Elephants Trail:
Where are we now?

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1.   Introduction

1.1   Background

The Elephants Trail builds on the learning from the Elephants Project in Greater Manchester in 2016-2017. The project is about people with lived experience and professionals working equally together, through a process of co-production, to solve the challenges that people face.

The project aims to create 'Elephants Spaces', which are informal and relaxed environments where relationships between people from different backgrounds and life experiences can be established. Through these spaces, decisions can be made together to actively work together for practical change.

1.2   Overview of the report

1.2.1   Aims and methods

This report has been developed from a series of interviews conducted with the Elephants Trail core team. Research questions covered four broad areas: (1) the context of the Elephants Trail work; (2) what individuals have learnt; (3) the systems around the work; and (4) the way the group learn and improving together.

Interviewees were provided with an interview topic guide (see Appendix A) in advance to ensure that the most relevant and important information was collected. Interviews were then conducted via telephone and following this a 'Voices from the Field' report was produced. This document collated core team members' responses to each of the interview questions. This provided core team members with sight of the raw data from the research which was drawn on in a collaborative sense making session in which the core team reflected on their responses.

1.2.2   Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to capture the reflections of the core team and feeds into the commitment to generate learning at the following levels:

- Personal development – participants develop the skills, confidence and networks to benefit both personally and professionally.
- Policy and practice – through Elephants spaces, participants will seek to generate new solutions to issues of severe and multiple disadvantage.
- Work systemically to secure change in the systems, structures and cultures that drive disadvantage by demonstrating in practice how pervasive power imbalances can be challenged and addressed.
- Collaborative leadership with people across organisational boundaries at different levels in the system to co-produce shared learning and solutions.
- Individual and collective focus on behaviours and values that enable co-production.

1.2.3   Report Structure

This report covers the following topics:

- The context of the Elephants Trail and its aims.
- Key learning from the work to date.
- What does this tell us about the system?
- Reflections on the mechanisms for learning.

2.   The context and aims of the Elephants Trail

2.1   Context

Telephone interviews explored the context which has set the need and agenda for the Elephants Trail work.

2.1.1   Severe and Multiple Disadvantage

It was reported that severe and multiple disadvantage remains a contemporary challenge for Greater Manchester, with people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages 'facing the most difficult of lives'. One interviewee proposed that the gentrification of Greater Manchester was exacerbating this by pushing people out into the suburbs.

2.1.2   The current system

The data represented the view that the current system is 'broken', and that mainstream responses to the challenges of tackling severe and multiple disadvantages do not work. This was reflected in the view that there is an increase in demand for services and the more extreme nature of that demand. In addition, an industry, which is well remunerated, was seen as being created around people with severe and multiple disadvantages. The morality of this was questioned given that local people are still suffering.

Several interviewees expressed the importance of considering underlying issues, suggesting that historically, the support infrastructure for people with severe and multiple disadvantages has been shaped to focus on single issues such as mental health, substance misuse and criminal justice. This approach was criticised for failing to recognise the interconnected nature of these issues inhibiting its effectiveness. Rather than the creation of an additional service, more creative solutions are needed. As one interviewee described, it is often the desire for things that others often take for granted such as friendship or purpose in life.

2.1.3   The voice of lived experience

A culture of 'doing to' not 'doing with' was seen as prevailing and the importance and benefit of seeing the world through the eyes of those experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages was reported. However, there were varying experiences of the participation of people with lived experience in co-producing solutions. Some interviewees reported that

people with severe and multiple disadvantages "don't feel they have a voice in the system". Although it was also suggested that a growing number of people with lived experience who have been through early user involvement initiatives are now working within the system, which is supporting a growing internal drive for system change.

Through their experience of the first phase of the Elephants Project, one interviewee described the significant role of power in the process of co-production. They described practical examples of the power indifference such as the meeting venue, who designs the meeting agenda and how information is shared in advance of the meeting. People with severe and multiple disadvantages saw themselves being "wheeled in and out as and when it suited the commissioner or service deliverer" and found themselves being excluded at the decision making point. Finally, people with severe and multiple disadvantages were asked to share their personal stories as part of co-production discussions, but this was not the case for the service deliverer.

