

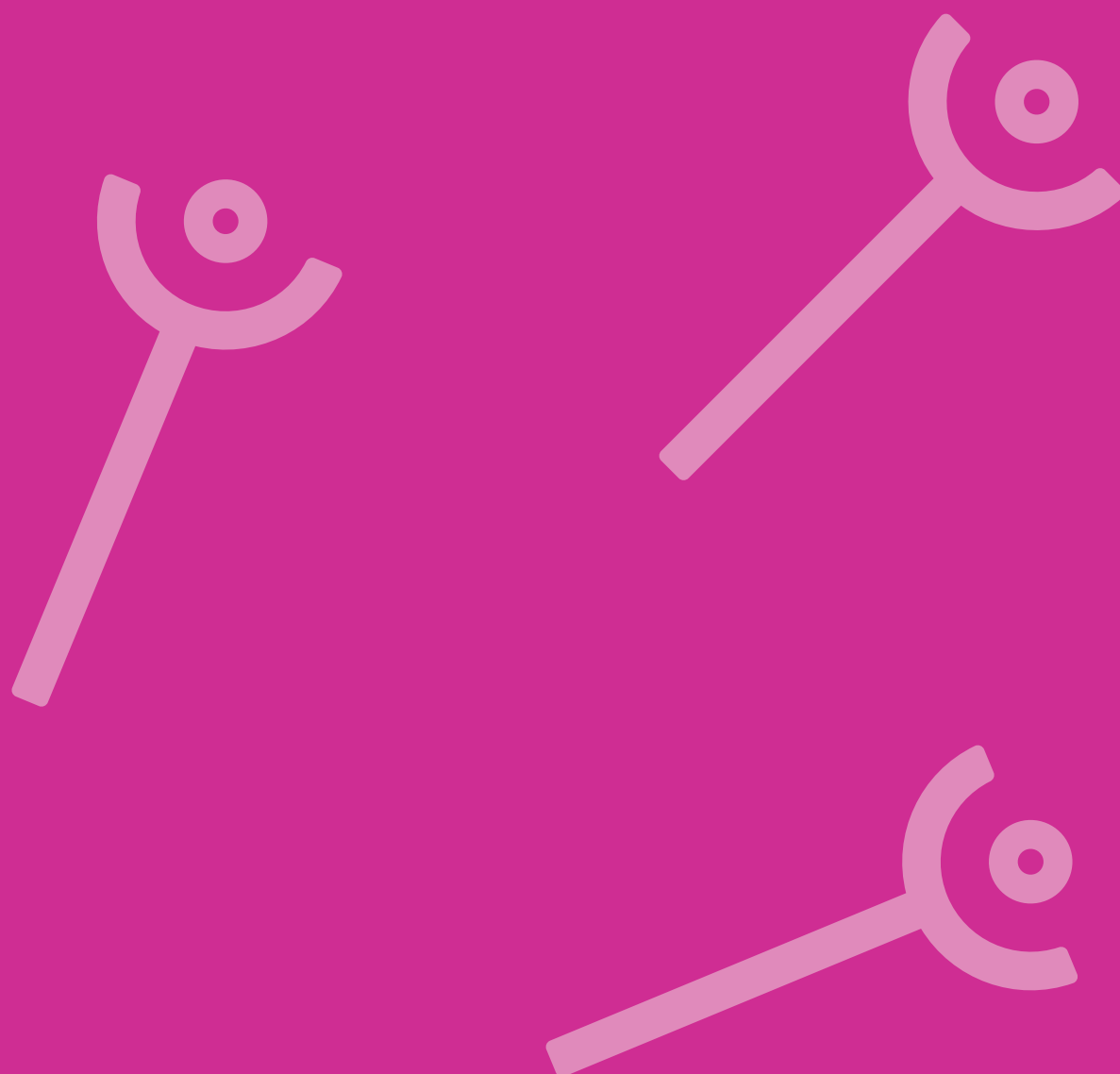
# People's experiences of multiple disadvantage in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham: Executive summary and recommendations

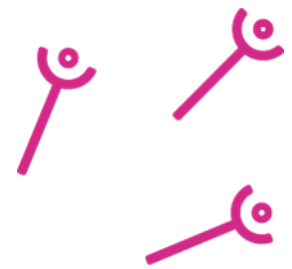
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**FULLFILLING  
LIVES**  
LAMBETH  
SOUTHWARK  
LEWISHAM





## Executive summary

This research explores people's experiences of multiple disadvantage and was conducted using a peer research methodology for Fulfilling Lives, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. Fulfilling Lives is a nationwide project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund that aims to support people experiencing multiple disadvantage; this includes experiences of homelessness/insecure housing, mental ill-health, substance use and/or contact with the criminal justice system.

