

WORKING TOGETHER TO
TACKLE DISADVANTAGE

DRAFT

Introduction

Lots of people who live in Greater Manchester are having a difficult time. Many are facing severe disadvantage and it is hard for them to find support. This guide is about working together to find a way to overcome these challenges. Working together well is sometimes called “coproduction”.

This guide is for:

- people who have lived in severe disadvantage (citizens)
- people who make decisions in services or organisations (professionals)

Most of the time these people try to find ways to overcome these challenges alone. Sometimes they have blamed each other for these challenges. We think blaming each other makes things worse not better. Instead, we need citizens and professionals to work together.

This guide is about working together to find ways to solve the challenges that people face. It is not about organisations doing things to or for people.

Why work together?

Working together can be hard but it is important. We believe all people have the right to achieve their full potential.

Through working together we can use all the expertise available and produce better solutions.

The more people that have been involved in making the solutions, the more people will believe and trust in the solutions.

Six Principles

The principles are the key ideas and rules for working together.

1. Strengths

- Everybody has strengths and weaknesses.
- Everyone has skills, knowledge, experience and other qualities to offer.
- Everyone is needed to produce solutions that work.

2. Power

- It is difficult for either citizens or professionals to challenge how things are alone.
- All types of power must be shared.
- Leadership, support and resources must come from everyone involved.
- Unequal power needs to be recognised and addressed.

3. Relationships

- Good relationships are crucial for working together.
- Positive relationships require time, respect and trust.
- Everyone needs to feel safe, valued and wanted.
- The process must feel fair, open and honest to everyone.

4. Diversity

- Diversity of people is important for high quality thinking.
- The process of working together and the language must make sense to everyone involved.
- Inequalities must be identified and talked about. These might link to age, class, disability, education, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

5. Knowledge

- There are different ways of “knowing things” and all of them are valuable.
- First-hand experience is as valuable as professional or academic knowledge.
- Knowledge of what does or does not work in the real world must be recognised and valued.

6. Testing

- Finding ways to reduce disadvantage is difficult and complicated.
- It is important to test new ideas early on and continue to test them.
- There is no failure. If things don't work out as expected make time to learn from this and change what you do.

Getting started and making progress

Below are some ideas on how to put the principles into practice when you work together.

1. Strengths

- Discuss everyone's hopes and fears, and what the 'elephants in the room' might be.
- Spend time getting to know each other as people.
- What skills, knowledge and networks does each person have to offer?
- What learning or support do citizens and professionals need to work together?
- Celebrate achievements together as they occur!

2. Power

- Everyone leaves their personal agendas, badges and labels at the door.
- Define the problem at hand all together.
- Put the hard conversations at the start and don't shy away.
- Be fully open about information and limits to what can be achieved.
- Share ownership, leadership and support between everyone. Support the people closest to the problem to lead.
- Use meeting spaces and formats comfortable for citizens.

3. Relationships

- Take time to really get to know each other as people (not labels). Build respect, trust and care, not "hi and bye".
- Set rules for behaviour that are checked frequently.
- Build a shared purpose and vision, while appreciating uncertainty and different perspectives.
- Develop bonds that can outlast the project. Who is the glue to keep everyone together?
- See issues in terms of relationships, rather than structures or services.

4. Diversity

- Use different ways to contribute and learn to allow for individual styles.
- Discuss openly how people from very different backgrounds can connect.
- Ensure diversity in everything, including leadership and facilitation.
- Continually review and identify perspectives that may be missing.

5. Knowledge

- Identify how the current system has positive and negative impacts.
- Find out about what is already going on to make things better.
- Make it feel safe to admit biases and to try new things.
- Use activities that encourage creativity and reflection.
- Clearly value both lived experience and social knowledge.

6. Testing

- Test the problem defined, the aims set and the processes to achieve them.
- Explore things that are difficult, with no expectation of where you will end up.
- The only silly idea is the one that is not shared.
- Test ideas for real, and learn from them, before moving on.
- Be open to continually learn, adapt and refine from what does and does not work.

Practicalities

Below are some things to think about to help make working together easier.

1. Easy

- Make sure you have an easy way of arranging meetings and keeping records.

2. Attractive

- Find nice settings for meetings that are comfortable for citizens.
- Make sure everyone's contributions are recognised.

3. Social

- Make sure you have good facilitation.
- Be aware of how much people are contributing. It is important everyone gets a chance to speak.
- Make sure there is clear accountability for tasks.

4. Timely

- Make sure the time you meet and how long for suits everyone.
- Make sure how long people have to do tasks works for them.

Ensuring change

1. Learning

- Evaluate the process and outcomes as you go along – don't wait until the end!
- Check anything you feel you have achieved against what you aimed to do.
- Highlight things that did not work and what you learnt from this.
- Recognise things that were unplanned or unexpected.

2. Reporting

- Be clear who all the audiences are, including any new ones that have become appropriate.
- Tell the story of the group's journey.
- Report what you have achieved in different ways to different audiences.
- Arrange to monitor how things go after the end of the project.

And finally...

Old habits are hard to break! Working well together takes time, energy and commitment but the results are worth it. We need to include everyone's voice if we truly want to overcome the challenges of disadvantage.

Find out more

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