

Our case for change

The Life Experience Council

Culturally, we don't talk much about mental health or drug and alcohol struggles. This means we don't talk enough about the services that can help people. Not talking about them makes services sound and look scarier than they actually are. So, we took time to trust the services and staff, but when we did things started to change for the better.

A lot works well, but there are things that could improve. Sometimes the support we're offered isn't right for us or sometimes isn't at a time or place we can access due to work, family or life commitments. Sometimes it is the support someone thinks we need rather than what we do. Earlier support could save lives, reduce jail sentences, reduce A&E attendances, and make it easier to get better.



People with a mental health or drug/alcohol need aren't who people often picture; they can be anyone and it can be hidden. **We are all on a journey.** The services that help us are incredible and the staff save lives, but to truly transform things for us, some priorities need addressing:

Systems:

- More people in services are "complex" than are not, more people have both addiction and mental health needs than just addiction. Services and commissioners need to adapt services and systems to that fact.
- We shouldn't need to navigate remits; I don't need help to fall between a chasm between services, I need a bridge that takes me where I need to go and your support and belief to get there.
- When one service becomes involved, all too often another reduces their support but sometimes it is not just 'different' I need, but 'more'.

Services:

- We know who the emergency services are before we need them, but most people don't know what services are available for drug and alcohol or mental health needs until they are desperate. That needs to change. People need to know which services are available in their community and how they can help.
- Services are vital to us – involve us in local decisions and communicating changes.
- Whether we're workers or clients, we are all people. We respect that our roles are different, but we need to keep the power imbalance in check if we're going to be able to trust each other enough to work through change together.
- Services need to be calm, non-judgemental, warm and personable. It should feel like entering a place of care, not a court or probation appointment.

Society:

- We often face challenges beyond just alcohol or drugs and mental health. Services can really help to keep us safe while addressing other needs too. But when we feel rushed or stigmatised, it can keep us away from the services or people that can help us and compound the very issues we're trying to resolve.
- We can be different people when we're in crisis. We need you to understand that when we act with urgency it can be misinterpreted as difficult, disruptive or even angry. These misunderstandings can often lead to us being excluded and marginalised by friends, family, services and society when what we're trying to tell you is that we need help.
- However lost we might feel, or however lost you might think we are, **everyone** deserves to be treated with kindness, empathy and respect, and everyone can feel better.

The Way Ahead

