

Reflection on the year:

Tassie Weaver

Four key messages

- 1) Reflections on where we've come as a network and a movement for change
- 2) Reflections on systems flex achieved over the next year
- 3) Evaluation
- 4) Future focus: strategic partnerships

Reflections on where we're come as a network and a movement for change

In November 2017, thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, 23 areas came together to form the new MEAM Approach network. The majority of areas were not yet operational, had varying degrees of partnership working established and were new to working on the MEAM Approach model. Of these we are delighted to see that 21 areas are now operational, supporting a group of beneficiaries in a coordinated, person-centred way.

In November 2018, we welcomed six new areas into the MEAM Approach network, meaning we are now a network of 27 MEAM Approach areas and 12 Fulfilling Lives areas working together to strengthen the movement for coordinated, effective, person-centred work aimed at improving the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. In addition to this, we look forward to welcoming areas in the Greater Manchester region into the MEAM Approach network later this year.

As the work in local areas has developed, we have been pleased to see new cross-sector relationships formed, partnerships established, many of which have importantly included people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage. We've also seen a peer-network of frontline workers develop in some regions. As well as coming together to share expertise at our Learning Hubs on Coordination and Coproduction, we are now facilitating reflective practice sessions for navigators across the Berkshire/Hampshire region and now in the Yorkshire/Humber region too, and navigators have supported one another through visiting different areas and shadowing one another's teams. As a coalition we would like to offer our support to continue to develop and strengthen these peer-networks going forward. We would also like to see the same peer-support networks develop at a strategic level, and again offer our support to facilitate this.

Reflections on systems flex achieved so far

As a result of strengthened partnership, person-centred working, we have seen some excellent examples of systems flex achieved, a few of which we'd like to share:

- Access to statutory mental health services is an ongoing barrier for many people experiencing multiple disadvantage, but we have encouraging examples of where this is being addressed. In Southend the CCG have agreed a simplified referral route into the CMHT for clients experiencing multiple disadvantage, allowing frontline workers to make appropriate referrals to the simplified pathway, removing the barrier of requiring a GP referral and putting trust in the expertise of the frontline workers.

In Norwich, a working group has been established with key decision makers specifically to explore how discharge from mental health units in the area can be improved for people with multiple needs, and in Surrey the OPCC have teamed up with the mental health trust to provide specialist triage support for those dialling 999 in mental health crisis who also have complex social issues.

- We have also seen great examples of flexibility within criminal justice services. Examples include relaxed approaches to Criminal Behaviour Orders and probation attendance, allowing MEAM beneficiaries to avoid unnecessary recalls and other punitive actions that we know to be counterproductive to recovery. In Surrey, the OPCC have extended the Deferred Prosecutions scheme to people with multiple disadvantage, so that this group benefit from the same opportunities for rehabilitation as opposed to punitive and damaging short term prison sentences.
- With regards to housing, there are numerous examples of flexible accommodation offers being agreed across the country, based on what the person wants and needs, rather than what their statutory duty determines. Some have adopted Housing First models, some have shown flexibility in supported housing criteria, and some have worked closely with local landlords to improve access to and support within the private rented sector. Through the strong relationships formed between coordinators and beneficiaries, we've seen many examples of people once deemed "hard to house" maintaining and thriving in their accommodation.

As well as the improved partnership working, we must also recognise the vital role played by the committed, skilled, empathetic and dedicated work of the navigators working on the MEAM Approach across the country. This work can be rewarding and is certainly worthwhile, but we know it's not easy, and we've been continually impressed with everyone who has taken on these challenging roles.

Evaluation

Since we last met as a group, a lot of work has taken place developing and implementing, in partnership with Cordis Bright, the national evaluation of the MEAM Approach. Starting with regional workshops with stakeholders across the country, right through to receiving the third round of data returns in January, the work has developed with speed. For more information on how this has developed so far, please visit the MEAM website. We would like to thank each and every partnership for their involvement and commitment to the evaluation. We understand that participation in evaluation activities can be a challenge in local areas, however we would like to encourage you to continue to focus on this, providing the key data that will allow us to learn from and evidence the impact we are having as a network. This is vital for creating longer term change at both a national and a local level.

Future Focus

Work developed over the past 18 months has come with challenges and we know there will continue to be challenges along the way. Nobody said partnership work was easy, and as you will probably hear from Toby later on, when you try to do things differently, the system will always push back and try to maintain the status quo. However, we have shown together that we can achieve change that leads to improved wellbeing for some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our local communities.

Over the next 12 months, we encourage every local area to focus on building and maintaining strong strategic partnerships to ensure that the change we're seeing on the ground is embedded within our systems, in culture, in practice and in both local and national policy. Central to this for every local area is to focus on how we really ensure that all interventions are co-designed and co-delivered by people with experience of multiple disadvantage, in a meaningful and impactful way.

As a coalition we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your work and commitment on the MEAM Approach so far, to celebrate the strength of the network, and to maintain the focus on

building the movement around multiple needs. We are already seeing great examples of systems flex and coordinated support. Through your work on the evaluation, we are starting to gather the learning from working in this way that will play a key part in influencing change. We look forward to working together over the next 12 months to build upon and strengthen the strategic partnerships and relationships required to achieve long term change.