

be a leader 



Evaluation Report

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Canterbury
Christ Church
University

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit



be seen · be heard · belong

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration
Kent, Surrey and Sussex

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SUMMARY

Be A Leader is a leadership training course for people with learning disabilities in Kent and Medway. The first cohort of learners began training in September 2022 and graduated in July 2023. The evaluation of the Be A Leader course focused on the experiences of the learners and co-learners to understand whether the course was acceptable, the barriers and facilitators to learning and how it prepares them for leadership. The course trainers provided insights into the feasibility of delivering the course and adaptations that could be made for future cohorts.

Highlights

- Prior to the course learners were uncertain about what to expect but were motivated by the potential to bring about change in their lives within the service systems locally.
- Some learners found it hard to identify a co-learner to join the course with them and some co-learners left the course part way through due to employment issues.
- The structure and support available during the course were commended, all learners were positive about the skills and contributions of the training team and found it to generally be an inclusive environment where they were well supported.
- Learners completed the course with a sense of achievement, increased confidence and clarity around the attributes and activities of a leader. They also begun working towards their vision and goals (something they wanted to lead on).
- Following the course learners did find it hard to work towards their goals and this required grit and perseverance to remain motivated. The need for additional support for learners was recognised and responded to. Becoming a leader was seen as a long journey.
- Some learners took up new paid opportunities in teaching future health staff and one person as a chair for a Transformation Partnership in the local NHS Trust.
- Overall, the course was found to be feasible to deliver and acceptable to the learners. Though everyone felt they had developed through the training, learners, co-learners and trainers noted that the nature of the course was not suited to everyone.

Looking Ahead

Drawing on everyone's experiences of the Be A Leader course, a number of recommendations are provided for future delivery, these include a tiered model for future training delivery, a focus on supporting people to identify and take action in line with personal or leadership values and finally areas to increase accessibility and provide resources for learners beyond the course.

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ABOUT BE A LEADER

Summary

Bemix is a social enterprise run with and for people with learning disabilities and autistic people. The values of the organisation are that everyone should be seen, be heard and belong. Whilst people with learning disabilities may not have the same opportunities to be fully involved in society Bemix seeks to change that through self-advocacy, co-production and leadership from people with learning disabilities.



In 2022, Bemix launched Kent and Medway's first ever leadership course for people with learning disabilities - 'Be A Leader'. Be A Leader is about giving people with learning disabilities the skills and knowledge to lead and govern. The course is designed and run by Steve Chapman, Ann-Marie Lillis, Matt Clifton and Tricia Nicoll (Tricia Nicoll Consulting).

Finding future leaders

In June 2022, Bemix promoted the course across Kent and Medway and asked people to submit an application. People were asked to apply for a place on the course as a pair of co-learners - one person with learning disabilities and one person without learning disabilities. It was intended that co-learners worked together as equals during the course and would continue their work together beyond the course.

Information about the course was shared with Bemix's local networks, the press and through online communications channels. Webinars were hosted to share information and help answer questions about the course.

About the Be A Leader course

The course started in September 2022. Course modules include history; law, policy and politics; education, health and social care; leadership; governance and media and communications.

Throughout the course the learners have worked collectively and individually, as well as completing projects throughout. A number of guest speakers and campaigners gave presentations including high profile leaders with learning disabilities Gary Bourlet, Scott Watkin and Ciara Lawrence. Speakers also included leaders in health, education and government, including MP Rosie Duffield. Learners had the opportunity to ask questions about things that matter to them and others.

Celebrating and looking forward

A graduation day was held in July 2023. Following this learners continue to work on their vision and goals- activities they wish to show leadership in.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Evaluation Team and Funding

The Be A Leader Evaluation was led by Lisa Richardson (University of Kent) and supported by Daniel Marsden (Canterbury Christchurch University). Emilia Ashley (University of Kent) provided support with the analysis.

Funding for the evaluation was from the University of Kent and the Applied Research Collaboration, Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Evaluation objectives



1. Evaluate the acceptability of the training from the point of view of the learners and co-learners, understanding barriers and facilitators to learning and skills development.



2. Explore the perceptions of learners and co-learners regarding their preparation for leadership.



3. Evaluate trainers' perceptions of the feasibility of delivering the training and perceptions of the impact of the course on learners' preparedness for leadership.



4. Assess changes needed for future delivery of the course.

Evaluation activities

- Interviews with learners before the course, after the course, three months on.
- Interviews with co-learners after the course and three months on.
- Focus group and interview with training team after the course.

