An Appreciative Model to Co-production
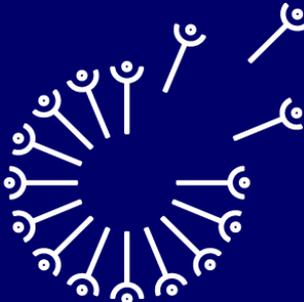
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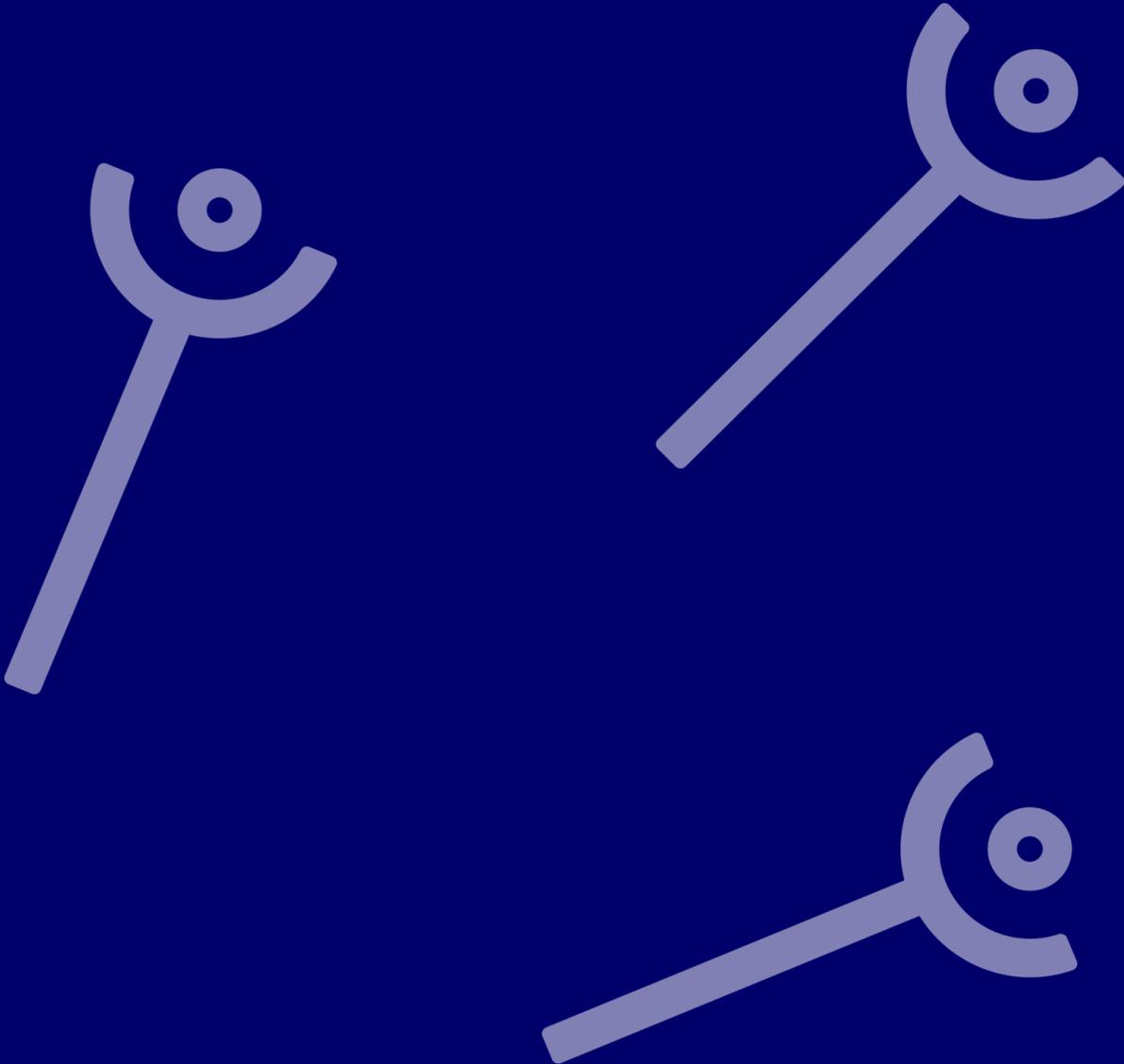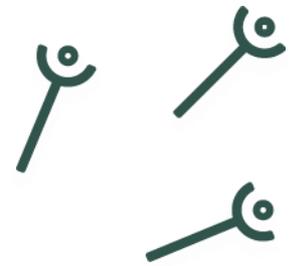
Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is part of the National Fulfilling Lives Programme. This is a £112 million investment over 8 years supporting people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage; the people we work with have a combination and interconnected needs of mental ill-health, are homeless/or at risk of homelessness, substance use and/or contact with the criminal justice system.

