

2019

The Fulfilling Lives  
South East  
Employment  
Programme:  
Learning So Far

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# Executive Summary

The South East Fulfilling Lives Project (SEFL) has an employment programme which aims to provide a pathway into employment for people who have experienced multiple disadvantages. This programme includes paid roles within the project, which are designed to value and utilise lived experience as an asset, and to develop employability skills. The programme appears to be achieving positive results.

The rapid evidence literature review revealed that there is little available evidence of best practice in relation to employing individuals with multiple and complex needs, (MCN). Current literature focuses on barriers to employment or details approaches that employ individuals with one predominant need, such as a mental health condition or a history of offending. The review did reveal that there are 3 areas employers need to consider when employing individuals with MCN:

1. Establish if an individual is 'work ready' - this often presents as someone who has good mental health and a stable home life
2. Have processes and procedures that enable an individual to address any financial stability concerns they may have in moving from benefits into paid employment
3. Consider how to address a criminal history in recruitment and employment policies

As SEFL's Employment Programme recruits individuals with a minimum of two complex needs (often 3 or 4), it provides insight into 'what works' to add to the sector's knowledge.

SEFL have used a variety of tools and approaches over the last four years to examine 'what works' in recruiting, developing and employing individuals with MCN. Whilst personalisation is always key, because different approaches will work for different individuals, the evaluation has identified a number of approaches that work favourably in most instances. These include, but are not limited to:

- Using established peer and support networks to identify potential suitable candidates for the employment programme
- Providing support to transition individuals from benefits into paid employment

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- Establishing and improving applicants' ability to self-reflect and improve through earning
- Providing an 'Expectations in the Workplace' induction as a supplement to the organisation's standard induction
- Providing dedicated support outside of direct and senior line management
- Using specific tools to help monitor and track progress and understanding
- Using contract lengths that are sufficient in length to develop an individual (18 months minimum)
- Offering formal and informal training opportunities to maximise learning across all required work-specific and soft skillsets
- Providing support to identify and apply for future employment opportunities

All of these approaches are provided within an environment that supports, and does not stigmatise, experience of MCN. Peer support is valued by all and the variety of personalities across the team has allowed individuals to learn and develop positive team dynamics in a short space of time.

## Impact

At the time of the fieldwork being conducted, 33 individuals had been employed by the SEFL programme. Of these, 17 had completed the programme, eight remained in employment with SEFL and eight had been unsuccessful in completing the programme.

Every individual who had completed their probationary period with SEFL had secured future employment. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact of the programme is potentially greater than this as two of the eight individuals who did not pass probation did

# Executive Summary

progress onto positive outcomes – one returning to education and the other working for an organisation on a part-time basis. However, not everyone sustained employment and the programme is now examining ways to address this (see below).

## Next steps

The programme is now looking to embed the learning within the employing organisation's policies and procedures. It is also looking at addressing the outstanding areas for improvement, specifically:

*Exploring transitional/step down support from the programme*

*Identifying alternatives to reflective practice to support individuals for whom this does not work*

*Addressing additional mental health support requirements for individuals with MCN seeking employment opportunities*

# Background

## South East Fulfilling Lives

South East Fulfilling Lives is a project that seeks to improve the lives of people who face multiple disadvantages. Funded from 2014 until 2022, the project operates across three localities – Eastbourne, Hastings and Brighton & Hove. It is part of The National Lottery Community Fund’s wider ‘Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People with Multiple Needs’<sup>1</sup> programme. It is run by a partnership of local organisations, led by Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)<sup>2</sup>. The programme has three aims:

- 1. It will change lives*
- 2. It will change systems*
- 3. It will involve service users*

Putting these aims into practice means utilising the knowledge and experience of people with lived experience within the project, and in turn developing those individual’s future employment prospects. Fulfilling Lives South East aims to act as an exemplar in employing individuals who have experienced multiple disadvantages. In order to embed best practice in this area both locally and nationally, SEFL aims to share their successes and challenges through evaluations of their work to date.

## The Employment Programme

Fulfilling Lives South East provides up to nine paid Project Consultant (PC) roles specifically for people who have experienced multiple disadvantages in their lives. The roles act as the key point of contact for lived experience in the project and contribute meaningfully to its day-to-day operations (see figure one). PC’s are given support to find alternative future employment when they feel ready to move on, or when their contract is nearing its end.

