

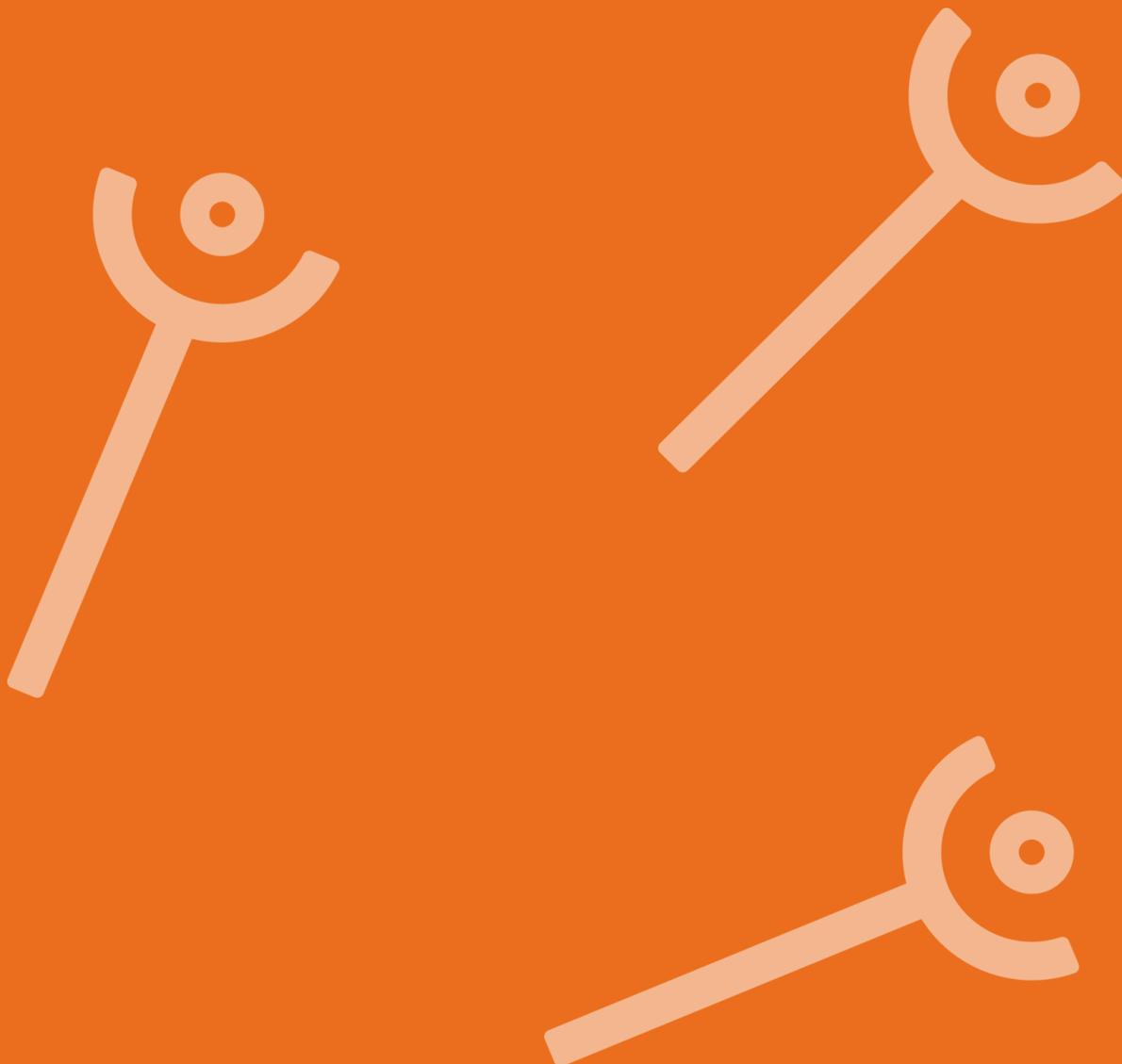
System thinking: How to think differently

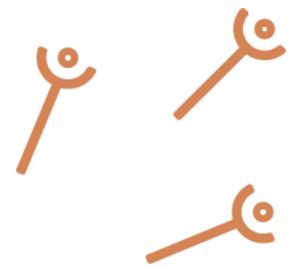
Innovation & Evaluation Team

January 2022



**FULLFILLING
LIVES**
LAMBETH
SOUTHWARK
LEWISHAM





Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham 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 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.