Table 1. Number of interviews completed at each point in time.

| | Learners | Co-learners |
|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Before | 5 | - |
| After | 6 | 3 |
| Three months on | 5 | 1 |

About the learners and co-learners

Learners

- 3 female, 3 male
- Age 28-31
- White British
- 3 attend a self-advocacy group
- Known their co-learner for 5-10 years

Co-learners

- 3 female
- Age 25-69
- White British
- 6-20 years in current employment role, one retired
- 2 paid in role as co-learner

One learner and co-learner pair left the course early on, it was not possible to include them in the evaluation.

Inclusive Approach

The evaluation team are grateful to Steve Chapman, one of the course leaders who provided guidance to the evaluation team. Steve gave his expertise to the evaluation to make sure all processes and materials were as inclusive and accessible as possible.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation findings are a qualitative analysis of the interviews and focus groups. Greater emphasis is placed on the views and experiences of the learners, whilst also bringing in additional views and experiences of the co-learners. The findings are presented in two parts, the first focuses on feasibility and acceptability of the training and the second on preparation for leadership. Where quotes are provided a code is used to indicate if the quote is from a learner (L) or co-learner (CL) and the time point of the interview T1 (before training), T2 (after training) and T3 (three months on).

Feasibility and acceptability

The first theme presented here focuses on issues of **feasibility and acceptability**, in particular the facilitators and barriers to learning (this relates to objectives 1 and 3).

As can be seen in figure 1 below, there are five sub-themes. The first three reflect the *barriers and facilitators* experienced at the different stages of the learner journey throughout the course, as well as their hopes and concerns at the outset: (1) Preparing to be a leader; (2) Developing as a leader; (3) Learning and leading beyond the course. Followed by an account of the learners broader views on the acceptability of the course: (4) Acceptability: Recommending vs personal choice. And finally a summary of the trainers views on the barriers and facilitators experienced in delivering the course: (5) Feasibility of delivery.

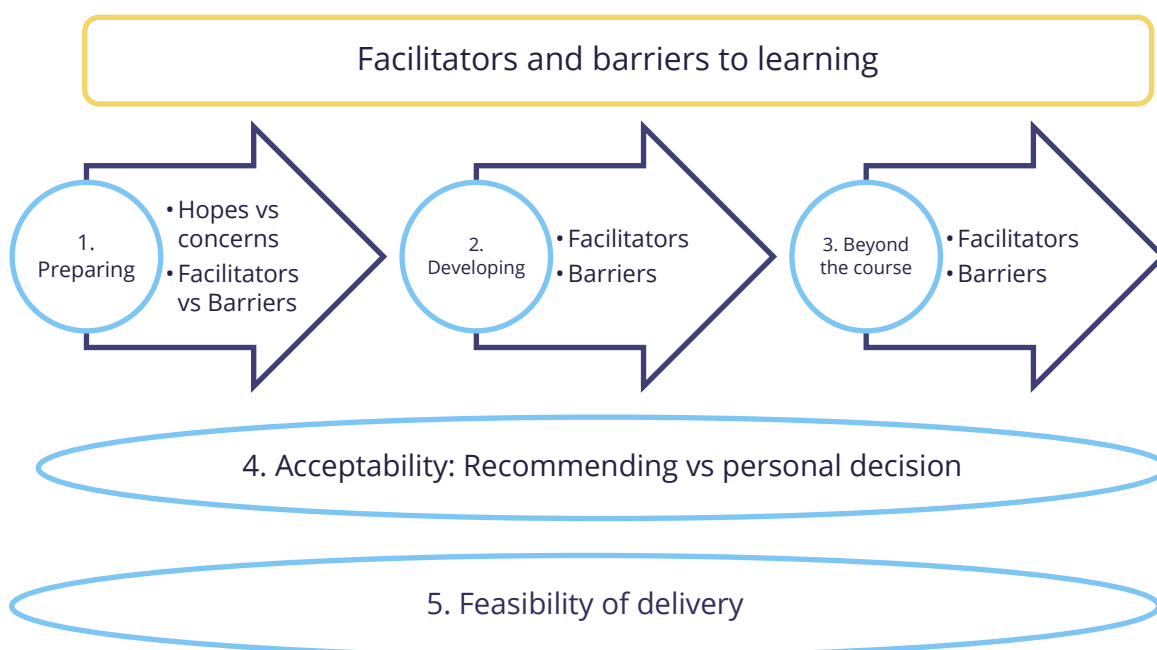


Figure 1. Themes relating to feasibility and acceptability

1. Preparing

Prior to undertaking the course learners shared their **hopes and concerns**. Learners were fairly general in terms of what they hoped to get from the course. There was a sense of not being sure of what to expect, but of trusting the process and a focus on getting to the end.