<sup>1</sup> [The National Lottery Community Fund project details](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Further information](#) on the structure and governance of the programme

# Background



Figure 1: Tasks of Project Consultants and Project Consultant Assistants

All participants of the programme are employees of the host organisation, Brighton Housing Trust. Each locality supports one full-time position (Project Consultants) and two part-time positions (Project Consultant Assistants)<sup>3</sup>. Both roles are line managed and supported by two staff members - the Service User Engagement Coordinator, and the Engagement and Development Worker. The latter role was introduced to the programme in 2017 to bring additional capacity.

## Methodology

Fulfilling Lives South East provides up to nine paid Project Consultant (PC) roles specifically for people who have experienced multiple disadvantages in their lives. The roles act as the key point of contact for lived experience in the project and contribute meaningfully to its day-to-day operations (see figure one). PC's are given support to find alternative future employment when they feel ready to move on, or when their contract is nearing its end.

In October 2018 Sarah Robinson Research & Consultancy was commissioned by SEFL to undertake an evaluation of their Employment Programme for individuals with lived experience of MCN. The methodology was designed in collaboration with SEFL and was to be achieved by undertaking and addressing the following research questions:

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the report, both roles will be covered by the term 'Project Consultants'

# Background

- 1. How effective are the tools and techniques used by SEFL to support people who have experienced multiple disadvantages in employment?*
- 2. To what extent has SEFL prepared people for future employment, in terms of workplace skills, emotional skills and maintaining wellbeing?*

Prior to addressing the research questions, a desk-based review was carried out of relevant project materials and literature as part of the initial scoping process. The review was limited to UK based organisations, and practices which related specifically to employing people who had experienced multiple disadvantages. Further to this, five interviews took place with comparable local and national projects to provide further context and best practice examples.

Within the project, current Project Consultants attended a half-day workshop to address themes highlighted in the research questions. Nine people who had completed or left the programme were also interviewed, in person and via telephone. Finally, five other (non-Project Consultant) staff members were also interviewed, to provide context and further information to the research. All interviews were recorded with permission and the data was analysed thematically and reported.

The fieldwork was completed in December 2018 and the report was drafted in 2019.

# Existing National Learning

A desk-based review was conducted to explore current practices which related specifically to employing people who had experienced multiple disadvantages. Current literature tends to focus on why individuals with MCN are not employed and the barriers they must overcome; or, it details projects that focus on employing individuals with one complex need, not multiple needs. The results of the review found the following key considerations for organisations when looking to employ an individual with MCN:

Establish if an individual is ‘work ready’ - this often presents as someone who has good mental health and a stable home life

Have processes and procedures that enable an individual to address any financial stability concerns they may have in moving from benefits into paid employment

Consider how to address a criminal history in recruitment and employment policies

## ‘Work Ready’ & Good Mental Health

Poor mental health can be a serious risk to employment. 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their jobs each year – notably more than those with physical disabilities<sup>4</sup>. Even if employment is retained, one in three have experienced employment difficulties as a result of their conditions, and multiple disadvantage is seen as a key factor which underlies these difficulties<sup>5</sup>. Despite these challenges, there is evidence that where investments have been made in people with long-term mental health issues in the workplace, the financial and individual gains have been notable<sup>6</sup>. This highlights the importance of supporting mental wellbeing within employment programmes.

<sup>4</sup> P. Stevenson; D, Falmer. (2017). [‘Thriving at work The Stevenson / Farmer review of mental health and employers’](#)

<sup>5</sup> Thorne, M. (2018). [‘Mental health and employment – a vicious cycle?’](#) Citizens Advice Bureau

<sup>6</sup> Waddell; Burton (2006). In the Marmot Review – ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’ (2010)

# Existing National Learning

The ethos of the Fulfilling Lives Employment Programme is in line with ambitions for mental health and employment outlined by national government in 2009<sup>7</sup>. It outlines that (supported) work is good for mental health recovery, and that the best models ‘empower people with mental health conditions to move forward, carry out activities and develop relationships to lead fulfilling lives’<sup>8</sup>. Whilst National employment schemes such as ‘Access to Work’ and ‘Fit for Work’ do not currently provide a direct source of mental health support<sup>9</sup>, there are examples of best practice in this area. Mind compiled a selection of good practice examples which include:

- Addressing barriers holistically
- Providing flexible, person centred support
- Regularly developing resilience
- Self-defining employment outcomes
- Quality advice on employer culture, HR practices and employment law

Identifying negative mental health triggers is a key way to support good mental health practices for employees. Triggers can be absolutely anything (a situation, a noise, or specific character traits) and are personal to the individual. New environments like offices can increase a person’s sensitivity to their personal triggers, and if left unmanaged can lead to negative consequences for a person’s relationship with their work and even risk their future recovery. Therefore, employment programmes should support individuals to identify their own mental health triggers and manage their impact on employee wellbeing.

