

**Inspiring  
Change  
Manchester**

**Groundswell**  
Out of homelessness

# Inspiring Change Manchester's coproduction journey



## Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all those who participated in this research: who shared their stories and insights with such honesty and thoughtfulness. We'd also like to thank the Steering Group for the project for their guidance through the course of the project.

**Report written by Simone Hellenen and Martin Burrows**

**Groundswell 2021**



## FOREWORD

### Jason – GROW Alumni and ICM Engagement Worker

*“Throughout my life I have struggled with multiple issues around drugs, involvement in the criminal justice system and mental ill health. I had never had a Job so I got my life back on track and started volunteering. I have been with Inspiring Change Manchester from the start. I was one of the first Core Group members who helped with the design and planning of the ICM Programme, then I became one of the three first grow trainees with lived experience within the Engagement Team. I moved on to become an engagement worker doing front line work and started to support grow trainees to become front line workers like I had become. Throughout the 7 years, I feel that everyone who has worked with ICM, including the partners, has supported each other and I have felt that it was more of a family than a run of the mill service. ICM has changed my life on so many levels like it has most of the people who have accessed the service and has worked with ICM.”*

### Polly Neate CBE – CEO Shelter

*“Inspiring Change Manchester was one of the first programmes I visited when I joined Shelter as CEO and it had a profound influence on me. It has inspired our whole organisation: our vision for our local service hubs at the centre of and learning from their communities; our employment practices; our approach to peer mentoring and volunteering; and above all the way in which we value, learn from and are guided by the people who have personal experience of facing and surviving homelessness, substance use, mental ill-health or the criminal justice system.*

*It’s not an exaggeration to say Inspiring Change has been at the centre of Shelter’s strategy and organisational development.*

*Through our award-winning GROW Traineeships, we hope to provide valuable opportunities for people with lived experience – but the insight, knowledge and skill these colleagues bring to Shelter is far more valuable.*

*We still have a long way to go. Co-production is not just a buzzword for us to throw around without committing to the very real principles it holds. Without the voice of lived experience at the heart of everything we do we can no longer claim to be working with the people we are here for.*

*This report helps to show the great strides that have been made in embedding co-production but also highlights the steps we still need to take in order to embed changes that will stand the test of time. We still need to make a fundamental shift which means we can’t drift back.*

*We hope to build on the learning from the ICM programme over the coming months and years, maintaining momentum and building on everything we’ve learned so far.”*

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## Summary of key findings

Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) is a programme that uses innovative ways of working to help people facing multiple disadvantage overcome barriers and reach their full potential. Over the last seven years ICM has been on a journey to explore and embrace coproduction, learning along the way how the participation of people with experience of multiple disadvantage can be better supported and the system changed. At the time of publishing this research, ICM is moving to its final year as funding from The National Lottery Fulfilling Lives programme draws to a close.

This research, conducted by Groundswell for ICM, aims to learn from this process and set out a vision for how the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can create lasting change in Manchester. Through in-depth interviews, focus groups, workshops and a stakeholder survey, it has explored how coproduction has led to change in understanding, beliefs, policy and practice. The findings highlight how coproduction can be a force for creating change, and while it is not always easy, it is essential if lasting change can be delivered in the city.

The following section highlights the key findings of the study.

**The ICM partnership has delivered a blend of tried-and-tested approaches across Manchester, as well as creative, educational and participatory projects that are facilitated, supported, and participated in by partners and members.**

- Manchester has high levels of people facing multiple disadvantage, which has created challenges, but ICM has formed strong relationships with partners across Greater Manchester to try to address this issue.
- The long-term funding from the Fulfilling Lives programme has enabled the formation of the ICM partnership, which has experimented in participatory ways of working and allowed learning to be achieved through the process.
- By building on solid, established foundations ICM has had the confidence to be creative and experiment with participatory ways of working with learning feeding back to fortify the foundations.
- Creating employment and volunteering opportunities specifically for people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage has been a central activity of the ICM approach to participation, with this approach being adopted beyond the partnership.

- Groups, exchanges and activities facilitated by ICM staff and members have allowed opportunities to be creative and social, but also have been a space to feed into decision-making and influencing.
- The ICM Hub has been key to the programme's delivery model offering multidisciplinary support and activities that are delivered in a psychologically informed and coproduced way.

**ICM has used a number of mechanisms that keep the activities responsive, exciting and constantly developing, including building relationships, diversifying the workforce, and participatory and reflective practice, plus some powerful advocates ready to speak up about the successes of collaborative, person-centred and trauma-informed work.**

- Coproduction and participatory working have driven change in ICM and across Manchester, but participants reported how “doing coproduction meaningfully” can be challenging and time consuming.
- Building relationships was identified as a central catalyst for creating change, whether these are built with other support providers or between the service provider and service user through a model of delivery that allows relationships to be built.
- Diversifying the workforce through employment and volunteering opportunities has created personal change for people who engage in these roles, but has also shifted the way other staff understand disadvantage and policy and practice within organisations.
- Psychologically informed environments (PIE) and reflective practice has promoted staff wellbeing, furthered a culture of learning, and ultimately led to better practice and support benefiting ICM members.
- ICM has built a large group of powerful advocates including frontline workers, managers, strategic players, and people who have recently and continue to access services, who are pushing the collaborative, person-centred programme forward in Manchester.

**ICM's participatory working has led to change taking place across a range of spheres including in the self-perception of staff and members, in beliefs and understanding around multiple disadvantage and also notably to policy and practice in the ICM partnership and beyond.**

- Members, staff and volunteers reported how the way they saw themselves had changed and how others around them have grown in confidence and made positive changes in their lives.
- A shift in beliefs and understanding was highlighted particularly around the value of lived experience in understanding what needs to be changed and that designing and delivering support can be collaborative and person-centred.

- ICM has driven change within the programme and the partnership organisations in how support is delivered, particularly in terms of flexibility in response to individuals, and has seen potentially rigid organisational systems such as human resources and finance being forced to 'flex'.
- ICM appears to have made significant ground in influencing the practice of other organisations and systems change in Manchester, including changes to commissioning by statutory bodies and employment practices in the not-for-profit and private sectors.

**Through ICM's coproduction journey there has been learning generated on how to effectively deliver participatory work and more broadly support for people facing multiple disadvantage. While participatory working is not always straightforward, it is essential and to be done well, it needs to be built with an approach that is flexible, fun and relationship focused.**

- While participatory working can be challenging, it is effective. ICM's participatory work has had an impact on individuals' development and motivation, as well as acting as mechanisms to make the work responsive and grounded in local experience.
- The relational approach is key to staff feeling they can adequately support people and members feeling they can approach ICM to seek support, sometimes in a preventative way. Creating spaces to engage socially outside support sessions is key to fostering these relationships.
- The more able ICM partners were to respond flexibly to a given context and the whole person in front of them, the more successful they were. A key tool in this has been the Flexible Fund.
- ICM has put an emphasis on keeping up the 'fun stuff' and made a real effort to celebrate achievements, run activities and visit social spaces. These activities have helped to draw people in and became the spaces to build relationships.

**ICM's journey to embrace coproduction continues and there are areas where it is 'stuck'. Persistent beliefs or attitudes or stubborn systems can hold back participatory working and its positive impacts. How we communicate and what we mean by 'lived experience' are other areas where more thinking and coproducing are needed.**

- Further work around communication is needed particularly around the impact of participatory activity; what we mean by coproduction; and presenting a unified message about the ICM approach to advocate for this model of working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- 'Old ways of thinking' are still present around how the sector works with people facing multiple disadvantage. The result is that many responses are reactive, short term, fixed and frequently punitive, as opposed to open-ended, flexible, relational and designed collaboratively.

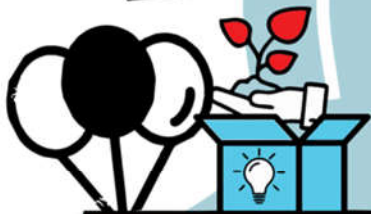
- Competitive and short-term commissioning of services stifles collaboration and deters meaningful coproduction. Smaller organisations are often put at a disadvantage and are less able to embrace participative working.
- What we mean by, how we frame, and how we put to use 'lived experience' are constantly evolving. Participants identified concerns particularly around the labels associated with lived experience and how it may hold people back personally and professionally.

The report outlines a series of recommendations for ICM and the wider support system so that the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can create lasting change in Manchester. These focus on advocating for lived experience and coproduction, championing flexibility and relationships, shifting employment practice and commissioning for coproduction.





Flexibility is the oil in this machine



### What we learned

Relations are fundamental  
Participation is support

## Inspiring Change Manchester

### What changed

Our beliefs  
Our practices and policies  
Our understanding



### What happened

New advocates for change  
Diversified the workforce  
Building new relationships



### What we can still change

Old thinking into new thinking  
Lived experience is visible and accepted  
Commission for flexibility



### What we did

ICM Partnership  
Flexible Fund  
Women's Voices  
Peer Mentoring  
PIE

### What Next?

Shifting employment practice

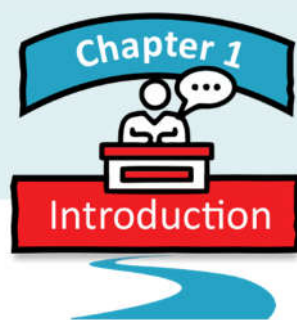
Commissioning for coproduction

Advocating for lived experience and coproduction

Championing flexibility and relationships



# Manchester



## Chapter I: Introduction

For the past seven years, Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) has worked with the aspiration to better support and change the system for people facing multiple disadvantage. This has been driven forward with an approach that embraces coproduction and learning through the process of ‘doing’. This research, conducted by Groundswell for ICM between January 2020 and February 2021, aims to learn from this process and set out a vision for how the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can create lasting change in Manchester. This report details how ICM’s coproduction journey has led to change in understanding, beliefs, policy and practice. It shows that change is possible and should be aspired to; however, it also reveals that there is still work to be done and identifies areas where change has stalled.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence begins their online resource about coproduction with a warning that coproduction is a ‘slippery’ concept and the importance of clarifying the breadth of the definition.<sup>1</sup> It goes on to warn that while how we talk about coproduction is important, the “real change is accompanied by a movement in resources to people who use services and to frontline staff”. We found that for ICM, this movement in resources has clearly taken place, but coproduction is indeed slippery and as the Fulfilling Lives funding draws to a close, there is a risk that ‘old thinking and working’ will return.

The participants represented in this study have been brave in their practice. They have thought about and lived through experiments in working together and they tell a good tale. We stand in solidarity and hope we have represented them and their work well here.

### About Inspiring Change Manchester

[Inspiring Change Manchester](#) (ICM) is an eight-year programme, running from 2014 to 2022, led by [Shelter](#) in partnership with [Back on Track](#), [Self Help](#) and [Community Led Initiatives](#), that supports people facing multiple disadvantage (including a history of substance use, mental health or emotional wellbeing issues, accommodation problems and involvement with the criminal justice system).

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production>

ICM is part of Fulfilling Lives: Supporting People experiencing Multiple Disadvantage, which is a National Lottery Community Fund programme investing £112 million into 12 projects.

The ICM partnership was formed to offer:

- **Engagement support** provided through a dedicated engagement team and peer mentors to help individuals break down barriers to accessing services and explore personal goals;
- **Education, training and employment support** to help explore personal progress, learning and developing new skills, and beginning to think about a life away from the service; and
- **A mental health pathway** to offer more person-centred mental health support and to develop access to existing mental health services.

This was partly underpinned by a conceptual 'motivational ladder of engagement' that helped to shape how the project came to view personal progress.

**Figure 1: Ladder of engagement**



To support both the development and the delivery of the project, ICM has developed specific groups to help promote participation of people with lived experience to play a central role in the programme. These include:

- **ICM Core Group:** This is a group of individuals with personal lived experience of multiple disadvantage who played a major role in the original concept and

development of the programme. They have played a key role in developing recruitment practices and traineeships; peer research and evaluation; governance of the programme; service consultation and building city-wide strategies.

