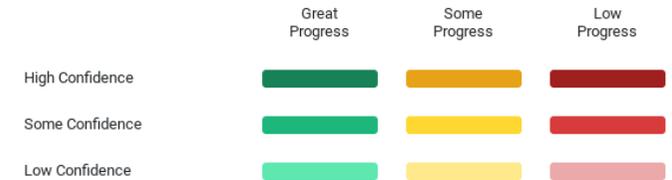
RISKS

- ⚠️ People with lived experience can be viewed as victims and treated differently
- ⚠️ Lack of opportunities to put skills into practice can mean those skills are lost
- ⚠️ This work can be frustrating when things don't go to plan
- ⚠️ Learning is sometimes not utilised
- ⚠️ Inclusion can be tokenistic and not used for real change
- ⚠️ Additional/outside training can be poor quality or not meet expectations
- ⚠️ Resources and waiting lists mean that people cannot access the services that would help them
- ⚠️ Partner organisations don't bring lived experience voices to partner co-production
- ⚠️ Disagreement on how to 'do co-production' or 'peer' within the respective movements

ASSUMPTIONS

- ⚠️ We role model and treat ourselves and others with kindness and humility
- ⚠️ We are positive about learning - about how we are doing things and from what doesn't work
- ⚠️ We have an 'all together' approach (not 'us' vs 'them')

1. Building the capacity of individuals to do co-production and lived experience work - pathway progress



1. Building the capacity of individuals to do co-production and lived experience work - summary findings

What we do - recruitment

A primary purpose of Struggle to Strength is to build the capacity of people with lived experience of mental health challenges, trauma and/or unemployment to engage in service design (often co-production) and delivery (peer work) in Fife. The first step in achieving that goal is to support and train people with the relevant experience and interest to do this kind of work.

Due to the new funding from Fife HSCP for the MHWPC project, LET recruitment and training in 2023 focused primarily on paid roles, which is a significant step forward for this work.

LET volunteer recruitment focused on the three priority areas for the MHWPC project: Cowdenbeath, Levenmouth and North East Fife.

The team visited over 17 different community groups to talk about the work of the LET and the MHWPC project. FVA also ran a social media campaign in January and February 2023, invested in posters, fliers, a pop-up banner and a selection of marketing materials such as stress balls, notebooks and pens. Volunteer recruitment was paused from the Summer of 2023 while attention shifted to supporting MHWPC engagement activities and will be re-launched in 2024.

At the time of evaluation, the team had supported **ten active volunteer** LET members (two of whom moved onto college and work) and **seven paid staff** (one of whom returned to volunteering).

The **Peer Support Network** gained 12 new members in 2023, a few members also left. As of December 2023, there are 157 on the mailing list, of which we estimate **54** attend as individuals who are peer practitioners or are interested in becoming peer practitioners.



March 2023 first meet of paid LE team & colleagues

According to feedback the most common ways LET and PSN members found out about the projects were through social media and word of mouth, and this will be factored into recruitment plans for 2024.

What we do – capacity building

Capacity building for individuals with lived experience occurs at multiple levels: through 1:1 support, mentoring within the team; and external training programmes. Ongoing capacity building activities in 2023 included weekly LET Facilitator check-ins, monthly LET volunteer check-ins, monthly co-production drop-ins, Peer Support Network Gatherings and bi-monthly co-reflection groups for Peer Practitioners.

External training attended by staff and volunteers on the project include: Making Co-production Meaningful (Thempra accredited course), Good Conversations training & Facilitator training (Thistle Foundation), Volunteer Manager training (FVA), Trauma Informed Level 1 (Health Scotland), Peer 2 Peer essentials (delivered by PSN members) and Understanding MH Stigma and Discrimination (See Me). Wellness Recovery Action Planning training (Rona McBrierty) has been postponed to 2024.

Below we share two stories which exemplify the amount of ‘unseen’ time which can go into coordinating the seemingly simplest of things.

The hidden work of recruiting volunteers

The team received **19 enquiries about becoming a LET volunteer** between January and November 2023. Despite multiple follow up efforts, only four people became volunteers. This is a 20% conversion rate (*note* two more people may have signed up by the time this report is complete which would lift it to 25%). Of the four who became volunteers, one has moved onto college and another got a job. Only two of our **new** volunteers are still **active**. **The significant** effort that is involved in recruiting LET volunteers is important for funders to be aware of. This is a specialist role, which a small number of people are able and willing to do

The hidden work of planning and delivering training

You might think organizing training is a straightforward affair. But not when you have a small target audience and varied availability. In April 2023 we met with a partner organisation to plan delivery of a training course. A date was set for June and people booked on. Unfortunately the trainer had to cancel at short notice for personal reasons. A new date was set for August, but this time a core LET colleague was sick. A third date was set in October but was not shared with partners and clashed with important events, again it was postponed. Finally the training went ahead in November 2023 with LET and HSCP colleagues attending.

Who with

Equalities information

FVA aims to ensure that members of the LET & PSN are representative of a range of relevant lived experiences, and diverse perspectives.

In November 2023 we sent an equalities survey to our membership. Nine staff and volunteer respondents completed it.

Results show that despite targeted recruitment events at Fife College and with Fife Centre for Equalities and Fife International Forum, the LET staff and volunteer membership remains predominantly white (100%), female (78%) and heterosexual (78%). There is a slight shift in diversity on gender identity and sexuality, with one respondent identifying as transgender and one identifying as bisexual.

The age range has shifted slightly since 2022 with a small extension (one member) in the under 25s age group, and a continued gap for those aged 46-54.

In terms of religion 33% had no belief, 22% preferred not to say and 22% said 'other', 11% (one person) said roman catholic.

Overall, in terms of the diversity of voices it is safe to say there is 'more work to be done'.

Efforts have been underway and both the LET and PSN had a stall at a Winter Equalities Fair on 18 December 2023. These efforts will continue throughout 2024.

Personal circumstances

The majority of survey respondents (66%) had experience of a mental health condition which is in line with our target membership and audience. For several this co-exists with other physical disabilities or long-term health conditions. One respondent identified as having a learning disability and one person issues with sight loss. Two people said they care for disabled adults and one for a child under 18.

In terms of employment status two respondents were in full-time employment, two in part-time work (of which one also in education) and three are volunteering part-time, all of these with the Lived Experience Team. Of the volunteers two are also officially retired, which correlates with the lower numbers of volunteers of working age. The increase in the numbers of LET members in work is a direct result of the project.

PSN members do not distinguish if they are attending as people with lived experience, staff/management or both. However, from our survey we can see that of the eight people who said they are members of the PSN, 4 said they had experience of using mental health or employment services. We estimate that around 54 (33%) of PSN members are there as individuals with an interest in peer support.