<sup>7</sup> HM Government. (2009). [‘New Horizons: a shared vision for mental health’](#)

<sup>8</sup> HM Government (2009). [‘Working Our Way to Better Mental Health: A Framework for Action Work, Recovery and Inclusion’](#).

<sup>9</sup> MIND (2016). [‘Supporting People with Mental Health Problems into Sustainable Employment’](#)

# Existing National Learning

## The Benefits Barrier

Moving from benefits to wages can feel like a huge jump for people who are moving into work. For some there can be impacts on other benefits, new language and processes, and the risk of having no income at all if they feel they are not able to do the role whilst in post. All organisations must abide by national guidelines in relation to pay and sickness. However, there are practical examples of how structures can be adapted to bridge this gap.

The Money and Mental Health Institute recently made a number of recommendations to improve policy around sick leave, in order to assist with these issues<sup>10</sup>. They concluded that having group income protection insurance, contractual sick pay schemes and signposting to support when sick pay is ending all help people to stay in work. There are also best practice examples from UK projects which have a similar remit to Fulfilling Lives South East:

- Advice on coming off benefits when applicants are deciding to take the job. This advice continues if the person accepts the role<sup>11</sup>
- Being flexible about when people are paid. Providing advance or more frequent payments and a personal budget has allowed people to acquire travel passes and suitable clothing for work<sup>11</sup>
- No commitment employment options. The use of zero-hour contracts to allow people to work when their resilience is high, but to be able to take a break when they need to without worrying about breaching contracts<sup>12</sup>

Contracts that work with Universal Credit Working within permitted hours enables the individual to retain financial and housing security should they find that they are not ready for paid employment or should they experience a relapse (although the low level of hours can limit involvement in complex project work<sup>13</sup>)

<sup>10</sup> Bond, N & Braverman, R. (2018). '[Too ill to work, too broke not to](#)'. The Money and Mental Health Policy Institute.'

<sup>11</sup> [Inspiring Change Manchester](#), another Fulfilling Lives Project. Personal budgets are offered by ICM. Each trainee has a budget of up to £1500 to spend on training, equipment etc.

<sup>12</sup> [Certitude](#) An organisation supporting individuals with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs

<sup>13</sup> [West Yorkshire Finding Independence](#), another Fulfilling Lives Project

# Existing National Learning

## The DBS conundrum

A history of offending is often a reality for people who have experienced multiple disadvantages. These histories can often impact on employment options, as employers may require individuals to state if they have a criminal record during recruitment processes. Some roles also require individuals to have a 'Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS) check<sup>14</sup>, which is a search for any unspent convictions by an external agency. These can limit employment options and discourage people with criminal records from applying for work.

Several pieces of campaign work and guidance on this issue highlight ways that these barriers might be reduced. The most recent government legislation was updated in 2014, and broadly supports checking criminal records only when it is essential for the job role<sup>15</sup>. International campaigns like 'ban the box' also support proportionate checks<sup>16</sup>, whilst UK-based campaigns bring together resources, guidance and case studies on the topic<sup>17 18</sup>. Some of these schemes have been supported by Fulfilling Lives projects in other parts of the UK. The Fulfilling Lives South East Employment Programme supports the principles highlighted in these campaigns, particularly around having open conversations about criminal convictions. However, it does not currently subscribe to particular campaigns in this area.

**KEY LEARNING:** ICM (Inspiring Change Manchester - one of the other funded areas of the national Fulfilling Lives programme) initially found that applicants to their GROW programme were worried that their job offers would be withdrawn following a DBS check. Instead of initial discussion about past convictions coming from the HR department of their lead organisation (Shelter), conversations following a job offer are now done locally through the project. Applicants are provided with the opportunity to talk to staff about their background before the checks are completed.

<sup>14</sup> Disclosure and Barring Service – '[About us](#)'

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2014). [Guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Ban the Box Campaign](#) seeking to stop irrelevant questioning about criminal records in the USA

<sup>17</sup> '[Recruit](#)' seeking to support employers in recruiting people with criminal records

<sup>18</sup> NACRO. '[Disclosing criminal Records](#)'

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

Fulfilling Lives South East has developed a number of tools and techniques to support people within the employment programme. This section reviews these interventions to answer the question: How effective are the tools and techniques we use to support people who have experienced multiple disadvantages?