To find out more please go to our website: <https://fulfillingliveslsl.london/>

At Fulfilling Lives LSL we recognise that the system does not currently work for many people experiencing multiple disadvantage. While some people may believe that individuals are hard to reach, or not engaged, we recognise that it is the system that needs to change.

What is a system thinking framework?

Systems thinking is a tool for change; it identifies and explores root causes, allowing for longer term and sustained change. A systems thinking framework invites us to think about the system as a whole, and as a series of interconnected parts that interact. It is an approach that flips the narrative from looking at single incidents and blaming individuals and considers the bigger picture. For example, if you build more houses but don't address causes of poverty, then people will still not be able to afford a home to live in.

Incremental change can create a rippled effect in many elements of the system because they are interconnected. A systems thinking framework identifies where small changes can make a big difference.

Applying systems thinking at Fulfilling Lives LSL

System thinking is at the heart of our work at Fulfilling Lives LSL. We look at the system as a lived reality, flipping the narrative and focusing on how the system behaves for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage. This has enabled us to develop deeper insight into how the system behaves, and how the system could be strengthened, and then apply this insight to how we, and others, deliver services.

We have applied system thinking to reveal how the system operates, including:

- Building an evidence base including developing a literature review, commissioning peer research, publishing learning reports and evidence reviews
- Identifying opportunities for systems change within the systems to help us identify system change priorities by mapping the system.

Building an evidence base

To support us in building the evidence base of system thinking we developed a Research and Learning Partnership with NPC (New Philanthropy Capital), Groundswell and CRESR (the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University).

This partnership has enabled us to gain further understanding of how the current system behaves, how it isn't working for the people experiencing multiple disadvantage, and why. We have been able to identify how things could change for better. The research has supported us to embed change through action learning events as well as system change projects.

Through the partnership we have published a number of outputs, that provide insight into how the local system is operating, including:

- A Systems Map that identifies the systems barriers and challenges at play for local people experiencing multiple disadvantages in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.
- A comprehensive literature review of existing evidence about the effects of these areas on people experience multiple disadvantage.
- Peer research which focuses on understanding people's experiences of accessing services and support.

Identifying opportunities for systems change

By applying systems thinking we have been able to identify opportunities for change priorities and develop systems change projects. In addition, we take a systemic approach to the direct support we provide.

A key part of our purpose is providing a service for people experiencing multiple disadvantage in the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. By applying a systemic approach to providing support, we have been able to:

- See the system as the issue, rather than the individual
- Understand how trauma and life experiences impact people's experiences of the system, and take a trauma, gender and culturally informed approach.
- Advocate for the people we support, working closely with other practitioners and services, and challenging parts of the system that aren't working for people we support.

This approach has had great impact, for example helping people access services for the first time, helping people to connect with children and family members and re-building relationships.

Supporting local services

We are also working with local organisations and services to apply systems thinking. For example, in Southwark we are working with a group of stakeholders from the community harm and safety teams, providing the group with knowledge and tools to apply systems thinking within their own work.

We are also providing a series of workshops, events and opportunities to share our learning and share systems thinking tools with organisations across the UK.

Conclusion

System thinking is a framework and way of thinking that has helped us understand the complex system we are working in. In turn this has enabled us to identify opportunities for long term, positive and systemic change.

We have applied some of the tools and approaches that support with systems thinking, including building an evidence base and systems mapping and we have worked with research and learning partners to build a strong evidence base. This has given us a deeper understanding of the intricacies of how the system behaves specifically for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Thinking deeply about the systems challenges at play has helped us find different solutions that better meet the needs of people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

By sharing our learning we hope to encourage other individuals and organisations working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage to broaden their thinking.

If you would like more information about how we work please contact us on information@fulfillingliveslsl.london.