- **ICM Women's Voices:** Originally born through a group of passionate women on the programme who recognised that women's voices were not being heard across the project, or more widely, across multiple disadvantage. It is run by women for women and works to unite all women with personal lived experience of multiple disadvantage to improve communities and services. They have played a powerful role in reaching out to women who are unseen and unheard across services.
- **ICM Xchange Group:** This group was developed with ICM members over time to offer an inclusive space for ICM members to come together, after office hours, to enjoy food, take part in activities and generally hang out.

## About Groundswell

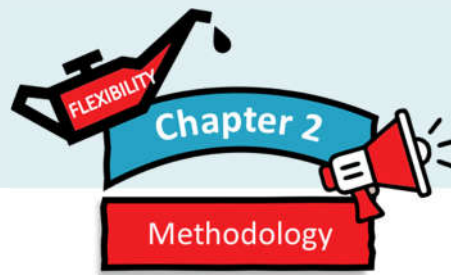
Groundswell works with people with experience of homelessness, offering opportunities to contribute to society and help create solutions to homelessness. Participation is at our core because the experience of homelessness is crucial in making decisions that affect the lives of people who are homeless and ultimately help people to move out of homelessness.

Groundswell exists to tackle:

- **Homelessness:** everyone has the right to a safe home and to contribute to society;
- **Health inequalities:** everyone has the right to good health and access to healthcare;
- **A lack of participation:** people who have experienced and escaped homelessness should inform the solution; and
- **A society that doesn't work for everyone:** the system has been designed in a way that restricts opportunity; it needs to change so that it works for everyone.

We achieve this through:

- **Good health:** we believe good health creates a foundation to move out of homelessness. Groundswell's people-focused health work and innovative services enable people who are homeless to access the health care they need because everyone has a right to good health.
- **Progression:** we are committed to developing and supporting a workforce of people with experience of homelessness to participate in designing and delivering solutions to homelessness while progressing in their own lives.
- **Creating change:** Groundswell brings together insight from people with experience of homelessness; we use this insight to tackle issues through changing practice and challenging policy. We believe that the experience of homelessness brings insight that can help tackle the issues of homelessness and create change.



## Chapter 2: Methodology

The overall aim of this research is to set out a vision for how the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can create lasting change in Manchester. Through this research we aimed to explore the following questions:

- Does the involvement and participation of people with lived experience influence how staff and volunteers within ICM understand complex needs? If it does, in what ways?
- Has it led to changes in people's beliefs, values and the actions they take, which shape their working practices and cultures? Through this, has it helped to break down barriers to accessing our own project?
- Are changes taking place at all levels of services, from support workers to management, and if so, how?
- Has it helped to highlight the problems that people face so that we can develop solutions that tackle inequality?

The project used a combination of participatory research and process evaluation in its approach, as explained below.

### Participatory research

Participatory research is an approach to research in communities that emphasises participation by the community itself in the research process (see references)<sup>1</sup>. Throughout this research people with personal experience of multiple disadvantage were involved as researchers and in the steering group. The involvement of staff and volunteers from ICM was fundamental to the approach of the project, allowing diverse knowledge and perspectives to shape the research process and findings. Wherever possible, interviews with people accessing ICM's services and activities were conducted by people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage.

### Process evaluation

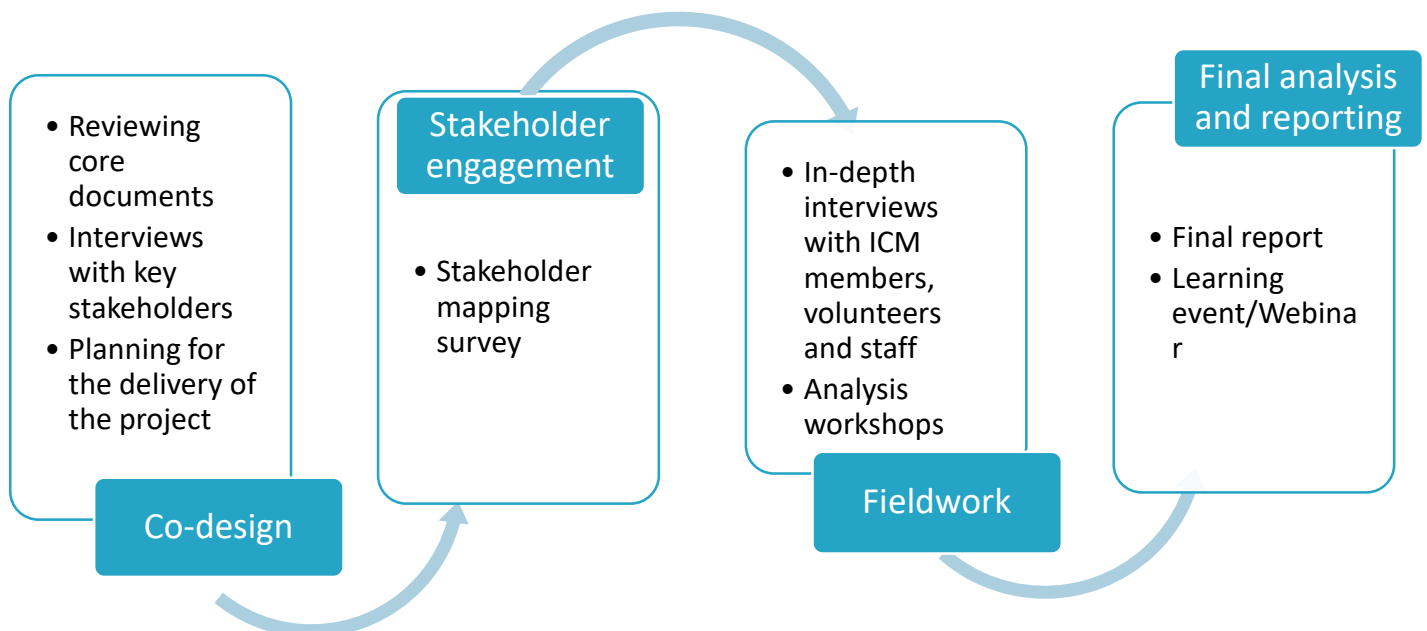
Process evaluations aim to explain how complex interventions work. They are especially useful for interventions that include a number of interacting components operating in

different ways and also when interventions address complex problems, or seek to generate multiple outcomes. The purpose of a process evaluation is not just to understand what has happened, but to create an understanding of how an intervention generates outcomes or effects. In this way the project aimed to examine the implementation, operation, mechanisms of impact and the context in which ICM is working.

## Research structure

The research was structured across four phases: co-design and setup, stakeholder engagement, fieldwork, analysis and reporting. The project was delivered by Groundswell between November 2019 and January 2021 and was guided by a steering group which met four times over the course of the project. The steering group was made up of a range of stakeholders from ICM including frontline and programme staff from across the partnership and former and current GROW trainees.

**Figure 2: Research project model**



### Co-design and set up

This stage involved setting up and designing the project working closely with the ICM programme team and steering group. It involved reviewing core documents and monitoring data to understand the intended and measured outcomes of ICM. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 key stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of ICM and how it has evolved from the original concept. A co-design report was written to summarise the progress of the research, which included a draft logic model for the programme.

### Stakeholder engagement

Stage 2 of the project focused on stakeholder engagement through an online survey. The survey explored how stakeholders felt ICM was achieving its strategic aims, as well as their perceptions on current involvement levels within ICM. In total 36 participants responded to the survey, including current staff and volunteers working within the ICM partnership, staff from partner organisations and commissioners of services. This information was used to inform interview guides for the fieldwork stage of the project.

### Fieldwork

Stage 3 involved qualitative data collection and collaborative analysis, including interviews, focus groups and workshops. A series of qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with 32 ICM members, volunteers and staff. Interviews focused on exploring participants' understanding, perceptions and experiences of ICM, the role they play within ICM and how change is made.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews and focus groups were conducted remotely by telephone or through Zoom. This made reaching a sample representative of ICM's members a challenge and it is fair to say that some of the voices of people facing the most severe impacts of multiple disadvantage are not as present in this report as we would have hoped. All participants who were accessing ICM's services were given a £10 incentive to say thank you for their time.

From the monitoring data collected (there were five uncompleted forms), there were 19 women and eight men, with an age range between 25 and 59 years and an average of 37. Around three-quarters of participants identified as heterosexual; others were a combination of gay and bisexual. Participants' roles within ICM were spread fairly even across the nine activities, with the largest group taking part in the Women's Voices Group and accessing activities at the Hub, and only one participant who had been a GROW trainee in the past. The breakdown is in the table below.

**Figure 3: ICM activities that interview participants had been engaged in**

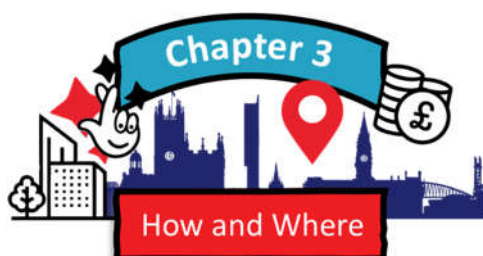
GROW	Past GROW	Women's Voices	Hub activities	Hub support	Mental Health Action Group	Exchange Group	Peer Mentor	Peer Mentor support
4	1	9	9	5	5	7	4	3

Eleven participants indicated that they were involved in activities not listed, with over half of them mentioning Back on Track and several mentioning the Art and Wellbeing Group.

Five analysis workshops were held to work together to review and scrutinise the data collected and to begin to form recommendations. Workshops brought together 29 participants who were staff, volunteers and members from within the ICM partnership and beyond. Around half of the participants had been involved in previous stages of the research. The workshops and the themes discussed were led by the ongoing analysis of data. In the two-hour sessions, participants heard a summary of interim findings and helped to verify and develop the themes further, with a focus on how to carry ICM's work and learning beyond the conclusion of the Fulfilling Lives programme.

### **Final analysis and reporting**

The final phase of the project focused on in-depth analysis of all data collected through the project and preparing this for dissemination. Analysis had been ongoing, with a series of themes developed in the first phase of the research and analysed through NVivo (qualitative data processing software). The final analysis integrated data from workshops to fill some of the gaps that were identified around particular topics or phenomena. The findings are presented in this report produced by the Groundswell team and launched at a learning event in Spring 2021. The quotes in this report are verbatim unless they identified the participant. When this was the case the Groundswell team changed names of places, people and organisations. The usual identifiers used to distinguish research participants like 'worker', 'manager' or 'client' have not been used because in this project because they occur together in individuals across the seven years of ICM. We have used instead the type of contribution they made to the research: Focus Groups, Interviews and Workshops.



## **Chapter 3: How and where**

“I had seen the homelessness situation getting worse in Manchester and knew that I wanted to do something.” – Interview participant

This research is focused on how ICM's work has affected change. As such, it is essential to consider what came before and how the context surrounding ICM's work supported and hindered progress. The following section highlights and elaborates on the context referred to by participants and that emerged in the analysis of the data.



## Manchester

Manchester was first chosen to be a part of the Fulfilling Lives programme because of the significant inequality and large numbers of people experiencing multiple disadvantage in the city. In the original project proposal, it was identified that there were up to 1,000 people who faced multiple disadvantage across the city. At the same time, Manchester had built a substantial infrastructure that was actively attempting to engage with people facing these challenges. This gave the city a unique opportunity to promote systems change and new ways of working that could have real impact on people's lives.

Participants in this study also painted a picture of an inclusive, diverse, and progressive city. Many suggested that the city has given the coproduced work of ICM a distinctive "flavour". Some talked about "devolution", others a willingness for services to work together "kind of on this wave of 'yeah, we can all do this!'" (interview participant). Some highlighted how a good working relationship with Manchester City and GMCA had helped.

It is in this context that ICM was established and became part of the city's 'eco-system'. Through this it was felt that ICM was able to make an impact on the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantage, while also having input into reshaping the system across the city. One participant elaborated around GROW traineeships becoming established in Manchester:

"To see something like that happening and to have people placed into employment positions with the mayor, with Andy Burnham. You are just like ... to see something like that happen ... in a short space of time [...] And they were kind of working closely with Andy Burnham and the homelessness partnership and Street Support and all that. Yeah, that was incredible really." – Interview participant

## A decade of austerity

Many participants talked about the impact of a decade of austerity measures had in increase in people facing challenges with multiple disadvantage. The most visible of this was a rise in street homelessness in Manchester and beyond (see [www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)). This situation undoubtedly increased the demand for services. Participants described how more demand and less available support meant that individuals missed out on getting help and their problems becoming more "entrenched".