Using a peer research methodology, this research focuses on understanding people's experiences of accessing services and support, the transitions they make, and how the system of support operates for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. The research was conducted in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham but the insights from the research have resonance nationally and mirror those in studies carried out across the country.

The research details the diverse and interconnected experiences of multiple disadvantage. The findings highlight the non-linear 'journeys' that people make towards recovery, which may contain successes, setbacks, and plateaus along the way. It illustrates the complexity in people's lives and how multiple disadvantages are bound together. However, the research finds that the complexity of people's lives, and the journey taken are often misunderstood by the system. Participants described needing to 'hit rock bottom', 'tick a box', 'passed from pillar to post', 'jump through hoops', 'give up hope' and 'look like someone who needed help' to receive the support they needed. More broadly, we found how certain attitudes within the system can be detrimental to people's wellbeing and recovery. Participants described how feeling listened to, having access to drop in spaces and having the opportunity to build meaningful relationships were key. Participants in this research spoke of the value of 'lived experience' and peer support and how increasingly services, and the people working in them, are developing an understanding of trauma and its impact.

The following sections highlight the key findings of this research:

### **Experiences of multiple disadvantage**

- Research participants were experiencing a combination of interconnected challenges - nearly all (90%) were either experiencing or had experienced mental ill-health, homelessness (85%), substance use (73%) and contact with the criminal justice system (48%)
- Participants were at different points in their journeys towards recovery at the point of participation- some felt they were 'on the way up', others 'in limbo' and some described being on an 'uphill struggle'. It was clear that no journey had followed a straight line and there were ups, downs, setbacks and plateaus along the way
- COVID-19 has brought additional challenges for some participants, however, for others, it brought new opportunities and improved sense of wellbeing

### **Understanding multiple disadvantage and support**

- Many participants felt that the connection between the experiences of substance use, mental ill-health, contact with the criminal justice system and homelessness was overlooked by services in the system
- 'Dual diagnosis' where people experience coexisting drug and mental health issues were described as a catch-22 situation where participants found it difficult to get support
- Participants felt that mental ill-health was often misunderstood services and needs were not always recognised as being 'serious'. In many cases, participants found it difficult to ask for help
- The realities of living with multiple disadvantage meant that participant's journeys had bumps and setbacks, however, the way services are designed in many cases does not accommodate this reality and seem to 'punish' setbacks
- Where participants were seen holistically as a person rather than a 'collection of issues' the support they received, and relationships built often led to better outcomes

### **Creating better services and learning from experience**

- Participants shared that being listened to and being given 'choice' was important for their wellbeing and recovery. When support services put value and judgments on the choices participants made this had a negative impact on their 'progress'
- As part of their journey participants described how relationships were crucial during times of transition
- Building trusting and meaningful relationships were described as being key to the well-being of participants and in their journey away from multiple disadvantage

- Participants detailed the power of shared experience whether it is peer support groups, employing people with lived experience, involving people with experience of multiple disadvantage in designing services or contributing towards systems change
- Participants highlighted how trauma, gender and culturally informed approaches can have a significant impact on relationships built, attitudes of those who work in services, and the environment that services operate in



## Recommendations and learning points

Based on the findings of this research we conclude this project with a series of learning points for commissioners and services. The findings highlight how the system is not working for people who face multiple disadvantage. But with steps taken to change how the system works with people experiencing these issues, and the will and resource to make these changes from commissioners, there is the opportunity to redesign a system that works for all. As part of this process of change, Fulfilling Lives will continue to respond to the needs of the people they support and to deliver key systems change activities.

### For commissioners

Commissioners and the commissioning process shape how support services are delivered and how they can respond to the needs of people who access support. To truly meet the needs of people who face multiple disadvantage commissioners should drive forward responses that are coproduced and built on the principles of flexibility, collaboration and being person-led.

- 1. Develop a joint strategic needs assessment on multiple disadvantage.** Local boroughs should develop a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) on multiple disadvantage, and apply the JSNA to ensure it informs all strategic commitments across the borough.
- 2. Participation in commissioning.** Commissioners should seek to embed coproduction across commissioning activities so that people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage can shape how support systems meet the needs of people experiencing these issues. This should include the design of services and commissioning tenders, assessing proposals and on interview panels, and the ongoing delivery and monitoring of services.
- 3. Building structures so services work across disciplinary boundaries.** When support services are commissioned to address issues like mental ill-health or substance use there is a need to build structures to ensure that these services collaborate and work towards coexisting issues that the people they support might face.