2.2 Aims of the Elephants Trail

The main beneficiaries of the project were identified as people with severe and multiple disadvantages, the wider community and other system actors such as leaders, decision-makers, funders, commissioners and statutory services.

2.2.1 People experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages

Interviewees reported the desire to support local people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages. An asset-based approach was described, with a focus on strengths rather than trying to treat a person's problems. This was supported through coaching in the early stages of the relationship with participants. Initially, conversations with participants aimed to create clarity about what might emerge from the project and the roles of the participant and the project officer in the process. Through this process, participants were then encouraged to 'recognise and nurture their development'. Practical skills such as presenting ideas and facilitating meetings, as well as personal and inter-personal strengths, such as confidence, self-esteem, drive and determination, were described as some of the broad range of benefits that project participants appeared to acquire.

There was a sense that the project had supported participants to forge a sense of belonging and feeling of being connected through developing a support network and creating opportunities to work collaboratively. This created a sense of hope and purpose to want to help other people. As one interviewee commented "A person with purpose and meaning in their life is someone who is in a much healthier place."

It was also hoped that these strengths and attributes would be linked to participants being better able to secure fulfilling employment and having a greater awareness of opportunities in their local community. A final aim of the project was to instil a belief that it was possible to have a 'voice in the system, power and legitimacy' to be able to make a difference to facilitate genuine co-production.

2.2.2   Wider Community

The data suggested that the project had potential not only to support participants, but also have impact at the wider community level. The opportunity to share learning around engaging people historically seen as being 'hard to reach' with local community organisations. Through this engagement, it was also suggested that participants would be able to explore their own ideas for helping other local people, therefore spreading the approach beyond the initial participant group. It was also an ambition that this improved connectivity would enable people with severe and multiple disadvantages to build networks with people who had 'more influence' in place and to have more of a direct say in the way that decisions are made locally. Therefore, a long-term aim was for people with severe and multiple disadvantages who have not been engaged on the project to benefit from improved provision in the system that is more appropriately designed to their needs and aspirations.

2.2.3   Leaders and Decision Makers

Although it was suggested that the focus of the current phase of the Elephants Trail project has not been on these beneficiaries, clear outcomes were reportedly achieved with this group in the initial phase of the project. It was anticipated that leaders and decision makers would have a better understanding of 'what works in relation to resolving the challenge of severe and multiple disadvantage'.

Another aim of the project was a greater understanding of the process of co-production in relation to people with severe and multiple disadvantages. In particular, one interviewee suggested that the project might support a power shift moving away from statutory services designing solutions to severe and multiple disadvantage to supporting local people to find their own solutions. However, it was recognised that system change in terms of culture, processes and structures will take time.

2.2.4 Co-production

The Elephants Trail project was seen as a space to explore more effective ways of people with severe and multiple disadvantages and decision makers, services and funders to work together. The historical challenges of this approach were acknowledged such as co-production often being tokenistic or ineffective with "very little stock placed on what people with severe and multiple disadvantage say". In order for this to change, it was suggested that both parties should have a shared purpose. It was recognised that this would require system actors to approach the process with humility and a desire to listen. In addition, as people develop strengths, through their connection to the Elephants Trail project, they then become more able to engage in a process of co-production with commissioners and decision makers in the system. This was seen as having the potential to be a really positive force for change in people's lives and provide the platform where the challenge of severe and multiple disadvantage could be discussed in a constructive way.

3. Discussion of key learning points from the work

3.1   Working Policies and Practices

Interviewees reflected on the working practices they had implemented to work towards these aims.

3.1.1 Planning Phase

Interviewees reflected on the initial phase of the project. This was focused on orientating core team members with policies and procedures, but also was used as time to plan how to move forward with the work. This involved researching the local areas in which core team members would be working and identifying local organisations and services. As well as conducting desk-based research, "spending time on the ground" reportedly helped to develop an understanding of the area and where core team members might make contact with people with severe and multiple disadvantages. Reflections on this initial planning stage indicated that this was quite time consuming. There were questions around whether implementing the local project work earlier on would have been more beneficial. An alternative view was that this time might have been better spent creating a more detailed project plan as there was the perception that there might have been some project drift.