"I was able to see the chaos of austerity on individuals, on teams, on services. In the voluntary sector, on housing and on mental health. And [I've] seen the repercussions of it. And the long-term hard, negative effects. On everybody working in homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. So that, once you see it, you can't unsee it." – Interview participant

Participants also shared stories of how a move to ‘professionalise’ the homelessness and wider social care sector over the last 20 years had seen a shift in how services were commissioned and monitored. In turn, professionalised systems have been embraced that create an outcomes-focused approach in an increasingly competitive commissioning environment. While this move was seen to have driven forward the use of evidenced-based practice, valuing participatory approaches, partnership working and innovation, it was also felt to have led to a delivery model that is more rigid and less able to adapt to the needs of the individual. It has also, however, had the effect of strengthening participants’ commitment to fixing the system that is seen to cause many of the problems we are dealing with: “This is why we are all trying to work alongside each other, to try and help that crisis.” (Interview participant)

### **Fulfilling Lives**

The Fulfilling Lives programme is a £112 million investment over eight years supporting people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage. The programme funds local partnerships in 12 areas across England to test new ways of ensuring individuals receive joined-up and person-centred services that work for them. ICM was originally awarded £10 million across eight years. Participants frequently highlighted the advantages of long-term funding that emphasises “learning” and “a person-centred approach” and is “flexible”. One person described it as “the dream” funding scenario.

“It was an eight-year project but it was broken into two-year sections. It meant that ... the commissioning was done in two-year rounds. So, it meant that every two years, the programme looked at itself and was able to adjust and change the emphasis in terms of what was commissioned, who was commissioned.” – Interview participant

“...What it leads you to do is kind of what we did in the beginning, which was a radical redesigning of systems.” – Interview participant

Ultimately participants were mindful of the advantages this particular funding stream provided:

“We have been a very well-funded project. And we have big names behind us. Acknowledging our privilege in that system and to want to acknowledge that privilege. And I think it is often hard to do this, because I think we tend ... to like power and we tend to like to hold power when we have it and keep hold of it.” – Interview participant

## The ICM partnership

ICM has built a strong partnership, led by Shelter with Back on Track, Self Help Services and Community Led Initiatives, but the early days of ICM appear to have been both exciting and turbulent. The National Lottery funders required the partnership to undertake various learning exercises to establish what they would do with the available grant. Central to this process was the participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage; the Core Group was established as a vehicle for people with direct experience to be involved in the design and delivery of the programme. Several people who were involved at that time say that it was particularly exciting in the early years because so much was still undecided. People involved in the partnership spoke frequently about the learning that has come out of working together:

“That was the point at which I started to realise exactly what ICM was all about in relation to being a genuine learning programme for us all. And I think that was quite exciting for us because ... I suppose I hadn’t and still haven’t experienced a partnership quite like it.” – Interview participant

Participants also noted that having Shelter as the lead partner has brought credibility, but also has meant at times that there was less flexibility and ability to do coproduction work due to Shelter’s pre-established policies and procedures. As one participant explained:

“[Being part of Shelter has given ICM...] a lot of weight and influence, but I also think it hindered the ... pure version of coproduction, which in my experience conflicts a little bit with working in ICM. So, everything would have to be Shelter-ised, done by Shelter’s policies and procedures. And a lot of them are not really with the true values of coproduction.” – Interview participant

## COVID-19

As much of this research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants reflected on the impact this had had on ICM’s work. Closing the ICM Hub, shutting office spaces and moving to home working placed obvious barriers to engaging people facing multiple disadvantage. One participant referred to the almighty effort of getting people off the streets into hotels, supporting and feeding them, and how it felt to be able to do something to help.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on ICM’s ability to realise coproduction. For example, one participant talked of the tension between launching a rapid response to the pandemic and taking the time to coproduce it: “We can’t open that up and then not be able to follow through.” (Focus group participant) It has created natural boundaries to engaging people, placed greater emphasis on telecommunications and opened up conversations about digital skills and inclusion.



## Chapter 4: What we did

“I have been working at ICM since 2016. I am trying to think of a specific example of coproduction because there is so much of it.” – Frontline worker

ICM delivers a range of services and activities aimed at tackling multiple disadvantage, including a blend of tried-and-tested approaches as well as creative, educational and participatory projects that are facilitated, supported, and participated in by partners and members.

By building on solid, established foundations, ICM is able to be creative and have the confidence to experiment, with learning feeding back to fortify the foundations. The activities are all delivered and centred around the ICM Hub and Back on Track.

### The foundations of the programme

The ICM delivery offer is built on approaches that are either well established, evidence based or were driven by insight from people with lived experience. These ‘foundations’ included: joining-up approaches across delivery; person-centred and psychologically informed approaches; coproducing solutions; sharing information across services; and access and inclusion for all people affected by multiple disadvantage. These foundations are structured around a series of delivery functions including:

- **ICM Community Hub** from where the delivery partnership directs its engagement work;
- **Workforce development** that enables staff to adopt new person-centred and psychologically informed practices;
- **Flexible Fund** (more information available in appendix) which is used to help individuals to overcome barriers to engaging and focus on personal strengths and goals;
- **Housing First**, a specific, housing-led intervention designed to challenge existing stepped processes to supporting people into housing;

- **GROW traineeship and peer mentoring** that offers strong progression pathways for people with personal lived experience to enter employment;
- **GM-THINK**, a multi-agency database delivered across the ICM partnership; and
- **Women's Voices Group**, which is an opportunity for women to come together to express themselves in a safe and inclusive way, building on their personal and social capital.

These only encapsulate some of the activities that have been delivered by ICM, but they have been consistent features throughout the lifetime of the programme. The efficacy of all these activities is dependent on how well they adapt to the individual and social context. The Fulfilling Lives programme, designed to test practice over time, encouraged and enabled flexibility and *required* coproduction. The success in building these solid foundational activities collaboratively seems to have given stakeholders the practice and confidence to experiment and develop more radical and creative approaches – the learning from which is then absorbed into the tried-and-tested approaches.

### **Employment and volunteering opportunities**

ICM adopted models of support that are delivered specifically by people with experience of multiple disadvantage through employment and volunteering opportunities. Of these, GROW traineeships had been a particular success for ICM and the model has been adopted by other organisations/institutions in Manchester and beyond (e.g. by Shelter nationally and Community Led Initiatives in Bedfordshire). Former GROW trainees have also moved on to different roles beyond ICM and in many cases to more senior positions. As one participant explained:

“So, I think GROW has been a particularly successful part of the programme. So much so that we have ... put more and more resource into GROW as it has gone on. Because actually the benefits of it have been brilliant across a lot of things. One it's really supported people who have gone through the programme. But also, people who engage with ICM. Having more lived experience within the workforce has made a ... really [significant] impact on their lives and their successes as well.” – Interview participant

Peer mentoring was highlighted as a way in which ICM engages its members and also creates opportunities for people who have had personal experience of multiple disadvantage to be a “stepping-stone” for people to move on in their own lives. At the time of writing this report, 126 peer mentors have been trained and deployed throughout ICM. There was discussion around how peer mentors could provide additional support to members, but also often needed quite a lot of support in order to deliver the role.

“The support that peer mentors can provide clients on our service, because of their lived experience, is just incredible. They have that true understanding that somebody without that lived experience [won’t have]. They [someone without lived experience] can be sympathetic, and they can be compassionate, but they don’t have that true understanding. When they say I know what you mean, they really know what they mean. You know? And the bond that that creates between the client and the peer mentor is unbelievable. And the fact that they are giving up their time. And this – they are not getting paid for the role. And that comes as a surprise to a lot of – certainly on this project – clients. But I think that also works as well.” – Interview participant

Participants noted the shift of significant resources towards GROW, increasing the aspiration to extend GROW beyond ICM, to members of the partnership and beyond, because the programme delivered promising results.

### **Groups, exchanges and activities**

In addition to the foundational activities, ICM partners and members facilitated, supported, and participated in a range of creative, educational and participatory projects. Weekly group sessions and ‘exchanges’ developed and grew in collaboration with ICM members; members had the opportunity to shape local research projects and participate as researchers. The Women’s Voices Group is using ‘community reporting’ to capture experiences of lockdown. There are many examples of member involvement in the recruitment of staff, with one GROW trainee describing how “shocked” they were to be so involved in the decision-making process: “I always had that thing about myself, that, like, well, you are not senior enough to make them sort of decisions.” (Interview participant)

Several participants talked about their experience of the Art and Wellbeing Group, which has given them new and different ways of expressing themselves and has motivated them to attend the Hub and engage even when they were facing barriers that would usually make them hide away. In the group, “they use all our creative ideas to make it better” (interview participant). Members have facilitated Art and Wellbeing Group sessions and they hope to evolve the group into a fully peer-led project. Stakeholders felt that it was important that the agenda for activities was set by members.

“Anything that people asked for, we responded to. We had an art therapy group that people really enjoyed, that we asked for. A creative writing group that was asked for. And we did that. We took them paintballing. We will go to the pictures with people. So that’s where my passions lie because it’s kind of like ... what do you like doing? Because for me that’s where the role to ... getting better is.” – Workshop participant

These experiences seem to have given people the confidence and enthusiasm to get involved in other forums beyond ICM including: the Legislative Theatre work with the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network (GMHAN); the Manchester Homelessness Partnership's Mental Health Action Group and the task group responsible for acting on their respective recommendations, to name but a few.

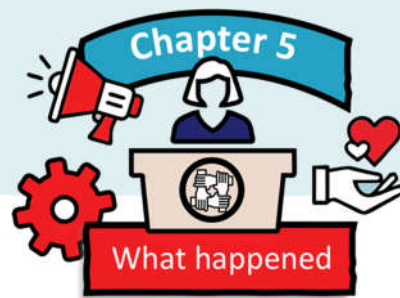
### **A space that brings it all together**

The Hub is the face of the ICM programme and is where support is provided and activities take place. Participants shared how important it was to have this space, bringing together staff from across the partnership to offer multidisciplinary support for ICM members, but also of how they felt it differed from the standard model of spaces where support is usually provided. Participants reported how the coproduction of the hub, guided by psychologically informed environments (PIE), has given a sense of ownership to those who have contributed to its design.

“We don't want to be trying to run a service ... piggy-backing on existing services. And in fact, we want some space that is independent where it is designed with lived experience, it can have a sense of ownership. [...] We reconfigured over the eight years ... to look like the opposite of what [people experiencing multiple disadvantage] had experienced that was negative in other services.” – Focus group participant

It was only through having this space that ICM could provide opportunities to bring people together for social, training and community-building activities. It was felt that these spaces allowed a community to be built around the services and was seen to 'narrow' the gaps between staff and members by being able to share common activities and interests.





## Chapter 5: What happened

“When I am talking about techniques for involving people, I suppose it’s about how do you actually make that process work? How do you make sure that people feel valued in that process, and how to influence people around that?” – Interview participant

Through this research Groundswell has explored how the changes that ICM aspired to, and inspired, have occurred. Participants were asked whether they believed that ICM’s work had led to change and what factors help and obstruct change. This question highlighted the mechanisms that keep the activities responsive, exciting and constantly developing, including building relationships, commitment to diversifying the workforce, participatory and reflective practice, plus some powerful advocates ready to speak up about the successes of collaborative, person-centred and trauma-informed work.

### Coproduction and participatory working

Coproduction and participatory working are central to how ICM creates change both within the partnership and in the wider system. Many of the staff and members of ICM we spoke to bring with them years of experience of participatory work locally and nationally. By embracing coproduction, it acknowledges that things are not fixed and so everything, to continue to serve its purpose, must have the capacity to respond to the changing world and the people that live in it. Research participants talked about “finding opportunities ... to influence and contribute to systems change” (Focus group participant) both within and beyond ICM. They highlighted the need for an ongoing conversation about “how we share space, talk about power and decision-making” (Focus group participant) and for a response that fosters “connectedness”, in what many perceive as an increasingly divided, isolated and oppressed society. Coproduction was seen as a positive way of “addressing the [unequal] distribution of power” (interview participant).

