

CASE STUDY #2

Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead's Respond training

**Improving access to
mental health support
for people experiencing
multiple disadvantage**

Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives:
Supporting people with multiple needs

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CFE Research and
The University of Sheffield,
with the Systems Change
Action Network





What was the problem?

 For me, it's actually being on the receiving end of bad treatment by quite a few of the blue light responders.

The emergency response to someone having a mental health crisis – be that police, paramedic, or other service called to the scene – is crucial in ensuring the safety of all involved. Ongoing learning from Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead (FLNG) has highlighted that the response to people with mental health needs in a crisis situation could be better, especially service understanding of the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Discussions were already underway in the North East about what could be improved to ensure that people having a mental health crisis got the help they needed.¹ While multi-agency working was perceived to be relatively strong in the region, it was felt that blue light responders sometimes needed further awareness raising of the role partner agencies played and how the system should work together to respond to a person experiencing a mental health crisis.

How did the partnership address it?

Organisations from across the North East and people with lived experience of mental ill-health co-produced a simulation training package. The aim was to “improve the efficiency of the care pathway to reduce wasted time and provide a better experience for the service user.”² Three mental health crisis scenarios (on a bridge, in a private dwelling and on a secure ward) were filmed for the training. These were co-produced with Experts by Experience to ensure that they were as true to real life situations as possible. Training sessions are held focusing on one of these situations, with the scenario revealed bit by bit throughout the day. Participants are encouraged to think about what they, and other responders, should and could do to help.

Key features of the Respond training include:

- People attend the training in plain clothes, so do not wear organisational badges or introduce themselves. As a result, all attendees are unaware of who they are working with. This allows all to contribute on an equal basis thus reducing power imbalances.
- People with lived experience join the training sessions, again without introducing themselves, and share their story and experiences. This ensures that the lived experience perspective is included in the same way as other voices in the room.
- There is no PowerPoint presentation or directed learning – attendees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

What sets Respond apart from other multi-agency training is the central role that people with lived experience play and the impact this has on attendees.

“ The unique selling point of Respond is that Experts are involved... there’s somebody in the room with that lived experience, sharing that with their peers, and that’s the difference with Respond. That’s what makes it special.

The training programme is managed by a steering group, made up of partner organisations involved in actively responding to mental health crisis situations in the region.

What difference did it make?

Improved understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies

Those who attend sessions gain a deeper understanding of the role of professionals in other agencies and how the system works (or hopes to work) when responding to a mental health crisis. Expectations are adjusted as professionals realise what other roles can – and perhaps more importantly, cannot – do in a crisis situation.

“ I left [the training] with the much better understanding of a person in a mental health crisis, and a much better understanding of the services and their roles to support that person.

Professionals report being better able to work with other agencies following the training.³ In encouraging professionals to modify not just their own response to a situation but also the way they work with others, Respond has the potential to change the systemic response to a mental health crisis.

Professionals take their learning back to their organisations and pass this on to colleagues, formally and informally, further sharing their insights.

Improved preparedness for crisis response situation

Feedback from professionals attending the training suggests that they are able to respond better to the needs of people in a crisis situation. It was certainly hoped that the knowledge gained through the training would better prepare professionals for these situations and improve the interaction for all parties.

“ I would hope that the next time somebody responded to a mental health crisis, no matter where it was, they would see the person. Have more of an understanding of their multiple complex needs and sort of the complexities of that person.

The training increases awareness and empathy for a person experiencing the mental health crisis. The role of the Experts by Experience in Respond training is believed to be key to this. The training helps to improve the way participants work with people experiencing a mental health crisis, and thus work towards an improved patient experience and safety.⁴

“ [I got] an up-to-date understanding of the procedure to get somebody assessed and potentially sectioned and a better understanding of how to approach, to deal with the individual.

Impact on Experts

The training provides Experts by Experience with the opportunity to influence the system and ultimately improve the way that people are treated in a crisis. Key benefits for Experts include:

- Increased understanding and empathy for professionals and how difficult their roles can be
- A sense of belonging from being involved in the team that contributes to the Respond sessions
- Acquiring new skills and confidence in making presentations and facilitating discussions, and
- The transformation of traumatic experiences into something of value.

“ The experience that I had, which was terrible and traumatic, becomes transformed into a useful thing where I'm being validated and listened to and people are listening to me and it gets transformed into something useful.

Feedback has shown that sessions have met or exceeded Experts' expectations.⁵

Learning from experience

Embed co-production from the start

Experts by Experience have been involved throughout the development and implementation of the Respond training. The training scenarios were co-produced with people with lived experience. This is key to scenario authenticity and therefore the impact on professionals. Experts were not just consulted but were fully involved in the design stage, and continue to work with the steering group on the design of future potential scenarios.

“ It was definitely a really early decision, [the steering group] decided that they really wanted to make sure that the training involved the Experts from the word go.

Make clear expectations about Expert involvement and what it entails

Lived experience involvement can be a learning curve for some organisations, particularly the amount of work needed to manage and maintain genuine involvement.