3.1.2   Roles

A diverse range of people were reported as being involved in the project with people with lived experience facing challenges in the system, people looking to make improvements in their life and people with formal roles within organisations in the system. Various roles were described, such as the role of Engagement Worker responsible for recruiting participants into the project, providing support so that they can sustain involvement and "helping people to benefit from the process and to be the best that they can be". Having two people working in localities was seen as beneficial. There was a reflection that had an Engagement Worker been recruited earlier on in the project, this might have helped to engage and encourage people with lived experience to connect to the work. A Project Co-ordinator role was also identified as important to 'drive the work', develop and 'sustain motivation' and "ensure that people are brought into the process at the right time". A number of skills associated with this role were named such as "ability to communicate with people regardless of their experience", "being authentic", knowing when to lead from the front and when to step back" and "being able to motivate people when things become difficult". It was reported that this skill set was not within the community currently, or perhaps individuals had not had an opportunity to bring this to the fore.

However, the Core Group was described as having a collaborative leadership approach and promoted the ability for people to take on different roles. There was a high degree of flexibility described and criticality in being open and honest about what was working well and what might need to be adapted. A lack of outcomes and key performance indicators, a focus on learning and diverse experiences of group members all supported positive working relationships. Although, there appeared to be a tension between learning and action, with

the suggestion that creating more collective accountability was needed to ensure that the project is a positive enabler for change.

3.1.3 Engagement

A process for engaging participants was described, beginning with desk-based and field research to understand the local area and identify places to make contact with people with severe and multiple disadvantages. Meetings were set up with contacts as these places in attempt to generate referrals. However, this did not lead to significant recruitment for the project. Barriers to engagement were identified as contacts' lack of trust of and their "desire to be cautious and protective of the vulnerable people with whom they worked". This required a flexible approach to adapt ways of working that was enable direct relationships to be formed with people with severe and multiple disadvantages to build trust. An existing connection with a location was also seen as being beneficial in generating connection and gaining trust to "raise the profile of the work". Legitimacy was also gained through core team members having relatable lived experience.

Engaging participants was seen requiring a sensitive and tactful approach. Openness and honesty about roles in the project were seen as important in building trust with potential participants. It was recognised that relationship building often needed to come first and a significant amount of work undertaken to build awareness of the project prior to a discussion about recruitment, before pitching the project to prevent barriers to engagement. Taking this approach led to "a strong sense of support and commitment" to the project from new recruits.

The approach to engagement was seen as context dependent, with different approaches needed in different areas. Recruitment of people from the statutory services varied across locations, although this was consistently delayed to later stages of the process to enable people with severe and multiple disadvantages to work on solutions independently in the first instance. Maintaining participants' engagement in the project was also a challenge. When participants has established positive relationships across the group, there was a tendency to remain with the project and WhatsApp groups were set up to help to maintain these connections. A sense of hope amongst participants that positive change could made was also described. Having a project co-ordinator to maintain contact with participants to ensure they stayed motivated was seen as important as was ensuring a positive working environment.

3.1.4 Co-production of a shared purpose

Interviewees described the process followed once participants had engaged with the project. This involved "exploring the principles of what it is we are trying to achieve together; working out a methodology for how we will work together as a group; sharing our understanding of the core principles and language of co-production; and how the group is going to make decisions". This was described as a "very developmental and inclusive process", ensuring language was accessible for all and using the principles of Deep Democracy to ensure there was shared understanding and commitment to decisions. It was recognised that not all participants had an interest in exploring system change and in one

location two groups were set up, one to explore these issues and another informal group with the purpose of providing space for like-minded people to come together and connect with positive things happening in their community.

Although there did not appear to be a formal inquiry question at a local level, there were themes starting to emerge through this process of co-production. There was a sense of a growing recognition of people being let down by existing services and that the system is broken. Rather than enabling people to negotiate this broken system, the focus should be on creating something new. The key question therefore appeared to be related to power and the most appropriate balance of power within neighbourhoods to address severe and multiple disadvantage.

3.1.5 Environment

As previously described, a great deal of distrust in the system was reported. Therefore, creating a 'safe and secure' space was seen as important. Various techniques were used to build trust. For example, check-ins and a card game called 'More than One Story' were used to enable all participants to be involved in conversations and to get to know each other better, sharing as much or as little as they felt comfortable to do. Deep democracy techniques were also used to support collective decision making. There was a sense of creating spaces that had an equitable balance of power, with some techniques being described as "levellers". Likewise, various locations were trialled to enable meetings to take place in a venue that felt comfortable for participants. Appropriate venues appeared to be those that were informal and situated within the local community, such as a soup kitchen.