Multidisciplinary meetings and collaboration should be outputs built into tender agreements.

- 4. Ensure support in place for those with a dual diagnosis.** Commissioners should commission services specifically focused to address 'dual diagnosis' and ensure that services addressing mental ill-health and substance use are accessible and equipped to support people who have coexisting issues.
- 5. Flexible support responding to individual journeys.** While services that support people in a 'crisis' play a critical role, there is a need for support that adapts to the needs of individuals and their relationships before they reach crisis point. Commissioning services that have no 'threshold' for access, have the freedom to connect and build relationships in a preventative way, and can respond to the 'ups and downs' of recovery is needed to meet this. Commissioners should ensure that adequate services are available to support people to prevent further crises.
- 6. Support for people in transition.** Commissioners should also consider transition points, when support is often most needed, but often absent. Such support is more effective when trusting relationships are developed between services, practitioners and the people they support. In addition, services that have low or no criteria for entry play an important role in preventing crisis situations.

### For support services and organisations providing support

This report indicates what people with experience of multiple disadvantage regard as positive and negative aspects of the services they receive support from. The evidence points to good practice in the way that support services work with people experiencing multiple disadvantage. These are:

- 1. Person-led and psychologically-informed approaches.** It is well evidenced that models of support that are flexible, compassionate, consistent and centred around individual need can have a significant impact on people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Support services should move toward delivering support in a way that is person-led and informed by gender, culture and trauma.
- 2. Gender-informed leads.** Support services like day centres working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage have to cater to the needs of many individuals from different backgrounds and circumstances. In this context having a designated staff member to promote and embed gender informed approaches within services can help to make sure services meet the needs of women.
- 3. Strengths-based support.** Services and the people who work in them should look beyond the labels of multiple disadvantage and understand that it is not a 'choice'. Services should support people to see the qualities they have, set their own goals and respect the decisions people make.
- 4. Training and support for staff.** Staff and volunteers working in support services need to be trained to work in a psychologically-

informed way and be given psychological support so that they can safely provide support to the people they work with. They should be equipped to understand how trauma impacts on the individuals they work with and respond appropriately.

- 5. Space to build trust and relationships.** Trusting relationships between people experiencing multiple disadvantage and the people who provide support are key to recovery. To achieve this, people in support roles need to have the time and capacity to build these relationships away from key work sessions.
- 6. Diversifying the workforce and support offer.** Connecting with people who have experience of multiple disadvantage to work in services and provide support can help to make the organisations and support offered more effective. Creating 'peer roles' as well as ring-fenced roles across the functions of the organisation, e.g. administration, finance and communications roles, should be adopted by support providers.
- 7. Information sharing and recording.** Organisations providing support should focus on recording only the most needed information and manage it transparently with the people they support. Effective information recording can help to avoid repeated and unnecessary questions which can retraumatise people.

### **Response on learning points from Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (FLLSL)**

The FLLSL programme seeks to address the challenges and barriers faced by people experiencing multiple disadvantage. This is done through key systems change activities as well through the provision of a person-led, wrap-around outreach service for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Key activities taking place as part of the programme to address the barriers and challenges outlined in this report include:

- **Co-production.** Co-production is at the heart of FLLSL. The programme is delivered by a blended workforce of lived and learnt experience, and works closely with experts by experience, Champions and Ambassadors, people we support, and people in the community
- **Enabling access to services and supporting people through transitions.** FLLSL works to enable people to navigate and access the system - notably in times of transition. The support provided is person-led and founded on trust and relationship building
- **Peer support.** FLLSL service is delivered by practitioners many of whom have lived experience of multiple disadvantage
- **Developing and supporting gender, trauma and culturally informed approaches.** FLLSL are developing tools and resources to support services across boroughs to embed informed approaches, including the development of an Informed Approaches Champion role
- **Co-designing gender and trauma informed pilots.** FLLSL are codesigning two trauma and gender-informed systems change pilots with the aim of improving women's access to services. The first is

working with local drug services to improve women's access to treatment, the second is looking specifically at support for women involved in street-based sex work

- **Providing spaces for joint working and shared learning.** FLLSL are committed to creating spaces and facilitating shared learning across the system. FLLSL have established a shared learning forum to support shared learning and communication between local services
- **Building an evidence base.** FLLSL continue to deliver ongoing research and learning in relation to people's experiences of multiple disadvantage, access to services, and how the system operates