

Involving People in Change

On Monday 4th May Homeless Network Scotland hosted the second webinar of the series, Involving People in Change. We were delighted to have members of the All in For Change team presenting their views and experiences of involving people who are experiencing homelessness in decision-making and changes that affect their lives.

All in For Change is a unique team of people with frontline and lived experience of homelessness from all over Scotland working together to embed the changes outlined in the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together plan and reporting on progress towards change on the ground. The group reports to Scottish Government's Homelessness and Prevention Strategy Group chaired by Housing Minister Kevin Stewart. Find out more about All in for Change [here](#).

Life has drastically changed for all of us in the wake of COVID-19 and much of what we take for granted has ground to a halt in ways we wouldn't have imagined a few months ago. But for many people in difficult situations such as homelessness, poverty, destitution, this is what normality feels like. For some people there is always uncertainty, often a lack of control, contradictory advice and information and no set deadline on when "normal" life will resume. And for people having these experiences, it is so important that when we move out of lockdown, we do not revert to business as usual - because it simply doesn't work.

Our first conversation focused on the idea of being "person-centered" and what that should look like during lockdown and moved into how we make space for more people to be involved now to better inform how we move out of lockdown when the time is right.

Being "person-centered" in lockdown means different things to different people – for Change Lead Janet McKellar it's about taking into account housing, health, wellbeing, skills development, information and advice and working creatively to offer opportunities that fit with people's skills and desires. To be able to provide options during lockdown, Janet's team have ensured all the young people they support have access to a smartphone or tablet and internet at home and have included the local community more in their work.

It is also about asking the right questions, and more than a simple "how are you?". By asking more specific questions we can build a deeper relationship and ultimately be able to be more supportive with more information. During lockdown those questions might be around getting shopping, keeping in contact with family or friends and how people are passing their time.

For Davie Pentland, being person-centered means people making choices for the support they receive and the direction they want their lives to go in, whether in lockdown or otherwise. The digital divide in Scotland has been highlighted by the pandemic that must be addressed going forward. There's been huge mobilization of support and accommodation to support rough sleepers off the street – on the flipside there are people already in the system who are now receiving reduced support or telephone support and may struggle due to social isolation. For Davie the response to COVID-19 and rough sleeping is similar to that of the AIDS epidemic in that rough sleepers are being accommodated primarily to protect public health, not necessarily on the basis of each individual's needs.

The key element underpinning working in a person-centered way is the development of trusting relationships. Janet's insight of people who have been in and out of systems are very good at knowing if you're real or not is invaluable. Having the right values in frontline staff is key to creating trust and meaningful relationships.

When the time comes to come out of lockdown, we must be ready to make space for people's lived experience of homelessness to inform our new reality. Key elements – frontline staff with the right values, time allowed to build relationships, varied opportunities to get involved in decision-making – will remain key to approaches moving forward. There are other elements that require consideration, one of which is how we frame and ask questions of people whose views are important. People with lived experience of homelessness are not often involved in the framing and posing of questions and we know that the framing can make all the difference in the data that comes back. Approaches like participatory action research and participatory audits allow more influence and input from people with lived experience.

On the theme of questions, sometimes a simple approach works wonders. Janet's service goes back and asks people what was the best thing the service did for them and the responses are rarely tangible and more often people talk about how the service made them feel.

Huge thanks to the All in for Change leads who joined us as presenters – Janet McKellar and David Pentland – and those who shared their wisdom behind the scenes to guide our conversations – Lisa Punton and Shea Moran. And to those who joined us and posed questions, thank you!