

Changing Futures evaluation Customer Case Studies

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Report commissioned as part of the Stoke-on-Trent Changing Futures evaluation

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Foreword

When people with firsthand experience are truly listened to and included, services naturally become more inclusive, compassionate, and connected to the lives they support.

At its core, co-production is a rich and collaborative process; a coming together of the people who make up organisations and communities to shape something meaningful. In support services, it means that providers and people accessing services come together to share their insights and mould ideas. This way of working honours everyone's experiences, recognising that knowledge lives in many forms, not just in textbooks, but in lived (and learned) realities. Through co-production, we build relationships grounded in trust and shared purpose. It's about equity, shared responsibility, collective creativity and sometimes it's even fun. It helps ensure that services aren't just designed for people, but with and by them.

The case studies presented here are co-produced with Changing Futures customers and Expert Citizens. Together, people with current experience of Changing Futures worked with people with experience of multiple disadvantage to shape how their stories are told, and how they want them to feel. These reflections shine a light on the moments and milestones that matter most to them. Every detail shared has been gifted to us, a piece of their lives shared with courage, honesty and hope that it can be used to motivate positive change. We have been trusted to hold these stories, to honour them with dignity, and to use them as a powerful lens through which we can see the bigger picture.

Over the years, many Changing Futures customers have become active members of the Expert Citizens membership and been involved in several projects in Stoke-on-Trent over the last few years including: contributing endlessly to Changing Futures evaluation activities, reviewing and developing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Stoke-on-Trent, contributing to a report focussing on co-occurring drug and alcohol use and mental health conditions, and co-creating the play Punishment Acts: Tales of retribution, reparation and redemption with Ride Out (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation) and participatory arts organisation B-Arts.

The active participation of Changing Futures customers in our community not only sets a powerful example of what is possible with the right conditions, but also illustrates the passion, insight, and capability within this group to shape and inspire positive transformation across services.

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Introduction

Context

[Changing Futures Stoke-on-Trent](#) (CFSOT) is the local implementation of the [national programme](#) that aims to affect systems change to ensure that people experiencing multiple disadvantage receive the support they need. It has built on the legacy of VOICES, which was funded through [Fulfilling Lives](#). VOICES made a substantial impact on the system of support for local people with multiple needs and disadvantage, but which also highlighted ongoing issues that CFSOT set out to address.¹

Nationally and locally, Changing Futures aims to improve how the system of support works at the individual-, service- and system-levels, with four priority areas: Workforce development and staffing levels; Data sharing; Referrals, eligibility, assessment, and pathways; and Commissioning.

These customer case studies are part of the wider local evaluation of CFSOT, which is multifaceted, comprising a series of distinct evaluations^{2,3,4} and a two-time point analysis to explore how the system has changed during the Changing Futures.⁵ The case studies, undertaken by Expert Citizens, have informed the overall analysis, but also provide an important standalone representation of the Changing Futures customer base. They serve to highlight the varied and complex situations, the range and extent of support needs, the critical role of trauma-informed support and case coordination, and the non-linearity of recovery

Case study approach

Case studies were undertaken by Expert Citizens. Initial data gathering (June – July 2023) involved informal, semi-structured discussions with customers and others involved in their support (e.g., Case Co-ordinators and Healthcare practitioners), triangulating information to create, as far as possible, a picture of their lives before and since the start of Changing Futures. Expert Citizens co-created the topic guide with people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage and the wider evaluation team (CHAD). The

¹ Gidlow CJ, Spyropoulos K, McCormack F, Ellis NJ, Beddows R, Fedorowicz S, et al. VOICES of Stoke-on-Trent: Legacy evaluation. Stoke-on-Trent: VOICES; 2022. <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/43302-VOICES-Legacy-Evaluation-Digital-Version.pdf>

² McCormack F, Spyropoulos K, Ellis NJ, Sams, L Gidlow, CJ. A review of the Multi-agency Resolution Group (MaRG) – Undertaken as part of the Stoke-on-Trent Changing Futures evaluation, May 2024. <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/MaRG-report-2024-FINAL-FOR-SHARING.pdf>

³ Sams L, Gidlow, CJ, Meakin A, Ellis NJ, Mankoo A. Experience and perceptions of commissioning, April 2023. <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CHAD-Commissioning-Report-final.pdf>

⁴ Sams, L, Ellis, NJ, McCormack F, Spyropoulos K, Gidlow, CJ. Insight Academy evaluation, May 2024.

⁵ Spyropoulos K, Gidlow CJ, Spyropoulos. Changing Futures evaluation – Time 1 Situational Analysis, April 2023. <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Changing-Futures-SA-Time-report-FINAL.pdf>

interviewer allowed the conversation to be led by the customer, touching on key areas of support, i.e. housing, drug and alcohol use, healthcare and social connections. Follow-up discussions were used to further explore how customers situations had changed through their time on the programme, providing a clearer longitudinal picture. These discussions took place at various timepoints depending on the circumstances of the individual (between 6 weeks and 6 months). This flexibility was necessary to accommodate the changing priorities of customers on their individual journeys and continue to maintain their involvement in developing their case study.

Case studies were completed for seven customers. The remainder of this report presents these case studies, using pseudonyms and removing names of places and other identifiable information, followed by a short summary.

Case study 1: Steve

Steve is a dedicated Manchester United Fan and follows their ups and downs meticulously. He has a rambunctious sense of humour, enjoys being around people and looks forward to one day having his own home again.

Life before Changing Futures

Steve was put into foster care after his father passed away when he was very young. He experienced abuse at the hands of his foster carers. It took five years for Steve to be removed from foster care, then he went to live in a Children's home where he stayed until he was 17. One of his best memories is going on a school trip which was paid for by the Children's home.

During this time staff at the Children's home set up a bank account for Steve and applied for, what was at the time, Disability Allowance and was successful. Steve does not know what the disability is that he received Disability Allowance for.