We acknowledge that the system doesn't work for everyone – particularly people who experience greater levels of disadvantage.

Certitude is the lead agency of the programme, delivering the programme in partnership with Thames Reach and strategic partners; South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and the three boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.

Our three core aims are:

- Co-production: Giving equal value to the voices of both the decision makers and the people we support, so that all opinions are heard and respected equally.

- Service delivery: Working alongside people and services learning and testing different interventions to change the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantages for the better – now and in the future.

- System change: Making an impact on the way people are supported - by influencing policy and practice, locally and nationally.

Introduction

The term co-production can be used to describe a wide range of different activities. In its most simple terms, it means working together to find a solution, make a change or improve something. At Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham (LSL), we believe key principles that underpin co-production are building trusting relationships, having a clear and shared purpose, working to people's strengths and valuing lived and learned experience equally. We believe in the importance of giving equal value to the voices of both decision makers and people with lived experience, recognising and understanding power dynamics and how they impact our relationships and how we interact with others in professional and personal settings. We also believe that kindness and compassion are essential to co-production, to bring people together and understand different perspectives.

Fulfilling Lives LSL recently piloted an appreciative inquiry model to bring together practitioners and people with lived experience to co-design a gender-informed drug and alcohol service. The aim of this report is to explore the success of using the appreciative inquiry model in co-production and to share our learning.

Section 1: About the workshops

We identified that women being supported by Fulfilling Lives LSL were reporting barriers to accessing drug and alcohol treatment in one of our local boroughs. Women found that the structure of assessments, waiting periods, and the male dominated environment were key factors in these barriers and resulted in women dropping out of treatment, high levels of script re-starts and continued levels of serious risk.

We wanted to find a way to bring women with lived experience, practitioners and commissioners together to increase the depth of understanding for all parties so that the barriers to access experienced by women facing multiple disadvantage could be explored and overcome.

We heard that various initiatives had been tried in the past without using a co-production approach: these had not been perceived as successful by either professionals or those accessing the service. We believed that by co-creating and involving all stakeholders including people with lived experience we could bring in new ideas that would lead to more sustainable service design and positive outcomes for women.

Fulfilling Lives LSL facilitated a series of six workshops using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, with the aim of co-creating a gender-informed pilot to address the barriers identified to access to treatment for women.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative, strengths-based approach designed to create changes in services or systems. It was developed to challenge the traditional approach to problem-solving, which often deficit focused. Below is a definition of AI[1]:

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[1] https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry-process/