Relevance of experience

The personal connection and relevance to people's lived experiences is an important part of the Struggle to Strength programme. Survey responses suggest that we are reaching people who want to use their relevant lived experiences to improve services for others. Importantly, as one respondent noted, this can also help the individuals themselves as part of their 'journey to wellness'.

Comments on why people got involved include:

to fight for better services for people who struggle. To have a voice.

I felt this may be a place where my voice could be heard, and I had lots of lived experience to share.

To help myself continue my journey to wellness and help others progress on the path of their own journeys.

To gain more experience and insight about LET and PSN.

In addition to core members of the LET & PSN the team have engaged with 13 people with lived experience through the Collaborative Conversations and a further 31 through focused engagement work to support the MHWPC project. For this project the team encouraged Fife HSCP to fund a full-time Equalities Coordinator post. This person is employed by Fife Centre for Equalities and has been helping the team not only monitor equalities characteristics of engagement work, but also reach out and build relationships with minority groups who are less likely to get involved through the usual routes.

Looking Forward:

From 2024 the team will run an annual equalities monitoring survey and use this to guide:

- targeted recruitment, working more closely with Fife Centre for Equalities and relevant community groups
- investment in training such as LGBTQ+ and neurodiversity awareness sessions

How they feel

The LET & PSN teams work hard to ensure their members and people involved in co-production activities feel **safe, valued and heard** and that the work they do is **helpful and worthwhile**. To help achieve this the team:

- provide advice and work alongside stakeholders to ensure engagements are conducted in ways which are meaningful and safe for our members. We say no to a project if we think the engagement is going to be tokenistic or unsafe.
- Create 'working together guidelines' for any engagement activity to ensure people feel safe and supported.
- offer pre-meetings to allow members to ask daft questions and get to know key members such as the Chair of a group prior to attending bigger meetings.
- encourage meetings to include smaller group conversations and human connection (going beyond the job role), role modelling asking for acronyms to be explained.
- provide post-engagement check-ins and de-briefs.
- take time to 'build the conditions' when delivering collaborative sessions so that both staff and lived experience voices feel safe and can speak openly. AND provide information on where to go and how to look after yourself if you feel triggered.

Co-Production Drop-in Creating a Safe Space

- Confidentiality
- Removing job titles – not having role here beyond as an individual
- No right or wrong answer, no fear of silly questions – this is a learning and development space
- Having the right intentions
- Being aware of people coming from different perspectives - Respect everyone's knowledge
- Challenge with kindness – constructively
- Make no assumptions
- Honesty is important, telling our story does not mean telling all, we choose what is appropriate
- Using the, "I," word rather than, "we" or "they". Speaking from our personal experience

- Ensure volunteers are reimbursed for travel and for big projects arrange recognition for their time in the form of vouchers.
- host safe peer learning spaces such as the PSN Gatherings, co-reflection groups, LET monthly meetings and co-production drop in's.

Crucially the team also commit to:

- accepting critical feedback as useful information that can help us to improve, rather than becoming defensive.

- supporting one another to hear difficult information with an open heart and reflect on our reactions to better understand and work with them.

Does this approach make a difference?

When we asked LET & PSN members if they felt valued and heard, safe, and that the work was helpful and worthwhile 9 respondents said yes to a greater or less degree.

Eight respondents said they feel that our work is considerably helpful and worthwhile, with one marking it moderately. Seven respondents said they felt considerably 'valued and heard' and 'safe', with two marking it moderately. Comments from members included:

Workshops are engaging and you are encouraged to learn more in a supportive atmosphere. (LET member)

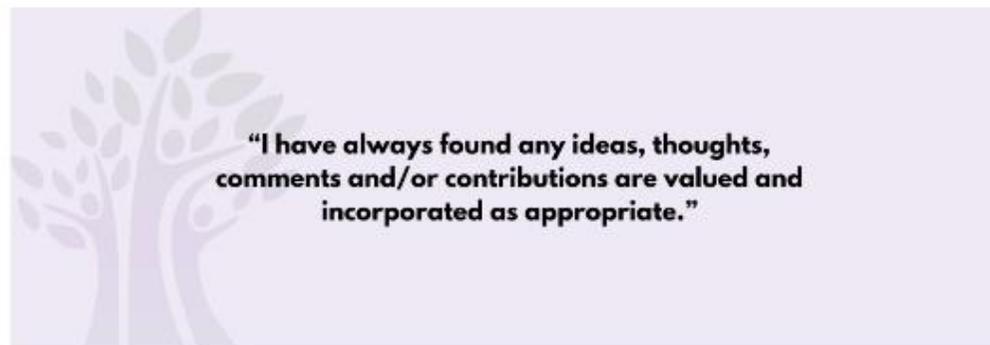
'XXXs meeting was very safe, welcoming and respectful to all views. This enabled some very powerful, relevant stories to be heard.' [LET member].

'I've felt very supported to develop in my role [...], and I really feel this support has made me feel so much more confident and capable than I did when I started' (LET & PSN member)

'I think that the facilitators did a fantastic job in setting up a great learning environment, allowing people to feel valued and have their say without negative recourse. I certainly felt very comfortable within the group almost from the beginning – which is to be commended as I usually avoid group activities where possible!' (P2P participant)

Feedback from people attending the MHWPC collaborative Conversations showed that this approach has rippled out with participants in the collaborative conversations commenting that they loved

'the ability to be fully open and discuss personal experience without judgement' (Cowdenbeath Collaborative Conversation);



'creating the conditions for co-production at the outset enabled us to participate in an authentic way' (Levenmouth Collaborative Conversation).

Suggestions which might help improve both people's sense of safety and their feeling that the work is helpful and worthwhile include:

- establishing more structured staff supervision for those undertaking paid lived experience work;
- ensuring new LE colleagues have buddies in FVA to help them settle in; and ensuring that the Peer Support Network retains its intention to be a community of practice and avoids fitting 'into already known structures'.

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Supporting the Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) Lived Experience Panel

2023 was our third year of supporting the OFP Lived Experience Panel. We had five volunteers, one of whom acted as the Lead Representative at the Formal Panel with strategic partners.

Building on feedback from previous years, FVA provided shared training for both staff and volunteers on how to read and assess the bids so everyone was on a level playing field. We only allocated 4 applications per volunteer (except the Lead Rep) to read *and were really clear* about the time and effort and confidence with written material involved in this one-off volunteering activity.