I'm hoping I will learn ... how to be a better leader. L, T1

I don't know what's available until I've done it L, T1

The sense of not fully knowing what to expect from the course was mirrored by one co-learner.

there was no- very little information. Because you just got the titles of the modules, there was no, nothing else about it, really...So I was like, okay, I'll give it a go. CL, T2

Other learners hopes focused on areas of change that were personal, such as gaining respect or confidence and stretching oneself through taking on a new challenge. There were also hopes for making new connections.

...just make things more improvements of my performance...finding ways of dealing with issues and, and making people have more confidence [in me]. L, T1

It's really challenging...it's gonna be really challenging. ...I'm going to see how it goes L, T1

Concerns of learners at the start of the course tended to focus on misunderstandings- either worries of not being able to understand something on the course or potentially being misunderstood.

Just some time, maybe not like, understanding what they're talking about. But I would say I'm like, over exaggerating, I get like worried, that I am not listening or not understanding but if I, if I didn't understand I would say. L, T1

I just need to be careful. I just need to be careful what I say. Really, in my words come out. With me, sometimes I say one thing and that person might take it offended. L, T1

At this point the learners experiences centred around the application process. As **strengths** one person noted a very positive experience of their early interactions with the trainers, another commented that the application process was 'easy'.

they're not pushy. They're friendly. They care. L, T1

It was easy. Just had to explain why I why I wanted to do the course. L, T1

The **challenges** experienced focused on finding a co-learner and the format of the application form.

I was struggling to find a co-learner... So that was quite stressful...then yeah, just no one being able to step forward and help me and it was really hard. L, T1

So, there was a question. And it only showed one question and answer box, you type in what you're going to say for your answer then you press next. And then that question and answer goes [disappears]. L, T1

Though most people noted having some support from their co-learner or another person when completing the application.

helps me find the right words. So he could put down for me. But it was okay. It was really okay L, T1

2. Developing as a leader

Following the course it was possible to capture the learners experiences of the course. Area's they considered as **strengths** of the course included the approach of the trainers, the availability of support and learning alongside others on an equal basis.

...all the staff were really respectful understanding. Very professional and kind. And that they felt like we were all humans and understand our experiences. L, T2

There were points where they had to be a bit more strict, and they had to get us back on topic. But a lot of the time, they were just a lot more laid back and which was quite nice. L, T2

Having a co-learner is great, because you can speak to them after the session. And you might see them in person. And you know that person cos you've chose. And you do the homework, and you show your homework, and then they can guide you. L, T2

They're not even [there] to co-learn, but they're there to be taught as well... I think is a very good opportunity for them. Because being on be a leader course, it's opened up the co-learners to things that they never thought they could learn. L, T2

Co-learners spoke of the positives of the structure of the course, which built learning gradually, as well as hearing from guest speakers to understand how different parts

of the health and social care systems work. Having guests was also seen as encouraging, showing everyone that their voices will be heard.

... they had made the building bricks, small enough and gradual enough, but with enough information for people to start to realise...they could, they could ask to be part of how the ...decisions are made, rather than just argue about them afterwards? CL, T2

It was great that we saw commissioners because I think that nobody really understood what the role of a commissioner is. CL, T2

you just gave you a feeling that there's a purpose...you can do this. And there will be people that listen. CL, T2

The **challenges** that learners revealed were the loss of co-learners or having to share a co-learner, the course duration and length, travel to the course, some aspects of the learning environment (such as need for quiet space for focused work, lighting in the room) and tensions or conflicts that arose within the group (which could be emotive). Furthermore, the pace of training delivery and accessibility of materials (background colour of slides and level of detail in slides to refer back to) were noted as challenges.