Project facilitators reportedly needed to be flexible in responding to changing needs of participants and to "expect the unexpected". Being authentic and having a genuine desire to be involved in the work was seen as critical to building relationships to show participants that the project workers were there for the "long haul". Listening was also described as important and actively keeping participants updated. There was a tension described between motivating participants to work collectively on something that would create positive change, and also being careful not to overpromise. In order to do this, giving people time to "get things off their chest" and sitting with people in their frustration were elements of the role.

Participants were provided with an opportunity to train as Community Collaborators, to develop knowledge and skills to support them to play a more active role in their community. There appeared to be an appetite from people with lived experience and professionals to talk about power and roles in the system this was explored further by inviting decision makers into the space to start the conversations on how best to reshape the system to be more effective in supporting people with severe and multiple disadvantages.

3.1.6 Engaging with the wider system

Alongside the engagement with people with lived experience, relationships were developed with other systems actors such as decision makers. A measured approach to engaging with the rest of the system was described, using allies that were already on board with the

ambition for the project and the underpinning principles and values that guide the work. This was described as challenging at times, with a tension between encouraging other system actors to have a stake in the work without taking control over it. This was seen as important to counteract the common perception that some form of permission from statutory organisations is needed to create change.

By casting the net wide in engaging many parts of the system, it was felt that participants had a diverse and wide range of experiences to draw upon. There was an intention to bring people with lived experience and decision makers together so that people with severe and multiple disadvantages can influence the development of local strategy. In order to do so, interviewees talked about preparation work with participants to ensure they felt confident to be part of these discussions. Through this process, the project was hoped to enable organisations to have a better understanding of co-production and raise awareness of the issue of severe and multiple disadvantage and for this to spread as members shared the approach in their respective organisations. Having a connection with Greater Manchester Combined Authority was also seen as providing legitimacy for the project and raising its profile with key stakeholders.

3.1.7   Wider Influence

Several challenges were identified in relation to the project having wider influence. Firstly, there was the view that the system was "incapable of learning and inflexible to change". Additionally, it was argued that there was often the notion that collective work with people with severe and multiple disadvantages was successful, however this was not representative of reality. Timescales for the commissioning process also did not seem to have a sense of urgency that was focused on making a difference to people's lives. When working with these challenges, it was recognised that the Elephants Trail should be centred on how to address severe and multiple disadvantage. With this in mind, it was argued that co-production should be viewed as a way of working or a "vehicle to solve the issue" rather than the sole focus of the project.

3.2 Severe and multiple disadvantage

It was argued that severe and multiple disadvantage is more prevalent and ingrained than ever before. There was a recognition that there are a number of reasons why people are disadvantaged and how this can become severe. A fine line between a 'normal life' and a life characterised by severe and multiple disadvantages was identified. With this in mind, the definition of severe and multiple disadvantage has changed for some. This has moved from a focus on people who are homeless, experiencing problems with substance misuse, mental ill health and in contact with the criminal justice system, to a more general definition covering people who are excluded from things that most people take for granted such as socialising or benefiting from employment opportunities.

The issue of severe and multiple disadvantage was regarded as complex and context specific, and there is not one homogenous group, but rather there are many different people experiencing different challenges in their life. Therefore, there is no one solution or 'magic bullet' to solve this problem. However, metal wellbeing was viewed as critical and

supporting individuals with basic human needs such as financial needs and a sense of belonging, purpose and being valued. Additionally, common strengths were also identified. For example, people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages appear to becoming more resilient and it was identified that initiatives should focus on assisting the positive change that is already being created through drawing on the wealth of knowledge residing in this group and providing additional support and resources.

The systemic nature of severe and multiple disadvantage was also discussed. Proximity to power and wealth was highlighted as one factor. Reduced access to power and wealth was a feature of the remote, however being situated close to power and wealth could also be adverse through negative comparisons. In fact, severe and multiple disadvantage was viewed as a construct that has been created by the system and people in positions of power. There is a further perspective that this construct is, in part, actively encouraged by a capitalist political system.

