

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 to learn more about us, hear some of our stories and find out how we've been adapting and doing things differently due to Covid.

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

Co-production during Covid - we're still doing it!

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FULLING LIVES
Newcastle Gateshead

www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk



CHANGING LIVES

CO-PRODUCTION DURING COVID- WE'RE STILL DOING IT

The Listening Project

By Carol R

The Listening Project with James Ward from Changing Lives was a great piece of co-production work. There were managers and team members from as far as Manchester and we were given a challenge to interview our friends and family about the Covid-19 situation and the effects of lockdown. I interviewed four friends, including a former nurse, using the questions we were given and all participants were paid £15 for taking part.

We went into breakout rooms via Zoom and discussed our questions to find out about how support looked before Covid and now. It was good to catch up with old friends and we really enjoyed the discussion.

I compiled some interesting results. Many of my group were disappointed with the government and thought that they did not give enough attention to mental health needs. During Covid there was lots of detail around physical health and great support from doctors, consultants, nurses and physios. No help at all mentally.

"I enjoyed the participation and it was an eye opener to some of the problems behind Covid."

My friends were also hopeful that lessons have been learnt, such as about accommodation for homeless people, and good parts would continue. The nurse hoped more would be done to keep the LGBT community safer during lockdown. Many had not been able to come out at home because they felt unsafe.

"One size doesn't fit all"

While we can't meet in person, we are still taking part in projects and welcoming new members using online Zoom meetings, emails and good old-fashioned phone calls. We asked Carol how she has found this new way of working.

How have the Zoom meetings been?

I've found online meetings refreshing - due to where I live and my health I can't always attend meetings in person anyway so being able to take part by Zoom has been brilliant for me. I've been shielding so it's been lovely to chat at groups and still get to see people.

What does the EBE Network mean to you?

For me, the EBE means being involved in decision-making, being listened to and being heard. One size doesn't fit all so it's important that everyone's voices are heard.



CO-PRODUCTION DURING COVID- WE'RE STILL DOING IT

Changing the system through staff training

FLNG offers a range of free training courses to staff working in local services to help them better understand issues linked to multiple and complex needs.

The EBE Network plays a major role in making sure these courses take into account the experiences and views of people who actually use the services.

Sam Bray is FLNG's Workforce Development Co-Production Worker who finds ways to make this happen.



Visit our website to find out more about our training courses

www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk

"Co-production is about working with all stakeholders, all with an equal say and equal share in the power, to improve a service and make sure it's doing the best it can do."

"I've been working a lot with the EBE Network to develop our co-production training with the aim of co-delivering it online. Co-production is about working with all stakeholders, all with an equal say and equal share in the power, to improve a service and make sure it's doing the best it can do. There's four key values of co-production: power-sharing, reducing barriers so everyone can participate, diversity and reciprocity (everyone putting something in and getting something out).

"The EBE Network was involved right from the start in designing the co-production training. Now, given the coronavirus situation, I have been working particularly with Sheila and Lou to develop the training for online delivery. Sheila and I have been working on adapting the resources and the exercises to work via Zoom. The plan is for Sheila and myself to then co-deliver this training, starting with a pilot with the EBE Network, from which we will incorporate their feedback into future sessions."

INTERVIEW

Sheila Blatchford is a member of the EBE Network who will be starting a degree course in Psychology at the University of Northumbria in September.

How did you get involved with the EBE?

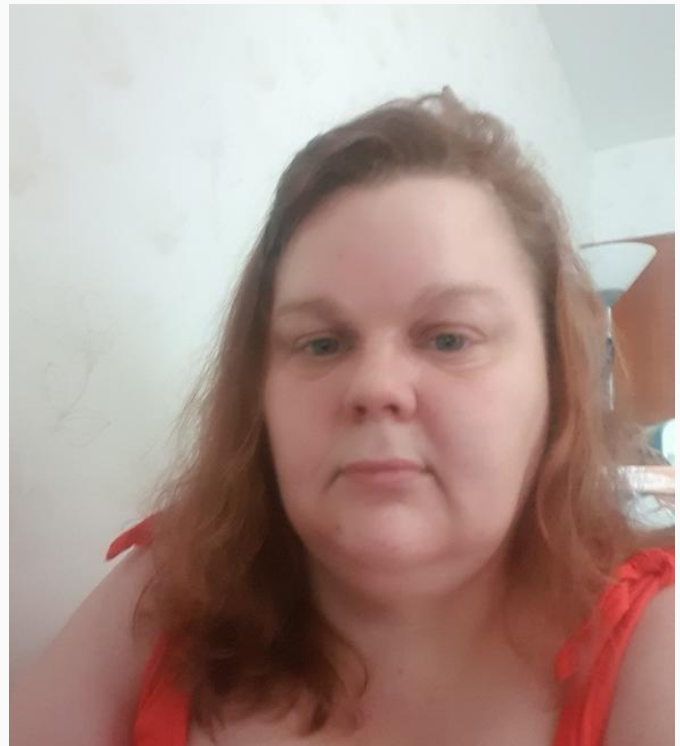
After a series of events that affected my mental health, I joined Moving Forward and began taking courses to build my confidence to help me find my purpose. One of these was a peer research module for an NVQ qualification facilitated by FLNG. This course was followed up with a research project and since then I have been attending Network meetings and events, taking part in opportunities to help spread the word about multiple and complex needs, sharing learning and even facilitating the co-production training sessions that the EBE helped to write.