I think I understand ... a lot of it. But it was just a lot of talking, quite a lot in every session. So, if you wanted to soak it in your mind, it was really difficult to remember everything. L, T2

...it can leave you really tired by the end of the day, because you're there for quite a long time, so it was quite a lot. CL, T2

It's nice and interactive, but things need to be a little bit...slow down a bit because I was rushing, writing things down, whatever. L, T3

There's been troubling instances in being a leader, but nothing really upsetting for me... no one got hurt. Just people got a bit emotional. L, T2

just not budging on their opinion, or not taking somebody else's opinions... sometimes you wouldn't be able to give your opinion. CL, T2

I do like the slides that they send to us that they have on the projector screen. I feel like that should be changed, not in the session, but when they email it, they should take out, break, two words. That's sort of not really necessary and maybe put a bit more information so we can go back and soak in the information that they provided that they think is important to remember. L, T2

But maybe they should have had a bit more time to reflect what they did on the day and what, ... they what they were talking about to make it easier to say in the learning logs. L, T3

Co-learners also mentioned that it could be challenging supporting more than one learner and noted difficulties engaging learners in course work. One co-learner felt they would have liked to have seen more preparation of learners for emotional responses that could be elicited by some of the content.

the only thing that I think might be possible is maybe a little more preparation for the emotions. So maybe talking to the people that are going to be going on the course, and...have some pre sessions, so that they've got a better idea. They're a little bit more prepared for it. CL, T2

And then you had the other times where people are like, it would be angry, you know, topics or, you know, whatever. And it just kind of took you through every emotion possible. But in doing that, it kind of made people realise and how to cope with their emotions. CL, T2

There were also reflections over how learners used their newfound sense of power, suggesting that it was possible for this to be misused or asserted too strongly within the organisations they were part of.

3. Learning and leading beyond the course

Learners talked about their experiences of working on their own vision and goals and the support beyond the course sessions. **Facilitators** to moving forward on actions towards goals were linked to having the right support, for example support knowing who and how to contact people who might help. Attending the course led to new opportunities for some of the learners, most notably some learners got involved in teaching (simulations) for trainee nurses and one person joined a Transforming Neurodiversity Support programme in the local NHS Trust as a co-chair.

However, support was also a **barrier**, either because people were needing to seek support linked to new opportunities they'd taken up or because they were missing the structure and support of the course. One person was unclear where to seek support from and tried many different sources of support, but felt held back by this. Following the course when people were not meeting together was more challenging for learners to maintain actions towards their goals.

cos we haven't had that sort of time on a Friday to go away or to be there and working on the vision and goals, it's been harder to find time. I know, it was always hard to find the time to work on it anyway. L, T3

4. Acceptability: Recommending vs personal choice

Five of the learners and the three co-learners suggested they would recommend the course to a friend/ colleague, thus indicating the course was acceptable to them. The

reasoning provided ranged from fun and enjoyment and to being with likeminded people and more specifically as a source of development, inspiration and creating change for oneself and in services.

I'm just saying that hopefully there'll be another [leadership] course with Bemix. And I would recommend anybody to send their applications to be on the course... L, T2

It's a great way to connect with...people...you get to meet loads of people that are passionate about different things, and it's...something to get your teeth into. L, T2

Because it's very insightful. I learnt a lot more about the history that I didn't know. I knew, like bits of it, that people with learning difficulties were locked away in asylums a lot of the time. And how far we've come with that, but I didn't know about eugenics...L, T2

Of course, I would recommend it because it's just, you want to be a leader and you want to change something for yourself [or] social services. L, T2

I'd just like to say that anyone that's thinking of doing it, go ahead, do it, and run with it. Because it's a once in a lifetime chance to do it. L, T3

Co-learner recommendation to people with a learning disability:

...what it gives you is a chance to, instead of hear that something's happened, and be cross about it, and maybe start up a petition, this is your chance to learn how you can join in the decision making before it's done. So, joining in boards, and that kind of thing. So, making that grassroot difference, and learning how to have the confidence to do that, and how to make your voice heard, and, and how to contact people... CL, T2

Co-learner recommendation to people working in the support sector:

...depending on what experience you've already got in this sector, if you're already in the sector, it's a chance to learn much more about it, how it works, where the decisions are made, who you can talk to, or be part of the decisions with, and also how you could support a person with learning difficulties to actually make that happen. CL, T2

...it's an amazing course, it was the, it was the first course of its kind. And the leaders arranged it, put it all together, oh my god are so passionate about what they're doing CL, T2

One person who felt the course was not really right for them (although they learned a lot and were glad they'd completed it), they felt that people would need to make a personal choice on the basis of understanding what was involved in the course.