3.3 Power

Power was seen as central to the work. As one interviewee expressed "power is the issue". However, power dynamics were described as being "subtle" with the concept of hidden power resulting in the Elephants Trail prioritising people with lived experience before engaging with other stakeholders. People with severe and multiple disadvantages were viewed as lacking in power and in most instances were subject to other people having power over them. For example, the data described the tendency for 'experts' to be perceived as academics or professionals, rather than the individual that is an expert in his or her life. This then led to solutions being created without listening to the voice of people with lived experience and missing "all the rich insight" available.

Interviewees argued that there is not a finite amount of power available in the system. There are opportunities for individuals to create their own power. This was demonstrated in the Elephants Trail approach of providing a platform for people to talk about issues that are important to them. This was seen as tackling the repressive nature of the current system whereby people with severe and multiple disadvantages feel that their liberty can be taken away. In providing this platform, there was the hope that people with will feel empowered and that traditional power holders will enter the space with an "open ear and open mind". This experience will help to build individuals strengths, to move towards 'achieving stability' and 'maintain power in the system'. In addition to individual agency, power could be created through collective agency, although it was recognised this is now not as prevalent with a lack of infrastructure to support collective action such as Trade Unions and Co-Operatives. In addition, there is a consideration that a redistribution of power needs to be supported by a redistribution of financial resources to ensure that the desired change occurs. The growth of technology was also mentioned as providing the opportunity for greater collective influence rather than power.

The complexity of power was further discussed with the observation that power is not always intentional. There were experiences of power being used in an autocratic way and it was recognised that this was the conventional expectation. Alongside this, there was the potential of power to be corruptive, with people seeking out power for their own means.

However, in contrast, it was acknowledged that there are people in the system that appear not to want to use the structural power that they are perceived to have.

3.4 Co-production

A consistent theme of interviews was the need to take a different approach to co-production when working with groups of people with different levels of positional power. There were a number of practices which were described as important in creating an environment for co-production to be successful. Firstly, building relationships and trust was seen as crucial. Next, establishing a space where there is authenticity and shared purpose. Ground rules may be helpful to develop boundaries for the discussion. Finally, all voices should be encouraged to participate in a supportive rather than intrusive way. There was an element of creating a safe space. It was suggested that through co-production we are asking all participants to "give up something of themselves". Therefore, sensitivity is required especially given that often people with severe and multiple disadvantages may not have the foundational support to draw on if things becomes challenging.

It was acknowledged that the approach was difficult and that a there is a recognition that there is a significant amount of time and support required for all concerned to get to a position where discussions are likely to produce positive outcomes. Power was seen as an important aspect of co-production and it was suggested that decision-makers also needed to understand how to operate in the space to be able to achieve the equitable balance of power, which co-production aspires to. With this in mind, co-production could be described as an output rather than an input.

The label of co-production was seen to be "trendy" at present however, there was a level of scepticism with the observation that people often find it difficult to give up power and control of resources. Forms of community engagement such as consultation and participation were also often referred to as co-production without addressing power imbalances. It was acknowledged that these engagement approaches are often appropriate, with local people not necessarily needing to have the same level of power as professionals in all situations. Regardless, there seemed to be a positive move towards being more customer focused, for example in the care sector.

4. The system

Interviewees reflected on the current system in which Elephants Trail is working and how this has helped or hindered the work.

4.1 Defining Place

The context and changing dynamics of the place were identified as important elements that define what will and what will not work. For example, levels of trust appeared to vary across local areas, which impacted on recruitment of participants. Power dynamics were seen as the reason for this, with the reluctance of local people building connections with those deemed as 'outsiders'. Therefore, a 'deep understanding' of place was required in order to work effectively. Having existing connections with a place could help to build on existing

networks and relationships. However, it was also acknowledged that prior links to place might come with preconceived perceptions that are not supportive. Part of the work was seen as helping people to identify with the place in which they live and have a sense of ownership and belonging. The aim was for the place to be more connected as a community and to be more inclusive.

There was a sense of the challenge of defining the boundaries of 'place'. The geographic constructs that were chosen were not necessarily recognised by the people that live in local communities. Additionally, some people identified with place on a bigger scale, with Manchester being the focus rather than the local community. Finally, place could also refer to a shared interest as well as shared geography.