Steve experienced financial exploitation from a young age. After leaving the Children's home he was placed in shared housing owned by a social housing organisation, he was evicted before his 18th birthday. He stayed with a friend until he was offered a council flat where he stayed for several years.

Steve started using drugs when he was 10 years old and continued to use substances until he was 27 years old. He was abstinent from drugs for two years until he began to use drugs again when his close friend suddenly passed away. His drug use escalated over the next five years.

Steve moved to another council house and lived there for over a decade. During this time Steve experienced difficulties with his mental health and was detained under section 2 eight times before receiving a mental health diagnosis and medication to manage symptoms. During this time, he was assigned a mental health support worker who supported Steve to claim Personal Independence Payments for his mental health diagnosis.

As Steve's drug use continued, he experienced being robbed multiple times and exploited by peers and drug dealers. He sold his household essentials, and his home fell into disarray. He regularly had no money for gas, electricity, or food shopping.

Steve has had the same social worker throughout his journey and has a good relationship with them. It was this social worker who put in a referral for an introduction to Changing Futures for Steve.

Steve's experience of Changing Futures

Steve waited a year for his introduction to Changing Futures after his social worker put in the referral. He remembers one day getting a knock on the door and being introduced to his case coordinator by another member of Changing Futures staff. Steve recalls his case co-ordinator giving him a hug and saying they could tell if people were good or not.

“Made me feel like someone knew I was a good person. At least somebody was seeing the light in me unlike most people.”

Steve received support from his case co-ordinator over the 8 months he was on the Changing Futures caseload, support focused on accommodation, drug use, financial support, and an introduction to positive social networks.

Changing Futures spent Steve's personal budget on his temporary accommodation, taxis for appointments, food shopping, clothes shopping, haircuts, McDonalds, furniture, and other items when he moved into his supported accommodation.

Accommodation

Steve experienced 'cuckooing' and needed to be removed from his council property for his safety. Steve's case co-ordinator advocated for him, and he was able to stay in a hotel that he had been previously evicted from. He stayed there for three and a half months while Changing Futures searched for more suitable accommodation. He was then moved to another hotel for a week. Then he was moved to 24 hours staffed supported living accommodation. Steve was there for 4 and half weeks at which time this supported housing was decommissioned and Steve was moved back to a hotel for three weeks. A place was then found for Steve in another staffed supported living accommodation. At the time of the interview Steve had been living there for about 6 months.

Drug use

When Steve came onto the Changing Futures caseload, he owed money to a drug dealer which was a source of great anxiety for him. Having experienced exploitation for most of his life, Steve was struggling to manage this situation alongside his addiction. The dealer had been extracting large amounts of money from Steve by coercing him to pay above the street value for his supply of drugs. Steve's case co-ordinator was able to work with Steve to budget his money to enable him to pay off his debt. The co-ordinator accompanied Steve to meet with the dealer to pay the money to minimise the dealers opportunity to intimidate or further coerce Steve.

Steve was supported by a worker from Stoke-on-Trent Community Drug and Alcohol Services (CDAS). He liked his CDAS worker and appreciated the advice they gave him

around harm reduction and making the decision to stop taking drugs. His Changing Futures case co-ordinator encouraged him to work with CDAS and to be open and honest. At the time of the interview Steve had been abstinent from drugs for about 7 months.

“Before, I didn’t think I could live without drugs. I didn’t think I could live a life just being normal without drugs.”

Mental health

Steve continues to claim Personal Independence Payment for his mental health diagnosis. He no longer has a mental health support worker. He is with the Depot Clinic at one of the two community mental health centres in Stoke on Trent. He sees them once a month for his depot injection and receives no other support for his mental health.

Positive social relationships

Steve’s case co-ordinator introduced him to Expert Citizens C.I.C early on in his time with the programme and he began to regularly attend coffee mornings and other activities i.e., a trip to Blackpool, a Christmas meal and bowling. While Steve was living in hotels, he would attend the Expert Citizens office every day for somewhere quiet, comfortable, safe and supportive to spend his time. He met a peer who had their own experiences of recovering from drug use, and they began a friendship. Whilst staying in the first supported accommodation placement Steve made a friend that he also introduced to Expert Citizens. They both continue to attend Expert Citizens regularly and develop relationships with the members and staff who have personal experiences of homelessness, drug use, mental health challenges and other social injustices. Being around peers with this experience has provided some support and inspiration for Steve.

“Watching those videos about [Expert Citizens staff member journey], brought some light to me, it made me want to follow in his footsteps. He’s come a long way. From where he was before to now. It’s inspiring.”

Since leaving the Changing Futures programme Steve has experienced one short relapse. He credits his ability to pull himself back on track to having the right people around him to support him through the ups and downs of recovering from drug addiction.

“[Friend] is always there for me, [other friend] is close by so I go round there every day. I see my brothers and sisters. None of them take drugs they’re all clean and they don’t rob off me. It keeps me at the place I am now, it keeps me off the drugs. Keeps me from slipping into my old routine. It’s doing me the world of good.”

Steve also has the support of the staff in his current supported accommodation placement. They help him with his shopping, managing his money, and they support him into social activities. Whilst he has been living in this accommodation, Steve has experienced some disruption as others living in the area have targeted him and began to come to his accommodation to intimidate him, take money from him and steal items from him. The staff were able to support Steve to report this activity to the police and he was able to get back his stolen items.

Steve's relationship with his case co-ordinator

Steve talks very positively about his experience of Changing Futures and cites the supportive relationship he had with his Case Co-ordinator as one of the main drivers behind his progress.

"I had a good relationship with my coordinator. She was there for me. She helped me pay my debt off that I owed. She brought me clothes, took me shopping, took me McDonalds. She was like an angel to me."

Steve and his case co-ordinator had regular contact throughout his time on the programme. In the beginning they spoke every day, sometimes seeing each other every day. Over time this was reduced to once a week.