Pegs supported the Lead Rep through regular check ins on Teams and email. The Rep described it as 'a great experience' and were confident the lived experience panel views affected decisions on the successful projects.

Another panel member commented *'I really enjoyed the process and to know we were being listened to.'*

Whilst the OFP Panel Chair said *'The contribution, comments and consideration that we got from our LET is invaluable when we are considering the bids. XXX represented the panel brilliantly and spoke incredibly well about each of the bids.'*

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What they learn and gain

Ensuring people with relevant lived experience connect with peers, gain confidence and a platform to shape MH and employment services and policy in Fife is a core goal of this work.

In 2023 the team have been significantly involved in the following strategic projects:

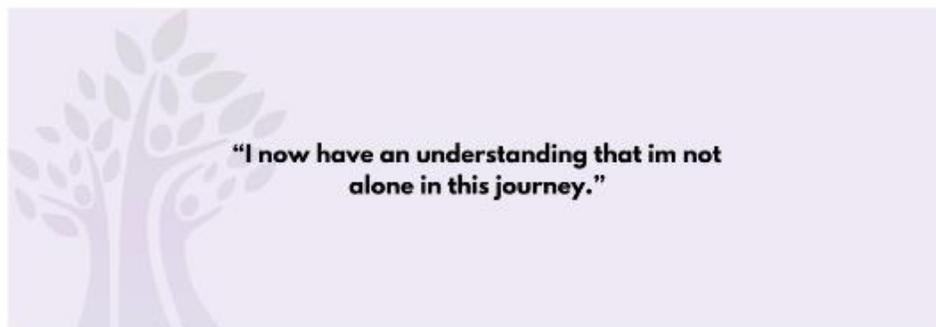
Employability	Mental Health
Informing OFP Commissioning decisions through the OFP Lived Experience Team Panel	Helping shape and deliver a five-year programme for the Mental Health and Wellbeing in Primary Care & Communities redesign (MHWPPC)
Providing the voice of experience on the OFP Oversight & Scrutiny Group which reviews performance of funded employability services	Helping plan and support the co-design of a commissioning framework for embedding peer practitioners in Community Mental Health Teams
Supporting work on redesign and piloting of separate OFP registration and personal characteristics forms (<i>a recommendation from previous co-production work</i>)	Advising on and supporting engagement work for the new MH Strategy for Fife. And creating a promotional video to support this
Starting a review of the OFP Mental Health & Work Indicator	Contributing to the Fife Suicide Prevention Campaign
Contributing to a UK-wide review on the future of employment services.	

The team have also continued to support work on the Jobseekers MH & Wellbeing Toolkit and are continuing to attend meetings to support future engagement on the MH Estates and Urgent Care redesigns and Personality Disorder Pathways.

In September 2023 the LET Project Officer attended an event - Autism Works at the Scottish Parliament. This event highlighted the findings of new research which explored what 'fair work' looks like for Scotland-based autistic employees and their managers and presented evidence-based

recommendations for employers and policymakers. Into Work's Autism Advisory Group, lived experience Trainers and local employers also shared inspiring experiences of the difference small changes can make to employers and employees.

Following the event, the LET Project Officer commented:



When asked about **what they have gained** people gave a diversity of responses:

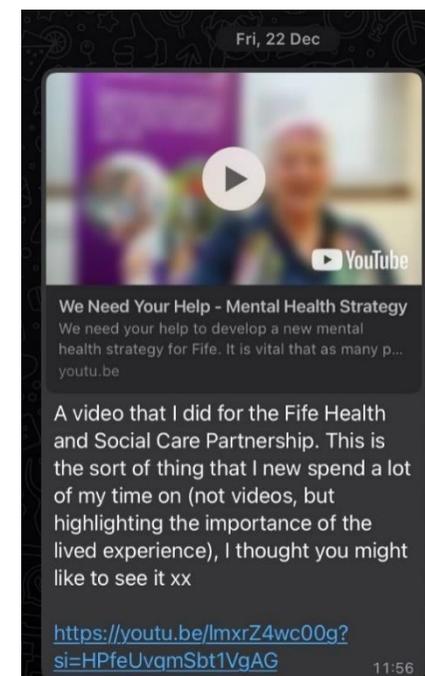
I've really appreciated the different experiences and perspectives that other members of the LET and PSN bring to the work, and I think that this has really expanded my understanding

Two LET members noted their increased understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced by people working *within* mental health services as well as of those using services.

Whilst others simply described not feeling so alone:



'It was an amazing event, I didn't think I'd have the courage to go alone, but I did, and glad I did. Due to being employed at Fife Voluntary Action and my confidence being built over the last two years I didn't feel like I was out of place. As well as the personal development aspect, my team leader Pegs Bailey of this project was confident enough to allow me to go in her place as she could not make it.'



'The like-minded individuals I met on this journey fills me with hope. That said, perhaps more to the fore because of the bond we have all built on our learning peer2peer journey.' (P2P participant)

A PSN Member's journey

Following 20 years of mental health challenges XXX was already on their journey training to become a peer practitioner when they came across the Peer Support Network through an FVA bulletin.

Following attending PSN events they found out about organisations delivering Peer work in Fife and have since gained paid employment as a Peer Support Worker with a third sector provider in the area.

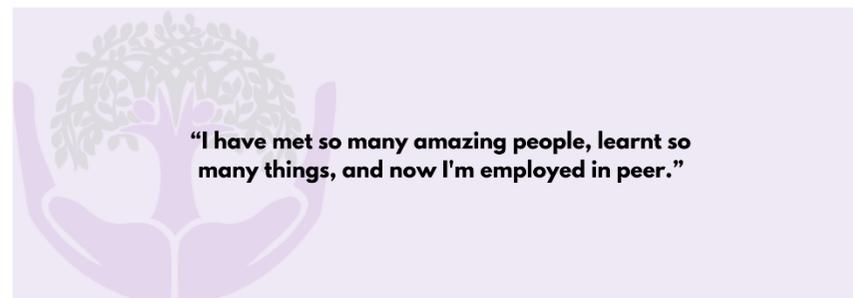
They have made the most of P2P training, the Gatherings and the co-reflection groups to catch up with others and to find out what is happening in Fife and beyond. They say *'for people who aren't sure about the PSN [it] is a perfect place to begin and learn.*

Seven out of nine survey respondents also noted they felt more confident to do Lived Experience or Peer work since engaging with the project.

People describe feeling more valued in their experiences as well as having gained practical skills in co-production, Peer Support and Emotional-CPR training. This is born out when we look at what people are doing differently as a result of being involved in the project.

'I have gained confidence to speak out in front of groups and hold engagement sessions.'