“We tend to like power and we tend to like to hold [onto] power when we have it ... And I think that being a power player in those relationships, where we need to be getting to is being able to ... how do you share power? How do you let go of power?”



And how do you use your power to support the voice of those who have less?" –  
Workshop participant

Participants all raised the issue of the time collaborative working takes. Many talked about the "anxiety" it provokes (for all engaged) and the "battles" to counter "old thinking" and the systems and practices associated with it. They are critical; some projects have demanded too much, too fast; others appear to have an agenda that is coming "from the top". There are concerns about who is involved, about the way work is facilitated and where it happens. There is a debate about what high-fidelity coproduction looks like. Some participants are disparaging of what seems like a 'consultation' but is labelled as coproduction; others illustrate how some of the incremental changes made as a result of engaging members can make a difference – being asked what you think should happen next, for example. Mostly, they want more because this participatory approach is mutually beneficial. Frontline workers can use their ingenuity; one manager says the best part about the job is being able to say "yes!" to members' requests and suggestions; many participants are emphatically proud at the better 'product' that results from coproduction.

### **Building relationships**

Relationships are key to the success of ICM. Most of the research participants talked about the significance of relationships built across stakeholder groups, but also having a model of delivery that allows relationships to be built between the service provider and the service user. The findings indicate that relationship building is supported by: opportunities for reciprocity, time, trust, a plurality of reasons for coming together and ways to be together, as well as appropriate spaces to meet. The certainty and long-term nature of ICM membership offers the time and promotes the trust required to build positive relationships, making possible the "honesty and humility" that make participatory practice thrive. With relationships we can connect parts of the system that have never met; they are the sticks in the web.

"So, people who were on the programme who have gone on to work in Manchester City Council outreach team or in other organisations... There has been that sort of reciprocal ... like, oh, we know about ICM and what ICM have done. And we're really keen to work with you on that. I think that has just come from being sort of tenacious with building them relationships and working together." – Focus group participant

Participants explained how relationships provide opportunities to experience things that they would usually avoid, but they will give them a chance if the opportunities are presented by people they have worked with before. One participant explained how they got involved with ICM groups after being invited to take part by someone supporting them:

“Well, funnily enough, I was asked to be involved. And I was like no chance, I don’t want to [...] put myself out there. However, I did have a couple of conversations with [staff member], the lead facilitator, and also one of the other facilitators. Because he used to be with ICM.” – Focus group participant

Time and resources are, however, tight and people need reasons to come together. In the case of ICM, these come in the form of socialising, participating in groups, responding to consultations, and working with people to address the barriers they are facing and support their aspirations.

“We have the luxury of being able to build those relationships with people. Whether it be through one-to-one work, whether it be through group work. Getting people involved in developing the service.” – Interview participant

Many participants talked enthusiastically about taking part in participatory research projects, one as their “best experience of coproduction”; over the (nearly) eight years of the programme there have been many such reasons for coming together facilitated by universities, grassroots forums, and voluntary sector organisations. As one participant explains:

“It gave me a voice because it helped me discover that I have got a bit of a skill – because I do know, because of lived experience, I do know quite a lot of characters, homeless people who have got a story to tell. And through listening to them it reminded me that I have got a story to tell as well.” – Frontline focus group

### **Diversifying the workforce**

ICM is committed to diversifying its workforce and employs a variety of approaches to achieve this: GROW traineeship, peer mentoring, volunteering, and changes to recruitment policy across the partner organisations to address barriers that exclude people who have been out of work for a long time, have convictions, and perhaps have fewer educational qualifications. The commitment has done more than increase employment and training opportunities: it has made participatory working more feasible and rigorous, and it has shifted the way people understand disadvantage.

“And I think what is brilliant about the ICM delivery team is that we actually have a mixture here of people with lived experience and people with more professional experience. And I think by having a team of both is actually ... [a] really positive thing because ... what they share between themselves is actually really powerful and makes for a real strong knowledge base across the team. And people asking each other advice all the time and whether it’s professional advice or somebody might know a bit more about how to navigate a system. Or somebody might know a bit

more about what somebody might be going through or some of the challenges. And together that makes for a really positive team.” – Interview participant

### **PIE and reflective practice**

Staff and volunteers described how having the space and time to reflect as a team on their experiences of the work encouraged honesty and a learning culture that developed better practice. The emphasis on reciprocal listening filters into supervision for a GROW trainee who finds they are never coming out of meetings feeling there was something missed. The ICM Hub, highlighted previously as key to ICM’s success, was designed with members according to the principles of PIE. It provides a flexible, welcoming space where people can find a nook that works for them at the time.

“The psychological informed approach obviously was done right from the start because ... people with lived experience were involved right from the start in designing how the project was going to be ... also as we go out into community, into other charities, organisation, services, I think we take some of that psychologically informed approach with us. So, I think slowly there might some influencing going on in those services. I don’t know to what extent, but I would definitely say there is some of that stuff going [on].” – Workshop participant

Participants highlighted that this approach has been central to how members are supported, but has also been key to supporting the wellbeing of staff.

“There has [sic] been things over the years that have happened, you know, incidents or things that we have witnessed and have been really, really deeply traumatic. I mean I have got some things that will stay with me for ever. And reflective practice has really helped me to put them in the right order in my mind. So that when I do think about them or when it does start to affect me again, I have the tools to start processing it again and working through it. And so while we are exposed to that, we are also exposed to the extra tools to manage it which is really a good thing and it’s helped me in my personal life as well.” – Frontline focus group

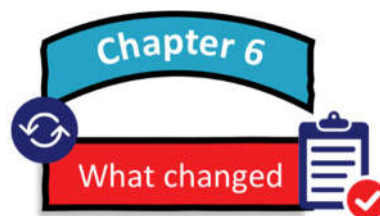
### **Powerful advocates**

The success of ICM’s work is ballast for a large group of powerful advocates who are pushing the collaborative, person-centred programme forward in Manchester. These advocates come from across the system: frontline workers, managers, strategic players and people who have recently and continue to access services. They are confident and articulate in their descriptions of the work and what it has achieved; their confidence is built on the success of the model and also the relationships that have been forged through difficult times.

“... we have been through challenges together. There is [sic] high levels of trust and respect between the partners. And that we hope will translate into future work.” – Interview participant

The combination of activities and mechanisms described in this section have enabled an ‘action learning cycle’ – observing, reflecting, planning and acting – not merely within the boundaries of the project but spilling out across Manchester, broadening and enriching the learning.

“I have known ICM from, like, an outside perspective, but in that role, it was just such a brilliant project to use for ... when you needed examples of efficacy, of being able to show this is why it’s important and this is how it can work. So, I kind of referenced to it all the time.” – Interview participant



## Chapter 6: What changed

“A day becomes a day again rather than just a group of hours. It just gives you a bit of stability in a world full of shite. Sorry...” – Interview participant

‘Creating change’ is an aspiration for the majority of people and organisations working within the not-for-profit sector, whether for individuals who are supported or across the wider system. When change comes it can be incremental or it can be significant and it is often hard to fully understand why change has happened or an individual actor’s role in making change. ICM’s participative working, while similarly hard to attribute fully, has led to change taking place across a range of spheres. Participants in this study reported seeing change in self-perception of staff and members, beliefs and understandings around multiple disadvantage and also notably to policy and practice in the ICM partnership and beyond.

### Blurring of boundaries and shared attribution

Groundswell has never experienced a project where the distinctions between ‘workers’ and ‘clients’ has been so blurred – which ‘service’ people belong to, who has ‘lived experience’ and who hasn’t; these boundaries are blurred. Participants in the research spoke from an

insider and outsider perspective on different workplaces and forums, and in different roles. It was difficult to see where ‘ownership’ lay over buildings, reports, forums, and projects. There was a sense of reciprocity and that the benefits of working with participatory approaches had a positive impact throughout each of the partner organisations and far beyond. Furthermore, perhaps as a result, across the 32 interactions in the fieldwork phase there was a lot of generosity towards many different services – reflection and critique as well – but an overriding sense that all these different players have an important, particular function. All this blurring seems very useful – in many ways the result of a participatory/coproduced approach – because it enables us to embrace the blurred complexity of people and the contexts we come from and exist within.

Outcomes are supported by a multitude of interventions and relationships. To support people to achieve their desired outcomes, flexibility and partnership working are key (none of which is new); but, unfortunately, the way services are commissioned most of the time works directly against this principle. Rigid timeframes and outcomes frameworks that require providers to pin down a formula that can be costed make it very difficult to be flexible in how we work with people.

Moreover, because a flexible approach is multifaceted, requiring services to work together, and a person-centred approach is individualised, so potentially different every time, and because the boundaries between people and services become blurred, it is not always (may be never) possible to attribute a particular outcome to a specific project, person, or intervention. It is important to highlight this attribution problem up front because many people participating in the research were sensitive to it: for example, “that wasn’t all ICM” or “I don’t know if person X who did this great thing Y was working as a GROW or for organisation X at the time”.

It seems that focusing on how we do the work – how we respond – is what delivers the outcomes individuals hope for. ICM provides evidence that given the opportunity to be flexible, collegial and person-centred delivers on outcomes, although it is not possible to attribute these outcomes directly to a specific intervention.

### **Changes in how we see ourselves**

We asked what had changed for the 32 people using, working for and with ICM who took part in the interviews and focus groups. Many participants emphasised that “change takes time” and some found this frustrating. Research participants with experience as ICM service users mostly talked about change in the way they saw themselves, in particular feeling more confident in themselves and having hope for the future beyond street homelessness and insecure and unsuitable accommodation. Workers and volunteers, sometimes the same people, also talked confidently about an approach that they have experienced working. Many were “inspired” by seeing others around them grow and change and flourish; others

had seen concrete positive changes in their own lives that they attributed to their experience with ICM. One participant described their now functioning relationship with adult social services; another how they felt more themselves at work; many spoke about feeling connected; and many described feeling more hopeful generally. Other themes identified were: improved access to healthcare, better mental health, housing, employment, strengthening family ties, developing new skills and aspiring for more.

### **Change in beliefs**

Among the research participants, there were many advocates of collaborative and person-centred working. The emphasis was not on a shift in beliefs about multiple disadvantage but on the value of lived experience in understanding what needs to be changed and how. The significance of the ‘changing beliefs’ aspiration and effect was made clear through the tales of individuals, services and systems who hold on to ‘traditional models of support’ but had been forced to shift because of coproduction. The participant quoted below explains how she had engaged with mental health services since childhood and throughout had been referred to interventions to “manage” her “anger”. Now in her 40s, she talks here about how her experience with ICM was different:

“They help people in their own way ... their own individual needs sort of thing. They listen to you first before they get on with it. And they ask first what you think... What would help with that, if that makes sense? And then they kind of reverse back saying, ‘Well, I think you need this help, what do you reckon?’ Where’s before, in the past, with different other charities and groups like [charity name] or ... other groups that I have been to, like the anger management group, they have kind of contradicted it. Well, I think you have done this ... duh, duh, because you done that duh, duh... know what I mean?... And it’s, like, well, hang on a minute why are they being like that, sort of thing? It got me madder!” – Interview participant

Change needs shifts in beliefs about who we are as workers and what we are doing in this work. A very strong wave of opinion in this study is that changes in beliefs were especially an effect of GROW and other measures to “diversify the workforce”.

### **Change in understanding**

Perhaps most profoundly, the participants in this research believed that the way we design and deliver support to address multiple disadvantage can be collaborative and person-centred and the evidence for that is apparent in the changes in practice within ICM.