“ To do [lived experience involvement] well requires a lot of support and effort [...] and the temptation for organisations is to take the benefit of involving people with lived experience and not want to share some of the difficulty, challenge and cost of it.

There can be differing expectations about what genuine lived experience involvement looks like, how it is managed and the extent to which this can be at the core of a programme. Lived experience is crucial to the success of the Respond sessions, and partners need to be committed to this. Expectations should be established and formalised at the outset of a project to ensure that all partners are aware of what is involved and the commitment required.

Consider the best way to get Expert input on project governance

Expert involvement should include lived experience at the project governance level. The FLNG Experts by Experience Network is currently represented on the Respond steering group by the FLNG System Change Lead, but there are plans for an Expert to sit on the group as a step towards the gold standard of co-production. Sitting with professionals in a formal setting and being expected to contribute can be intimidating so care is needed to make sure that both the Expert and the rest of the group are fully aware of each other's roles and responsibilities and what is expected of them.

“ It's not just Fulfilling Lives responsibility to facilitate that Expert voice on the steering group. It's the steering group's responsibility to make it accessible to that person.

Manage and support Experts throughout their involvement

Experts by Experience are in recovery and need to be protected to ensure, as far as possible, that they do not suffer setbacks from having to revisit difficult times in their lives. It is important that Experts are in the right place in their journey (as co-determined by them and the Co-production team) and are appropriately trained to make a positive contribution and not feel disempowered. The nature of the Respond training can require Experts to discuss negative experiences. They may find themselves in a room with professionals linked to these experiences. This needs to be carefully managed through ongoing support and reflective practice.

“ We still have a very, very significant duty of care for our Experts, and it's managing and balancing that for everyone [...] Experts might present confidently and be mistaken for paramedics etc. in Respond sessions however the Experts are people in recovery and it is vital we have regular check-ins to ensure their recovery journey is not being impacted by being part of Respond.

During Respond sessions, Experts are aware that they can take time out if needed. Experts may find it hard to admit when they are finding things difficult – hiding relapses or problems they are having, and wanting to put on a brave face. Again, this needs to be considered when managing their involvement.

The Respond training provides the potential for a progression pathway for Experts: from volunteering to attending sessions, to facilitating, to contributing to programme governance. If managed well, this provides a valuable opportunity for people to gain vital skills and experiences that contribute to a person's ongoing recovery.

Get multi-agency buy-in from the start

The Respond training was instigated through a collaborative process. This ensures that it is not perceived as one agency imposing their ways of working on another. The steering group is made up of the local police force, the regional NHS Trust, local councils, blue light services and Fulfilling Lives Newcastle & Gateshead.⁶ Key agencies were involved from the start which ensured buy-in from across the sector.

“ It's the fact that all the organisations have come together and said, 'We need to do something like this,' and I think it's that that makes the difference, that makes it so special.

This should extend to the training sessions themselves, as it was seen as a strength of the programme and a way to ensure that the whole system benefits from thinking differently about the response to a mental health crisis.

“ It works, because it's too easy sometimes, some agencies or all of us to go, 'well, that's not a police issue,' 'that's not a mental health issue,' 'that's not a medical issue.' It's actually, it's all of us, we're all part of the solution, and it's a case of not all of us just going, 'somebody else needs to deal with this.'

Taking it further

Respond is now an award-winning training package and has attracted the attention of other local authorities, NHS trusts and emergency services. There is the potential to offer the training to many more professionals, within the North East and beyond. The challenge is to ensure that the core features of Respond, which make it a success, are retained. There is a particular need to ensure that Expert involvement follows a similar trauma-informed process; ensuring the safety of Experts remains integral to the Respond offer. There are also plans to increase the number of scenarios offered. The fourth scenario will focus on a mental health crisis in an A&E department, as suggested by an A&E doctor who attended the training.

Find out more

Read more about Respond and download evaluation reports at:
<https://www.nrw.nhs.uk/resource-library/respond-multi-agency-mental-health-simulation-training/>

Find out more about Fulfilling Lives Newcastle and Gateshead:
<http://www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk/>

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Endnotes

1. These discussions were prompted by the Crisis Care Concordat, a national agreement between services and agencies involved in the care and support of people in crisis. It sets out how organisations will work together better to make sure that people get the help they need when they are having a mental health crisis. For further information see www.crisiscareconcordat.org.uk
2. Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) North East and Northumbria (2017a). *Respond Training: Mental Health Simulation Training. Feedback from Experts by Experience*. <https://www.ntw.nhs.uk/content/uploads/2019/06/Respond-Training-Expert-by-Experience-Feedback-Report-Final-1.1-.pdf>
3. Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) North East and Northumbria (2017b). *Post impact and summary of findings following the evaluation of the RESPOND multi-agency mental health simulation training, November 2016 – March 2017: Executive Summary*. <https://www.ntw.nhs.uk/content/uploads/2019/06/Evaluation-of-RESPOND-mental-health-simulation-training-Executive-Summary-Final-Nov-2017.pdf>
4. Ibid.
5. AHSN (2017a)
6. Ibid, p.10

Evaluated by



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