Several members describe their involvement as simply 'life changing', whilst for others it was simply *'useful to find out more about the LET and PSN'*.



What they do differently

'It has made a huge difference to my wellbeing knowing that my experiences and views can be taken forward to improve local services. I feel much more confident in myself and my ability to speak out about things which are difficult to discuss/express and feel like I am listened to and taken seriously when discussing my experiences, something I hadn't been with local mental health services' (LET member).

As a result of engaging with this project it is our goal that people use their skills and share learning with others more confidently, and that they feel able to apply for paid lived experience roles when possible.

This year three LET volunteers have been successful in applying for paid roles *within the team*. Of these one has decided to return to being a volunteer. This has been acknowledged as a positive choice due to personal circumstances. In addition, two staff who were part-time have moved to full-time, and three have taken on increased responsibilities during the year.

Five LET/PSN members have moved into work with other organisations since being with the project. At least two of these have told us this is as a direct result of being involved in the project.

Seven members of the LET have been involved in the SIPHER research project which connects the voice of lived experience with academic research mapping determinants of health inequalities across the UK. Three of the team attended the end of research presentation event and two spoke on the platform about their experiences and why it mattered to them. The team were also cited as co-authors in the official academic paper: [evaluating participant experiences of Community Panels to scrutinise policy modelling for health inequalities: the SIPHER Consortium](#)

In addition to the roles listed above people described other changes including:

Volunteered with other projects and have grown in confidence.

I have been involved in things that I probably wouldn't have been, including a couple of projects with St Andrews University Medical School

I have engaged with people that i would never have met

MHWPCCT LET Facilitators

In March 2023 we recruited 3 LET Facilitators and 1 Support Facilitator to support work on the MHWPCCT project. The team were supported as peers to learn and work together, with a strongly structured induction, regular weekly check-ins and buddying from Christina as they found their feet at FVA. This seems to have made a difference to helping the team settle in even when the project was still very new and a little bit 'bumpy' at times. The facilitators attended a training course on Making Co-production Meaningful, and then were given opportunities to test their skills in their own team and with others before going 'live' with public engagement events. They started with different levels of experience, but have all visibly developed in confidence and skills.

Perhaps most crucially they have played an ongoing role as equal partners in designing, delivering and writing up multiple engagement activities to inform the redesign of mental health and wellbeing in services in community settings in Fife. They are now core members of the MHWPCCT Project Team and contribute along with Heads of Service and wider stakeholders to discussions on how the project should progress.

As one team member commented: *I've felt very supported to develop in my role within the LET, and I really feel this support has made me feel so much more confident and capable than I did when I started. The LET has felt a safe space, and lots of this is due to the dynamics within the team.*

The MHWPCCT Participant and Engagement Officer said: *Working with the Lived Experience Team has provided us with invaluable insights. They have played a significant role in preventing us from maintaining the status quo, and instead, have encouraged us to think differently and consider new ideas for engagement.*



The MHWPCCT LET Facilitation team, Sep 2023



A collaborative conversation in action in North East Fife

What difference does this make?

Ultimately, we want our work to help ensure that lived experience learning is both visible and valued, we want to see more good quality employment opportunities for people with lived experience and we want research and services to be more relevant and helpful.

Data on this building block applies to both pathways for the project and so more detailed analysis is available in Pathway 2. However below is a case study on how the team have contributed to academic research. And some quotes from LET/PSN members

For many of the people being involved with S2S has been hugely influential:

SIPHER – Community Panels for Research

Seven members of the LET have been involved in a Community Panel for SIPHER. This is a large-scale UK-wide research project which aims to shift from health policy to *healthy* public policy resulting in all policy sectors working together to tackle health inequalities and improve the health of the public. The team attended four meetings in 2023 where they got to review and comment on the academic's research and findings. They also contributed to an evaluation of what it is like being on a Community Panel and were named as co-authors on the resulting [paper](#).

Three panel members spoke at the mid-programme Conference in Edinburgh in November 2023.

'I have met so many amazing people, learnt so many things, and now I'm employed in peer' (PSN member)

'Both as a volunteer and as LET Coordinator. My involvement was life changing for me' (LET Member)



SIPHER Scotland, Greater Manchester and Sheffield Panels meet up in Edinburgh, Dec 2023

'I will take pride in saying I played a tiny part in this surrounded by a fantastic supportive team. I have learned more on the computer & still have a long way to go in the digital world!' (LET Facilitator)

2. Influencing others through co-production and lived experience - pathway progress



What we do	Who with	How they feel	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	What difference does this make?
<p>We provide knowledge and skill building opportunities</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Partner organisations, stakeholders and key decision makers</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Safe</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: Some</p>	<p>Opportunities to connect and work with peers</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Opportunities are explored and developed for employed lived experience roles</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Lived experience learning is visible and valued</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>
<p>We build relationships to grow opportunities to support meaningful engagement and peer practice</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Researchers</p> <p>Progress: Some Confidence: High</p>	<p>Valued and heard</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>A better understanding of other people's experiences</p> <p>Progress: Some Confidence: High</p>	<p>Lived experience is meaningfully embedded in service development and research</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>More good quality employment opportunities related to lived experience</p> <p>Progress: Some Confidence: Some</p>
		<p>This is helpful and worthwhile</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>Empowerment, confidence and insight</p> <p>Progress: Great Confidence: High</p>	<p>People use their insight to change how they do their work and promote positive change</p> <p>Progress: Some Confidence: Some</p>	<p>Research and services are more relevant and helpful</p> <p>Progress: Some Confidence: Some</p>

2. Influencing others through co-production and lived experience - summary findings

What we do

A key part of our work is to build relationships with strategic partners and organisations interested in growing peer practice and lived experience work in mental health and employability contexts in Fife. This has continued to grow during 2023 and involves a combination of:

- strategic meetings in both employability and mental health partnership contexts
- peer or co-production project specific meetings
- 1:1 conversations

Between January and December Pegs, Trish, Pam, Lea & Christina attended well over 100 engagements of this nature, not including ad hoc conversations and relationship building moments.

It is hard to overstate the importance of time spent attending meetings and building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. These relationships make it easy for strategic partners to work with us from a basis of trust and open dialogue, as well as for us to help them see opportunities for LE collaboration at the earliest possible moment in a project.

Our survey of stakeholders shows that nine out of eleven respondents got involved with the team through an existing working relationship with FVA, and the remaining two through word of mouth. The majority got in touch because they were seeking lived experience involvement in a specific project or piece of strategic redesign work with only two reaching out for general interest.

Sometimes the enquiry is resolved with a one-off bit of advice, or we may become involved in a longer-term project which requires ongoing investment of time and resources such as the MHWPC.

