

Team Around Me: guidance for practitioners

“It was easy to follow and allowed the client to be in control. The client decided who she wanted to attend and I believe that this complimented the level of engagement. It is a better format than typical professional meetings as it was client lead. The meeting started by acknowledging the clients achievement and she was overwhelmed by how far she had come as she generally suffers with low self-esteem. The meeting was extremely uplifting.” - **Feedback from Camden partner agency**

What is Team Around Me?

‘Team Around Me’ is a new structure for holding case conferences or multi-agency meetings. It is being piloted in Islington and Camden for clients experiencing multiple disadvantage who need a multi-agency response. The template was developed in recognition of the fact that many professionals are holding multi-agency meetings already, but that there is currently no standardized structure for how meetings are held, minuted, and how agencies are held accountable for actions. Team Around Me also gives clients agency by enabling them to choose their own lead professional where possible, who can call the meetings, take minutes and advocate for the client if they choose not to attend the meeting themselves.

The meeting structure begins with recognizing positive factors and achievements, rather than problems or deficits – to enable the client and the agencies who work with them to reflect on what a client is doing already to keep themselves safe, and what their strengths are, before thinking about what goals remain.

Team Around me also has a focus on identifying “system blockages” – i.e. problems or issues which are getting in the way of a client accessing services or achieving their goals. The template includes a system blockages process tool, which guides meeting attendees through identifying and thinking about issues/blockages collaboratively with a solution/action focused mindset. This will allow services to work together to overcome obstacles/create flex for clients individually – and any trends in system blockages will also be captured as part of the pilot and fed back to commissioners, to evidence the need for wider change if necessary.

Who is Team Around Me for?

Team Around Me has so far been piloted with a focus on women experiencing multiple disadvantage and violence and abuse, who have a number of cross sector professionals involved or aware of their case and who need a multi-agency response to support them, keep them safe or help them to achieve their goals. Team Around Me can be used more widely with anyone experiencing multiple disadvantage who requires a multi-agency response.

How often should a Team Around Me meeting be called?

This is up to the client, the lead professional, the other agencies involved and the level of risk/need. It may be that one or two meetings is enough to overcome an obstacle and for a client to move forward and feel safe, and following that they are able to engage effectively with a range of support services without those services coming together. For clients who are

finding engagement difficult and/or who remain in high risk situations, it may be appropriate to hold Team Around Me meetings monthly, on an ongoing basis. Team Around Meetings can also be held to review and celebrate progress and achievement if the client wants this – they do not necessarily need to be problem/solution focused. Frequency should be decided on a case by case, needs led basis.

What about MARAC/Safeguarding?

Team Around Me is a framework for clients who are having non-statutory multi-agency meetings held for them or where there is an identified need for such a meeting . MARAC and/or Safeguarding referrals should always be the first response if you are concerned about a client experiencing any form of violence and abuse, but in some cases clients, especially those experiencing multiple disadvantage, require on going multi-agency work outside of/in addition to these frameworks.

Who should attend?

The lead professional will take responsibility for inviting other agencies who are involved with a client's support – this may be quite a few people, or it may be just one other worker in some cases. Only people who are working with/trying to work with the client should attend, in order to keep the meetings personalized to the client and action/solution focused with her needs and goals in mind.

What if the client can't or won't identify a lead professional?

If a client can't or won't identify a lead professional, because - for example – they are very disengaged from all services, then the professional with the most contact with the client can call a Team Around Me meeting on their behalf.

What about consent?

The lead professional, regardless of what agency they are working for, can only proceed with a Team Around Me meeting with consent from the client. In most cases, the client will already be engaged with the lead agency and will have signed a consent form enabling that agency to share information with other relevant agencies. If this is not the case, consent should be obtained in the first instance before multi-agency working can occur.

Will it take up a lot of time?

No! The template is designed to be simple, easy to use and the minutes can be action focused bullet points of what needs to happen next. Team Around Me is to be used only for clients who are having case conferences/multi-agency meetings held about them already – it is not to be used for people who do not need these meetings, and therefore will not create extra work.

What if a system challenge/blockage cannot be overcome despite meetings?

Capture it! It will be useful feedback as part of the pilot to look at what the issues are for clients experiencing multiple disadvantage in Camden and Islington even if they cannot be overcome straight away or within the context of the meetings.