Why do you want to study psychology?

Following the original project, I was asked to participate in another peer research project. I enjoyed research and decided that I wanted to pursue a career in psychology for two reasons.

The first reason, I really enjoyed the research, devising and asking questions, followed by disseminating the findings and reaching a conclusion for the betterment of services for service users, and a belief that peer research is the way to get more honest, unbiased research.

The second, after being involved with the EBE I could see that there are lots of issues for people with multiple and complex needs accessing the services they need for a variety of reasons; I want to help and I think as a trained and qualified psychologist I can make a difference to people's lives, offering a service where there is a gap.



What would you say to anyone thinking about joining the EBE Network?

Do it. Come along to a welcome meeting, hear about the things we do and have a chat, there is no obligation to do more than you are comfortable with, for some it is just a couple of hours each week for a cuppa and a chat.

There is a fantastic group of people, working together for system change. We are trying to create sustained changes within the services people use, to make them a better experience for those that need them.

We meet up once a week for a Network meeting, to catch up on work that we have been involved with and have a chat and cuppa.

I love the EBE Network as I can do as much or as little as I want and have a bit of fun at the same time, with people that have similar life experiences to me... and you.

Visit www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk or get in touch with Lou (details on the back page) to find out more about joining us.

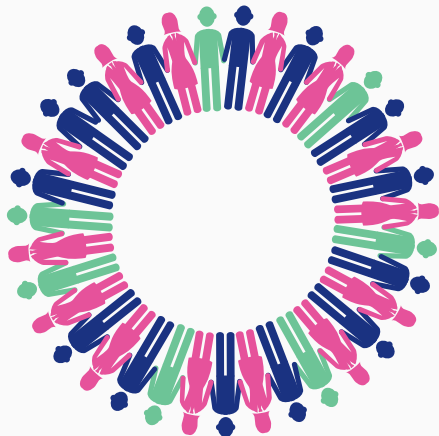
MY EBE STORY

Hi my Name is Desmond. I would like to share my story about how I found the EBE Network, or more how it found me actually.

How I heard about the EBE Network

I was attending a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in Newcastle in January of this year and after the meeting I was offered a lift to another meeting in the area by a guy in the fellowship. On route to the next meeting he asked me "have you heard of the EBE Network?" He told me the Network is people who meet each week to discuss topics around four main social issues: mental health, substance misuse, homelessness and criminal justice. The purpose of the network is to take these people's lived experience around these issues to bring about change and lobby organisations to make things better.

Wow. I was immediately interested in such an approach.



What difference can I make?

I in no way think I am a professional expert but I do have lived experience and the way it was put to me made perfect sense: that people with lived experience do have a voice to be heard and the way services are run, sometimes by statistical data and social work models and set scenarios compiled by academics, is not necessarily the best way to deal with and tackle the core issues the EBE is addressing.

It's not about giving the power to the people, it's about listening to informed and valued voices of the very people services are aiming to help. Lived experience can really give a true insight to what's actually going on in these areas and where they are failing. We live in a world where the dynamics of such burning social issues need new radical and outside-the-box approaches for change and to me that is what the EBE Network is all about.

What difference has the EBE Network made to me?

Six weeks previous to getting involved with the EBE I was isolated in my flat in the depths of addiction and mental health and through working a programme of recovery six weeks later I was sitting in meetings discussing the very issues I was tackling myself.

Experts by Experience gives me a platform to learn new skills, interact with people and revisit old skills in a very short space of time. I am very grateful to the person who introduced me to the Network. The friends I have made, what I have learned and what I can learn in the future and could lead to vocational opportunities. It is fun too.

The EBE Network and Covid

I went back into the madness during lockdown but EBE never stopped contacting me and through the grace of God and good peers I am back in a programme of recovery and involved with the EBE again because they retained contact with me which I am so grateful for.

EBE did not stop when Covid arrived and the issues they deal with are still there, or getting worse. We need change and if you have lived experience of substance misuse, mental health, homelessness or criminal justice the Network is a fantastic way to try and make a difference locally and nationally. I love it and I will definitely be staying connected.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Since the start of the pandemic, one of the focuses of the group has been checking in with each other and looking after our wellbeing. At our meetings we've shared our experiences of lockdown and the steps we're taking to stay well.

Gardening has been a big help to Joanne who has told us all about her own grand design and how it's helped her - looking good Joanne!



"Gateshead Carers helped me to get started - they gave me the kick start I needed so I want to thank them for that.

It's a work in progress but it's much brighter and I am enjoying being outside, it's good for my mental health."

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EXPERIENCE  **Newcastle Gateshead Network**
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CONTACT US

Our usual meeting programme has been temporarily suspended but our group is still in action and welcoming new members. Call, text or email Lou to find out more.



Lou Thorpe
Female Engagement
Co-Production Worker
07812 6727389
ebenetwork@
fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk

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 'Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead'.