Building Capacity

Ensuring partners and leaders feel confident to do lived experience work in both peer and co-production contexts is crucial.

In addition to providing 1:1 advice, in 2023 the team coordinated the following skills development opportunities on peer and lived experience work for organisational stakeholders:

Designed and delivered 'Introduction to Co-production' workshops x 2, for the Whole Families Wellbeing project (total 73 participants).	Designed, funded and co-hosted Peer 2 Peer Essentials attended by staff from two third sector organisations. (5 participants).
Co-hosted 'Understanding Peer Practice' sessions for Community Mental Health Team staff and Post-graduate Medical Students (24 participants).	Hosted 3 PSN Gatherings which include presentations from other areas and organisations doing peer to help share learning and inspire others in Fife (combined total 103 participants)
Hosted 10 x monthly online co-production drop-ins with an average of 9 participants per session from employability, mental health, social work and other backgrounds.	Hosted 4 bi-monthly peer co-reflection groups. Average four participants from three different organisations.
Recorded a video-interview on Understanding Peer for the HSCP High Risk Pain Medicine Team.	Making Co-production Meaningful training by Thempra (attended by 3 external participants)

In addition to the above the team have continued to maintain and promote the following guides that we helped co-create: A Framework for Growing Peer Support in Fife; the Fife Peer Skills Pathway; and [Co-production: A trauma-informed guide for Fife.](#)

We also shared top tips on resources including books such as [Beyond Sticky Notes: what is co-design, by KellyAnn McKercher](#)

Working from a place of trust

One of the key pieces of work that the Team supported in 2023 was the design and delivery of engagement activity for the refresh of Fife's Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy. LET involvement is already an integral part of the MH Strategic Implementation Group. Having an established relationship of trust meant that the team were able to work together to develop an inclusive approach to engagement within a very short timescale.

LET members worked with the project team to design questions and formats of engagement events. The LET members and engagement lead facilitated and co-delivered four sessions together. Over the course of all engagement over 400 people have been reached through face-to-face engagement events, using questions designed by the LET. Additionally, a promotional film was made to support engagement work.

The project lead has commented *"Thank you so much for your help and support, we have had an incredible response to the online questionnaire following the video going live on social media. This is no doubt a reflection on having somebody with real experience share their story, encouraging others to share their own experience, and highlighting just how important it is for everyone to get involved."*

Furthermore, the engagement lead for the project added *"A huge, big thanks for supporting us on this and also the events that you attended to co-facilitate. We couldn't have done it without you!"*

Having this collaborative approach involving the LET members in different projects has supported the continuation of building trusting relationships across partners.

Who with

As evidenced in the previous case study, in order to grow the voice of experience in both strategic planning, service design and delivery, it is important that we maintain professional and trusting relationships with key people in relevant policy areas.

In 2023, through a combination of attending meetings and 1:1 conversations, the team engaged and worked closely with colleagues in:

Fife Council Employability Division and the Opportunities Fife Partnership Programme Team;	Fife HSCP Complex and Critical Care and MH Service and Programme design Leads and Participation and Engagement Team,
NHS Fife Health Promotions (Suicide Prevention and Jobseekers Mental Wellbeing toolkit)	GP Services
Fife Trauma Informed Steering Group & Collective	Researchers with SIPHER at Strathclyde University
NE Fife Rural Poverty Action Group, Child Poverty Subgroup, Cowdenbeath Poverty Action Group, and Whole Families Wellbeing Children and Families Services	Countless third sector partners active in relevant employability and mental health services across Fife

The Peer Support Network has 41 organisations on its mailing list and in 2023 worked most actively with LinkLiving, Change Mental Health, BRAG and Families in Trauma and Recovery.

Some of the team's engagements have led to substantive action whilst others have involved short advisory meetings or been through events where we have shared our learning. All are valued and valuable in growing capacity and opportunity to do lived experience work in Fife.

The Struggle to Strength Steering Group has also played an important role in guiding the work of the team. Membership has changed and been updated throughout the two years of the project to ensure appropriate perspectives are present and maintained.

It is worth noting that the team have also promoted LE work beyond Fife through presenting on co-production and lived experience in employability strategy to members of the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development group (SLAED), and supported the UK Commission on the Future of Employment Services through planning and attending special workshops to share our learning on co-production in employability in Fife (second workshop scheduled for 18 Jan 2024).

How they feel

An often-under-appreciated element of lived experience work is the need for professionals *also* to feel safe, valued and heard and that this work is helpful and worthwhile. In addition to the training outlined earlier, in order to support this the team endeavor to:

- work at a pace that feels comfortable and safe for the professionals whilst also encouraging them to take a risk on doing LE work
- create 'working together guidelines' for projects
- discuss risks and concerns transparently and help find ways to address them
- help plan and meet timeframes and deadlines that are important to strategic leads
- co-design plans for engagement which feel achievable and meaningful and are both safe and appropriate to the scale of the project
- address practical concerns such as volunteering expenses, role descriptions, salaries, and finding the 'right' people to get involved
- appreciate that people working in professional settings are also human, and often doing their best in difficult circumstances

AND as with the LE pathway

- host safe learning spaces such as the PSN Gatherings, co-reflection groups and co-production drop in
- accept critical feedback as useful information that can help us to improve, rather than becoming defensive
- support one another to hear difficult information with an open heart and reflect on our reactions so as to better understand and work with them

For these last two points the team also engages in reflective practice *and* collective dialogue when challenges arise. This helps us to be aware of our own triggers and remain open and compassionate in our work even when we find ourselves in conflict or disagreement with a key partner.

Does this approach make a difference?

When we asked stakeholders how they felt about their engagement with the LET and PSN teams 8/10 said they felt considerably valued and heard, and two people said moderately. Comments included:

'I have always found any ideas, [...] or contributions are valued and incorporated as appropriate - this is very much a two-way street'

Meanwhile 10/10 said they felt considerably safe and supported *'any project leads I have worked with have always taken my needs (lived experience) into account too'*

This comment reflects the often-forgotten fact that many professionals themselves have lived experience of trauma and/or using services.

One PSN co-reflection participant notes the importance of safety in this space *'feeling safe with each other enables us to take fresh ideas back to our organisations'*

Finally, 10 respondents said that being involved had been considerably helpful and worthwhile with one saying moderately. Comments include:

The LET members have been a huge help and support in developing meaningful and valuable engagement

The LET team are very able and have definitely added value to the work that I am supporting.

'the LET members have been a huge help and support in developing meaningful and valuable engagement for public consultation' and in future they would have 'got involved with them sooner!!'