## Recruitment

All applicants to the employment programme must follow the processes set out by the host organisation, Brighton Housing Trust. However, the project uses supplementary tools and approaches to adapt these processes and make them more flexible. The project has created a volunteer employment pathway, with the aim of bridging the gap from benefits to employment. This ensures that the project can develop potential employees from the offset and is more likely to produce staff who are keen and knowledgeable about the organisation. Whilst it is important to note that individuals who enter the volunteering programme may still have significant development needs to address before moving into a paid role, many have made this move successfully within the project.

**KEY LEARNING:** The programme has developed valuable learning on how to identify individuals who have the resilience to cope with paid employment. The project and its host have learned that someone is more likely to be 'work ready' if they have a stable home life, can commit to something (like volunteering or study), and are able to use constructive criticism to reflect and develop. Indicators that a person may not be ready for a paid role include being unable to give examples of their experience, not understanding terms used in the sector, and not understanding professional boundaries (such as displaying enthusiasm to work beyond their remit or extra hours if appointed).

As the Key Learning box above highlights, the project has learnt a lot about who could benefit the most from the programme. However, the programme also regularly encounters individuals who interview well but struggle in the role when appointed. This could be because applicants had not fully understood the scope of the role or have experienced a deterioration in mental health issues whilst in post. People who had been successful in the programme felt that the key to success was not being afraid to ask for help if they needed it and seeing the importance in learning from their mistakes.

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

Other practices which current and ex Project Consultants felt were beneficial to recruitment were:

- Using established networks to identify suitable candidates for employment
- Mentoring and support from current Project Consultants for volunteers applying for roles
- Establishing an applicant's ability to self-reflect and improve through learning
- Using feedback from past applicants to improve processes and procedures
- Feedback for unsuccessful applicants

Areas identified for development and further learning often highlighted the risks associated with more positive processes and techniques:

- Relying on existing networks means that more rural localities have a limited pool of candidates
- More detail is required in job specifications to fully explain what it means to work for a complex learning programme
- Project Consultants can find it difficult to maintain professional boundaries with friends who remain volunteers once they have been appointed

This is an area of ongoing development for the programme. In line with the flexible working solutions highlighted in the existing national work, the project and its host organisation are considering options around internships and other flexible working approaches to support recruitment. To improve the assessment of whether people are ready for the role, the programme is considering potential psychometric tests to include in the application process. It is hoped that these tests would help identify the more resilient individuals and therefore those most able to cope with the positions available.

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

## Induction into the workplace

A standard induction process is often not enough for individuals who have not been in work for a considerable time, or at all. Fulfilling Lives South East have found that 'Expectations in the Workplace' training is a valuable asset when provided at the start of employment. This training includes topics such as:

- Language in the workplace
- Acceptable mobile phone and internet usage
- Punctuality
- Acceptable reasons for lateness/absences
- Email etiquette
- Organisational and time management skills
- Team dynamics

The programme also provides outlines of expectations and 'how to' guides for core role responsibilities to guide the individual through their probationary period. These written tools have proven useful, but only aid understanding in conjunction with face-to-face support from senior team members. These practices exemplify elements of MIND's guidance on employing people with mental health conditions, discussed in the 'existing national learning' section.

A further measure developed by the project is a 'Performance and Monitoring Form'. The form allows the individual to rate their performance against each key area of the role, alongside their levels of understanding/confidence in that area. It is used during the probationary period to support progress and identify potential areas of difficulty. This is foundational to the development work undertaken with new employees.

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

Additional successful tools and approaches include:

- Pay flexibility in initial months of employment (see benefits barriers in ‘existing national learning’ section)
- Employing staff who are experienced in supporting people with negative education and employment experiences

## Contract Length

Learning from the early part of the programme was that twelve-month contracts were too short for the Project Consultant role. It was felt that:

- There was not enough time for people to settle into the role or gain confidence to seek appropriate employment when their contract ended
- The short time frame caused instability around managing the activities of the project volunteers, which was a key part of the role
- Large-scale systems change work was rarely able to be completed within 12 months, leading to a lack of consistency and insufficient satisfactory endings for the individuals
- The length of contract was disproportionate to the extended probationary period

The project decided that a contract length of 18 months would provide a better balance given these considerations.

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

**KEY LEARNING:** Engagement & Development Worker - The primary role of the Engagement and Development Worker is to provide personalised support to the Project Consultants during their employment journey for personal development and to look at future employment options.

Each staff member has an Individual Development Plan, this is tailored to their specific needs; linked to their performance, supervision and Wellness Action Plan. The Engagement and Development Worker meets with each Project Consultant on a 1-1 basis regularly (usually every two weeks) to support them with specific actions set up in the plan; this can be using coaching methods, reflective practice and practical, experiential activities. The plan covers the needs and aspirations of the employee for the entire length of their contract, from induction through to seeking further employment towards the end of their journey with the project.