I wouldn't recommend it to them. If they liked the idea, and they want, really want to do it...I will tell honest truth...and they want to want to carry on in that line as a career or in or as a job, then I'll put them in right lines for the right person, so they could talk to that person. I just don't want to sit down and say, yeah, yeah, okay, it's for you. L, T2

...it is challenging, it is very, very, powerful. But it is worth it in the end. L, T2

5. Feasibility of delivering Be A Leader training

Attendance across the course for all learners was high- 92-100% of all sessions were attended, with 0-2 sessions missed per person. Sessions missed were due to sickness, surgery and for co-learners planned holiday.

The trainers were able to reflect on the delivery of the course. Whilst it was feasible for the group of trainers to deliver, there was a lot of learning identified about how to adapt the programme for the future. The key **facilitators** as seen by the trainers were:

- Development of a bank of resources within the organisation.
- Team reflections and debriefs to implement learning for the current course and to record other learning for planning future courses.
- Powerful contributions from Steve and Ann, bringing their own experience of becoming leaders to share with the learners. Showing what is possible through them and through the guest speakers who have a national profile.
- Co-produced development and delivery, with clear roles and equal decision making, drawing on complementary skills and facilitation styles.
- Delivering the course in person, for people to benefit from making connections and peer support.
- Learners and co-learners being part of organisations (with potential for additional support structures, networks and resources).
- Recognising and implementing the need for ongoing support beyond the course.

The **barriers** for delivering the course on this occasion and challenges for the future were:

- Recruitment from a wide pool of people and understanding whether applicants are well suited to the course. Recruiting from a wide geographical area.
- Maintaining learners concentration and enthusiasm in a long day and over time.
- Ensuing good use of resources- may not be feasible in the future to have four trainers present to deliver every session.
- Co-learners leaving the course.
- Getting commitment to coursework and completing learning logs.
- Sustaining commitment of learners to taking leadership actions beyond the course.
- Working in the context of society and systems having low expectations for people with learning disabilities and not promoting the possibilities or self-determination from an early age. In some cases working with people who have experienced trauma in their lives and navigating tensions when people become emotionally dysregulated.

- Working in a national context that has changed- opportunities for leadership and influence are not as obvious or well supported (post Valuing People and opportunities to join Partnership Boards for example).

Preparation for leadership

Learners' preparation for leadership was another focus of the evaluation (see objectives 2 and 3). Three themes related to this are covered in figure 2. They are: (1) Motivation for becoming a leader; (2) Learning to become a leader; and (3) Being a leader.



Figure 2. Themes relating to Becoming a Leader

1. Motivation to be a leader

Central to learners' motivations for becoming a leader were ideas about **becoming an agent of change**, either linked to existing activities or new activities e.g. becoming an advocate or being a role model to others. Some people already had ideas about how they saw themselves leading, such as attending local government board meetings or putting things into practice in the organisations they were already part of.

I would say that when I complete the course and receive this useful knowledge that I can help others like [organisation name] and help out with discussions and how to make it more effective... L, T1

I would like to learn new things, new ways of helping people out. Working as a team working together. And I want to be passionate about what I've been doing. That's, really it to be honest. L, T1

The people who's got disability, like vulnerable people who's got disabilities. I'm more like a role model for them, you can say. L, T1

I'd like to be able to be able to go to like board meetings and get my voice heard and get other people's views heard that maybe aren't as confident to talk about. L, T1

Sometimes this motivation to be an agent of change arose from past feelings of powerlessness.

I know what it's like for people trying to control you. And I want that to change. I don't want people being controlled, I want to give back to society, and make people...people with learning difficulties lives better. Even if I can just make a little bit of a difference. L, T1

2. Learning to become a leader

Though attending the Be A Leader course learners developed their ideas of what is to be an agent of change and were clearer about the **qualities and activities** of leaders, this included a focus on creating change within systems, supporting others to have a voice and creating change in their own lives.

I would say that we should have more leaders with autism, learning difficulties and disabilities to take part and use that knowledge, what they've learned on the course to troubleshoot how things work and what you should do to make improvements, and who to speak to, like a trustee or a charity, or the government or which councils to contact that would solve your issue... L, T2

I guess I would say that I would encourage and listen to people and hear their concerns and finding a solution to convince them or give them confidence, to give them a voice and stand up and give their...opinions to improve services. So then, people might be more happy because they're getting listened to... L, T3

I've decided I might be having a meeting with staff, and I might be having a word with them about might be moving to a flat of my own or somewhere. L, T3

I love to go to meetings and get to know other people with all mixed ability... get to know them...And some of them haven't got a voice or they've got a voice but they're too frightened to use it. So, they can use me. So, I'm their voice and I will take it out. L, T3

Working together was seen as an important aspect of leading. One person spoke about this with pride and a sense of belonging. For someone else there was a realisation that they could start something that would be a legacy, where others may continue the work they started.