'hearing people's lived experience has made me reflect on my own practice' (Online Collaborative Conversation participant)

Working over the long-term

The team were approached to support a strategic partnership in bringing the voice of LE onto their Steering Group. First the Employability Development Manager attended the meeting to understand how it currently works. She then met with the Partnership Manager and Chair to create a plan. This involved working with the Steering Group to be clear on the purpose of bringing LE voices around the table and to help address their fears and concerns. From this meeting a working group co-created guidelines for LE involvement which included training, adjusting how papers and minutes were written (e.g. use first names not initials) and adjusting meetings structure so that they include friendly introductions, guidelines for working together and small group conversations. During this time the Partnership Manager and Chair also became occasional participants at the Co-production Drop In.

The working group also discussed volunteering versus paid options and the right number of reps. The team agreed to trial-fund two part-time (4hrs/month) roles which would be employed through the LET. FVA created the role descriptions and recruited to the posts. They then arranged pre-meetings with the Chair and Partnership Manager as well as a debrief after the first Partnership meeting.

Given the group only meets quarterly, the whole journey took around 12 months from initial enquiry to actual LE representation. This, however, was important to ensure that both professionals and LE reps felt safe and that the experience would not be re-traumatising for anyone involved.

One off advice matters too

A partner who was keen to create paid lived experience roles reached out for advice. We shared our job description model, our approach to paying salaries and recruitment advice.

The person said: *The knowledge and advice they gave was pivotal in the way I employed LE posts.*

What they learn and gain

It is our hope that external stakeholders gain opportunities to connect with peers, a better understanding of others experiences *and* are more confident to do lived experience and peer work themselves.

The desire and value of connecting with peers is really important. Everyone who responded to our stakeholder survey (11/11) said they had gained opportunities to connect with peers through being involved with the project.

In 2023 we adapted the PSN Gathering format for September to allow more time for informal networking as participants had said that mattered to them.

Six survey respondents said they had gained a considerably better understanding of others' experiences whilst five said moderately. Comments included:

'Having the chance to discuss, share and agree views with those of many differing voices has been instrumental in better service design'

'it strengthens and enhances my understanding, work and day-to-day life as any one of us can have lived experience of various conditions etc at any time including trauma etc - these things do not discriminate'

'Since I am a person as well as a worker, I already have a direct understanding of what it is like to access and use services and supports'

Eight out of eleven respondents said they felt more confident to do lived experience and peer work as a result of being involved with the team.

Supporting Co-production for others

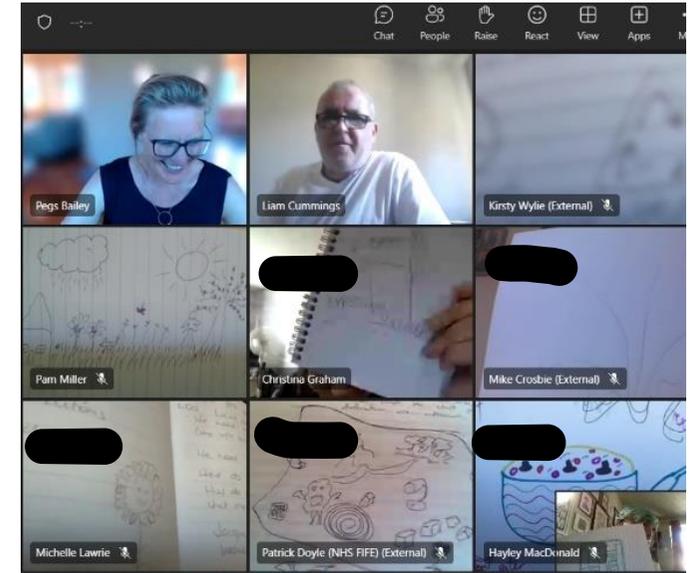
Guided by the Struggle to Strength experience, the Whole Family Wellbeing Leadership Group are funding a co-production approach which is aimed at establishing the conditions where the views and experiences of children, young people and families are central to system transformation and funding of future children's services in Fife. This includes employing a Coordinator to support co-production activity and funding third sector organisations to support engagement from people who use their services. This programme is in comparatively early stages of development. The lesson's learned will be used to shape future co-production with children and families and an evaluation is being produced to inform this.

Being able to go to colleagues for advice and support has been invaluable for me. Talking things through and drawing on the knowledge and experience of colleagues who have already been on a co-production journey has helped to guide us in the right direction and offer reassurance when it was needed.

Monthly Co-production Drop-in

The monthly co-production drop-in was developed at the end of December 2022. Following the bumper (>70) attendance at our webinar on Trauma Informed Co-production, we realised many professionals were interested in co-production, but uncertain how to do it 'well'.

The drop-ins are open to both staff and people with lived experience, so that the very experience of attending is an experience of co-production. Initial participants created shared guidelines on working together and identified the drop-in format and topics they would like to explore. Over the year the drop-ins have explored common co-production challenges, testing co-pro tools and discussed live case studies of co-production in Fife. Attendance varied from 4 - 14, with an average of nine people participating each month. Participants said they appreciated the safe space to learn from one another and build confidence and skills together.



Co-pro drop-in participants share the results of a 'visual exercise' on what co-production means to them

What they do differently

Exploring opportunities to create employed LE roles

As noted previously a result of engaging with the Struggle to Strength team in 2022 Fife H&SCP created 5 funded posts to support the MHWPC Redesign project. This included adapting two existing full-time posts and the creation of three part-time LET Facilitator roles. The posts were filled by two existing LET volunteers and two people who were new to the project.

The team also supported the Trauma Informed team in Fife to create two part-time (4hrs/month) paid roles representing the voice of lived experience on the Trauma Informed Steering Group and Collective. This provided new employment for a LET volunteer and expanded responsibilities for an existing LET Facilitator.

Separately the North East Fife Rural Poverty Action Group sought the team's advice to recruit two Lived Experience members to attend their meetings and contribute to discussions on addressing rural poverty in the area. The post-holders will also be supported as members of the LET and PSN.

Employment opportunities in the context of Peer Support have been slower to expand than hoped, but nonetheless two PSN members stated that they are now in paid work as a result of engaging with the project. Whilst Fife-based organisation and PSN founder member, Families in Trauma and Recovery gained funding to employ 4 new staff, 3 part-time peer practitioners and a peer coordinator to develop peer work in Glasgow.

Crucially between 6-8 peer practitioner employment opportunities will be coming forward in 2024 as a result of our work with Fife HSCP to commission Peer Practice in Community Mental Health Teams.

The PSN Coordinator will continue to work with both individuals and organisations to increase capacity in the area in 2024.