“But since working in ICM, it’s really opened my eyes up. Because they are coming from a place ... they have been through it themselves. And I have learnt a lot from them, in terms of their perspective. Some of the GROWs have been really open in the past about their own struggles, their own ... the addiction problems,

homelessness. It's been eye opening for me. And I have learnt a lot. And it's really helped me with my work as well, helped me to understand the difficulties and struggles." – Interview participant

Participants emphasised how there was a change in how the participation of people with lived experience could be utilised in the delivery of programmes both internally at ICM and beyond. ICM demonstrated that coproduction can be done and can have an impact. As one stakeholder explained:

"The good thing about ICM ... a lot of the staff have lived experience. And I think that is a really big thing, ... really important for the clients. So, they can relate to that. And I think over the years that's something that has changed. [...] I think previously in sense of hiring people with lived experience ... where I have worked in the past, it's been quite tokenistic. So, for example, we had people with lived experience or clients sit down in interviews and that would really be it. There wouldn't be much beyond that. So, I think things have definitely changed." – Interview participant

### **Change in practice and policy**

Participants highlighted the change to practice affected by ICM's commitment to being flexible in response to individuals and their context, coupled with its use of 'membership' as a concept that cements open-ended access – a 'never give up' approach. These changes seem to be significant across the board, but particularly regarding mental health support.

"And that is how ... ICM differs from other places, in terms of mental health support. Because usually you get your eight sessions and that's it. So yeah ... I think the important thing about ICM, I think what works ... it's about building relationships... And often what we find with our clients is they have a mistrust of professionals... And because there isn't that degree of flexibility when it comes to accessing appointments through the NHS. They don't have an opportunity to build those relationships." – Interview participant

In comparison, the mental health support available through ICM includes a period of one-to-one sessions to learn strategies to manage mental health drawing on cognitive behaviour therapy and art therapy techniques. Workers may at this point help with a referral for counselling and then "take a step back", but the ICM member can return for further support "at any point". This accounts for what we know about the experience of multiple disadvantage – it's not a single-fix problem.

Through coproduction, ICM delved further into its own policies and practices, reflecting critically on the barriers it was creating to employing people with lived experience. The GROW traineeships acted as an initial foundation for having more robust conversations

about recruiting people with specific experiences that would usually exclude them from employment opportunities. Some changes have been made to the way that people are now recruited to the project, including making it a specific criterion in job applications; personalised support plans for entry level roles; personal budgeting where barriers to progression are recognised; new lived experience criteria for senior roles; support sessions for applications where lived experience was a criterion; and specialist budgeting advice for people entering the workforce for the first time.

ICM has adopted 'Ban the Box', a way of promoting fair-chance recruitment for people with criminal convictions. They also removed requirements for people to have to be abstinent or in recovery for a period of time before taking on volunteering opportunities. Instead, disclosure of personal mental health or substance use was at the person's discretion and where this might act as a barrier to volunteering or employment would be discussed with the lead recruiter beforehand.

Community Led Initiatives and Back on Track have made significant steps in opening employment opportunities for people with convictions across the private and public sectors.

"As Back on Track's profile has risen, people have started to approach us and say we are looking to build ... our community element, we are looking to work with you closely to provide some job opportunities for individuals. The biggest example is XPL Logistics. They are massive global haulage company, but they have got a huge base in Trafford. So, we have built a relationship with them and they have ended up getting a ... good handful of people jobs with them." – Interview participant

Another positive step in driving forward participatory work is that Shelter has adopted the GROW training scheme nationally and has changed its recruitment practices across the board to promote the inclusion of diversity in experience throughout Shelter's services. For example, the following text now features in their recruitment advertisements and application packs:

"[We] encourage applications from people, who have been homeless or have been at risk of homelessness. We are facing diverse problems, so need diverse people to tackle them. In addition to this, we encourage an approach to involving people with personal insight of housing issues and homelessness in our recruitment processes."

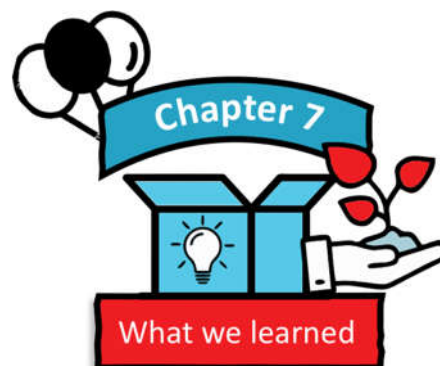
In addition, ICM introduced 'safety planning', an established way of working that helps to promote safe ways of engaging people through the project. This refocused the lens away from top-down, service-led risk management procedures. Safety planning has been embedded as an engagement tool to help people manage safe practices, both for



themselves and for others. It was developed with staff and volunteers across the project and is now being used across users of GM-THINK.

Both of these have opened up new paths to involving people who traditionally would have been 'risk managed' away from services. This provides new opportunities to engage with services but has also shifted how the project comes to view traditional ideas on risk and personal histories, re-establishing these as potential strengths to be drawn on through the programme.

The changes to practice influenced by ICM go way beyond its immediate work. ICM appears to have made significant ground in influencing the practice of other organisations and systems change in Manchester, using the foundations of the programme first highlighted in this evaluation. Participants talked about changes to commissioning practices, specifically within the local authority. New navigator models, coupled with peer mentoring, have become part of all outreach services. Adoption of psychologically informed approaches, safety planning and GM-THINK have become more wide-spread across the city (with 25 organisations adopting the system). Recruiting people with lived experience has become a part of recruitment practices (evidenced by 35 GROW trainees moving on to employment).



## Chapter 7: What we learned

“Is everything going to work for everybody in a great way? No, it’s not, because we are dealing with people and things are going to be complex. I think the point is that we keep trying to do things. We do learn from mistakes.” – Interview participant

ICM’s coproduction journey has been littered with learning about what works when working in a participatory way. It is clear from participants in this study that while it is not always easy, coproduction works and it is worth doing. To make participatory working (and wider

service delivery) effective, ICM has learnt that a flexible, fun and relationship-focused approach is key.

## Participatory working is worth it

“Coproduction is a slog. It is hard work; it is like herding cats at times.” – Focus group participant

As highlighted earlier in this report, participatory ways of working take “time”, can cause “anxiety” and require “battles”. Even for the most enthusiastic converts, some days it is too hard to coproduce effectively.

“I could speak of, like, an amazing game in this session now... And give the impression that like I am totally committed to authentic non-tokenistic coproduction. But I might be really tired tomorrow, and be like, ah you know what, I am going to phone it in and I am not going to coproduce it as much as I could have, because it’s loads of effort.” – Workshop participant

Participatory ways of working are effective. The research data indicates that the forms of participation utilised by ICM have an impact on individuals’ development as well as acting as mechanisms to make the work responsive and grounded in local experience. The quote below illustrates what one participant describes as learning to “think forwardly”. Participating in ICM groups involves participants planning sessions.

“... people come up with different ideas, but then you go and do it. It’s to inspire to, sort of, think forwardly rather thinking about just every minute and every hour... thinking about what are you doing next week. And then your weeks become weeks and your months become – you know, everything just goes back into place, rather than being every minute, every hour thinking right what am I doing for my bed tonight? What am I doing for sleeping tonight? What about food in the next two hours? I don’t have a clue. That sort of thing.” – Focus group participant

The use of time here to explain a state of homelessness is useful in understanding how participatory practice (alongside other interventions) makes a particular difference in “things falling back into place” for people experiencing multiple exclusion.

The principles that run through participatory approaches account for the fact that things are not fixed and require constant attention, review and adjustment. Participatory work trains us to pay attention, bear honest scrutiny, and respond flexibly to new knowledge.

“I don’t think it’s a case of, like, you get it and then you do it perfectly every single time. I think it’s a case of, like, you actually need to keep yourself trained and present and put in the effort to make sure that that coproduction is as good as it could be.” – Interview participant

Participatory ways of working make the work more satisfying (which is significant given the high turnover of staff in the sector); participants described feeling more “passionate” and “motivated” about their work.

“And I suppose a highlight for me is – it might sound a bit funny but – saying ‘yes’. So, when people will sort of come to me in the Hub and say some of the clients want to do this, whether they were setting up the Exchange Group, or we want to do this, we want to do that. And just saying... ‘Yeah! Let’s do it!’” – Focus group participant

### **The relational approach is fundamental**

The significance of relationships has already been discussed regarding how they act as a mechanism to start, study and develop participatory work. Here we want to draw out some significant lessons from the ICM experience emerging from this research.

Relationships extend across the experiences of all individuals. Frontline ICM staff talked about how rich local knowledge is and how having the opportunity to meet and get to know people across the organisations meant they could provide better support. As one GROW trainee explains:

“... Because there is such a wide amount of expertise and teams in Shelter and getting to know everyone is such an amazing thing, because we are learning in this job, and sometimes we will come up with a problem and you think, oh, I met someone in [the] legal [team] the other day, I am just going to give them a call and see what they think. And then you end up getting a more in-depth solution to people’s problems. Or you know, I am going to speak to someone in [the] debt [team], or all the different areas that Shelter have got...” – Focus group participant

The participant quoted below talks about how the relationships they have built through ICM have a preventative effect, where other members are able to catch issues before they become crises. Several participants discuss how ICM is a project they can turn to in the early stages of a problem, when in the past they would wait and present at services in crisis.

“Before I get out to the ... outburst stage, they kind of see ... they are recognising all the little behaviours. Not even just with me, it’s in [name] or everyone else in the members. And they kind of look at our behaviours and then they kind of nip it in the bud before we kind of realise it, it’s different.” – Interview participant

Relationships are about connection and connection is why we continue to build these relationships.

“People feel like they are able to connect more. And we have certainly had case studies where clients have told us. I saw something in my ICM engagement worker that reminded me of myself and my situation I am in. And that is why they continued to build those positive relationships and eventually make those positive changes in their own lives.” – Managers’ focus group participant

“I have been here with ICM about a year and half, just under two years, I think. And the highlight for me is the women, the connection. I have got loads more but you said highlights so...” – Women’s focus group participant

The following three participants agreed that the support and connection were also the highlights of their time with Women’s Voices, including for one of the group’s facilitators.

“And I think personally I have got a lot [out] of working with women and the women who volunteer in the group. And they have inspired me and supported me equally as much as I have hopefully inspired and supported them.” – Women’s focus group participant

This statement takes us to ICM’s learning around reciprocity as a way of relating and how it builds solidarity and trust, and helps to break down the barriers between ‘workers’ and ‘users’ and other hierarchical divisions in the work. ICM has fostered this by encouraging ‘workers’ to attend groups, social events and forums as participants – rather than ‘in role’ – and valuing opportunities to have open and non-judgemental conversations about it. The reflective practice is strengthened through PIE and emphasis on collaborative working. The balance of attention in the ICM intervention is obviously towards the ‘beneficiary’, but as these distinctions are blurred it is possible to catch a glimpse of the shift in position in the relationship.

“When I was a volunteer, definitely I would be going to Women’s Voices to enjoy myself as well. And as a bit of a chill out time for me as well. I wasn’t there with a worker’s hat on so much. And I think the staff are always like ... maybe it’s a bit different now that I am paid, but I think it is still very much like I go to Art and Wellbeing and that is a chill out time for the staff as much it is for people who are taking part.” – Focus group participant

The research participants were keen to discuss the identities and roles we play in the support process and how it is possible to relate. Groundswell saw a confidence among all

stakeholders towards facing and working through the complex issues that are likely to arise when trying to forge systemic change.

The connections members make while undertaking activities also seem to be what encourages them to keep showing up – to engage with help, socialise, debate and decide, to volunteer and work. People turn up because of the connection they feel and sometimes they end up in challenging conversations or have difficult interactions – and this is how entrenched views are nudged a bit and we learn. The following discussion from a focus group highlights how relationships cement this sense of connection as a reason to come together and stay together over time:

Researcher: “What has built that trust? Can you tell us about that? What do you think makes that possible?”

Participant 2: “Well, like I said, I was a bit of a twat. She didn’t turn her back on me. A few times she asked me to leave the service, but I could come back in 24 hours. I don’t know ... taking time to build that relationship up, isn’t it.” – Woman’s focus group participant

Participant 2 goes on to say that she was unable to go without a drink and that they came to an agreement whereby they could drink enough to keep them going but no more – and then they were able to attend outings. This flexible response to what is often just bracketed as ‘risk’ and avoided is the sort of practice that can be learnt from ICM.