"I just needed to get out of that circle. My case co-ordinator got me out of that circle, broke that circle by getting me in the [hotel]."

Following his move to his current supported accommodation Steve was discharged from the Changing Futures programme. He was discharged from CDAS the same week.

What set the Changing Futures case co-ordinator apart from other professional interventions that Steve had received, was the non-judgemental approach and the cultivation of an open and honest relationship. Steve's time on the programme gave him a chance to 'break the cycle' that he found himself stuck in and try something different.

"I'm free now like. It's the freest I've ever been. From the drugs, from the people that take them. And I'm not going back down that road again. I'll keep plodding on and hopefully get my own place again."

Six months later

Steve is still a part of the Expert Citizens membership and regularly attends coffee mornings. As his confidence has grown and his understanding of what Expert Citizens does has developed, he has taken part in several projects by contributing his experiences and offering his perspectives on the support services in Stoke-on-Trent. Some of the key activities he has taken part in are:

- Peer research activities in a project about ‘Monkey Dust’ in collaboration with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire University and Expert Citizens.
- Community Conversations about sharing health research with the public in partnership with the Impact Accelerator Unit at Keele University.
- Telling his story at a community event hosted by All The Small Things CIC.
- Supporting Expert Citizens staff to deliver the INSIGHT Awards in November 2023.

Steve also supports his peers by offering advice from his own experiences and recently attended the wedding of two of the Expert Citizens membership.

Steve continues to struggle with drug use and has reconnected with CDAS but is having a difficult time building a relationship with the worker he has been assigned. He has developed a positive and honest relationship with the Changing Futures Community Recovery Coordinator who is based at Expert Citizens. Although Steve is no longer on the Changing Futures caseload, the Community Recovery Co-ordinator continues to support Steve in the absence of other support that Steve trusts.

At the time of submitting this case study, the Recovery Community Co-ordinator had visited Steve at his accommodation with a donated slow-cooker and the two of them had learned how to use it together before attending a coffee morning, so that Steve would have nutritious homecooked food over the weekend.

Case Study 2: James

James is a chatty and out-going person, who is still thinking about what they want to do in life.

“Maybe I will open an oatcake shop, maybe I’ll become a chef. I could be a professional dog walker!”

Life before Changing Futures

James was born in the Northwest of England and spent his early childhood being ‘*shifted from place to place*’ before being adopted and moving out of the country from ages 7 to 18. During this time his behaviour became unmanageable for his adopted parents, and he was placed in a youth hostel. It was around this time that James began to use drugs.

At 18 he moved back to the UK. He met and began to build a relationship with his birth mother. His drug use escalated, and he began to steal from people around him. Following a breakdown in family relationships, he moved to Stoke-on-Trent.

His drinking and drug use increased and began to affect his health leading to multiple stays in hospital. James stayed in a hostel for some time before being told to leave due to increasing drug use and challenging behaviour. He then went to stay in a different hostel, but the same problems lead to him being evicted. Following this no other temporary accommodation would take him. James then started to sleep rough.

Testimony from the Homeless Healthcare Team (Jane Morton, NHS Staffordshire, and Stoke-on-Trent ICB)

The Homeless Health team have worked with James since Dec 2020 when he presented with leg wounds. He was advised to see the outreach health team for dressings twice weekly but often didn't present, consequently wounds became much worse. Since 2020 he has had 8 hospital admissions following presentation to A&E and due to his condition, he has required admission on each presentation. During many of his stays he has been abusive to staff, absconded from ward and refused all treatments. When not under influence James's behaviour was totally acceptable although he needed a lot of convincing to have dressing changed due to pain although with distraction techniques, the pain was acceptable.

Prior to the last hospital admission, the team had concerns he would not survive for much longer. He was very frail physically, had lost a lot of weight and was extremely unkempt. Wounds very grossly infected and necrotic (dead tissue). Mentally he appeared to have "given up" and drug use had escalated to alarming levels. He presented as someone who had no hope.

James's experience of Changing Futures and his Case Co-ordinator

During a hospital admission James was introduced to a Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator. James recalls his Case Co-ordinator relaying the seriousness of his situation to him and assuring him that he is there to support him. When he was discharged from hospital, he continued to sleep rough. Initially, James did not want to engage with Changing Futures, but his Case Co-ordinator continued to work to locate him and offer support until he was ready.

"He came to visit me outside the supermarket a few times, he brought me breakfast a few times brought me Maccy Ds. It's like he's got a sixth sense he always finds me I don't know how. It's like he's got a tracker on me."

James describes his relationship with his Case Co-Ordinator as positive and a crucial part of his journey so far.

"[Case Co-ordinator] isn't just a key worker to me, he's a friend and a father."

Accommodation and drug use support

At the time of his interview James was living in a residential rehabilitation centre in Scarborough and was just moving onto step 5 of the 12-step programme. Changing Futures was able to secure the funding needed to send James to rehab away from Stoke-on-Trent. His Case Co-ordinator has travelled to Scarborough to visit James.

James acknowledges he needed to leave Stoke-on-Trent as part of his journey to recovering from drug addiction. He also feels that this is a crucial time in his life, believing that if Changing Futures had not intervened, he would be dead.

"Scarborough is my last opportunity. If I stayed around stoke, I would be dead by now. I had to move area. Put me many miles away."

James has seen a change in himself *"I went from nothing to this."*; not just because he is now abstinent from drugs, but through the self-reflective practice he has engaged in whilst in Scarborough stating, *"I will always be an addict, but I won't always be a user."*

At the time of the interview James's Case Co-ordinator was trying to secure further funding to allow James to stay in the rehabilitation centre in Scarborough for an extended period of time to allow him to complete his 12-step programme. This is something that James is very keen to do: *"I need that extra funding to help me. I need that funding to help me stay."*

When asked what he would say to the Changing Futures funders if he had the chance, James said he would say “*Thank you for changing my life.*”

Follow up 2 months later

James was uncontactable for a two month follow up. James was asked to leave the rehabilitation centre in Scarborough by the staff after starting a relationship with another service user not long after the first interview took place. James’ Case Co-ordinator was not contacted by the rehab when this happened, and he was instead notified by James’ parent.