## Training Offer

Workplace skills are taught throughout the programme, from both internal and external training sources. The training offer is positively spoken about by all past and current Project Consultants and is a highly valued element of the work. The key reasons for the success of the training are:

- The wide variety of training available to suit a wide range of needs
- Personalised training offers Selecting their own courses meant individuals were more likely to be motivated and engaged
- Specific in-house training to develop skills required for the role, such as facilitating and chairing meetings, or research skills
- Refresher courses on core skills providing the opportunity to keep the learning at the forefront of the role

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

Training was also offered to help Project Consultants to develop future career skills. Most Consultants selected training opportunities that developed their therapeutic skills and understanding in preparation for roles they wish to pursue in the future. Examples of these courses included motivational interviewing, coaching techniques and mental health training.

## Reflective Practice

Reflective practice can support people to identify workplace issues and reflect on positive solutions<sup>19</sup>. In particular it can help with the identification of mental health triggers and, as such, it can help to sustain employment. One of the employment programme's most successful tools to support self-reflection is the Wellness Action Plan. The tool enables all Project Consultants to identify and manage triggers relevant to them. It asks individuals to reflect on how they keep themselves well, what their early warning signs of mental ill health are, and how they would like to get back on track after a crisis. It is treated as an 'open document' to refer to and update when needed.

Tools which are like the Wellness Action Plan are also being used in similar programmes. A Fulfilling Lives project in West Yorkshire uses a 'risk and support plan' which requires individuals to consider and note their triggers and how to deal with them in the workplace. Another tool on a national scale is the 'Mindful Employers' Making Work Work' confidential disclosure template<sup>20</sup>.

Other tools and approaches that are successfully contributing to a reflective culture are:

- Building peer support networks through employing groups of people who have experienced multiple disadvantages and encouraging a positive, supportive environment
- Talking about life experiences openly so that experience of multiple disadvantages is not stigmatised

<sup>19</sup> [Reflective Practice](#) summary from Bright Knowledge

<sup>20</sup> ['Making Work Work'](#) Mindful employer

# Tools and Approaches to Support the Employment Journey

- Individual and group support sessions to further encourage development

Not all employees are aware of reflective practice prior to the programme. It can take time to develop and requires a desire to be open and learn from experiences, which may not be for everyone. People who do not have these qualities are less likely to see their personal contribution to any workplace issues and may need additional support from the programme as a result. Where employee issues required therapeutic as opposed to employment support, not accessing this support meant they were less likely to pass their probationary period.

A further area for development is the employee assistance scheme:

- An employee assistance scheme provides telephone access to a counselling service for all BHT employees; however, no Project Consultants interviewed had used this service<sup>21</sup>

## Move On

The Engagement and Development Worker supports people to find and apply for work in advance of leaving their post. Local employment and volunteering opportunities are regularly sourced and shared with current Project Consultants for themselves and for the volunteers they support. These roles can help to affirm the kind of employment opportunities which could build on their experiences with Fulfilling Lives. However, it is important that the sharing of these opportunities is communicated as being simply for their information, so individuals do not see it as an implicit suggestion that they should be seeking move on immediately.

<sup>21</sup> As the helpline was identified after interviews it could not be established if this was not mentioned due to lack of awareness or because it was not valued

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

To date the South East Fulfilling Lives Project has employed 33 individuals with multiple complex needs as Project Consultants on the employment programme. This section addresses the question: To what extent has SEFL prepared people for future employment?

## The impact of the programme

As the last chapter outlines, SEFL has provided an array of tools and approaches that enable Project Consultants (PC) /Project Consultant Assistants (PCA) to be prepared for employment. The support into employment does not end at providing work-place and soft skills that are required to be successful. As part of their role, the Employment and Development Worker also supports individuals in sourcing and applying for work in advance of leaving their post.

### Project Consultant Employment Status



**16 of the 17 Consultants who had completed the SEFL employment programme secured further employment within 6 months of their contract ending.**

By October 2018 a total of 33 individuals had been employed in either a PC or PCA role; of these, 8 had not been able to pass their probationary period and a further 8 were still employed in the programme. Of the remaining 17 Consultants, 16 found employment within 6 months of

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

their contract ending (11 did so before their contract period ended) – the remaining individual was unemployed at the time of interviewing but has since secured employment.

