

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE

Newcastle Gateshead Network

Equal and diverse people making change happen



NEWSLETTER

**By the Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead
Experts by Experience Network**

We are a group of people with lived experience of the most challenging circumstances including homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse and offending.

We work with Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead (FLNG) to raise awareness of these issues and encourage local organisations to hear and act on our ideas and improve how they deliver their services.

Read on for some examples of projects we've been involved in since the start of this year, including the steps we've been taking to look after our wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions about our group, please get in touch! We'd love to hear from you.

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CHANGING LIVES

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Department for Work and Pensions

The JobCentre Plus is a lifeline for many people facing challenging circumstances so it's important their service recognises the different situations people can face and how this can impact the way they engage with processes like the benefits system and job searches.

Earlier this year, Haley attended a case conference at the Job Centre on behalf of the Network to learn more about their processes and raise awareness of the issues people face. She said:

"I was surprised at how relaxed and welcoming the staff in the case conference were. We worked together on some ideas and I gave them some specific feedback about how the noticeboards in the building could be better and I felt they really listened."

As a result of this initial session, we've been invited to take part in further case conferences and we hope our relationship with the team will go from strength to strength.

Do you need us on your interview panel?

Services that support people facing challenging circumstances must have the right people in the job and we have lots of experience of helping local organisations with their recruitment. We regularly take part in interview panels alongside managers and HR staff, asking questions as part of the interview and giving our views on which candidates we think are right for the job.

We recently welcomed Iain Donnelly to the FLNG team as the new Programme Manager. Iain started in April following his interview for the job in February. Fiona was on the interview panel and said:



"I was able to give my views on the candidates' answers and even ask my own question. I knew the role involves dealing with different types of pressure and sometimes hearing about difficult situations so I thought the right candidate should be aware of their own coping strategies which is why I asked a question about this as part of the interview."

Any Newcastle or Gateshead service can request our help in recruitment processes by visiting www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk.

PUTTING CO-PRODUCTION INTO PRACTICE

"Why I got involved in the Experts by Experience Network"

by Keith



"I joined the Experts by Experience Network in January 2020, I found out about it from my worker at Oasis Community Housing. Once the referral was made, I attended an introductory meeting which was then followed by weekly meetings. I also attend other training opportunities with other organisations who share the same ideas and values as the rest of the group. I have met really good people with similar experiences to me, they offer support whilst sharing ideas and looking at issues we feel may need improvements. We contact each other with opportunities and ideas to improve systems as well as the way people are treated by authorities when they are seeking help to make progress in their lives. I have found Experts by Experience a really positive group for me to attend at this time in my life and hope to contribute and receive help in equal measure."

Positive Perceptions with Homeless Link

Homeless Link is a national charity that invited us to take part in a session helping them to develop a psychologically-informed resource for frontline practitioners called Positive Perceptions. Fiona said:

'This was one of my first pieces of work as an Expert by Experience; I wasn't sure what to expect but I knew more than I realised and it was very good for my self-esteem. When I first got ill all I heard was how bad I was but in the meeting everyone was really encouraging and told me how important my role was. I'm also very proud that I came up with the name for the resource: 'Positive Perceptions'.'

"This piece of work was so important because it was about being able to identify feelings and when you've numbed your feelings all your life you sometimes need to be reminded that it's alright to feel. Taking part in things like this makes you realise your feelings are justified and valued."

HALEY
EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE
NETWORK

Understanding Psychologically Informed Environments can make services work better, for both the staff working in that service and the people they are supporting so we were really keen to take part in this project. The session was led by Alex Smith from Homeless Link who told us:

"The members of the Experts by Experience Network were so engaged with the activity - it was a real pleasure to work with them. The tool will be an excellent resource for frontline complex needs workers and we will be sharing it with services all across England to help people reframe negative perceptions to positive perceptions for the people they work with."

KEEPING WELL DURING LOCKDOWN

While we can't meet in person as a group because of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing rules, we have still been coming together to share our experiences and the steps we've been taking to look after our wellbeing during lockdown.

Here's a selection of our thoughts and photos.



"I planted some marigolds, hot peppers and sunflowers on my windowsill."

Joanne

"Doing jigsaws, walking the dog, enjoying the coastline and enjoying the sun in the garden with a good book."

Fiona

"Saving photos and quotes I see on the internet to inspire me later."

Sheila



"When the country come to a standstill I was overcome with fear, fear of mostly having to sit with myself. When everything was closing I bought myself a journal. I want to take this time to look at me, find out what I really love and where I want my life to go. I want to take that leap of faith and master yoga and meditation, to be able to light that lavender candle, close my eyes and sit by myself and understand how I feel and see not only problems but solutions too. If I can stop running from me, learn to love me and accept me I can be the best possible version of me to my family, friends and others. I want to show others no matter what your past you matter and can come to love yourself again but to show it I must do it. So take this time, work on you, try something new and keep safe. "

Haley

CONTACT US

Our meetings have been temporarily suspended while we adjust to social distance restrictions but please get in touch if you would like to find out more about our group.



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Connect online

You can keep up to date with what we're up to in the news section of www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk and on FLNG's Facebook and Twitter pages: search for 'Fullfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead'.