James returned to Stoke-on-Trent and his Case Co-ordinator worked with him to find temporary accommodation in a hotel. James’ drug use escalated, and his behaviour became unacceptable to the hotel staff and he was asked to leave. Another hotel accommodation was secured for James, but he has now stopped returning to that accommodation.

At the time of the follow up James’ Case Co-ordinator did not know James’ whereabouts and is considering putting in a missing person report highlighting the high risk of overdose.

Case co-ordinator experience

James’ case co-ordinator discussed the impact of working on cases like this one.

“On a personal level it’s very very frustrating. And it makes me question my job, am I doing my job right? What’s it all about? Are we really changing lives? Or are we just cleaning up all the mess afterwards? But then you sit back and look at it and think well this guy’s alive and although things are a bit shit at the moment, he had three months in rehab where things weren’t shit. If we didn’t intervene, he would be dead.”

As well as focussing on the positive impacts of the intervention during challenging times, the Case Co-ordinator also draws upon his own lived experience of going to prison and changing his life, and his Christian faith.

“Lived experience has given me the strength, and because of my Christian faith most importantly, given me the strength to go do what I have to do. It’s difficult but the last 23 years I’ve learned to put a bubble around myself and separate myself because when I first started out I used to burn myself out because I wanted to fix everything.”

James Case co-ordinator feels supported by his team leader both in Changing Futures and in his organisation. He also feels having experience in this area of work and a willingness to engage in reflective practice helps him to continue working with enthusiasm even when things do not go to plan.

Case Study 3: Bethany

Bethany enjoys music and watching reality tv, especially the Real Housewives television series. She has a dry sense of humour and likes feeding the squirrels that come into her back yard.

Life before Changing Futures

Bethany has struggled with mental health challenges and drug and alcohol addiction for a long time. She stopped using heroin at 26 years old but continued to drink and use other drugs.

“Life before [Changing Futures] was terrible for me, I was just living in my own weird, horrible way.”

Bethany had been with Community Drug and Alcohol services before however she didn't feel like it had helped her. She feels the approach of her worker had been unsupportive and she often felt blamed or overlooked *“they just throw questions at you: What have you used and how much. How much have you drunk and that was it.”*

Initially Bethany was referred to receive support from the Changing Futures Community Recovery Co-ordinator because she was already working with community drug and alcohol services and had a Support, Time, Recovery worker. However, after some time her situation deteriorated, and Bethany was then taken onto the Changing Futures caseload and paired up with a Case Co-ordinator.

Bethany's experience of Changing Futures

As a result of experiencing many years of ill mental health and substance use Bethany cannot remember a lot of what has happened during her time on the Changing Futures caseload. She cannot remember being referred to the programme or meeting the Community Recovery Co-ordinator who is her main source of support from the programme. One of the first things she can remember is joining the Expert Citizens CIC Christmas Bowling trip alongside another Changing Futures customer, Expert Citizens members and staff, including the Changing Futures Community Recovery Co-ordinator.

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator first met Bethany with her social worker. She was sofa surfing at the time. They went to pick her up and took her out for coffee before going to an appointment with her GP. The Community Recovery Co-ordinator recalls Bethany looking forward to what Changing Futures could offer her. At the time of the interview Bethany had been with Changing Futures for over twelve months and in that time has developed a good relationship with the Community Recovery Co-ordinator.

“She helps me with doctors, doing me garden. She's done ever such a lot for me.”

They are in regular contact, speaking by telephone most days. The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has introduced Bethany to the Expert Citizens membership and encouraged her to do things she enjoys.

“To me, she’s like a friend now. She’ll always phone me back. She’s like a godsend to me.”

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator is in contact with Bethany’s family and keeps them informed about her journey and encourages them to be a part of it. Bethany says her relationship with her family is getting better.

“She [mum] will sit down and have a conversation with me now, because I can have one. Whereas before I would be drinking, and she wasn’t listening.”

On several occasions Bethany has attended her Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings with her Case Co-ordinator and the Community Recovery Co-ordinator, taking an active interest in representing herself at these meetings.

Bethany has been admitted to hospital at least twice in the time she has been with Changing Futures. The first time was due to her mental health deteriorating. During this stay in hospital Bethany found out she had cirrhosis.

Accommodation

Bethany was sofa surfing while waiting for a property to become available when she was first introduced to Changing Futures. After some time, this property became vacant, and she moved in with the support of Changing Futures. For Bethany a notable change for her over the course of her time with Changing Futures has been her relationship with her home. After a long period of feeling unsafe in her home she now feels much more settled and enjoys doing the day to day ‘normal’ life things that were missing before.

Bethany: I enjoy going home and just watching the TV. Something as simple as that. I’ve even done the dishes!

Interviewer: What’s that like being able to do those sorts of things for yourself now?

Bethany: It’s nice, it’s like normality

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has supported Bethany in making her house a home. A key part of this was helping her to clear her garden at the beginning of the summer. Since then, Bethany has planted seeds and is keeping up with maintaining the space.

Drug use/alcohol

Bethany has been involved with Community Drug and Alcohol Services (CDAS) in Stoke-on-Trent for several years. She has consequently had several workers, and two whilst she has been with Changing Futures.

“Some of them just come and go. I had [CDAS worker] and she was good but then she went and now we’ve got [CDAS worker]. She seems nice.”

When Bethany has spent time in hospital, she has gone through a detox from alcohol but started to drink again when she was discharged. At the time of the interview Bethany had been sober for 3 weeks and was continuing to engage with CDAS and the Expert Citizens community to continue with her recovery.

“Am an alcoholic but I don’t drink anymore. I’ve done it myself. It couldn’t be better.”