“Boundaries are something you always have to re-evaluate. And yet there are times we do go above and beyond. And that is just the availability of being flexible. So, we work very flexibly. So sometimes you might support someone to attend A&E. Because they wouldn’t have gone without your support and you could be at A&E until 6.30, 7pm. That’s providing the support that that person needs right now, outside the usual hours. But that’s OK. When I am aware, I am able to provide that support to the worker by being available and I will also stay on my phone until that person has finished.” – Interview participant

### **Flexibility is the oil in this machine**

The research findings indicate that the more able ICM partners were to respond individually to a given context and the whole person in front of them, the more success and goodwill they generated with people accessing ICM, the workers, and other providers. The beneficiaries are freed from some very concrete barriers thanks to the Flexible Fund, from which members are able to draw down cash in order to support their development, in addition to training budgets for GROW trainees and peer mentors.

“What do you think will benefit you to develop professionally? So, I chose driving lessons. I passed my test and got a car, which has really, really helped me professionally. But a lot of organisations would be like OK, you need to use this money for this. It was just really flexible. And it really benefited me. I also spent the other £500 on [an] education course, which, OK, it didn’t benefit me professionally, but it gave me a lot of confidence and now I am back at university studying part time.” – Interview participant

Across around 72 applications per year, ICM distributed around £13,000 in each of the seven years of the project to date. In addition to training budgets for GROW trainees, this gave ICM a way to shift funds directly to people to help address the poverty they were experiencing and remove some of the barriers they were facing as a result. The process is simple and it can be used for “absolutely anything that supports an individual’s growth and development”.

“We have helped, for example, deposits for accommodation, items for accommodation. We have helped with travel fares for someone who has not seen their children for a long time to go ... clothes, art materials, books.” – Interview participant

ICM’s Housing First project also became increasingly flexible, in contrast to mainstream allocations policies. This flexibility resulted in one research participant being moved into a home that is close to children and far away from an abusive relationship following years of inappropriate placements. Thanks to the multiplicity of activities provided by the ICM partnership and the ease of referral, the sense of family and membership seems to have allowed people to stretch out towards their aspirations, in their own time.

Flexibility enables frontline workers to respond intuitively, and engagement workers have mobile phones so are easily contactable and able to be flexible, when statutory services (in particular) cannot. The ICM experience demonstrates that the more flexible, humble, and honest all the constituting parts of services and institutions are, the more likely the project is to become more holistic, relational and person centred.

“So, having a staff member coordinate this work or having someone to coordinate is really important in the groups. Because then as much as women want to get involved and what they are ready for, and they can step up and step down depending on what’s going on in their lives – that consistency is there. And that relationship is there, and the contact is there.” – Focus group participant

The ICM experience strongly makes the case that flexibility is possible and effective, but you have to be able to ‘commit’. The quote below is from a focus group; the individual started

out as a Development Officer tasked with sourcing accommodation in the private rented sector:

“We realised that it needed to be on their terms, otherwise it doesn’t work out. So, we need to be able to find accommodation in their part of Manchester to [meet] their specific needs. When they want it and what price they want it. And to do that, you have to really commit.” – Interview participant

### **The importance of the fun stuff**

Many participants talked about days out to galleries, museums, the cinema, paintball and chatting over food at a restaurant; for some these experiences were a first. Additionally, the Mentor below explains how ‘fun’ can help with support work.

“As a Mentor it was just – really nice, like getting to know someone and see someone when they are relaxed and happy rather than, like, always being ... when they are thinking about their issues and like ... it really helped when my mentee was like would be having really bad days. I would be like, ‘Oh well, we have got this to look forward to’, or ‘Remember when we did that’, and you have actually got concrete examples of, like, times they were happy, basically, to draw on. Because you have been there and done that with them.” – Frontline focus group participant

ICM has made a real effort to celebrate achievements, hold exhibitions of work and offer events like performances of music and poetry. These activities have helped to draw people in and once there became the spaces to build relationships. One participant describes going to a Back on Track event:

“... their end of year Christmas party. And I went along and just the atmosphere was just amazing and I was just, ‘Right, I want to – this is where I am going to work!’” – Interview participant

Making things in the workplace fun is not as easy as it might appear but the findings suggest that it is worth prioritising nonetheless.





## Chapter 8: Where we are stuck

“Although there is [sic] a lot of people at ICM who have lived experience, once you become that worker, your perspective changes. And the language that you use changes. So, at one point you are going in saying we need to change the way everybody talks because I don’t understand what you are talking about.” – Interview participant

ICM’s journey to embrace coproduction has seen real successes but it has also been and continues to have areas where it is ‘stuck’. Participants in this study shared how persistent beliefs or attitudes or stubborn systems can hold back participatory working and its positive impacts. How we communicate and what we mean by ‘lived experience’ are other areas where more thinking, working and coproducing are needed.

### Communication

Research participants identified several issues related to communication: firstly, communicating the impact of participatory activity to all involved; secondly, communicating what we mean by coproduction; and finally, presenting a unified message about the ICM approach to advocate for this model of working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

There are clear indications that a lot of change has occurred because of beneficiary contribution in forums, consultations, and research, but the fact that these changes have taken place, and the details and extent of the change, remain the knowledge of a small group of people. This is not surprising given the issues raised earlier about attribution and the time it takes to see palpable change. It is made more difficult because of changes in staff and client groups; over eight years details are bound to get lost. While group facilitators and other staff are mindful of this problem and do share information, some of the research participants had a strong sense that things had changed but were not able to recall specifically in what way or how.



“I don’t know, because I have not seen that change myself. Does that make any sense? But I hope it has. All I know is when I change other people that I work with.” – Interview participant

“But that could be just because it’s not been fed down yet to us. So, it may well have happened, it may well be working. We have not heard about it.” – Interview participant

As the following participant explains, this sort of gap in the participatory feedback loop can easily build resentments.

“They are given a consultation and it’s, like, fill this in and then a service is designed – sometime later they are not kept up to date and what’s designed doesn’t match anything that they really wanted. And they think, well, why were we involved?” – Interview participant

There was a reluctance by most participants to suggest that ICM had got coproduction ‘right’ or indeed that they were close to practising what they aspired to. Conversely, one person suggested there was a reluctance to talk about “mistakes and failures” and another said that “negativity about coproduction is heretical”. While discussion and debate are essential in developing participatory practices, it seems that it would help to have a clearer, shared idea about why and how coproduction is effective.

Finally, it is clear that ICM members have had to work with practitioners in other services who do not share ICM’s values. Some individuals have developed ways to work with this issue; one engagement worker talks about keeping a diary of the negative interactions one of his clients had while attending treatment services and taking it to a “higher-up manager”, who then addressed the issues with managers at the treatment service. Another is confident to argue against punitive treatment by providers with an articulate account of addiction as illness:

“To punish someone for being ill is morally and ethically wrong. Whether that makes a difference or not in that time, I don’t know. But it definitely plants a seed...” – Frontline focus group participant

Many others do not have strategies to counter these ‘old ways of thinking’ about and working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage and need some support to communicate the advantages of the ICM approach.

## Old thinking and working

When trialling innovative practice, resistance is inevitable. ‘Old thinking’ is the terminology used by a number of participants to describe the traditional responses to multiple disadvantage that ICM’s work directly challenges. It groups together attitudes about the people experiencing it and the subsequent response. The responses are reactive as opposed to considered and designed collaboratively; it is mostly short term, fixed and frequently punitive, as opposed to open-ended, flexible and relational. The attitude is stigmatising and reductive, as opposed to strengths based and person centred. Research participants spoke frequently about encountering ‘old thinking’ in face-to-face interactions, policy, organisational systems, the law and commissioning processes. Many noted how easily ‘new thinking’ is assimilated.

Two participants with very different roles painted a picture of a sector responding to an increasingly difficult situation with short-term solutions that actually multiply and worsen longstanding problems.

“I think there is still quite a lot of reactive policy-making activity around it, like, oh, the numbers on the streets have gone up, we need some new outreach team ideas. Or we need a new night shelter or hostel. Or we have got lot of people in poverty, we need to boost the foodbank. So, there is still a lot of sticking plaster on the problem; thinking and activity rather than understanding fundamentally what’s going on here.” – Interview participant

A number of participants acknowledge that ICM is not immune to ‘old thinking’, which is especially apparent in parts of the partner organisations.

“There is also a hefty amount of labour intensivity [sic], which is generated from us having older ways of thinking in services. So, for instance, like ... we always have to do a certain way of recruiting people ... and it’s simply that ... they don’t talk about coproduction in the finance team... I don’t suppose they have focus groups on it like we do. And unfortunately, we do have to work around those systems.” – Managers’ focus group participant

Most participants suggested that there is significant change required “higher up” to turn the tide. This includes addressing the compartmentalising of care, which has established entrenched silos that prevent partnership working and fragment beneficiaries by their disadvantages because staff working in services are unable (or not allowed) to see outside their specialism.

“So, there is that failure of communication at every level, everything has been siloed off, everything is compartmentalised in a certain way. And it needs that fundamental

change at the top to bring that about. So, it needs a much higher level of collective lobbying to achieve that ... and until that is addressed, I think you will keep on having a failure of services to be able to support people in the most effective way.” – Interview participant

The problem, many research participants suggested, is the way in which funding is managed by central government and that Manchester can only ‘react’ to that as best it can.

“... the piddly wee bits of money that they give out ... when they know that it needs a long-term investment... GMCA local authorities can only do what they can with the money they have. That is the limitation. And that’s why it’s important to take a non-judgmental view on commissioners or higher bodies in Manchester. Because they know what’s needed and they know the limitations of what they can do.” – Interview participant

### **Glass-half-empty attitudes**

In the meantime, while hoping for change higher up and becoming increasingly distant from the purpose of the work, it is “easy to nod and clap and say thank you for your opinion” without ever bringing people with lived experience in to have “the conversation together”, and make use of their knowledge of where things are not working and how they could work better. Despite the theoretical developments regarding how we understand the experience and causes of multiple disadvantage, participants in this research had still met reductive and stigmatising attitudes to multiple disadvantage and those experiencing it, in frontline services and ‘higher up’ – the attitudes are the same.

“[I see] pessimistic attitudes towards the people that we were supporting. But also generally pessimistic attitudes about the work. And they would be quite patronising about ICM. They would be like, oh yeah, we know about ICM, you are ‘Care Bears’. This is not realistic work and ... you have got to get to know the people you are working with better.” – Frontline focus group participant

Pessimistic attitudes about people experiencing multiple disadvantage and the ICM approach are inevitably reflected in practice that can be described as “completely the opposite”, “not person centred” and “not strengths based”.

“... the workers make assumptions, aren’t there for the same reason, don’t have any shared experiences or don’t think about it if they do.” – Frontline focus group participant

Moreover, ‘old thinking’ is pervasive and difficult to counter. Frontline staff describe developing relationships with individuals within services over years and making some

ground, improving information-sharing and referral processes, for example, and when that individual leaves their job having to start again from scratch with their replacement. A previous GROW trainee explains how getting a job outside ICM meant that he had to “hide” his past and parts of himself:

“...the lived experience part wasn’t really valued. Like, I could be sitting at multidisciplinary meetings and I would listen to doctors saying the most ridiculous things. Like, well, he is not going to get all the way there, on the bus. That’s two buses, he is not going to go that far for drugs, he’s not well. And I was like ... are you messing? Really? Like, if he has got a heroin habit, he will crawl there if he gets the nag. Do you know what I mean? And at Shelter and ICM like, it’s changing perceptions. Having people who ... can recover, and people can go back into the workplace and people can function in society and pay tax and pay bills and all the rest of it.” – Interview participant

While ICM has contributed to significant change in the attitudes and responses to multiple disadvantage in Manchester and beyond, more is required to address the systemic ‘old thinking’. One participant suggests collective lobbying at the most senior level, in addition to the collaborative efforts led and supported by ICM. Most are fearful about how easily things could “slip back” after the end of ICM; others are fired up to take the work forward, as the Engagement Worker who was referred to above as a ‘Care Bear’ resolves:

“I think I might get a badge that says ‘Care Bear’ and I will just wear that all the time... I mean it’s not the worst insult really is it? ... I should have been like, ‘Oh, thanks! We do care.’” – Focus group participant

### **Commissioning against flexibility**

Several participants described how the competitive commissioning of services stifles collaboration and puts smaller organisations at a disadvantage. To survive, services are more likely to be reluctant to share knowledge and clients. Because of the short-term nature of most funding opportunities and the need to have an array of commissions, services can become distracted from the work in order to fulfil the requirements of funders.