Now it's our time to shine the end of the day. We want to learn new things about like governance and being leaders together. Like working together with things... apparently, I'm a part of the Bemix family [now], someone told me. L, T2

...realising I can't do it all on my own...It might not have completely happened in my lifetime. But if I can start then someone... that I know, or a younger generation could build on that and keep pushing...chipping away at it. L, T2

being a leader is talking to people, be part of a group...the main resource is talking and listening. L, T3

I want to be sort of let's do this together..., I want to be supportive to other people. L, T3

people started to say, Oh, I wonder if we could work on that together. So suddenly, instead of it being one person, there was a much bigger force all supporting each other with a wider range or a wider reach that could get in and start doing these things CL, T2

Learning to become a leader involved **social learning**. Learners talked about the learning alongside a co-learner and the range of support they received from them from encouragement, support with research, reviewing learning, clarifying things to aid understanding and helping people to stay focused and on task within the sessions. A couple of the learners also mentioned how their co-learner was a good source of emotional support. Additionally, for some co-learners they felt the amount of support in some areas could be tapered off as the course went on.

All learners valued that the training team was made up of trainers with and without learning disabilities. Learners felt this made them feel more equal on the course, and it was felt that this approach reflected Bemix's values of co-production. There was a sense of 'you cannot be what you cannot see'- that being taught by trainers and leaders with learning disabilities role modelled what was possible (including the challenges people faced and overcame to get to where they are today).

It was nice to have some teachers that have had autism or learning difficulties and understand our experience and it feels like they're more inclusive to the course not just... abled people... L, T2

...it definitely made me feel like I was an equal. I wasn't like...they were all we didn't have learning difficulties, and they were talking down to me. L, T2

I think it was very inspirational for Steve to actually put a course together, with his learning difficulties. I wouldn't know where to start with putting a course together. And I think he's done a very good job of, he's put lots of thought and effort into, a course that we all will benefit from... they're just engaging with us, and not giving loads of talks and engaging with us on a level that we understand. Instead of going above our level sort of thing L, T2

... it was co-produced, that's the best bit about it. And it was co-produced in a in a very equal way. CL, T2

Some of this social learning seemed to arise from navigating the group dynamics, in particular the strong differing opinions in the group.

So lots of different opinions that might be around about a topic and I guess hearing different opinions, makes you challenge what your own thoughts are. L, T2

However, over time there was an increasing sense of peer support between the learners.

It's just inspired me when I hear their stories and their visions, that that is just absolutely amazing what they've done. L, T3

Keep you focused on that vision and go and say keep saying to me, you can do this, and you will do this. Because at the minute, I feel, I don't feel useless. But I feel like, well, I want to do it. But no one's sort of accepting the fact. No one's giving me that chance to do it. So, to have [someone] behind me, saying oi let her in, let her do this L, T3

The impact learners talked about related to **personal learning and growth**, which mainly focused on an increase in confidence.

I think I'm a lot more confident than whatever I was. I mean, when Daniel Marsden came to the course, asking for co- teachers, and he asked for someone to be a chair on a board meeting. I was like, Yeah, I'll do it. So, I've definitely gained that confidence to just say, yeah okay. I'll do it. I mean, before I probably never would have gone to Medway or Chatham on my own, and now it's sort of, it's like second nature really. L, T2

I mean, it's given me the new skills that I knew I had, but I was too shy to, to put out there. The more confidence I have to actually pursue my passion in trying to make the schools or the mental health system a little bit better than it has been. L, T2

Increased confidence with public speaking was also reported by the co-learners.

One learner also talked about having a greater understanding of themselves, which included exploring how they viewed their disabilities.

It does help me to learn me. And where I wanna go, not where I'm gonna go. But it helps me seeing who I am, what I am...That's a powerful thing. When you're on a course. L, T2

Other people were able to identify specific knowledge or skills they'd developed.

About how so health and social care works.... Like what are the best ways of about communication with learning with communications with people in the right appropriate way. L, T2

Overall, there was a general sense of pride and achievement from having completed the course.