Reflecting on their experiences within place, interviewees observed that were individuals that were important assets in place and had wide connections. There was a definite appetite for system change. However, an imbalance of power was felt with too much power being held by a small number of people in Manchester city centre making decisions for the whole of Greater Manchester. A reluctance to relinquish power was also experienced meaning people were "working against a massive headwind trying to resolve some big systemic problems".

4.2   Describing the current system

The current system was described as fragmented and "disconnected from realities of people's lives". Austerity was seen as having a negative impact of the system and highlighting systemic inequalities with some being able to maintain resources and power, whilst others have not been able to do so. An example was provided of the voluntary sector shouldering some of this depletion of resources and the tension this is causing within the system. Nevertheless, a potential benefit of austerity was seen as creating a space for local people to create their own solutions which has resulted in greater focus on severe and multiple disadvantage. Devolution was also cited as creating a situation where local initiatives are closer to power and where people feel they can now take more of this power.

4.3   The impact of the current system on the work of the Elephants Trail

It was felt that there is a growing recognition of the need for communities and the public sector to work more closely together, with one interviewee citing the People Powered Group as a practical example of new infrastructure within the system that is providing important benefits. Additionally, the funding model through which the Elephants Trail project had been financially resourced felt different given the lack of 'interfering' or requirement for typical performance management information. It was hoped this was a signal of funders realising that complex issues require a different approach.

Interviewees also reflected on the difficulties of the current system, with a lack of shared information and impersonal responses being identified. The removal of funding from organisations and a disinvestment in communities was also seen as having a negative impact. Finally, it was recognised that the challenges sometimes came from within. It was acknowledged that often actions were not taken due to the perception that they would be

hindered by the current system. However, this perception had been changed through the project.

The Elephants Trail project also seemed to have made an impact on the system with examples shared regarding various system actors. One front-line worker was reported as describing the engagement with the Elephants Trail project as "the most impactful piece of work that they did that year". Additionally, networks with commissioners and service providers appeared to be developing and it seemed that the Elephants Trail had "raised some questions about disadvantage and co-production". This was demonstrated with an example of the Combined Authority starting to engage people with severe and multiple disadvantages and get to the root causes of problems.

5. Learning

Through interviews there was the opportunity to reflect on the processes for learning and improvement that had been undertaken by the core team.

5.1 Learning infrastructure

There was a sense of the creation of an environment for learning and innovation which had been created by Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Lankelly Chase. The core team explained that they had structured monthly meetings so that every third month, there was a learning session facilitated by the Place Action Inquiry Learning Partner. This allowed there to balance between action orientated meetings, which focused on organising activity and learning meetings which provided an opportunity to reflect on the work and identify learning that could be taken forward. These sessions were seen as providing confidence to local co-ordinators to be flexible in their development of the project.

There were reflections about how learning sessions could be enhanced by using more creative approaches to stimulating and capturing the learning. Likewise, a more disciplined approach to capturing the learning between action and learning sessions was also identified as a way of improving learning processes.

Other formal learning support was taken from colleagues with expertise in Deep Democracy and also from an artist that captured learning from sessions in visual form. Interviewees explained that working in pairs in local places was also a "key success factor in ensuring we move the project forward positively". Informal learning processes were also described such as individual processes of reflection. Collectively, the core team was described as being "mutually supportive" and had developed a space where there was genuine interest and desire to help. Interviewees saw their colleagues as "critical friends" with "shared common values" and collectively a "shared belief system". There appeared to be relationships formed which also recognised individuals outside of the project.

5.2 Accountability

There was a recognition that the second phase of the project differed in the sense that unlike phase one, there was no single organisation that held partners to account. There was

an aim to move towards collective accountability. However, it was suggested that an effective mechanism for collective accountability at the core group level had not been developed as yet. This had resulted in the perception of project slippage.