With 100% of individuals passing their probationary period and 68% of all SEFL Consultants obtaining employment, the SEFL programme exhibits high success rates in preparing individuals with MCN for future employment. [See Appendix 2 for updated statistics from the programme up until October 2019.]

In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact of the programme is potentially greater than these cited figures as 2 of the 8 individuals who did not pass probation did progress into positive outcomes – one returning to education and the other working for an organisation on a part-time basis.

Most graduates of the programme sought support or volunteer management positions; they tended to prefer to stay in the sector because they have experienced it first-hand and then been trained to work in it professionally. They understand the language and the culture. Those who have been successfully employed have undertaken the following positions: Peer Support Worker, Recovery Support Worker, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Development Worker, Move-On Support Worker and Women's Support Worker.

When seeking to understand the success of SEFL, consider 'STRIVE', a programme delivered by St. Mungo's Broadway and Crisis; the final evaluation report for this programme stated that it supported 100 people, of which 15 progressed into work (14% of the cohort). This was considered to be a favourable outcome compared to the performance of the Work Programme that demonstrated 'at best, a 4% success rate in moving homeless people into work' [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government]. Whilst these latter two programmes work with the same client group (i.e. individuals with MCN), the level to which the individual is experiencing MCN whilst on any of the programmes (including SEFL<sup>21</sup>) is not clear. What is clear, is that SEFL is providing a programme that does fulfil a specific niche in the recovery journey of individuals with MCN – it offers a development opportunity for individuals with MCN who are volunteering across the sector, many for years, who have so far been unable to progress that experience into employment. Few programmes offer development opportunities for individuals with MCN and those that do typically provide volunteer positions, unpaid internships, or work with individuals who are significantly further into their recovery journey. SEFL's Consultants predominantly move from volunteer positions into the programme and onto employment.

<sup>22</sup> Individuals across the programme have experienced MCN to different degrees

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

## What are the key factors behind the results?

Although each individual may find a particular approach or tool of greater value to their personal development than another, every individual who obtained employment stated that the training provided had helped them secure their job. In addition to the training offer (which includes the 'Expectations in the Workplace Induction') the most valued aspects of the programme in terms of securing employment from a PC/PCA view is:

1. *The personalised support from the E&D worker*
2. *Honing their reflective practice skills – including use of the WAP (Wellness Action Plan)*

Positively, one interviewee also mentioned that they believe the programme helped overcome any issues they may have had in passing DBS checks. By being employed in the role and having experience 'under their belt' and solid references, they felt this helped alleviate the fact they had a criminal background.

Individuals who have employed graduates of the programme have found that they possess unique skillsets. Employers recognise that the knowledge of lived experience, the streets and the benefits system is valuable to improving service design and delivery. However, the difference between individuals who have been on the programme and those that have not, is that SEFL graduates have learnt skills which enable them to deal with team dynamics and work successfully in a team.

**'PCs have worked alongside people they don't know or like but have adjusted themselves to work in that team and it shows through'** STAKEHOLDER

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

Further skills which PCs/PCAs have gained that employers value include: the ability to be reflective, aptitude for maintaining professional boundaries, punctuality, good listening skills and an understanding of sector and organisational values. Where PCs may be competing against one another for a position, successful appointees are those that know the difference between ‘having done it themselves’ and being able to recognise that someone else’s journey will be different and their job is to support them through that, not replicate their own journey. These individuals are also more likely to show humility in an interview by expressing their desire to continue to learn and not be over-confident that they ‘have all the answers’ (a trait that led to some PCs taking longer to obtain employment).

**KEY LEARNING:** Factors in getting and sustaining employment after the programme

## DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS

- Case management experience This was not provided through the employment programme, but was often asked for in support worker roles
- Not selling themselves Some individuals struggled to highlight their achievements in interviews with familiar organisations because they felt the organisation already knew them
- Separating support networks Some individuals sought recovery support out of area in order to maintain professional boundaries
- Circumstantial factors
- Availability of suitable options Limited employment opportunities in areas where there were fewer people living
- Age Some people believed that their age was a barrier to finding future employment

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

## Barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment

Although every individual who completed the SEFL programme obtained employment – not everyone did so quickly, and not all sustained it. Not all the employment statuses of the graduates are known at the current time. Anecdotally, SEFL is aware that eight of the 17 people who obtained employment are still employed (four with BHT either permanently or as bank workers<sup>23</sup>) and two people who were employed after completing the programme and did not sustain it, have been re-employed onto the programme as PCAs.

For the purposes of the evaluation, barriers for obtaining and sustaining employment fall into two broad categories 1) those that SEFL can directly influence and 2) those that they cannot; these are displayed in the figure on the following page.