“So, basically ... smaller organisations, they are getting that funding from bigger organisations like the NHS etc., yeah? And, like, they are basically – it’s all about the funding. We have got to protect the funding. And they are that concerned about delivering outcomes and ticking boxes that they lose what it’s really about. They lose what they are doing. Like they lose sight of what they are hoping to achieve because they are that concerned about getting the funding renewed. And I think that’s wrong.” – Interview participant

This phenomenon was observed across the board, with one senior manager describing a process where providers get increasingly disconnected from the service they hope to provide as they sign up to achieve impossible outcomes, for example, moves on from hostels within a certain period when there is nowhere to move people on to. They suggest that as the “purpose gets lost”, “it has an effect on the staff” who no longer “know what they are doing”. Another senior manager describes completing outcomes reports that barely resemble the service they provide; the rich qualitative evidence they have, in the main, is of no interest.

“You end up in a position where you are trying to work around the outcome requirements in order to deliver the service that people are asking for. And we all do it.” – Interview participant

### **What we mean by ‘lived experience’**

The way we talk about lived experience matters. Perhaps new ideas about better ways to provide support are easily assimilated because the ‘old thinking’ is in everything we do and the way we talk about it. The ruminations around the use of the terminology ‘client’ or ‘beneficiary’ or ‘user’, and ‘peer’ and ‘lived experience’ and ‘member’, help us have the conversation about who we are to each other in the work we are trying to do together. We have already discussed the ‘blurring’ of the distinctions between ‘worker’ and ‘user’ and other groups within the ICM project, but there is still further to go regarding what we mean by lived experience.

Research participants had a broad sense of the ‘sort’ of lived experience that can be mobilised to address social problems. Some talked about having a more general “connection” with the problem being addressed rather than singularly direct experience of that problem, a citizen or social relationship. Others felt that it is important to draw on “specific lived experience”; using the example of policies and procedures pertaining to people fleeing domestic violence, they noted that others who have come to homelessness via very different circumstances should not be put in a position where they are asked to contribute. Others remarked that lived experience is “beneficial in the right person”, suggesting that some people come to the work with very rigid ways of understanding recovery, for example, and are less able to mesh their direct experience with ‘professional’ knowledge to the benefit of their clients. Some participants suggested that it is equally valuable to have a personal connection with multiple disadvantage via the experience of a family member or friend: “Don’t we all have lived experience?”

“They might know people who have been through the experience and been on the outskirts of it. So, everybody will have a mental health breakdown, you know. We all have one now and again.” – Workshop participant

Some research participants were concerned that there is a ceiling for people with lived experience in the workforce, a presumption that frontline roles are all that are on offer, but this does not seem to be the case. There are people with lived experience in other roles within and outside ICM, but it is not made obvious through the GROW or 'peer' label. The rigour with which ICM has gone about debating and refining how lived experience is used has led to a broader discussion about the absurd separation of personal and professional experience.

“And I think that what we have explored is that actually they do overlap and it's important they do overlap. And lived experience is really important for all of us.” – Focus group participant

The second analysis workshop exploring 'what do we mean by lived experience and who should know about it?' was especially vibrant. There was some frustration that the drive to recruit diversity of experience into the sector is not always met with opportunities to use individuals' knowledge. There were concerns that the term 'lived experience' is 'othering' and reductive. Opportunities to reflect help people to feel safe enough to “acknowledge the trauma” and stand up to shame in solidarity with others. The following quote from this workshop illustrates that ICM has come a long way:

“A group of colleagues who talk ... openly and genuinely, it's phenomenal. We are so open, we are so able to talk about certain things. And ... I think that there is the challenge. I think that some things we are always going to feel slight shame over – challenges that we have had... Ultimately, the things that make it work for workers tend to be the same things that are making it work for clients and members Is the idea that creating the safe space, acknowledging trauma. Psychologically informed environments and building relationships so that it does become safer around that... I think it becomes harder the deeper into an institution [or] organisation you get, to feel that safety.” – Workshop participant

It is important to recognise that 'old thinking' does not reside solely in systems or institutions, but also within our own well-meaning selves. In the second workshop, when talking about how we label roles for people with lived experience and how those labels follow them, one participant said:

“... for that guy who ... ended his peer research role then became a very good professional researcher working on academic projects, being able to deliver really high-quality work that comes from professional experience. But he is always stuck with that peer label. Wherever he goes in meetings, he feels like people are almost talking down a bit to him. And when do you lose that? When do you say I want to be respected for the work I am doing, not for this peer-hood.” – Workshop participant

This quote highlights an important issue: what other job title says so much about your personal life? The ICM coproduction journey has taken us a distance, but there is still a long way to go.

“To single out the fact that somebody has been caught and prosecuted and sentenced as the defining feature is very frustrating. And that’s been part of what ICM has been really good at, is not making any of those categories the defining feature or the ... thing that determines the service that people get.” – Interview participant



## Chapter 9: What next? Recommendations

“It’s actually a project where you are modelling new ways of working and trying then to encourage other organisations and services, and commissioners to adopt that good practice. It’s important that it makes a difference to individuals’ lives. But it’s also important that it’s feeding into that wider understanding.” – Interview participant

The following section details recommendations for ICM and the wider support system so that the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can continue to create lasting change in Manchester. We hope that the recommendations will help to continue the work delivered by ICM, but also take forward the learning from ICM to inform the wider system.

### Advocating for lived experience and coproduction

Within organisations that want to embrace coproduction and create job and volunteering opportunities for people who have experience of multiple disadvantage we recommend the following steps:

**Coproduction as a foundational activity.** Participants in this study stressed the importance of ongoing learning and development driven by coproduction. While codesigning a service

may be a starting point, coproduction should be a foundation to all initiatives and built into the design of services.

“[Coproduction should be] kind of evolutionary – like, I guess, for me the way that a lot of people talk about coproduction in ICM [is...] the idea that you would just have this ongoing ... looking at what is happening. Talking about how is it working, how it can be improved and then making those changes and then going again. Look in whether it’s working, how can it be improved, what could be better? That kind of [on]going cycle of ... understanding and communicating what you understand about it.” – Workshop participant

**Agreeing what can be coproduced (can also lead to more coproduction).** Not all services and organisations will be able to coproduce their offer from the ground up. Some statutory services, for example, take their responsibilities from the higher powers of central government; however, employing coproduction in a specific way can create opportunities for coproduction to grow and flourish in the future. To avoid this being tokenistic, there is a need to agree what can initially be changed through coproduction with those who are engaged in the process.

“Because I remember we talked a lot earlier in the project about how you motivate people to get engaged. And it’s exciting people about creating change. But also, change might not actually happen. And it’s an honesty about what is actually up for grabs within an organisation – what is on the table.” – Workshop participant

By doing so, this opens up new opportunities to coproduce areas that were previously seen as ‘untouchable’. Changing human resources policies, financial regulations, data sharing agreements, risk management and health and safety procedures, areas that were typically the domain of management circles, opens up new innovations, bringing forward new skills and opportunities to grow.

**Keep talking about lived experience.** Participants shared a variety of tensions and concerns around how lived experience is defined, shared and understood. While we do not have a definitive solution to this at present, we know that creating a safe space (through PIE) to have these conversations is the first step to solving this issue.

“We value [lived experience] when we want to value it. I think it’s one of these things where ultimately, I don’t feel comfortable – I am saying this now in a group of people who I work with – but I don’t feel comfortable necessarily talking about my lived experience as part of my job. I refer to it every now and then ... and it’s been really useful for building relationships [...] ICM has done quite well with this because we have also placed an awful lot of emphasis on trying to create psychologically



informed environments. We have placed a lot of emphasis on awareness around trauma. [...] there is no doubt a group of colleagues who talk about their mental health openly and genuinely, it's phenomenal. We are so open, we are so able to talk about certain things." – Workshop participant

Finding ways to make lived experience more visible, without stigmatisation and judgement, opens up ways for people to talk about their own experiences, building relationships and trust. Lived experience is not something to be used as currency, but can instead be expressed as a strength that gives personal insight and value to the work that we do.

**Communicating change.** In all coproduction it is essential that changes made as a result of people's participation are communicated to all involved. Designing clear feedback loops is key: working out at the start what we hope to change in the broadest sense and continuing to check in on that. Feedback systems should be prepared with the knowledge that people accessing and working in services will move on – change may be slow – and we need to try and maintain feedback loops in this context.

**Communicating learning.** There have been significant good practices developed by ICM around how to 'do' coproduction. To ensure that this learning is not lost and is made available to the wider sector we recommend that ICM spends time developing resources based on this learning. This should include embedding the GROW model, the Flexible Fund and other ICM participatory approaches as standardised elements within all future projects.

### **Championing flexibility and relationships**

If flexibility is the oil that keeps ICM's work together responsive, to continue to create change on a greater scale in Manchester support services need to be flexible in their model and in the way they support people facing multiple disadvantage.

"But the flexibility that came with ICM did allow us to do things differently, try things, be experimental. It allowed you to kind of question the things that you had always done or the ways that you had always worked." – Interview participant

**Open-ended support offer.** ICM's shift to a membership model has been credited as key to providing the flexible support that meets people's needs. Having a long-term and open-ended support offer should be advocated for across other services in Manchester. This includes ending 'time-framed' projects, with short-term deliverables that create transactional, non-relational, ways of working. These do not work and create a system where people are 'rotated' around services with little progress being made.

**Flexible Fund.** The ICM Flexible Fund has allowed recipients of funds to make real differences in their lives, but in administering the fund it has also sparked conversations and

led to change in sometimes bureaucratic systems. Continuing the Flexible Fund through the ICM partnership, and advocating for a similar model for other services in Manchester and beyond, is key.

“And it’s had a really positive impact on how people engage with services. I know that when I found myself in services, I had heard all the horror services of the media and I was very on guard, very suspicious. And it took a kind act on Christmas where a service funded presents for my children. And it gets me less suspicious, it opened me up a little bit. And helped me to engage that you ... these guys aren’t out to get me. They actually do want to help. So yes, it works when administered the right way.” – Workshop participant

**Keeping the ‘fun stuff’.** Participants in this research stressed the importance of the ‘fun stuff’ in terms of opportunities to come together with others to engage over activities and entertainment. It has benefits for building relationships – on people’s own terms.

“I had a conversation with a member yesterday. And he said to me he has got a friend who is a poet. And he attends the Art and Wellbeing Group. They attend it regularly. And he said to me I have been chatting to my friend and he is a poet. And I have asked him if he would be interested in coming to ICM when the Hub reopens and deliver a workshop. And I just said to him I think that is a fantastic idea. I will speak to the team and see what they say. But that is a brilliant example of member ... off his own back, doing that. So, it [is] examples like that where I don’t think you get in other services to be fair. There just wouldn’t be the opportunity for members to have that and the freedom to express themselves.” – Interview participant

**Psychologically informed approaches.** Key to supporting people facing multiple disadvantage and ensuring staff wellbeing through the process is embracing psychologically informed approaches. This should be a staple of Manchester’s ongoing response to multiple disadvantage.

“But I think it’s why I asked the question about what do we mean by fun? Is because like for some people we are working with – and sometimes even for people like myself. Fun might be just sitting in the corner of a room reading a book, which might not be an organisation’s idea of fun. But it is extremely psychologically informed for that person, because they are getting their own little space, they are quite happy, comfortable with what they are doing. So, it’s tricky, because fun is something that people understand and can connect into. But I think always of the psychologically informed environments and approaches and understanding about people and how they connect to things.” – Workshop participant

**The importance of hubs.** The ICM Hub bringing together multidisciplinary support shaped by psychologically informed approaches has been central to the ICM model, building a resilient community of support. Moving forward there is a need to sustain the ICM Hub and create more ‘hubs’ that can work as community spaces of support. The ICM Hub should continue to operate and offer support, but could also become a centre for participatory experimentation, bringing together people from across sectors to share and learn, and to plan for how to make change around some indisputably stubborn ‘old thinking’ in dual diagnosis, service accessibility for women, stigmatising laws etc.