"Appreciative Inquiry is a way to engage groups of people in self-determined change. It focuses on what's working, rather than what's not working, and leads people to co-designing their future".
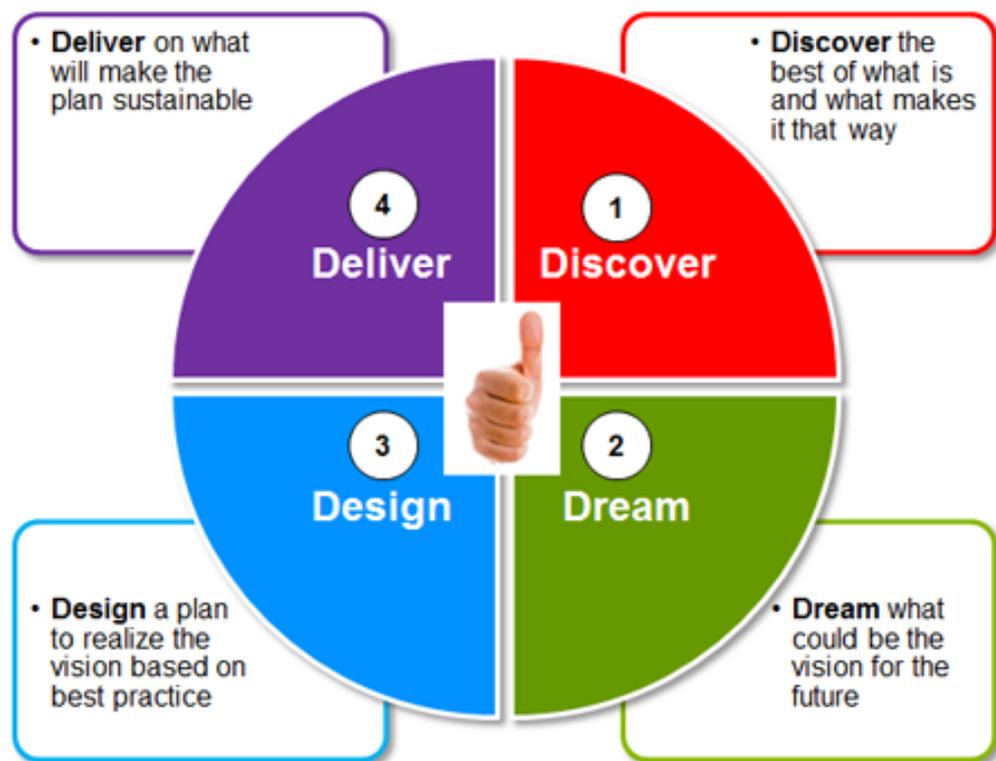
We chose AI for the workshop design as it allowed the facilitators to work with the group to identify and develop innovative ideas rather than focus on the barriers and problems they had experienced.

We already had collected evidence around systemic barriers to women accessing drug and alcohol treatments prior to the workshops that we had gathered through consultation and shared learning events. Consultations highlighted that it can be difficult for people to imagine positive change; it is easy to talk about what isn't working but harder to identify what would work.

The workshops were not designed to ignore the negative experiences of participants, and time was given in the second workshop to express these first-hand; it is important not to dismiss these experiences, but to also help people identify what has worked however insignificant it may feel using the AI model to help to develop solutions.

The workshops were designed around the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle:

Initial workshop development
The workshops were attended by seven women; four of whom have lived experience of using services and three who are current practitioners in drug services. They were co-facilitated by two members of the Fulfilling Lives LSL Community Team which is composed with people who have lived experience.

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[2] This image was taken from http://rayjay.tv/appreciative-inquiry/

Due to the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshops took place over Zoom. We chose to keep the group numbers small to create an intimate space where all the participants felt at ease, and that their views, experiences, and contributions were heard and held with equal value.

We recognised that it might be the first time that they had worked in this way and that this could potentially create challenges or conflict including opposing opinions and disagreements during discussions. We also used group discussion and online planning tools such as Miro to visualise ideas and capture feedback.

The participants were supported to co-create a group agreement in the first workshop to mitigate any risks and to help identify what was needed to keep the space safe. We felt that it was important for the cohesion of the group to acknowledge and surface any unspoken power dynamics and recognise the difference in experience, knowledge, and perspective before moving forward with the work.

Throughout the remaining five workshops, the group followed the 4-D cycle.

- <u>Discovery</u>: the workshop participants talked about what had worked for them and gave examples of what they identified as good practice.
- <u>Dream</u>: the participants focused on blue sky thinking and building on what they felt was working, they considered what they would want if there were no limitations. No ideas were off the table.
- <u>Design</u>: the participants looked at the gap between what currently exists and what it is that they wanted to see happen. They identified where there was leverage for change.
- <u>Deliver</u>: The group pinned down actionable points and created the recommendations they felt would lead to positive changes in the current service design.

The result of the workshops was a co-created service design and recommendations for women's drug and alcohol treatment.

