

What good looks like. Survivor Led Services

Background

This guide has been prepared in conjunction with survivor charities who are supported by the Scottish Government's Survivor Support Innovation and Development Fund. A workshop took place in May 2019 and was attended by 12 staff and a survivor from 12 different charities. The workshop involved a facilitated discussion prompted by the following:

- Survivor led – what does this mean for you
- Key impact of this approach
- Lessons learned positive and challenges
- Ideas to improve going forward

The Survivor Support Innovation and Development Fund is managed by Inspiring Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government. The Fund aims to enable third sector and other organisations to support the delivery of the Scottish Government's strategic outcomes for these groups. These outcomes are a Healthy Life, Choice and Control, and Safety and Security for survivors of sexual abuse. There are 25 charities supported by the fund. They receive around £1.3m and support 2300 survivors a year across 32 Local Authorities.

Thanks to

The following organisations were consulted in order to prepare this guide:

- Addaction
- Break the Silence
- Cornerstone
- Hear Me
- Mind Mosaic
- Say Women
- Talk Now
- Thriving Survivors
- Wellbeing Scotland.
- Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre

What does a Survivor Led service look like to you?

- **Survivors are part of the decision making around what the service provides and often at the heart of it, actively shaping the service.** The service has a range of options, which maximises the number of people who can be helped and ensures that it does not follow a 'one size fits all' approach.
- When your service is not the best one for the survivor they are **signposted elsewhere**. Good referral pathways need to be in place both into the service and on to other services. Care is taken when signposting to other services to maintain confidentiality and support given to the survivor with the handover.
- **Continuity of staff** is important to survivors, as is **flexibility** with appointments and an open-door policy. Support should be offered **for as long as it's needed**. Survivors should be given time with no pressure, sometimes they might need ten minutes more to talk and this extra time could make a massive difference to them.
- Giving survivors the opportunity for **personal development** can be life changing, it gives hope, purpose, and an opportunity to give back. It is empowering and puts the survivor in control.

- **A client led advisory group** gives credibility to survivors, a culture of transparency, and allows survivors to influence charity's strategy, government, community and statutory services. Services should be adapted based on regular feedback from survivors and evaluation of their views. Survivors should be given a forum so that their voices are heard.
- Survivors benefit from upskilling and empowerment although **boundaries are needed**, for instance non-disclosure during group sessions, to avoid retraumatising other survivors. Mutuality i.e. rights and responsibilities for both the survivor and service provider should be clear and adhered to. For example, around use of personal social media.

So, the key learning from this is: having a 'survivor led' approach benefits the charity as well as the survivor, both in the start and long term. Charity strategy, innovation and direction is influenced by the people who know best and through their valuable input, survivors can grow.

What is the key impact of this approach?

- Survivors receive **empathy from support staff**, feel **empowered and are more confident** to try new skills. They also have increased choice. However, survivors can set unrealistic goals and staff may need to be firm in outlining what is achievable. Staff can feel pulled in lots of different directions as they try to balance a survivor's needs with service resources. Within a group setting, there can also be issues around the group being dominated by certain individuals.
- Care should be taken in making a service totally survivor led, this can result in **mission drift** and a survivor **having unrealistic expectations**. It can also **increase staff workloads** and doesn't fit well into the current funding climate. There can be frustration around missed appointments and cancelled meetings. Mitigating factors for this include **a clear strategy, business plan and a strong Board**.
- Staff can and do suffer **from compassion fatigue (vicarious trauma)**. **The need for clinical supervision** was flagged by most organisations who offer this as standard to all staff having frontline contact with survivors. Some organisations are taking this a step further and **offering mindfulness, meditation, massage etc to their staff**.
- **Boundaries** between survivors and staff need to be very clear and set out at the outset. Survivor led charities who empower survivors and are clear about expectations and boundaries find that both the charity and survivor benefits.

Lessons learnt from adopting a survivor approach

- Proactively asking survivors what is best for them takes the guesswork out of service provision and **empowers survivors**. It provides a deeper insight and awareness into what will work best for them and keeps them engaged with the service. It demonstrates partnership support rather than us and them, as services are tailored to meeting their needs. Meeting survivor needs early on through a tailored service is thought to result in less intervention in the long term. Survivors do have to be at the right stage of recovery to get the most from support services they need.
- However, the view of service providers is that such services do need to be time limited and support survivors to move on to other services to ensure that **they don't become overdependent**. This may be contrary to the survivor's own views. Survivors need to be empowered to find their own resources, interest groups etc. to prevent over dependency .

- Some survivors need support to **manage expectations** as to what is realistic, the example provided was survivors who wanted support to open a shop.
- Survivors can be **inconsistent in their engagement and attendance**, which is disappointing for staff who have supported and can result in added organisational costs and time being wasted. Longer engagement can also prohibit the service from taking new users in. Professionals may have conflicting views as to what the best support for the survivor is.
- **Boundaries need to be in place** around the strategic development of the organisation as there can be a conflict between listening and acting on the survivor voice and planned service development. Survivor led services are likely to **cost more to deliver**.

Lessons learned are important in identifying potential pitfalls and the cost impact of these

How can survivor lead services be improved going forward?

- **Terms of reference** would ensure survivors' expectations are managed, whilst still allowing the organisation to meet its own objectives. All staff supporting survivors should be **offered supervision** and providing holistic therapies is very beneficial. To support staff, **boundaries should be in place** to include what happens if the two meet outside therapy sessions. This is a particularly important in rural areas where staff are most likely to bump into survivors. These boundaries can often feel compromised at social events, for example fundraisers where staff are there in their own time and mixing with survivors socially.
- **Communication with survivors could be enhanced** by the language used (power giving and demonstrating understanding, mirrored behaviours, positive body language.)
- Survivors should be **involved throughout the organisation** i.e. survivor led advisory groups, survivors being on the board and staff and volunteers who are survivors. The organisation will have a family feel and survivor support teams will have credibility amongst other staff teams.
- **Survivors should be empowered** by playing an active role in organisational events, having opportunities to feedback on services and by having a training budget for them to pursue their own interests, with support. Supporting survivors to network or attend other events leads to shared responsibility and shared practice.
- **Staff working on their own are vulnerable** and one organisation uses a telephone safety App called Personal Guardian to protect staff.

Having clarity of purpose, survivors embedded in the charity, supporting staff and being aware of risks affecting them are key to continued improvement.