<sup>23</sup> A fifth individual was employed by BHT after SEFL but did not pass their probationary period in this role

# Extent to which SEFL has prepared people for future employment

Barriers SEFL could help to address	Barriers outside of SEFL control
<p>Not having enough experience of case management.</p>	<p>Availability of suitable options in terms of accessibility/location and permanence of contract</p>
<p>The ability to separate personal recovery/support networks from those they may now be involved in as a professional – some individuals seek support outside their local area, others find the transition difficult and it impacts on their ability to retain professional boundaries and maintain their own recovery.</p>	<p>The age of the individual - many of the individuals who were suitable for the programme were older and more reflective which helped them develop in the programme however, for some, they perceived their age was a barrier to obtaining employment after the programme.</p>
<p>Length of contract – shorter contracts gave less time to develop – this has been addressed already but was an issue for the first cohort of PCs.</p>	
<p>Need for additional support through transition/step-down in order to help ensure employment positions are sustained.</p>	

Figure 2: Barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment

Finally, the more time that passes post-programme that the individual does not secure employment – the harder it is for them to achieve. It is easier to secure employment whilst in post.

# Conclusion & Recommendations

Over the last four years SEFL has designed, delivered and further improved a programme that successfully employs individuals with MCN and develops their skills to allow them to seek future employment opportunities. Indeed, all individuals who have passed the probationary stages of the programme have been employed. The PC/PCA role provides an effective response to developing individuals with MCN from a volunteer role into paid employment. A variety of replace skills with tools and interventions contribute to this successful development but those that offer the greatest improvements are:

- The Wellness Action Plan
- The 1-2-1 Development Sessions
- The Training Offer
- The Peer support offered by other PCs/PCAs
- The opportunity to experience, and learn from, team dynamics

Positive outcomes are most likely to occur if an individual enters into the post with a history/ understanding of reflective practice and has access to consistent therapeutic support external to the programme. Providing the individual with 18 months in which to identify, reflect and develop their skills in an environment that is open, non-judgemental and empathetic to the issues involved in MCN is also likely to provide positive results. Individuals who enter the programme still needing to develop their own strategies and approaches to maintain their resilience and confidence are most likely to struggle in the role, take significant sick leave and may not fulfil the programme.

## Next Steps

For the lead organisation, BHT, the employment programme has impacted them both positively and negatively. Employing individuals with MCN has provided them with insights about people's experiences of using services and the fears people experience; this information is valuable in developing their service offers. It also provides BHT with evidence of co-production which is useful when bidding for funding. However, the programme has required

# Conclusion & Recommendations

an increase in staff time and resources to be used in the development of the programme and whilst staff noted that this increase would occur, they admit that they had underestimated the level that would be required – particularly in the early stages of design and set up. Over time, the resource requirements have levelled as the programme’s structure has honed and the project developed processes and procedures and additional staff were employed.

In terms of taking the learning from SEFL’s employment programme and using it to make changes to the design and delivery of BHT – this has yet to occur in a formalised manner but is now the next-step in the programme’s evolution. An initial steering group has been convened with staff from BHT and SEFL to share learning. The purpose of the group will be to examine what changes can be made while being mindful of maintaining the balance between meeting the needs of MCN employees and being an employer. One current consideration by BHT is whether there is a need for the distinction surrounding experience of MCN and therefore whether roles should specify if MCN is a requirement for a post or not. Further analysis of the impact on the host organisation will be obtainable in due course following the establishment of the group and the evaluation of its work.

## Recommendations

Whilst the programme is successful in developing individuals into being ready for future employment opportunities, there are a number of areas that require further consideration: improving the number of individuals who successfully pass probation; providing a smooth transition into employment and ensuring it can be sustained and implementing ‘what works’ in SEFL into the policies and procedures of BHT (initially) and the wider sector (over time) – although the latter has begun (see above). The following recommendations are in no particular order; the programme should consider:

1. The transition/step down from SEFL into employment, particularly for individuals who do not obtain jobs prior to completing their contract with the programme. Suggestions of providing ‘in-touch’ days/sessions with the Engagement and Development Worker or the Service User Engagement Coordinator were made by PCs/PCAs. These sessions could include:
  - a. Identifying job opportunities

# Conclusion & Recommendations

- b. Interview practice
- c. Identifying and providing training opportunities for obvious skills gaps (following feedback from unsuccessful job interviews)

If this is beyond the scope of the project, consider partnering with an existing employment support programme that Consultants can build a relationship with over time.