5.3 Sharing the learning

The core team has delivered a range of workshops to share learning about commissioning and decision-making, the Elephants Trail principles and the topic of co-production. For example, through the Combined Authority Together Initiative's Co-production Network. A specific session around co-production was delivered to strategic leaders to explore what the learning means for strategy and policy. The experience of sharing learning has led to the reflection that often there is a focus on 'good news stories'. This was related to the drive to raise the profile of the Elephants Trail and a recognition to share the 'warts and all' story to demonstrate how the project has learned from the challenges it has faced. Finally, it was acknowledged that there were practical challenges in sharing learning with people that are currently facing severe and multiple disadvantages. Exploring a process for sharing learning with people with severe and multiple disadvantages in neighbourhoods outside of the ones in which the project is currently working was highlighted as a priority.

5.4 Individual reflections

Interviewees reflected on their own development throughout the project so far. Power was a recurring theme in reflections with some inward insights around reluctance to share power, how to act with assertiveness without representing power dynamics, or gaining confidence to share ideas. It led to one interviewee reflecting on their own historical experience of co-production, realising that this was not power sharing as they now know it to be. Although, there was the recognition that working in non-hierarchical structures could lead to paralysis when making collective decisions and there were times when individuals had to step into their power to decide on action. However, this needed to be based on an inclusive discussion and multiple perspectives. As one interviewee explained this involved recognising power and using it for positive influence or "the issue is how you use it, and with whom it is shared".

Individuals talked about the skills they had developed such listening, "learning to be more human" and to be authentic. Resilience also seemed to feature in the reflections with the acknowledgement of the need to be flexible when things do not go to plan and remain positive. The benefit of partnership working also seemed to be affirmed. Finally, there was a real sense of passion for the work, with one interviewee expressing "the work is really meaningful to me". There was an example of a core team member drawing on their own experience to support others: "You feel like you're lost sometimes and you feel you are too far up the road to ever make it back. But it is possible. I really want to instil that hope in people if I can."

6. Conclusion

This report has presented the key learning points from the Elephants Trail core team. This section summarises the overarching key themes from the previous discussion.

6.1 A broken system

There is the view that the current system is broken and disconnected from the realities of people's lives. Therefore, there is a need for a different approach which considers the underlying, varied and complex reasons for severe and multiple disadvantage, rather than simply creating additional new services. Solutions should be co-designed with people who have lived experience of the issues the services wish to support.

6.2 Power

People living with severe and multiple disadvantages are lacking power and there is currently 'very little stock' placed on their perspectives. There is also a common perception that some form of permission from statutory organisations is need to create change. This perhaps relates the notion of 'experts' failing to recognise that people living with severe and multiple disadvantages have gained expertise through their experiences. There is not a finite amount of power available in the system and therefore there are opportunities to create power through individual and collective agency.

6.3 Engagement

The process of bringing together a group of individuals firstly requires an understanding of the local area. Having a previous connection to the area can be beneficial in terms of building on existing networks. Likewise, having relatable lived experience can also help to build trust more quickly with participants. Being purposeful on which stakeholders are engaged in this process can ensure that a diverse and wider range of perspectives are brought into discussions and can help to spread the impact of the project by raising its profile and through the application of learning at participants organisations.

6.4 Trust

Building relationships with participants was seen as the foundation of the work. This involved being transparent and honest about the project, having a genuine interest in supporting people and being there for the 'long haul'. This can create tensions between motivating individuals to be involved, whilst also being honest about limitations and not overpromising.

6.5 Co-production

Participants are less likely to share their perspectives when there are power dynamics at play. Informal and inclusive environments in comfortable surroundings can help to create the right conditions to support individuals to share their perspectives. Other tools such as check-ins, story cards and Deep Democracy can also to develop conversations. When bringing together various parts of the system, preparation work with groups can help both parties feel comfortable in participating fully. However, collective decision-making can be challenging with the potential for decision paralysis. In these situations is there the need for individuals to step in to power to move the work forward?

6.6 Accountability

Tensions were voiced around maintaining the direction of the project with "project drift" being described by some. There were questions around whether a detailed project plan was needed to outline this and the need for a project co-ordinator to ensure that motivation is sustained and the project driven forward. In contrast, the need for greater "collective accountability" was as voiced. Underlying this was the governance of the project with a focus on learning rather than key performance indicators enabling greater flexibility, but also an argument that this needed to be balanced with action to enable the project to be a positive enabler of change.