Mental Health

Bethany is still experiencing challenges with her mental health yet at the time of the interview was receiving no mental health support. The initial challenge to accessing mental health provision was that Mental Health teams would not work with Bethany while she was drinking and using drugs, stating that this was the cause of her mental health challenges. Now that Bethany is not drinking, the Community Recovery Co-ordinator is seeking to have Bethany reassessed.

Positive social relationships

Bethany was introduced to Expert Citizens by the Community Recovery Co-ordinator early on in her time with Changing Futures, and she has been attending coffee mornings and social activities regularly for about 12 months.

“I enjoy coming to EC. All the staff have been brilliant. It’s helped me loads. It’s something for me to do, something to make me get changed out of my jammies. Some structure to my day and met some nice people. The people around me have made so much difference. I walk in and everybody speaks to you, and they don’t judge us. Here to me is like a safe place.”

Follow up two months later

Bethany is still with Changing Futures and went 6 weeks without drinking alcohol. Unfortunately, Bethany’s mental health deteriorated, and she continued experiencing

psychosis. Despite several referrals to mental health services from her social worker, her GP and Changing Futures, mental health services declined to take on Bethany, citing alcohol as the cause of her poor mental health. Consequently, Bethany began to drink again to self-medicate her poor mental health.

Community Recovery Co-ordinator experience

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has been able to maintain continuous communication with Bethany throughout her time with Changing Futures. She visited Bethany in hospital each time she was admitted and has developed a trusting and open relationship with Bethany.

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has seen a difference in Bethany since she has been with Changing Futures; *“there has been big changes since she’s been with Changing Futures, she’s accommodated, and she’s more confident. In her good times she’s proactive. And she looks after her accommodation really well.”* The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has also experienced frustration, particularly in trying to get the support in place for Bethany’s mental health needs.

“You take the good with the bad. But when she had these psychotic episodes it was really tough. I felt a lot of pressure and felt like I was the only one doing anything.”

Case Study 4: Lucy

Lucy likes to travel and enjoys getting involved in arts and crafts activities.

Life before Changing Futures

Lucy has a brain injury caused by an accident that happened when she was a child, but the injury was not discovered until 12 years later. She lived with her parents all her life until she was asked to leave because of her drug use. Lucy did not begin using drugs until 2020 following the end of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns when she met her ex-partner. Lucy moved into his home. The relationship was physically, emotionally, and financially abusive. He is the father of one of Lucys children. Lucy was assigned a social worker when she became pregnant. Following the birth by caesarean, Lucys ex-partner carried out a violent attack on her, leaving her for dead in their property. Lucy contracted sepsis following the attack and was severely injured. At this time Lucys social worker put in a referral to Changing Futures.

While waiting for the introduction to Changing Futures, Lucy was placed in a property that she shared with another woman. She continued to use drugs during this time. Lucy experienced exploitation while living at this address from a woman in her community, and by her keyworker at the time. Lucys health suffered, she was not eating, and she became paranoid. Lucy told her social worker about the exploitation.

Lucys experience of Changing Futures

Lucys first contact with Changing Futures was meeting her Case Co-ordinator in the property she was living in at the time. Details of this meeting are provided in the *Accommodation* section of this case study.

Lucy has had a positive experience of Changing Futures and would like to see more people know about the programme. At the time of the interview, she had been with Changing Futures for about three months.

“It’s fantastic. Its brilliant and not many people know about it. They need to advertise it more because it’s brilliant support. I didn’t know it existed.”

As well as her Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator Lucy also has the support of the Community Recovery Co-ordinator, a worker from Community Drug and Alcohol Services and the support of a women’s specific service.

“I think I’ve done a lot. I’ve never done appointments and I’ve never lived on my own. But I’ve done it all now. It’s scary. I’ve never gone food

shopping. When I met the baby's dad, he took over my life. Last year I was carrying drugs when I was pregnant."

Lucy's brain injury has played a significant role in her life, contributing to her parents being the guardian of her children and impacting on how she experiences the world.

"If they'd of picked up on it, I don't know where I would have been. Perhaps if they'd picked up on it earlier, I could have gone to brain rehabilitation and I'd be thinking a bit different. Because my brain, it's the communication side which people think it's just talking but it's not, its understanding and making the right decisions."

Lucy is aware of the additional challenges she faces because of her brain injury but it has not stopped her from trying new things and working with her Case Co-ordinator to move forward in her journey.

Accommodation

Perhaps the most significant change from Lucy's perspective was being able to move to another property. After becoming aware that Lucy was being exploited by her key worker, Lucy's Case Co-ordinator was able to advocate for her and move her to another property.

"First time I met [case co-ordinator] ... When [case co-ordinator] saw me I had my head down, I was skinny ... I've put weight on now ... I wasn't me and I think she knew. They see it all the time so I think they know when someone wants help. She asked me how was I feeling living in that house. I said walking on eggshells. She got me out of that house within a week."

Lucy's Case Co-ordinator recalls this first meeting; *"She had her head down standing in the kitchen, she was so withdrawn. She'd been exploited."* At the time of the interview Lucy had moved again to another property, the Case Co-ordinator highlights the significance of this move:

"[accommodation] is now tenancy, not license, you know how hostels are on license so you can be kicked out whenever, well [accommodation] is supposed to be move on from that so it's her tenancy, it's her property, so it's really hard to get people in there from our customer group because [landlord] would have a hard time getting them out if it went wrong"

The Case Co-ordinator recalls introducing Lucy to the Landlord to make her case for a tenancy. They were so impressed with her progress that she was immediately offered a space. At the time of the interview Lucy had been in this property for a short time, and

although struggling with the new experience of living alone, was also enjoying having her own space that she could make her home.

Drug and alcohol use

Lucy is in recovery from drug use and is actively engaging with Community Drug and Alcohol Services. She attends a support group and has a positive, open relationship with her drug worker who has lived experience of addiction. Lucy feels that her drug worker understands what she has been through and provides valuable advice as she is also recovering from her experience of exploitation.

