



THE BEAUTIFUL MONSTERS MANIFESTO

A peer-led system change movement.
Helping people build beautiful futures.

PEOPLE • EXPERIENCE • ACTION • CHANGE



Beautiful Monsters Community Interest Company
Company Number: 17343257

WHAT WE'RE BUILDING

The pieces of our manifesto

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Why Beautiful Monsters exists



Beautiful Monsters exists because too many people are still expected to navigate systems that are fragmented, difficult to access and organised around institutions rather than the realities of people's lives.

People experiencing drug-related harm may also be dealing with housing insecurity, poverty, physical or mental ill-health, trauma, criminal justice involvement, family pressures and stigma. These experiences do not arrive in neat organisational categories. Yet support often does.

When someone does not engage, misses an appointment or falls out of support, the question is too often framed around the individual. Beautiful Monsters starts somewhere different. It starts with the people, the families and the communities who come to us for support: What happened around that person? What got in the way? What could the system have done differently?

People are not the problem. Systems can be.

We are a Community Interest Company and a peer-led system change movement. We bring lived and living experience together with communities, evidence, research and professional expertise to understand what is happening, identify where change is needed and turn insight into practical action – all led by the people and families we seek to serve.

We are not interested in collecting people's stories without changing anything. We want lived and living experience to influence priorities, shape decisions, design solutions, deliver projects and evaluate whether those solutions actually work.

Our six core principles



1. People are not the problem

We challenge systems that create barriers, gaps and unnecessary harm. Our focus is not on “fixing” people so that they fit services; it is on making systems more humane, accessible and responsive to people’s real lives.

2. Nothing about people without people

People affected by ineffective services and policies should have guaranteed and meaningful influence over research, governance, design, delivery, evaluation and improvement. Participation should happen at every stage of service design, delivery and execution - early enough to change the outcome.

3. Peer-led must actually mean peer-led

Lived and living experience is expertise. Peer leadership means real influence, responsibility, ownership and decision-making power - not token representation. We want peers to be researchers, ambassadors, navigators, designers, project leaders and partners in governance.

4. Harm reduction comes first

We meet people where they are. Keeping people alive, safer, connected and supported matters. We do not make dignity, compassion or practical help conditional on abstinence, compliance or somebody else’s definition of success.

5. Evidence and experience belong together

Research, data and professional knowledge matter. So does lived and living experience. We use both, and we pay particular attention to what datasets miss, whose voices are absent and what people’s experiences reveal about why systems succeed or fail.

Kindness is not an alternative to rigour or accountability. How people are welcomed, spoken to, listened to and treated affects trust, engagement and outcomes. A kinder system can also be a stronger, more effective system.

From insight to lasting change: our seven-step approach

Our “*building beautiful futures*” model turns the manifesto into a practical method. The house is a metaphor for a service, system, community response or place of support that is designed with people, built with people and ultimately owned by the community around it.

1. Peer-led research

Start with the people closest to the issue. Combine lived and living experience with existing research and data to understand what matters, what works, where the gaps are and what people say needs to change.

Understand before designing.



2. Peer-led harm reduction steering groups

Create meaningful structures through which peers can guide priorities, challenge assumptions and shape decisions throughout the work.

Share power, not just opinions.



3. Peer-led harm reduction projects

Turn insight into practical interventions. Test ideas, learn quickly, evaluate impact and adapt.

Insight without action is not system change.



4. Peer ambassadors

Support people with lived and living experience and their families to become champions for change across communities, services and systems.

Peer voices belong wherever decisions are made.



5. Understand what a home should look like

Co-design the solution around local needs, local strengths and people's real lives. There is no universal blueprint.

Build with communities, not for them.



6. Make the house a home

Move from plans into delivery. Culture, relationships, accessibility and joined-up support determine whether a technically good service actually feels safe, useful and welcoming.

Do not just build services; build places where people can belong. We call them living rooms: places where people go to live, not die.



7. Sustainability

Plan from the beginning for long-term funding, community ownership, workforce development, partnership and evidence of impact.

The strongest change should eventually belong to the community.



Find the gaps. Build the bridges.



Beautiful Monsters is particularly interested in the spaces between systems, because this is often where risk increases and responsibility becomes blurred.

- Between prison and community.
- Between treatment and healthcare.
- Between housing and homelessness.
- Between statutory and voluntary services.
- Between referral and appointment.
- Between eligibility thresholds.
- Between one organisation saying “not ours” and another saying the same.
- Between organisations that say “our clients” and organisations that recognise personal autonomy and empower it.

Prison release is a clear example. A person can leave custody needing continuity of medication or treatment, harm reduction information and supplies, housing, benefits, healthcare, relationships and practical support - all at the same time. The transition should not require someone to rebuild every connection from scratch at a point of heightened vulnerability.

Our role is to work with people who experience those transitions and the organisations around them to understand where the pathway breaks down, identify what would make it safer and then co-design practical ways of bridging those gaps.