6.7 Individual benefits

As well as providing participants with a platform to voice their perspectives, individuals have the opportunity to develop a range of skills and create a sense of shared purpose. Also, the space provides an opportunity for individuals to "get things off their chest" and voice their frustrations. Benefits were also felt by the core team members, expressing that they had developed skills such as resilience and flexibility and also that the work was meaningful to them.

6.8 Learning

The use of formal learning sessions were seen as beneficial in providing an opportunity to reflect on the work and providing confidence to members to be flexible in their development of the project. Within the core team, having mutually supportive relationships helped to develop criticality amongst members. However, this was related to the theme of accountability, with a focus on learning perhaps being at the expense of action. Finally, there is a need to share learning from the project, both what has worked and also the challenges, with wider stakeholders from across the system including people facing severe and multiple disadvantages.

Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide

'Where are we now?' Publication - Telephone Interview Topic Guide

1.0   Introduction

Lankelly Chase have commissioned 'additional support' for the Place Inquiry targeted at three specific areas – Gateshead, Greater Manchester, and York. The 'additional support' is being provided by Northumbria University as part of its role as Learning Partner. The principal output from the 'additional support' is a separate **"Where are we now"** publication/material for each place that is co-produced with the core teams. A key underpinning principle for the development process is that it should build local ownership and commitment and contribute to the further development of the work.

As part of the development process for the "Where are we now" publication, it has been agreed that telephone interviews will be undertaken with the Greater Manchester Place Inquiry core team. This Topic Guide will provide the structure and focus for individual telephone interviews. The core team have been central to the production of this Topic Guide having been involved in co-design sessions with Simon Penhall (Learning Partner Associate) on Tuesday 7 January and Tuesday 4 February.

2.0   Preparing for the interview

The informal telephone interview is planned to take approximately 1 ½ hours to complete and will be undertaken by Simon Penhall (Learning Partner Associate). It would be useful if you could give consideration to the questions that are provided below, in advance of the interview. If possible, making some notes in advance would also help to ensure that we collect the most relevant and important information.

3.0   Telephone interview questions

Some questions about the project

- What is the context that sets the need and agenda for the project?
- What are you expecting to be different, and for whom, in part as a result of the project?
- What work have you done to try and make that difference happen?
- What is the Place Inquiry question that you are exploring?

Some questions about what you have learnt

- What have you learnt about the difference you have made so far?
- What have you learnt about the work you have undertaken – what's worked well? What would you do differently if you had the time again?
- What have you learnt about power?
- What have you learnt about co-production?
- What have you learnt about severe and multiple disadvantage?
- What have we learnt about Place? (Greater Manchester and your local area)
- What have we learnt about yourself as an individual?

Some questions about the system around your work and people with severe and multiple disadvantage

- How have you used the Lankelly Chase system behaviours in your work?

- What have you learnt about how the system has helped or hindered what you are trying to achieve with the Elephants Trail project?
- What have you learnt about the extent and ways in which the system has been reshaped by your work?

Some questions about the way you learn and improve together
- How do you learn?
- How do you go about learning about your practice?
- How do you capture / document learning?
- How do you reflect on your learning to change your practice?
- How do you share learning with others?
- How are others in this work learning and sharing with you?
- Do you have dedicated spaces for learning together, and do these work well?
- How does the core team express emotional support and encouragement for one another?
- Does the core team have a clear sense of purpose and coherence in our work?
- Do people come to meetings with a clear sense of purpose?
- Has working with the core group changed what you value, or what you prioritise?
- Are others in the core group open to discussion about what they think and feel?

Thank you for taking part in the telephone interview

If you have any questions regarding these questions or the work of the Learning Partner, please don't hesitate to get in contact with:

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07815 187653

Lankelly Chase System Behaviours

Lankelly Chase have identified core behaviours that help systems function better for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage. These behaviours are about **perspective, power and participation**.

PERSPECTIVE
1. **People view themselves as part of an interconnected whole**
2. **People are viewed as resourceful and bringing strengths**
3. **People share a vision**

POWER
4. **Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted**
5. **Decision-making is devolved**
6. **Accountability is mutual**

PARTICIPATION

7. **Open, trusting relationships enable effective dialogue**
8. **Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level**
9. **Feedback and collective learning drive adaptation**

You can find out more about Lankelly Chase System Behaviours on their website -
https://lankellychase.org.uk/our-approach/system-behaviours/