“My CDAS worker, she’s an ex-addict and she says, ‘they need you’, said I’d been groomed. I’m a people pleaser.”

Lucy feels like she has a *“Better understanding about myself now.”* Which is helping her to overcome her addiction. At the time of the interview, Lucy was noticing a change in herself and how she was behaving. Saying that she felt differently about situations involving drug use and had recently found herself in a space where people were using drugs but decided to go home.

“I don’t know what was different this time, but I just decided to come home. I was like what am I doing here? I went home.”

This experience is both challenging and motivating for Lucy. Recognising she is more capable of change than she thought she was, but at the same time being afraid of the unknown. At the time of the interview, Lucy had had small ‘blips’ in the four months she has been engaging with drug and alcohol services but feels confident she will stop using drugs completely because she has good influences around her.

Positive social relationships

Supported by the Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator Lucy was introduced to a women’s specific service. At first, she was apprehensive, but her Case Co-ordinator took her to visit the service and meet the staff to introduce her to them. The service offers breakfast, showers, and has a television room as well as hosting an art group. Lucy was encouraged to use the service instead of being home alone and to meet new people. She now regularly attends the service and has a good relationship with the staff and some of the other women who attend.

“They’re there for you, they don’t look down on you. They help you out a lot. There’s people there who have been through all kinds of situations so they understand.”

Being around other women with similar experiences to her own has helped Lucy to feel understood and not judged.

Lucys family have been a consistent presence in her life. Her parents are guardians for Lucys children and as she is allowed unsupervised contact with them, having her parents support means a lot to Lucy. Their relationship has been challenging at times but has been getting better as Lucy continues to work on herself.

“I’ve got me family. I could ring me mum now or me nan and I know they’d be there for me. This time two years ago they wouldn’t have been. They might not have even answered the phone.”

Lucy has a positive relationship with a friend that has been supportive of her while she has been working to change her life; *“I’ve got a really good positive friend. I’ve known her for years. She’s been there when I’ve come and wanted to get clean.”* Lucy and her friend have been on day trips out of Stoke-on-Trent and have now booked a holiday.

“I’m going Ghana next year it’s all booked up. I’m excited.”

Follow up two months later with Case Co-ordinator

There has been a big change in Lucy since she has been with Changing Futures. Her experiences of exploitation have made it challenging for her to understand that the staff on the programme did not want anything in return for helping her. Seeing her children has been the biggest motivator for her. She now goes out, attends groups and meets new people. She’s accommodated with her own tenancy and has more independence. A notable change has been her ability to take public transport alone.

“When I met her she wouldn’t get on public transport but now she has no problem, she rings me saying she on the bus on her way!”

The interviewer visited the women’s specific service that Lucy still attends regularly. She has built up open and trusting relationships with the staff at this service who continue to support her in doing new things that she wants to try.

Case Study 5: Angela

Angela loves outdoors and nature. She is looking forward to having more opportunity to explore creative outlets now that she is accommodated.

“Like more opportunity to explore arty stuff and baking stuff. And nature. Nature is gorgeous, always drawing flowers and trees. Arty stuff. Creative. Creative with food. Chuck it in. Mix it in. Boom.”

Life before Changing Futures

Angela was adopted and spent much of her childhood being bullied. She does not elaborate on this experience instead preferring to talk about how she wanted to join the army since she was very young.

“I went into the army cadets and I loved it. From the age of about 8 to 15 I was always saying my plan was to go into the army then come out settle down have a family. But it didn’t go like that. I did get the phone call off the army because I applied when I was 16 but they said I was too young I can’t go in until I’m 18.”

When the army recontacted Angela a few years later, her life had drastically changed:

“They phoned me back when I was 18 and said you can come in the army if you want but I said I can’t because I’m pregnant. It was the most devastating news I’ve ever had to give. Not devastating because I was pregnant, that was the happiest thing that ever happened to me I love my little boy more than anything in the world, but it was devastating because it just fell to early and I wanted to go in the army. Its really sad.”

The relationship she had with the father of her baby was abusive, again Angela does not go into detail about this experience, only to say that; *“The relationship I was in was a bit, domestic abuse. But you do go through them.”*

Angela was referred to Changing Futures by one of the Case Co-ordinators who had worked with Angela in a previous role. The accommodation provider that Angela was with only supports young people so at 18 and pregnant she left that accommodation and became homeless.

“She was my worker before at [accommodation provider], so if I had any issues, I would just go to her. I fell pregnant in [accommodation provider] I’d just turned 18, I’d had so many suicide attempts, and she was worried about me. But she couldn’t keep me because she worked at [accommodation provider]. I moved out with my partner; I was forced to move out. I was homeless. For about 8 months, all the way through my pregnancy I was homeless.”

In their previous role the Case Co-ordinator continued to keep in touch with Angela, visiting her tent when she was rough sleeping and bringing her food and water. Following the appointment to the Changing Futures Case Co-ordinator role, they reached out to Angela to offer the support of the programme.

“She was like I want you back on my case load. She told me about Changing Futures, her role and what she could do for me. She asked if I wanted to join, and I said yes any help that I can get.”

Angela's experience of Changing Futures

The approach of the Changing Futures programme emphasises the importance of relationships between the customers and those providing services to support them. In this case, the relationship between the customer and the Case Co-ordinator pre-dates the Changing Futures programme which has benefited the customer greatly.

“I’ve always had help that has just left me, just let me slip through the gaps. But [Case Co-ordinator] didn’t do that, [Case Co-ordinator] was there, and she proved that she could do what she said. So that’s how I got onto Changing Futures [...] Its always been just [Case Co-ordinator] because she wanted me to have a familiar face, I’m not very good with people generally. She knew I could do with a familiar face.”