“The Hub is a really kind of therapeutic place. It’s really relaxed, it’s got sofas. When I was a peer mentor, there was no lanyards. It was just ... [a] safe space for members. And even if you weren’t meeting a member, you could actually just go and have a cup of tea. Being isolated, you could just pop in and being part of that community. Whether you were a paid professional, a volunteer or a member – it was a space for all of us. It was lovely ... and they have access to the likes of job applications, whether you are a peer or a member, there would always be somebody there that could help you break through the jargon or help you put a CV together. Point you, signpost you somewhere else, whether you were professional, a member, peer mentor, somebody struggling. There was always somebody there to help you or signpost you somewhere else. And I developed a CV, stuff like that, while peer mentoring. I was encouraged to look at my assets, know what I mean? Rather than where I had come from. [...] Because while you are learning you don’t know the skills you are picking up. [...] It’s a great place for [unclear] friendship and relationship. That’s why I came back.” – Interview participant

### **Shifting employment practice**

The research has revealed the importance of diversifying the workforce as a driver for change, and to directly address poverty, but it has also revealed the blockages that are present in ICM and beyond around how people are employed. We suggest the following:

**Continuation of GROW.** When participants were asked what feature of ICM we should not lose many said GROW. The GROW model should continue to be rolled out across the ICM partnership and other third-sector employers, statutory partners and the private sector. ICM can play a key role in sharing good practice and embedding this approach.

**Bespoke volunteering roles.** Expanding the personalised approach from support to volunteering roles has been a success within the ICM partnership. This approach to asset-based volunteering should be shared with other organisations and rolled out further.

“Similar with volunteering opportunities as well. We had always had quite traditional structured volunteering roles that people could access within our organisations. But

again, why should people have to follow that sort of rigid ... like a role description? These are the duties and these are what you need to have to do that. So, we were able to create quite bespoke volunteering roles for people to go into.” – Workshop participant

**Lived experience is not a job title.** Job titles stick with participants through their career. Having ‘peer’ or even ‘GROW’ in a job title can mean people carry the stigma of multiple disadvantage into future careers. We recommend that job titles reflect what people ‘do’ rather than what they ‘are’.

“I was at an event [run] by another Fulfilling Lives project recently. And they have a similar opportunity and people are hired as project consultants. And I thought, ‘Oh, that is so interesting because it is such a neutral title but also does really well summarise what it is.’ Which is like – I don’t know I thought that was quite interesting and it made me think [about] the label of GROW trainee. And do we need to call them GROW trainees, can they just be on a traineeship? Because I had actually never thought about – it’s stupid, because traineeships are all about employment opportunities. I have actually never thought about that label on a CV, which I am sure everyone else probably has. But I am sure we could, even if we understand it all. We promote traineeships when we are trying to get funding or when we are talking about them. There is a difference between, like, what someone’s job title is and how that is communicated back to the programme when you are trying to raise awareness of it. So, maybe that is something we could take away.” – Workshop participant

**Coproduction where coproduction has never been before.** Embedding coproduction and roles for people with lived experience can be a driver for change across organisations even causing human resources and finance practices to shift and bend. There is further work to do to use coproduction to ensure that processes can be made more flexible to support people.

“This is the sort of thing that is hard sometimes to like – when we talk about culture change. Very simply a couple of our GROW trainees didn’t have any form of identification when they were employed. So, really logistically getting them on payroll took us about four weeks. Because we had to get a birth certificate, then a photo ID, and then your national insurance number, none of which they had, any of that identification. My initial contact with HR was ‘I don’t have what you are asking me for, how do I go about that?’ And the response was almost ... ‘why are we employing somebody that doesn’t have any of these things?’ And then it was like they don’t have any references. I can understand. HR are going, ‘Who the bloody hell have you employed? Why would we...? Why have they never had a job? Why are we

doing this?’ Because they wouldn’t necessarily understand that was kind of the point of the opportunity.” – Workshop participant

**Support in employment that meets individual and organisational needs.** The individual may need additional support to be able to fulfil a role – but also across the organisation there needs to be an acknowledgement that practice needs to change (and they may need support to do this).

“We have had situations where there has been new roles that ... they are looking to have someone with live experience, but it might be the first time that there has been a role that has existed like that, whether that is a GROW traineeship or something else. And actually, there is not a culture around involvement and it is always like, well, we will bring this role in and it will help support that culture change.” – Workshop participant

Organisations that branch out beyond traditional recruitment and employment practices, opens up new possibilities for people to build their skills and abilities, which comes to bear on the organisations themselves. Personalised support for staff and volunteers (**all** staff and volunteers) shifts people’s capacity towards their strengths (as opposed to their weaknesses) building confidence in their roles and drawing out their best skills. Reviewing HR policies to make them more person-centred builds a culture where this way of working becomes standardised and built into an organisation’s fabric.

### **Commissioning for coproduction**

As Fulfilling Lives funding draws to a close, there is a need for other commissioners, whether statutory or grant making, to fund services that allow coproduction to be central to their model.

“People are very good at vocalising that coproduction is the way to go but when it comes down to it practically, they can’t do it. And what they can’t see – it is about austerity. However, longer term it will cost more if they don’t coproduce. But I don’t think they see the wider picture.” – Workshop participant

**Allowing space for coproduction in service design.** When commissioning takes place there is often little space to pre-define projects. They need to be coproduced through the course of the project. Long-term funding is key to this. Taking developmental approaches to projects, as opposed to top-down, short-term, competitive funding commissioning, is more likely to allow coproduction to flourish. Tokenistic gestures towards coproduction, simply asking for lived experience input, is not enough.

**Coproduction as practice.** Delivering participatory work itself is an activity that creates change in systems and for people engaged in these activities. We recommend that commissioners offer funding for coproduction to be enacted. This comes with secure funding for participatory practices, not just a dimension of a service, but a core purpose of it. To reduce tokenism, this should be backed up with monitoring and evaluation activities that support this way of working (and do not punish it), taking on board reflection and learning that allows these changes to happen.

**Commissioning and monitoring for learning.** Rigid outcomes and monitoring frameworks can drive services away from offering a person-centred service. ICM has shown that, by focusing on learning through service design and monitoring, it can allow services to offer a better service to the people they support.

“Whereas with ICM, obviously everyone has got the right principles and you want to do the right thing, but there is that – because it is more like targets rather than set outcomes, but I actually think that means you do more and do better, because when you work on other contracts which are very ... outcome driven, you start doing what is right to meet the outcome rather than what is right for the person.” – Focus group participant

Outcomes and monitoring frameworks can reward good practices (rather than punish bad performance) if they are built to support person-centred working and not final outcomes that can feel a long way off. Focusing on soft outcomes builds capacity in people accessing services and those that are supporting them. It positively reinforces good practices that allow relationships to form and trust to be built.

**These recommendations are not ‘pick and choose’ options. They work together and are dependent on each other. If coproduction falls down in one area, it will start to fall down in all areas. Building coproduction should be a foundation to how we work with all communities, not a luxury add-on that only plays a role in certain spheres.**



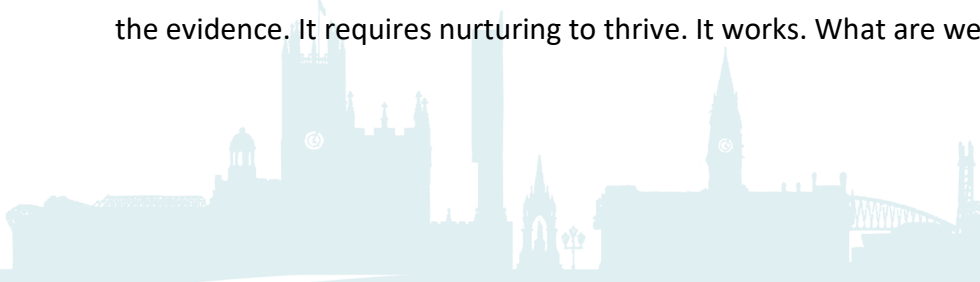


## Chapter 10: Conclusion

This research finds that the involvement and participation of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage can and has created change in Manchester. Through a range of mechanisms that enable coproduction, change has taken place within the work of the ICM partnership, across the organisations, to the wider system in Manchester and beyond. The oil in this responsive machine seems to be flexibility and the web that holds together the collaborative and values-led approach is relationships.

In the presentation of interim findings for the five workshops, we noted that there were 32 passionate, reflective and articulate contributions to the third stage of the research project. We wondered – did we just get lucky? Groundswell would like to acknowledge how the participants in this research project have helped to synthesise learning about non-hierarchical – cooperative/coproductive/participatory – ways of working and (importantly) the practice of it. Key to this is people scattered throughout the partnership who could articulate a theoretical basis on which this personalised and coproduced approach sits, as well as a rich telling of their experience of it. These theoretical frameworks knitted with experience seem to help people *think through* the complexities of participatory ways of working.

The ICM coproduction story does not exist in a vacuum. Manchester has so much going for it and this is significant. ICM is part of a much larger effort. We can see a couple of lessons from this. One, forging change is a collective process. Two, all efforts towards a more humane way to help people help. There is great practice all over; we need to shout about the evidence. It requires nurturing to thrive. It works. What are we waiting for?



## Appendix I: Flexible fund practice guidance

### Why use flexible funds

Flexible funds are designed to enable individuals to overcome barriers to engaging with services and move towards sustainable personal outcomes. It allows individuals to access a service they may otherwise not be offered or find affordable in mainstream services. It forms a fundamental part of offering person-centred approaches. Key elements include:

- ▶ Empowering individuals to define what they need rather than offering a fixed range of services
- ▶ Gives options to staff to bring in services that may not be on offer in existing accessible services

### Do they work?

Early evidence of the effective use of personal budgets and flexible funds suggests that:

- ▶ They improve quality of life and psychological wellbeing
- ▶ They help people move off the streets and into sustainable accommodation
- ▶ They improve take up of drug and alcohol services and mental health services
- ▶ They develop independent living skills such as paying bills, cleaning and cooking
- ▶ They improve people's physical health by paying for medical/support equipment, i.e. hearing aids

### Seven key elements of a good flexible fund

- ▶ Enables personal choice for client
- ▶ Used to broker access to additional services
- ▶ Focuses on what service user wants and needs, not what money is available
- ▶ Identity affirming – fits with both short-term and long-term goals of client
- ▶ Used to support sustainable outcomes – not just 'quick fixes'
- ▶ Is cross-checked with peers and other staff to ensure purpose and gain clarification
- ▶ Develops top-level categories to support clients with choices not 'suggested uses' lists or exclusion lists

### Examples of how they could be used

- ▶ To purchase annual bus passes
- ▶ To purchase furniture for individual tenancies
- ▶ To provide a bond to secure accommodation
- ▶ To enable access to private counselling support
- ▶ To pay for a deposit on rented accommodation
- ▶ To pay for leisure activities to enable engagement
- ▶ To pay for a college or other training course
- ▶ To purchase goods to enable an individual to pursue hobbies or personal interests

### Further information

If you would like to find out more you may find the following of interest:

JRF (2010) '*Providing personalised support to rough sleepers*'

Homeless Link (2013) '*Personally speaking – A review of personalised services for rough sleepers*'

MEAM (2014) '*Suggestions for the use of personal budgets*'

Want to find out more? Contact us at [ICM@Shelter.org.uk](mailto:ICM@Shelter.org.uk)



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Durose, C, Needham, C, Mangan, C & Rees, J (2017) Generating 'good enough' evidence for co-production, *Evidence and Policy*. 13 (1) pp. 135-151

Freire, P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

Seal, M (2018) *Participatory Pedagogic Impact Research: Co-production with Community Partners in Action*. London: Routledge