But it's an amazing achievement what I've done now. I've passed it. L, T3

But I always block my confidence, always blocked myself saying "I can't do this". "I can't do that"... No, I can do it. And luckily, they did push me to do it. And I achieved, I achieved what I thought I was never gonna have. L, T3

I was pleased with myself. And now, I'm ahead in the world. L, T3

...it was in University that I'm doing the course. So, it feels like yes, I actually went to university at last! L, T3

Co-learners observed similar areas of developments in the learners over time, including:

- Greater understanding of the challenges other people face and empathy for them
- Developing a passion for being part of something
- Becoming empowered to do something
- Learning to be more professional and balancing passion and emotion
- Taking a lead
- Focus on turning negative experiences into something positive
- Ability to think more about the future
- Patience
- Asking for help

I think the best part of the course for me was when you started to see people begin to understand why they were doing it. What the aim was... that empowerment that you started to see come out of people was just amazing. CL, T2

A content analysis for some of these outcomes is available in Appendix 1.

3. Being a leader

This theme emphasises that the Be A Leader course is a catalyst for change. The course sessions aim to prepare learners for leadership, but the end of the course is not the destination. Learning and leading continues beyond the course. People move from being learners to being leaders through creating their own **vision and goals** and starting to work towards these. The vision and goals of the cohort of learners were a combination of shorter-term achievable goals (linked to something they were already

involved in) and a longer-term vision, which would give them something to work towards.

The visions learners had included:

- Educating professionals, e.g. social workers or trainee nurses
- Being part of research
- Writing a book (raising issues related to disability and travel)
- Working with the education system to make education more inclusive
- Being a peer mentor
- Creating inclusive sports opportunities for women with disabilities.

Co-learners visions were:

- Arrange a jobs fair for people with learning disabilities at a local shopping centre
- Improve employment opportunities
- Produce information for parents following a diagnosis about support and opportunities
- Be part of campaigns and consultations and co-work with people with learning disabilities to be at the decision-making table.

Through the graduation process learners were able to share something of their vision and goals, this was seen as a public declaration which could help them to gain more support and connections.

Well, I think it's more of being aware of what our goals and visions, and if anybody with like, had the same idea, they could come up and see us and say, we're, we're interested in collaborating or giving you advice. L, T3

...to show everyone that I wasn't bluffing, I'm not bluffing. And I really have plans for the future. L, T3

There was a sense from the learners that they were on **a journey** which had only just begun. Many had taken some actions towards their goals following the graduation, but this was seen as just the beginning.

it's going to be a long, long road to get things underway, hopefully. L, T3

It made me feel like actually, yeah, I know what I want to do. And I know in time I'll be able to achieve it. L, T3

Given the challenges some people experienced in working towards their vision and goals there was a need for perseverance. Some people were able to take this in their

stride, accepting that it was going to take time to achieve their goals and others talked of being self-motivated.

Encouraging, and giving people a chance to tell them to act upon to improve for services. And sort of never give up on that idea and find ways of convincing the services to be better. L, T3

Motivating my, well I'm kind of motivated myself and what I'm working on L, T3

One person in particular lost a lot of confidence and began to question if they were a leader.

I've lost a lot. I think I've lost a lot of confidence. I don't know what to do. I felt much better on the course.... I just don't know what I can change. It's made me try. It's made me think... I'm not a person of a leader. L, T3

The need for continued support beyond the formal course sessions was recognised by the trainers and further regular support was arranged, so that the learners could meet as a group with support on a more regular basis. It was not possible to capture the impact of that intervention during the evaluation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The Be A Leader course for people with learning disabilities is the first of its kind in Kent and Medway. It has been a long-term vision of Steve Chapman to make this type of training available and increase the pool of leaders who can be seen, be heard and belong in all the spaces where decision making happens affecting the lives of people with a learning disability. Realising this vision is a process and the Be A Leader team have shown that it is possible to deliver the course and the learners have communicated that it is acceptable. Through the course learners have developed skills, confidence and a deeper understanding of what it is to lead, as well as working with others and through differences of opinion. They have access to knowledge that they did not have before which has inspired their passion for creating change. Learners have taken their first steps in embodying leadership (albeit not all in spaces that seek to influence service systems), through creating a vision and goals. Some individuals have been successful in securing new paid roles for themselves, giving them new opportunities to put into practice what they learnt through the course. A lot of learning has occurred through the course delivery and this evaluation has attempted to capture that for future implementation. The report now concludes with a set of recommendations.

Recommendations

These recommendations reflect the learning shared through the evaluation (related to objective 4), as such they can be seen to have been co-produced by all who took part.