Overall, the team can be said to have directly supported the creation of at least 10 new lived experience roles in 2023, and (at least) a further six in 2024.

Lived experience is meaningfully embedded and people change how they do their work

The move to embed the voice of lived experience in service development and research has grown significantly in the two years that this project has been live, and whilst there is still a long way to go there is clear evidence of change, not only in the policy arenas of mental health and employability but further afield.

From **an employability perspective** it is now the norm that we have a Lived Experience Representative on the OFP Oversight & Scrutiny Group and in any project which is reviewing elements of the project management infrastructure such as the new equalities and registration forms and the mental health and work indicator refresh. Members of the team have contributed to assessing bids to deliver services and critically informed changes to registration forms and equalities data gathering.

As of December 2023, the LET have an official place in the new OFP governance diagram and strategic view.

One employability stakeholder described engaging with the LET as *'incredibly eye-opening'* and another said it had showed them *'How to be more understanding in the employment process'*

In the **mental health policy and service context** things have also changed significantly in the past 12 months.

When we first started working with MHWPC colleagues in 2022 some people expressed concern to have LET members sitting on the Project Team alongside professionals, and we needed to advocate for this to occur. 12 months on the LET Facilitators work directly with the MHWPC partnership and engagement lead designing and delivering workshops. Their presence on the Project Team and hosting workshops is not only accepted, but deeply valued.

Since 2023 the LET have a core place on the MH-SIG and Programme Boards. Discussions are underway to explore how the co-production approach used in the MHWPC Programme can support wider redesign work.

When asked to describe what they do differently as a result of engaging with the project one stakeholder said;

'In meetings and conversations, I routinely insist that the human voice of people forms the underpinning principles for design and delivery; and I intentionally ask stakeholders to 'remove their professional hats' and bring themselves as people as well as professionals to conversations about shaping new patterns of provision.'

Embedding Peer Practitioners in Community Mental Health Teams

In 2021 Fife HSCP committed to trial embedding peer practitioners in Community Mental Health Teams and resource was set aside to achieve this. Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic and change in key personnel the work did not get into action until October 2022. At this point the PSN Coordinator and the Employability Development Manager helped create a working group with key Fife HSCP colleagues to move this work forward.

The PSN Coordinator reviewed different approaches to embedding peer practitioners in CMHTs across Scotland outlining the pros and cons of each approach. They invited people involved in leading practice elsewhere to present at the PSN Gathering to share learning, and gave talks to the local CMHT staff to discuss concerns and risk.

The team supported Fife HSCP to co-produce the Commissioning Brief through the PSN and a short life working group of third sector providers and peer practitioner views. This led to useful adaptations and clarifications. The team then promoted the commissioning opportunity to Network members once live.

The Commissioning process was completed in December 2023, with a view to the service going live in April 2024. The PSN Coordinator will continue to attend the Pilot Steering Group.

What difference does this make?

The ultimate goal of this work with the LET and PSN members, organisations and our strategic partners is to ensure that:

- lived experience learning is both visible and valued
- we have more good quality employment opportunities explicitly related to lived experience
- research and services are more relevant and helpful to the people they aim to support.

We can confidently say that **lived experience learning is now far more visible and valued in Fife** than it was when this project commenced.

Strategic level changes on lived experience involvement that have happened *directly as a result of* this project include:

- ✓ The LET Coordinator now has an official place on both the Fife Mental Health Strategic Implementation Group (MH-SIG) and MH Programme Board which oversee the strategic direction and redesign programmes within MH services in Fife.
- ✓ Conversations are in train to explore how the co-production approach tested through the MHWPC project can, and should, be used to inform other MH redesign projects.
- ✓ The OFP have a guaranteed LET rep place at the OFP Oversight & Scrutiny Group,
- ✓ The LET are included in the new OFP Strategy and Governance structure, and in future any OFP short life working group will include people directly affected by the issue under discussion alongside relevant partners and service leads.
- ✓ All OFP funded employment services are expected to demonstrate how they engage with the people who use their services
- ✓ The Whole Family Wellbeing Leadership Group are funding a co-production approach to reviewing third sector and community provision in Fife. This includes employing a co-production coordinator, and funding third sector organisations to support engagement from people who use their services.
- ✓ We have been approached by public sector partners to share our experiencing of bringing the voice of lived experience into assessing bids for funding, ensuring meaningful approaches to representation and creating employment of lived experience roles

Indirect feedback suggests that staff and those who use services find them more welcoming and less rigid in their delivery model. Whilst it is too early to see if there is an improvement in outcomes, it is clear there has not been any reduction.

Some of the things stakeholders say they have done differently as a result include:

'Advocated greater lived experience involvement in other areas of work I have been involved in.'

*'The shift in focus to understand that **how** we deliver being as important as **what** we deliver is a strong change in how we build provision with the client at the heart.'*

'I am informing my colleagues in other areas of what advice and knowledge the LET gave me.'

Stakeholders we have worked closely with suggest that the experience has been transformative to how they do their work:

'In meetings and conversations, I routinely insist that the human voice of people forms the underpinning principles for design and delivery; and I intentionally ask stakeholders to 'remove their professional hats' and bring themselves as people as well as professionals to conversations about shaping new patterns of provision.'

Whilst others are sharing their experience beyond Fife:

'It [the LET work] has been promoted to funding partners through Scottish and UK Government and at Regional and National LEP meetings/ events.'

The first meeting to develop a National Peer Support Network for Scotland was co-organised by the PSN Coordinator, with others from NHS Borders and Moray Wellbeing Hub and was held in September 2023. The PSN coordinator has continued to be closely involved in organising as a founding member alongside six other people involved in peer across Scotland, with a second public meeting scheduled for March 2024.

And although it is hard to know if the **resultant services are more relevant**, as one partner commented:

'The projects we design, and support often are done so with the best intentions and are designed by people with significant experience of delivery. Even with this expertise they sometimes fail to resonate with those that would actually use them. Finding out why this is the case from the LET has been very interesting. Gaining an understanding into what organisations are trusted and why has allowed us to consider the way we develop provision.'

The Peer Support Annual Celebration Awards 2023

Since 2021 the PSN has raised the profile of Peer Practice through their Annual Awards Ceremony.

In 2023 we invited Nicky Connor Director of Fife H&SCP and Chief Officer of the IJB. She was unable to attend but said:

I would ordinarily not be able to resist an invitation or such an important event focused on peer support'.

Fiona McKay, Head of Strategic Performance, Planning & Commissioning at Fife HSCP attended in her stead, again showing the value that is given to growing peer practice in Fife.