What peer-led means in practice



Peer-led work should redistribute influence, not simply add a lived-experience label to an existing project. Depending on the work, this can include:

- Paid peer research and community inquiry delivered with LUV through our sister CIC, We are LUV (Liberating User Voices).
- Peer representation with genuine decision-making influence.
- Co-production from the earliest stage of project design.
- Peer-led harm reduction initiatives and outreach.
- Peer navigation across fragmented services.
- Peer ambassadors influencing practice, commissioning and policy.
- CRAFT-trained family members, CRAFT Maintenance Groups and a CRAFT Community of Practice.
- Training, development and progression routes for people with lived and living experience.
- Evaluation that asks peers whether the change is meaningful, not only whether organisational targets were met.

If the people most affected do not have meaningful power in it, we should question whether it is genuinely peer-led.

Collaboration over empire building

Beautiful Monsters does not need to own every solution. System change requires collaboration across organisational and professional boundaries. Sometimes we will lead; sometimes we will partner; sometimes our most useful contribution will be to strengthen somebody else's work or bring the right people together.

We want to work alongside people with lived and living experience, their families, communities, treatment providers, prisons and probation services, health services, housing organisations, local authorities, charities, police, universities, commissioners, policymakers, funders, responsible businesses and local community-based services.

The outcome matters more than whose logo is on it.



Constructive challenge

System change also requires the confidence to ask difficult questions. We will celebrate good practice and recognise that many people working within services are themselves constrained by systems. But respect cannot become an excuse for avoiding challenge.

- We will question accepted wisdom when evidence or experience suggests it is not working.
- We will look for voices and experiences missing from the data.
- We will challenge stigma and language that dehumanises people.
- We will highlight gaps between policy and what happens in practice.
- We will focus criticism on learning and improvement rather than blame.
- We will challenge you on “how you know what you know” when it comes to doing things “to” people who use drugs and their families rather than working “with” them.

If you're doing something to us rather than with us, we want to know: how do you know we need that thing?



The Beautiful Monsters test

Before we call a project, service or intervention successful, we want to be able to answer these questions:

- Did people with lived and living experience have meaningful power?
- Did we understand the problem before designing the response?
- Did we combine evidence, data and lived experience?
- Did the work reduce harm or make people safer?
- Did it make support easier rather than harder to navigate?
- Did it strengthen relationships and trust?
- Did insight lead to something practical changing?
- Can the change last beyond the initial project or funding period?
- Can the learning be shared without pretending one solution fits everywhere?
- Most importantly: did it make things better for people?

Another meeting is not an outcome. Another strategy is not an outcome. Change is the outcome.



What success looks like

Our ambition is not to create perfect people or perfect systems. It is to help create conditions in which people are safer, heard, valued, connected and able to shape their own futures.

SAFER PEOPLE

Less preventable harm; better access to practical support.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES

More local capacity, connection, ownership and peer leadership.

BETTER SERVICES

More humane, joined up and responsive systems.

BRIGHTER FUTURES

More opportunity, dignity, hope and lasting change.



Our commitment

We will keep listening. We will keep learning. We will use evidence without losing sight of people. We will work with communities rather than doing things to them. We will be prepared to challenge systems while remaining kind to the people working within them. And we will judge ourselves by whether something genuinely changes.

Beautiful Monsters is about turning lived and living experience into influence, influence into action, and action into lasting change.

We are not going to ride the crest of the wave. WE ARE THE WAVE.

Safer people. Stronger communities. Brighter futures.

KIND PEOPLE. REAL CHANGE.

A peer-led system change movement helping people build beautiful futures.



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Kind people. Real change.

OUR MANIFESTO

PEOPLE. EXPERIENCE. ACTION. CHANGE.

Beautiful Monsters is a peer-led system change movement and Community Interest Company. We bring lived and living experience, family members, communities, evidence, research and professional expertise together to challenge what isn't working — and build better, kinder systems.

We believe that **people are not the problem. Systems can be.** And with the right mix of experience, evidence and collaboration, we can create real change and help people build beautiful futures.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

-  **PEOPLE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM**
We challenge systems that create barriers, gaps and unnecessary harm.
-  **NOTHING ABOUT PEOPLE WITHOUT PEOPLE**
Lived and living experience should have meaningful influence in research, design, delivery, evaluation and decision-making.
-  **PEER-LED MUST ACTUALLY MEAN PEER-LED**
Real power, real influence, real responsibility for people with lived experience.
-  **HARM REDUCTION COMES FIRST**
We meet people where they are. Keeping people alive, safer, connected and supported matters.
-  **EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE BELONG TOGETHER**
Data, research and professional expertise matter. Lived and living experience too. We ask what the numbers don't tell us.
-  **KINDNESS IS PART OF SYSTEM CHANGE**
How people are treated can determine whether they ever come back. Kind systems work better.

A PEER-LED SYSTEM CHANGE MOVEMENT

helping people build beautiful futures



OUR VISION

A kinder, safer, fairer society where people are supported to live healthy, connected and meaningful lives.



OUR MISSION

To turn lived and living experience into practical solutions that create lasting system change.



OUR IMPACT

- Safer people
- Stronger communities
- Better services
- Brighter futures



GET INVOLVED

Work with us. Partner with us. Support us. Help us build beautiful futures.

LET'S BUILD CHANGE TOGETHER →

"A kinder system is a stronger system."

Beautiful Monsters
A Community Interest Company



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