Section 2: the impact of the workshops

The workshops created a level playing field and a chance for all participants to understand each other's experiences, both good and bad. Combining ideas and bringing together practitioners and women with lived experience produced a better outcome than if one of the groups had worked on the project alone. The service design was comprehensive, well-considered, and met the needs of all those using and working at the service.

Participants reported feeling happy to be part of something that could have such a positive impact on the lives of other women, those accessing the service, and practitioners.

"I felt as though the workshop was a safe space, my past was valuable, and I was not ashamed to share my experiences." Person with lived experience

"I believe involving clients and different organisations has been beneficial." Practitioner

"It was really enjoyable experience, there was no 'us and them', the staff, Fulfilling Lives, and the women and I who participated got on really well, everyone contributed equally, and it was interesting to hear the staff perspective on things. I felt throughout that we were making a real difference and designing a safe space for women." Person with lived experience

"It was enjoyable, informative and exciting. It was a new and different experience for us all. It was a great discussion and space to brainstorm." Practitioner

"I have found it really good; it's been a really positive experience having a forum in which there isn't a hierarchy." Practitioner

Recommendations: For using Appreciative Inquiry as a model to co-produce

- **Have a clear and shared purpose**: Share the model with participants and explain how you see the process working. Respond to feedback and be prepared to be flexible.
- **Manage Expectations**: Be transparent and honest about why you want to do the work and what is achievable.
- **Create a group agreement**: Use the initial session to create a group agreement. If people feel safe and understand the boundaries of the workshop, they are more likely to feel free to talk without judgement.
- **Surface and explore power dynamics**: These can be difficult or uncomfortable conversations to have. However, imbalances of power need to be discussed to allow participants to build trust and overcome any barriers that may impact the work.
- **Value Lived and Learned Experiences equally**: Everyone has something important to share and we can all learn something from others.
- **Allocate time**: Each part of the cycle can be allocated more than one meeting, don't rush the process. Don't underestimate the amount of administrative work that needed between sessions. Give yourself ample time to plan, prepare and reflect.
- **Seek to include other voices**: Remember a person with lived experience does not represent all people with lived experiences, a practitioner does not represent all practitioners. Look for ways to include other voices, such as consulting more widely on the outcome of the workshops throughout the process.
- **Capture and summarise**: Write up each workshop and share them with the group, check that what you have captured matches their experience. Write recommendations together.
- **Support well-being**: Have meaningful and unhurried check-ins and check-outs at the beginning and end of each workshop. Understand what people are bringing with them into the space. Offer support outside of the workshops in case people are impacted in ways that they are not happy sharing with the group.
- **Accessibility**: Make sure that everyone has the tools to be equal participants in the process whether this is in person or digital. This may include providing training or preparation, equipment or renumeration for volunteers, and considering the time implications on professionals' workloads.
- **Trauma, gender and culture** – embed trauma-, gender- and culturally-informed principles throughout the process. This means considering the physical, psychological and emotional safety and wellbeing of all involved and how previous experiences of trauma, gender or culture might impact their participation.

Conclusion

We found that AI was an effective model to use for co-production, it helped workshop participants to imagine 'what could be' and supported them to pin this down into tangible actions. It was a positive experience for all who took part.

We would encourage other organisations to try this approach; it does not have to be rigid, and the basic structure can be adapted to any kind of problem. Even if the recommendations are not taken forward, there will be benefits to the process including building relationships and developing deeper understand between those with lived and learned experience.

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the people we have worked alongside and our partners who have made this work possible, in particular:

- The participants of the workshops and their invaluable contributions and support driving this work forward
- The people we have supported who spoke openly about the difficulties they have experienced
- The participants and practitioners who have been involved in shared learning events, focus groups, surveys and peer research to shape and develop the qualitative and quantitative evidence we have captured over the last three years
- Our Peer Programme Lead, Katy Griffiths, for leading this work
- Lambeth Drug and Alcohol Treatment Consortium for their openness to trying new ways of working
- The National Lottery Community Fund and the support and funding of the National Fulfilling Lives programme for providing the opportunity to influence long-term change for those experiencing multiple disadvantage