In 2023 six individuals received awards and one project, Better than Well at Link Living. However the Awards panel acknowledged that many organisations, like Families in Trauma & Recovery who had received an award the previous year deserved a special mention for continuing to expand their investment in peer delivery in Fife and beyond.

Looking forward:



PSN Award recipients 2023: Chelsea, Jennifer, Lisa, Katie, Kirsty, Janette, Maggie (on behalf of Cheryl), Fiona (award host) and Deirdre.

Lived Experience work has become a fundamental part of both the mental health and employability strategic contexts in Fife. It is increasingly expected through national policy as well, and so the team are discussing how to share their learning with the Fife Partnership, Integrated Joint Board and Senior Leadership Team. Using the case studies and learning to date we are working with an external organisation to design and deliver a workshop targeted at the wider senior leadership in Fife on Understanding Co-production for later in 2024.

Conclusions

Reaching the end of 24 months of the Struggle to Strength project we have come a significant way towards achieving our original goals.

We may have recruited slightly fewer, and a less diverse range of, lived experience volunteers than we had hoped. We have certainly supported less Peer Work Placements... but the evidence presented here suggests that within Fife we are well on our way with the big picture goals of increasing lived experience employment opportunities *and* that lived experience learning is visible and valued. We can even demonstrate reach to wider parts of the country through the national PSN and presentations and workshops on lived experience and co-production in employability.

On the way we have learned a lot about the unseen work and time that is essential to recruiting and supporting people to get involved in lived experience work. We have also learned about the qualities, values and practical behaviours that are needed to make it meaningful and positive for all involved.

One of our project's founding principles was the **commitment to treat ourselves and others with kindness and humility.**

This has meant that when bumps in the road have arisen, we have been able to address them and learn from them rather than see them as a reason not to progress. As one partner put it *'if it is not difficult, then we are doing something wrong'*. This quote captures the feeling that co-production and lived experience work asks everyone involved to step out of their comfort zones and work differently. When seen in this light 'difficulty' is an inevitable and expected part of the process, not something to worry about or try to avoid.

Another commitment was that **we are positive about learning**, about how we are doing things and what doesn't work.

This has been evidenced through our continual adaptation of how we support volunteers and projects or organise events, as well as through an open approach to addressing challenges with partners or LET/PSN members as and when they have arisen. We feel this has been central to ensuring the success and positive experience of all parties we have engaged with.

Finally, we wanted to ensure we engaged in co-production and peer work with an **'all together approach'** and that we avoided, and where appropriate addressed, 'us v them' narratives.

We are particularly proud to see from feedback that we have managed this with many survey respondents saying:

'[I learned] that we are all of value.' (LET & PSN member)

'everyone is considered equal.' (LET member)

'The LET has a role in promoting the human voice of service users AND workers, and insisting that this voice is captured, heard and acted on.' (Strategic Partner)

'Any one of us can have lived experience of various conditions etc. at any time including trauma etc. - these things do not discriminate.' (Strategic Partner)

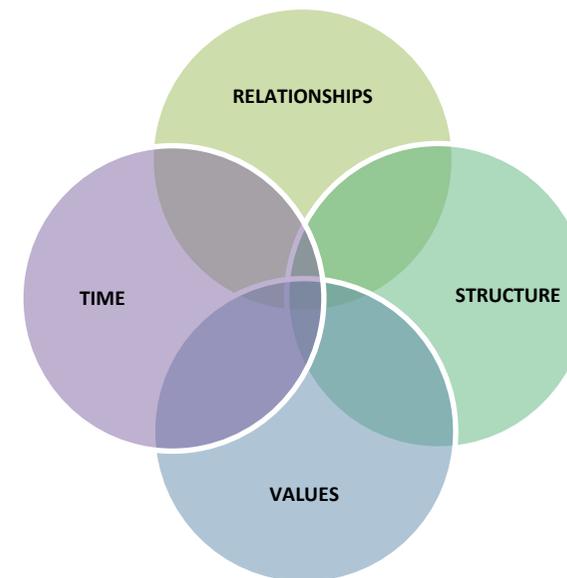
At a presentation to SLAED Pegs was asked 'what do you do when someone becomes almost a professional 'voice of lived experience' and they are no longer close enough to the issue to be 'genuine'. This is a common concern around lived experience work, and it is important to address this head on.

Our reply was simple: *'give that person a job'*: they can use their knowledge and experience to help others become volunteers and find their voice. That is how we grow lived experience voices at the heart of our system and service design processes.

It is important to emphasize again that this project builds on an existing foundation of co-production, lived experience and peer work that has been growing in Fife since well before 2021. The project has also benefited from a wider social and public policy context which increasingly expects strategic partners to evidence how they meaningfully engage with people who are affected by policy and who use the relevant services.

In addition to the ingredients we have brought, this **time before, and current context** have been central ingredients in the project's success.

Co-production seems to be the buzz word of the moment. Where previously we might have worried about this work vanishing, a more present risk is that it loses its transformative potential and becomes co-opted to traditional forms of consultation or engagement activity.



Visualizing what we have found matters when doing co-production in Fife

We believe that our **'all together', values-based approach** is central to ensuring that it does not happen.

This requires time, effort and skilled resourcing to support both professionals and people with lived experience to work together in ways which are safe, empowering and feel helpful and worthwhile to ALL involved.

Whatever comes next, we have no doubt this work will continue to grow, and that these projects still have a role to play. As shown by these comments from different strategic partners:

'{The} work of FVA/LET/PSN is fundamental to key projects and programmes across Fife and conscious, people can become quite stretched. It would be amazing to see more resource/funding to support this great work going forward.'

'I wonder [...] if the FVA/LET could make a case for the decision makers to create a safe space for the discussion / exploration / simulation / modelling of 'disruptive' ideas (creating a space for thinking rather than doing).'

'I signpost and encourage others to contact LET/FVA/PSN as appropriate for different pieces of work.'

Looking Forward to 2024:

There will be plenty for the team to be getting on with in 2024. A few highlights worth mentioning include:

- diversifying Lived Experience Team volunteer membership and continuing to invest in skill-building for LET members
- supporting the trial bringing peer into community mental health teams and help grow peer elsewhere too
- consolidating work on the MHWPCP programme to inform meaningful change and to secure LET funding for a further three years
- consolidating work with the OFP and ensuring we have appropriate structures in place to support co-production in employability work going forward
- building understanding of co-production with senior leadership in Fife through workshops and case studies
- maintaining and growing our co-produced peer-learning environments: the Peer Support Network; Peer Co-reflection groups; co-production drop-in's and LET meetings

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