

## CATALYST: Co-designing and testing an Asset-based Task-sharing model for Youth mental health Services in deprived communities



### Background

Devyn Glass, a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow within the Starting Well Theme at ARC KSS has been working on the Catalyst research project, which aims to **co-design, implement, and test a new model of mental health support for young people aged 16-25** in deprived coastal communities. The model centres non-specialist workers in neighbourhood-level community groups as providers of support to improve the accessibility, appropriateness, and acceptability of mental health care for young people.

Catalyst has drawn upon participatory approaches to design the new model, which is being trialled in Voluntary and Community Sector Enterprises (VCSEs). The team conducted co-design workshops with young people and Theory of Change workshops with local professional stakeholders.



Below, Devyn shares her reflections about Public Involvement through the project.

### Involving People with Lived Experience

**Public Advisory Group:** The project was first informed by a public advisory group. We first conducted an in-depth situational analysis of the service landscape in Sussex and the needs of local young people. Then, we worked with young people, community members, and professional stakeholders to co-design the model. The public advisory group were essential for identifying local community networks, facilitating contact, and ensuring the project remained grounded in lived experience.

**Embedded Networking:** The advisory group supported us to embed ourselves within existing youth support networks across Sussex. This involved building relationships with youth services, voluntary sector organisations, and grassroots community groups. This helped us gather a rich data set for the situational analysis, and allowed us to better understand local community assets, which was essential when identifying community partners to deliver Catalyst in the pilot period.



#### Public Member Support:

While we implement and evaluate the model, we are supported by our theme public advisor, Fiona Wallace. Fiona has helped ensure the training and research materials are appropriate for community mentors and young people, and has acted as a sounding board, offering constructive challenges and helping us remain accountable to local young people.



## What I have learnt



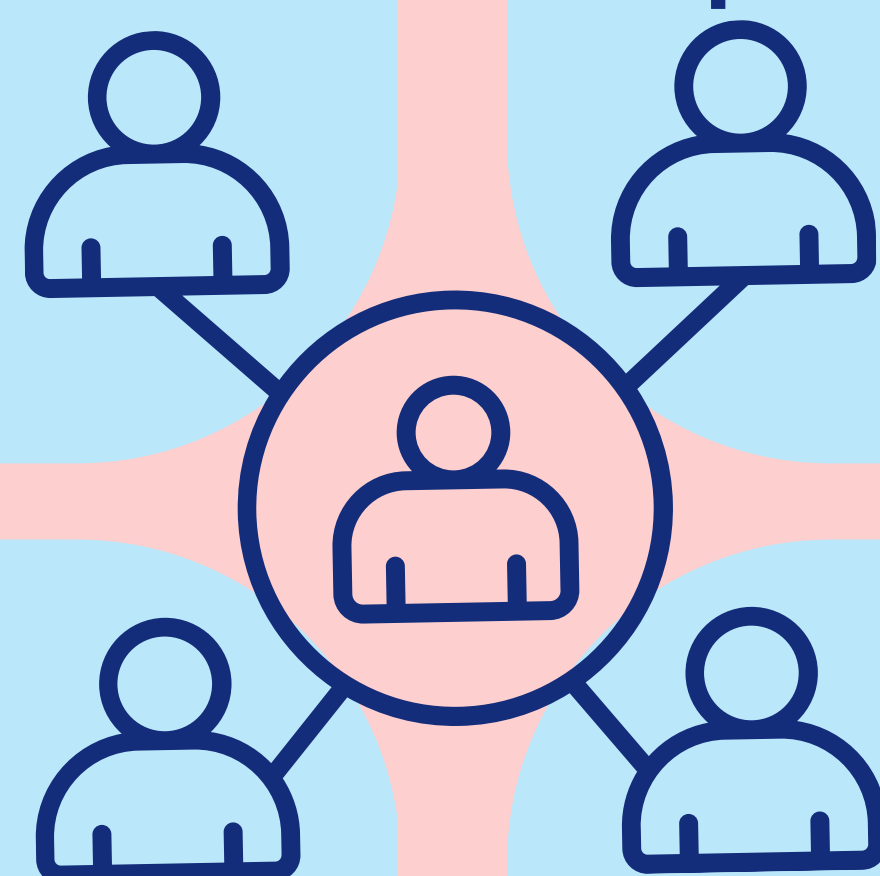
A key thing I have learned from this project has been the importance of **engaging the people who will use the service and benefit from the research** as early as possible. We initially took a broad approach to the situational analysis and co-design, which was valuable developing a scalable model of mental health support. However, each study site has its own organisational practices, cultures, and community contexts, and involving young people and local stakeholders from these sites is crucial for ensuring the model can be appropriately adapted.

I have also learned the value of **embedding young people and public members as ongoing, active members of the project team** rather than involving them only at set stages. Their continuous input can strengthen the relevance and accessibility of materials, and provides real-time feedback as the project develops.

## What Changed 'IMPACT'

We have created a youth mental health support model that is community-driven, responsive to the needs and preferences of local young people, and aligned with existing provision of support.

We have continued to adapt the model to adjust for local implementation contexts. Ongoing involvement and feedback from our partners has supported buy-in from providers and acceptability from young people.



Support from our public advisor has enhanced the training and research materials to make them more accessible and relevant. The training materials will be a key output from the project and will be used for future implementation.

As a team, we have learned about the value of combining broad, system-wide perspectives, with local voices to ensure new models of support are scalable but also appropriate for local communities.

## Devyn's over-riding message is:

Public involvement can take many forms and often changes as the project develops. Having public advisors as a part of the team can be especially helpful, not just for shaping your approach to public involvement, but also for making sure you are connecting with the right communities and professionals, and staying focused on what matters to young people. Fiona's continued involvement means she understands the project really well, and is able to offer thoughtful and useful suggestions to help improve it.