

Changing Futures Sheffield – Learning Report – Cohort Identification

May 2022

We combined data led and person-centred approaches to identify the highest levels of need in the city	<p>The programme had to identify circa 80 individuals to be supported by our core team. A task and finish group was established in November 2021 which met five times and disbanded in April 2022. 25 different organisations across Sheffield participated.</p> <p>We wanted to avoid the bias pitfalls of referral processes (identified need prioritised over hidden need, referrals used to hand off difficult cases, larger organisations dominating the process) so we agreed a collaborative, iterative process to identify the caseload.</p> <p>This involved three stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Data Approach - collating and cross referencing data from multiple data systems and applying agreed data filters to shortlist an initial cohort.2. Hidden Need - we engaged organisations that support groups known to be underrepresented in mainstream provision (women, foreign nationals, people from ethnic minorities, LGTBQ) to facilitate priority access3. Emerging Need - we used existing fora to identify individuals not yet identified but where need was either emerging or the person has recently reached crisis
Sheffield needs a better approach to identifying need in the city	<p>A piece of work prior to Changing Futures identified that the city had around 200 adults facing multiple disadvantage (experiencing three or more of homelessness, mental health, substance use, domestic violence or contact with the criminal justice system). The data led part of this process identified just under 3,000 people who were experiencing multiple disadvantage across Sheffield.</p> <p>The programme also made a concerted effort to identify people less well known to services. This hidden need work has impacted on our demographics, with most of the programme's caseload being female, which is unusual for the sector (52% in Changing Futures versus 13-15% in mainstream provision in Sheffield).</p> <p>This is in line with findings from projects like Fulfilling Lives Camden and Islington that suggest women are less visible in 'systems' as they are currently configured, but the real level of need is just as high and with focused pieces of work that need is easily identified.</p>
The definition of 'multiple disadvantage' could exclude people who require enhanced support	<p>There is a question of how helpful the programme's primary definition of multiple disadvantage (three out of five needs mentioned above) is in identifying who would most benefit from enhanced offers of support from projects like this.</p> <p>Our process has highlighted that the key factor in deciding to offer bespoke and enhanced support should be the individual being unwilling or unable to engage with existing services, rather than a checklist of needs. The reason for this non-engagement can often be traced to levels of risk or perceived risk, resulting in the individual being excluded or self-excluding from services.</p> <p>We are exploring a more nuanced understanding of risk & need to offer a future model that ensures enhanced provision is well-targeted and operating preventatively where possible.</p>
If we utilised 'negative data' we could help prevent need emerging later on	<p>Multiple services were often aware of our caseload and held 'negative data' on them e.g. lapsed referrals, missed appointments or case closures due to non-engagement. Due to capacity challenges and demand services are often forced to focus on those who are engaged in their support.</p> <p>However, if we could systemically utilise 'negative data' we could identify individuals who are being failed by the system and offer targeted interventions to meet need earlier on.</p>