There is already a familiarity and trust between the two, and Changing Futures created the conditions for the Case Co-ordinator to build on that and start the work to co-ordinate support around Angela.

Angela has an ongoing court case involving her child and at the time of the interview she had not seen her child for two and a half months. The Case Co-ordinator was the person that Angela reached out to when her child was first taken into care at six months old.

“[Case Co-ordinator] was the first person I rang and told that they’d taken my son. I was crying I’ll tell you know it was horrible I was saying they’ve took him they’ve took him. And the first thing she did was she come and got me and took me to the [service provider]. She helped me. That was through Changing Futures she helped me. If I didn’t have her, I would have just been left, without a son without a family, just left.”

Changing Futures was able to support Angela to go to court to engage with the process to gain access to her child. They provided practical support in the form of taxis to appointments and emotional support by checking in with Angela following court dates.

“[Community Recovery Co-ordinator] got me a taxi back from court because she didn’t want me walking. They always phone me up after court.”

As well as court dates, Angela has been supported to attend numerous appointments across the city as she is pregnant with her second child and at the time of the interview had just secured a property.

“They do the best that they can to make sure I can get to where I need to be if I’ve got appointments, they won’t let me suffer. They won’t let me walk and be an hour late. They’ll get me a taxi or bus. They’ve always helped me when I’ve needed it. It takes away a lot of stress.”

Accommodation

Through-out her time with Changing Futures Angela has slept on the streets, in a multiple occupancy accommodation, and in hotels. Angelas experiences in temporary accommodation have been traumatising including being sexually assaulted, harassed, and intimidated. She is looking forward to having her own accommodation with her partner.

“I was living in [multiple occupancy accommodation]. I was the only female, with like a hundred men. I was sexually assaulted in there [...] I’ve been terrorised by this guy, and he thinks he’s got away with it. But I’ve got someone to come forward now.”

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has supported Angela and worked with her throughout the process of reporting the sexual assault and pressing charges against the perpetrator. Throughout this process the approach of the Community Recovery Co-ordinator has been key to reducing the stress experienced by Angela.

“She knows when I need that break from, life. It’s not even from anyone, it’s just from life. And from where I was living.”

The Case Co-ordinator has been key in advocating for Angela to get her spots in hotels when she has been rough sleeping. The staff in the hotels were not always supportive of the people who are being accommodated there and Angela experienced a fit following a negative interaction with a security guard.

“It was horrible in there in [hotel], I passed out had a fit the other week. The night security guard in the hotel, he was coming up in corridors every night without fail, kicking off, screaming, slamming doors, this one night he’s been doing it really bad and we’ve all got fed up. With me being pregnant I was recording it and he was screaming in my face. I had a fit. He was screaming in my face it was terrifying.”

Angela now lives in a flat with her partner. Changing Futures supported her to get this accommodation and continue to work with her to sustain it.

Mental and physical health

Angela has multiple physical and mental health diagnoses including epilepsy, osteoporosis and bulimia. At the time of the interview the Case Co-ordinator was working with Angela and linking in with the Citizens Advice Bureau to put in an application for Personal Independence Payments to ensure she is claiming the appropriate financial support. Angela is having her forms sent to the Changing Futures office.

Angela has experienced challenges with her mental health for most of her life. She talks about the stress and pressure of the life that she has been living and how she struggles to deal with it

*“So much stress and so much pressure, I just bottle it up and when it pops, it pops. I’ve got so much stress in my life [...]. One aspect of Angela’s experiences with poor mental health is suicidal thoughts, feelings and behaviours which have been constant throughout her life
“I’ve got 12 suicide attempts and I have died before. So many overdoses.”*

Changing Futures has been able to use the personal budget in this case to provide a flexible counselling offer to support Angelas mental health recovery.

“[Case Co-ordinator] got me a private counsellor but she’s been put on hold with everything that’s going on. All the sessions are paid for so it’s there when I need it. But right now focusing on my son and when all this is sorted I’ll go back to the counselling.”

Recognising that Angela would benefit from counselling but needs flexibility in when she engages with that process demonstrates a knowledge of Angels personal circumstances and a broader understanding of trauma informed approaches from the Case Co-ordinator.

Positive social relationships

Angela has few positive relationships but those she does have are very important to her. She feels the only people in her life who have not let her down are her partner *“He’s always been there. He’s the person I trust the most.”*, her Case Co-ordinator and the Community Recovery Co-ordinator *“They’ve made me believe that I can trust them. So I put my hope in them.”*

“[partner] is the main person I count on. He does everything for me. He made himself homeless for me. When I got kicked out the [multiple occupancy accommodation] for being pregnant, he didn’t stay [there] he came and slept on the streets with me. We slept in a tent for a week.”

Case study 6: Alex

Alex used to like jogging and did cross-country when he was at school. He wants to put down roots, get married and have kids. This is his motivation to tackle his substance use and get a tenancy.

First interview: Alex's experience of Changing Futures so far

At the time of the first interview Alex is in addiction and has been staying in a hostel for between two and three months, before this he was rough sleeping. He is under an Adult Safeguarding section and has an appointeeship that controls how much of his money he receives. He is barred from Community Drug and Alcohol Services. His family will not see him. Alex has been coming to visit the Community Recovery Co-ordinator at the Expert Citizens office for a few weeks and was still unsure of himself in that space but did agree to a chat with the interviewer about his Changing Futures experience so far.

Social services got him into the hostel and referred Alex for Changing Futures.

When asked what has happened so far that has been helpful for him, Alex talked about the location that he collects his money from. His Case Co-ordinator has been able to move the location from Stoke to Hanley which has made a big difference to Alex who has to collect his money three times a week. His Case Co-ordinator accompanies him to get his shopping when he has collected his money. This helps Alex to make sure he gets the things he needs.

“Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able get anything. Stops me from spending money on drugs and that. Just by going shopping with me and making sure I buy stuff I say I’m going to buy.”