1. Course format

- The course duration and length were felt to be intensive, and the course did not seem the right fit for everyone's learning needs.
- An adapted tiered approach to training may enable a more personalised learning journey and support the selection of strong candidates to be ready to work in influential roles in the health and social care or education systems.
- Figure 3 shows how the tiers might look, with most people with learning disabilities potentially benefitting from a first tier that supports learning for leading in their own life, developing agency and skills in self-determination. Some support for emotional regulation may also be beneficial at this stage. The next tier

of learning would support people who want to become a self-advocate, join speaking up activities and be part of decision-making spaces (they will have benefitted from working on leading in their own life as a foundational skill). The top tier may only suit a smaller number of people and would focus in more depth around leadership in service systems and governance (and would develop from the work undertaken in previous tiers).



- In this model everyone would benefit from support from people who know them well, such as the co-learning model, but the intensity of this may be more flexible in a tiered model, for example, people learning to lead in their own life, may only need support when it comes to action planning or work outside of sessions. Alongside the co-learning model there is an emerging need for support from an independent person who could offer coaching to learners and co-learners, again, this could be tailored to individual tiers and for individual people dependent on their learning and support needs.
- There would be feasibility questions around the implementation of such a model, for example, would enough people filter through to the higher tiers to make running the course viable? To address this, it may be that the higher tiers of training and support would not be offered as regularly. Consideration may be needed as to whether the top tier should be run with other organisations as a national programme, with tailored learning opportunities and coaching relevant to the local context. It could also be an embedded programme within the services systems where there are tangible roles for people to take on.
- Another consideration is how the model could be implemented within education systems, such that people develop a sense of possibility, agency and knowledge about future opportunities from a younger age. Some work to co-design a

modified program may be necessary to achieve this, but as Bemix works within the education sector, they are well placed to lead on this.

2. Values, goals and actions

- Through the course learners developed a sense of what it is to be a leader and the ways in which they wanted to lead. For some the ideas and goals set out in their vision became very large in their life and found set backs or lack of progress difficult to manage. Given this it may be helpful to support some people to think flexibly about their vision.
- At each of the tiers it could benefit the learners to identify and connect with their personal values early on. Values are the beliefs and principles that you believe are important in the way that you live and work. Setting goals means that something is either ahead of us or behind us, this may put people in a deficit position (noticing things they haven't got or haven't achieved and can be demotivating). In contrast values are ever present and like a compass offer an overall sense of direction, rather than specifying one destination. Connecting with values then, offers a way into thinking about goals, but is distinct and flexible. Taking action in line with values may afford people more opportunities to embody being a leader, in their own life and beyond.
- Following values identification and actions. Any goals that are developed should be crafted so that they are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely), which would also aid in reviewing progress and updating them.
- Individual coaching from someone who is independent would help facilitate identifying and reviewing values, goals and taking actions that align with these.

3. Accessibility

- Whilst the course was found to be inclusive, there were some issues of accessibility that were noted and could easily be built upon, of particular note were:
 - Some issues with the format of the application form, which could be resolved by offering different format options
 - The pace of delivery- giving people the tools to feedback on this in the moment (which may need to be in a confidential way)
 - Understanding individual learners needs- though one-page profiles, which could also support relationship development and empathy between learners.
 - Breakout spaces for more individual/ focused work
 - Most learners and co-learners reported challenges with concentration and memory. Whilst course materials were provided, consideration could be

given to the development of a handbook which would allow cross referencing at a later time.

- There were instances of high levels of expressed emotions and topics and activities that on some level lead people to consider their own identity- a sense of who they are. The training team might consider:
 - Whether there are further steps that could be taken to embed trauma informed awareness and approaches within the training.
 - The importance of exploring learners own views, attitudes and feelings about disability and assessing their sensitivity to content which may bring into stark relief how negative attitudes and stigma powerfully pervades society and public services.

Appendix 1. Content analysis of selected outcomes

| Outcome | Self-reported (Total/ %) | Self-reported or co-learner observed (Total/ %) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increase in confidence | 4/ 67% | 5/ 83% |
| Increased ability to present in front of others | 4/ 67% | 5/ 83% |
| Increased motivation to advocate for self/ others | 5/ 83% | - |
| Increased understanding of own/ other's disabilities | 1/ 16% | 2/ 33% |
| Intentions/ actions to make own decisions and act to make things happen in own life | 4/ 67% | - |
| Using skills through professional opportunities/ volunteering/ employment/ advocacy | 4/ 67% | 4/ 67% |