2. How the PC/PCA role translates into the available job market. The role, whilst suited to SEFL, is unique and most future opportunities require additional skills such as caseload management and more practical 'support' role experience. This is something the PC/PCA role is strictly defined as not being but does then present issues around developing a specific career path for consultants.
3. Alternative support mechanisms outside of reflective practice, particularly for individuals whose predominant multiple need is poor mental health. Not everyone responds to reflective practice and it can take a long time to master and use effectively. Alternative approaches such as provision of peer support networks for mental health issues could be explored – consider replicating the models that are used for NA and AA that allow individuals to access support with ease (and all over the country). If successfully deployed, this support could help bridge the gap in current healthcare provision and the demand placed on services (and then employers) to meet this need.
4. Support options, tools and approaches that can be used to support individuals with maintaining their recovery outside of SEFL. The level of support provided by SEFL is intensive and unlikely to be provided at that level outside of the programme or with future employers. Arming individuals with skills to cope that do not require them to have continued contact with SEFL staff will be of great benefit, both for the individual and for new employers. As examples, some SEFL graduates recognised that to maintain professional boundaries, they had to source their own continued recovery support outside of the local area, and in WY-FI (West Yorkshire Finding Independence - one of the other funded areas of the national Fulfilling Lives programme), they have co-produced a 'Valuing Lived Experience in the Workplace protocol' for mutual use by workers, line managers and partner organisations which includes consideration of potential safeguarding, boundaries and confidentiality that may arise in employment settings.

# Conclusion & Recommendations

5. The balance between ‘building self-confidence’ and acceptance that there is ‘more to learn’ – this is particularly the case in relation to preparing Consultants for future job interviews.
6. Tracking the employment details of those who leave the programme. In order to ensure the programme fully meets its aspirations the impact further down the line is required. Tracking type of job, whether it is permanent or temporary, part time or full-time and location will provide valuable data to honing the programme and ensuring it is built for continued success.

# Appendix 1 Glossary

Term	Explanation
Action Group	<p>Each of the three local areas has an Action Group. This is a group of individuals with MCN who may currently still access services. The group meets regularly to identify issues with accessing and using services for people with MCN. Once the group has identified an issue that exists (i.e. it is not just a grievance of one individual) it creates a report that will be submitted to the local Service Improvement Officer (SIO) for review. These reports determine which issues the local area will work on to improve the design and delivery of services for individuals with MCN. Over time group members have become more and more involved in the work completed by the SIOs - thus providing greater levels of involvement and increased empowerment.</p>
Beneficiary	<p>Beneficiaries are individuals with MCN who require support services – they may still be taking substances; be homeless; have undiagnosed mental health needs and/or have just been released from prison. These individuals are supported by specialist workers. Volunteers are seen to be further along their recovery journey than beneficiaries – they are likely to be in stable accommodation and working on addressing their other needs</p>
MCN	<p>Multiple Complex Needs. This can have many definitions but for this project it refers to individuals who have lived experience of two or more of: homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse and offending behaviour.</p>
Project Consultant (PC)	<p>An individual with lived experience who has experience of facilitating groups. A full-time role which takes the lead on lived experience involvement in the local area.</p>

# Appendix 1 Glossary

<b>Project Consultant Assistant (PCA)</b>	An individual with lived experience who typically has more development needs than a PC. The role is part-time and there are two roles available in each local area.
<b>Performance Monitoring Form</b>	A management tool used to assist individuals through their probationary period.
<b>South East Fulfilling Lives Project (SEFL)</b>	The brand name of the Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People with Multiple Needs project based across Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne and Hastings.
<b>Service Improvement Officer (SIO)</b>	Each area has an SIO who works to implement improvement changes to service and system design and delivery that have been issues identified by the local Action Groups.
<b>System and Service Review (SSR)</b>	A process whereby the project identifies an issue and then collates information to help review and improve the services, systems, processes and protocols that may have contributed to that issue.
<b>The Service User Engagement Co-ordinator</b>	The lead manager in relation to lived experience activities on the project.
<b>Wellness Action Plan (WAP)</b>	A support tool used by PCs/PCAs to monitor and help control their own wellbeing.

## Appendix 2 (further data up to October 2019)

Since the fieldwork was completed for this report (December 2018) the project has employed a further six people with experience of multiple and complex needs. This brings the total number of individuals with MCN having been employed by the project to 38; 14 of these were previously SEFL volunteers (36%).

Of the 38 people employed, 22 of them successfully moved on to further employment either before their contract with SEFL ended or within 6 months of ending. This equates to a 73% success rate of the programme.

[This data was added retrospectively by the project]

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