The Community Recovery Co-ordinator has been encouraging Alex to visit the Expert Citizens office to help him to begin creating some positive social relationships. Alex’s social worker told Alex about Expert Citizens when they made the referral to Changing Futures.

Alex: social worker said they’re really good people. Go have a chat and just see how it is. It’ll help you get off the drugs. Stuff like that. People been through the same stuff that I’m going through. They might have solutions, they might not. That’s what I’ve been told. Been told I need give it a go. So that’s what I’m going do. I have done.

Interviewer: What did you think when they said just give it a go?

Alex: It’s not going work out well. Basically, I was actually wrong. I thought it was just going to be one of those places where I’ll just turn up and not want to come back. That I’d find pointless or find useless. But not all of its useless.

Interviewer: Which parts are not useless?

Alex: Being needed. Having a chat. Having someone to have a chat with. That's the positive thing about Expert Citizens you just come in and have a chat. That's all you need do. That's why it's a good place to be.

Interviewer: Why does that make it a good place to be? Do you have that anywhere else?

Alex: No duck. [...] It makes you feel useless and unwanted.

Interviewer: But now you have somewhere like this to come to...

Alex: I'm heard. And I'm listened to here. It's scary and appreciated at the same time.

Alex's second interview

The interviewer invited Alex to talk again about his experience with Changing Futures about 6 weeks after his first interview. Alex was happy to talk again but was experiencing withdrawal, so we agreed to keep it short for his comfort.

During this conversation Alex disclosed that he was considering leaving the hostel to go back to sleeping on the streets because he was experiencing intimidation, an escalation in his drug use and was not in control of his financial situation as he was finding himself deeper and deeper in debt with drug dealers and peers. Although he was in touch with Community Drug and Alcohol services now because Changing Futures had been able to advocate for him to be accepted back into the service, he has missed his appointment to start his methadone prescription twice. He was feeling frustrated because he was under an adult safeguarding section 21. He was feeling distressed and feeling the effects of withdrawal. The conversation was ended, and Alex was invited to stay at the Expert Citizens office with a cup of tea and see if some solutions could be found.

Immediately following this conversation, the interviewer disclosed the key points above to the Community Recovery Co-ordinator, who Alex was developing a relationship with and trusted. The Community Recovery Co-ordinator spoke with Alex at length about how he was feeling and what he thought would help him. The Community Recovery Co-ordinator then contacted Alex's Case Co-ordinator to arrange for Alex to be removed from the hostel temporarily to allow some respite, and Community Drug and alcohol service to make arrangements for the assessment for a methadone script. That afternoon Alex was accommodated in a hotel across the city and the following day Community Drug and Alcohol staff went to the hotel for the assessment.

Case Study 7: Thomas

Thomas really likes to paint.

“Now I can’t wait to get home and paint. There’s pots of paint all over the place. It’s unreal”

Life before Changing Futures

Thomas began using drugs at a young age and this continued into adulthood. He experiences severe mental health challenges which consequently impact on his physical health. Thomas has been excluded from multiple temporary accommodation options in Stoke-on-Trent because staff were not able to support someone with Thomas’s level of need, resulting in periods of rough sleeping.

Thomas’s experience of Changing Futures

At the time of the interview Thomas has been with Changing Futures for over twelve months. He is not sure who his Case Co-ordinator is because it has changed a few times. However, he knows the Case Manager well because they have been intermittently supporting Thomas between Case Co-ordinators.

Thomas recalls working with one of his Case Co-ordinators to support him to sustain his drug treatment. While Thomas was waiting for his new accommodation, Changing Futures were able to advocate for him to stay in a hotel because he was engaging in treatment for his drug use. His Case Co-ordinator would arrange for a taxi to take Thomas to the area where he could collect his methadone script which he says benefited him greatly.

“Taxis to get methadone in [town] and I could do my own stuff in [town] and then a taxi back – it helped me to get out otherwise I’d be stuck in the hotel.”

Thomas talked about how Changing Futures differed from other interventions he’s experienced. Other organisations or programmes “*can give you a phone call, maybe a lift but that’s it*” but Changing Futures “*can do things that others can’t do*”. Thomas believes that this is due to the programme having the money it needs to do the work with customers like himself.

“Changing Futures can do things that other services can’t do because they’ve got the money. The supports there with the money. It’s like proper support. They’ll come out and talk to you for hours. Or they’ll buy you things you need. I had nothing on my feet, I couldn’t walk, and [Case Manager] took me and bought me trainers.”

Accommodation

Thomas now has a property which was secured by Changing Futures through applying for the Rough Sleepers Initiative funding. This funding was £10,000 for everyone accepted and by having this funding Changing Futures were able to offer an accommodation provider a bond. In Thomas' case a property was identified if Changing Futures could guarantee a £5000 bond for damages, which they did.

Thomas is pleased with his property and talks about how it is supporting him to keep moving forward on his journey; *"It's motivated me to not do the shit that I've done in the past that would lose my flat like letting people in and hoarding stuff"*.

"It's better than anything, it's got a back garden, patio doors a living room. The only thing it hasn't got a bedroom but that's not an issue really, I'm off the streets I've got a wicked flat wicked location. Its lovely mate. Brand new washing machine brand new cooker. Got my washing line up and that."

Summary

These co-produced case studies provided valuable insight into the lived experiences of Changing Futures customers. They illustrate the complexity of their experiences within Changing Futures and some common issues. The interplay of childhood trauma, substance use, mental health, social relationships, effective support structures, and future aspirations constructs a rich understanding of individuals' journeys. They highlight to the importance of having a more inclusive and joined up system of support to facilitate recovery, and that people in this situation need support long-term, often beyond the delivery of targeted programmes such as Changing Futures. Individuals facing these challenges require long-term support, as recovery is inherently non-linear; it is often characterised by instability and variable circumstances. This demands consistent and adaptable support that can align with the dynamic needs, ensuring that services are proportionate and responsive to their evolving situations.