

Connected Communities

Learning lessons from implementation of community support services



Public Summary

Community support services are non-clinical services (provided by healthcare, council and voluntary organisations) that signpost people to local sources of social, emotional and practical support in their communities.

These services involve somebody in a signposting role (e.g. social prescriber, link worker, navigator, connector or neighbourhood coach) talking with service users before directing them towards local relevant support.

Despite much investment in community support services (particularly social prescribing), little is understood about their implementation. Research is required across different contexts to describe their implementation; particularly, how social care providers interact to support implementing community support services, and how they responded to circumstances imposed by the pandemic.

This post-implementation study explored how services were implemented and became part of usual working practice, by using three existing services as case studies.

We interviewed 12 service users, 16 service providers and 8 linked providers (February-September 2023), and coded data to a combined framework Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) with process domains from Normalisation Process Theory (NPT).

Across services, we identified five themes around how services address implementation barriers and facilitators:

1. Flexibility of services;
2. Collaborative delivery;
3. Practicalities of accessing services;
4. Service resource availability;
5. Understanding how services make a difference.

Overall, community support services are valued by staff and users, but face challenges from uncertain funding and increasing need.

We are testing the findings with other communities for generalisability, and results will be shared in an implementation toolkit (to guide implementing future services), an academic publication and accessible report.



Public and Community Involvement

In addition to our two Public Advisers' involvement throughout (2022-25) in shaping our methods, contributing to analyses & interpreting findings (including producing thematic illustrations), we also:

- Engaged with a case-study service user research group to check the appropriacy of interview questions (involved 6 service users), and consulted on preliminary Phase 1 study findings to sense-check & promote engagement in final interviews prior to recruitment closing (8 service users);
- Consulted (and later reported back to) the NPP's National Strategic Lived Experience Group about our developed accessible recruitment materials (easy-read Participant Information Sheet, compliant with screen-reading software for visually-impaired people and participant information video).

Dissemination

We presented our methods & findings via:

- external-facing seminars (open meetings, practitioners & public) for the Personalised Care Interprofessional Education Network (PerCIE) International Conference, and the University of Central Lancashire's Social Prescribing Unit, and
- internal seminar to 30 attendees (open meeting, HE students & academics) for the University of Central Lancashire's Institute for Applied Health & Wellbeing (LIFE).

Impact and Implementation

We collaborated with community partners, linked providers, existing service users, operating organisations. They feel heard and seen for the impacts these services have upon people, and encouraged that learning is passed on to support other communities establishing new services to benefit from their own 'lessons learnt'.

It also helps them to do things 'differently' - by focusing upon building on service successes and addressing identified implementation barriers to better support service users, linked providers and their local community in the future. This means that communities are better linked with local resources, linked provider relationships are strengthened, and service users receive improved and sustainable signposting services to enhance their wellbeing.

Publications

[Connected Communities | Learning lessons from person-centred community-based support services' implementation: a mixed-methods study protocol](#)

Next steps

We are sense-checking our findings with other community support services and eliciting insights from adult social care service users/providers where possible, to refine our implementation toolkit (both as PDF and a website) to aid service managers in considering the barriers and facilitators to developing and implementing community support services.