

Co-designing peer support at Future Pathways



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Executive summary

Future Pathways is a service which supports adults who experienced abuse or neglect while in care as a child. The service has received feedback that people seek opportunities to access support from and with peers. In response to the feedback received, a co-design group was formed to:


- Explore the peer support and engagement opportunities that people accessing Future Pathways seek.
- Identify what these opportunities could look like.
- Develop ideas for Future Pathways to explore and test.

The co-design group comprised participants from Voices for a Better Future, Iriss, Scottish Recovery Network, and Future Pathways. Members of the Voices for a Better Future lived experience group contributed the perspectives of people with experience of in-care abuse or neglect, and of accessing Future Pathways' support. Participants from Iriss led the design and delivery of the co-design process. Scottish Recovery Network contributed expertise and experience of approaches to peer support. Participants from the Future Pathways staff team contributed safeguarding and evaluation expertise and linked this project with the service's wider strategic aims, including ensuring a link to the Alliance Leadership Team in order to secure funding for new initiatives. The co-design group worked collaboratively to progress the above aims.

This report consolidates what the co-design group learned about:

- Gaps in Future Pathways' current support
- The group's proposed approach to peer support at Future Pathways
- Ideas for Future Pathways to explore.
- The support needed to progress.
- Participants' experience of the co-design project.

The project enabled Future Pathways to better understand how the service can respond to the needs of people accessing support. It demonstrated that there is an appetite among people supported by Future Pathways for opportunities to share and hear stories of recovery; connect with others with lived experience of in-care abuse or neglect; and using the voices of lived experience to influence positive change.



We also learned more about how Future Pathways should approach developing peer supports. We learned that everyone has different needs and preferences for the supports they access. Therefore, centralising voices of lived experience, and espousing mutuality and intentionality is vital to developing peer support opportunities at Future Pathways. We learned that, at this point, people supported by Future Pathways seek opportunities to connect with peers in a way that is facilitated and supported by Future Pathways. And we learned that we must continue to focus on empowering people with lived experience to take increased ownership of supports.

The project also provided opportunities to reflect on what the group learned about the co-design approach. Participants with lived experience and partner participants were deeply motivated to meaningfully contribute to service developments that would benefit people with lived experience of in-care abuse or neglect. We also learned that the group's choices about where and how the group collaborated contributed to the overall experience of participating in the co-design project.

Key terms

Co-design is an approach to designing and developing a product, service or system which involves the participation of multiple stakeholders. In the context of services, this involves collaboration with people accessing the service to design and deliver solutions that will benefit others accessing support. It involves working in participatory and inclusive ways that appreciate everyone's skills and expertise and where everyone is treated as an equal collaborator.(1)

Engagement activities, in the context of Future Pathways, are opportunities to build or sustain relationships with the service's audiences. Engagement activities promote participation and connection with various audiences, including people we support, Delivery Partners, existing statutory and non-statutory services, our alliance partners including Scottish Government, and the wider population of people who experienced in-care abuse or neglect. Engagement activities can be led and facilitated by people we support, by Future Pathways staff, and/or by external services.

Peer support is a relationship of mutual support where people with similar life experiences offer each other support, especially as they move through difficult or challenging experiences. Peer support is based on people sharing experiences, and developing relationships founded on hope, mutuality, and empowerment. Peer support focuses on what works well for the whole person and on solutions, rather than only thinking about needs, deficits, or problems.(2) You can read more about peer support in Appendix 2, or [by following this link](#).

People with lived experience, in the context of Future Pathways, refers to people who have experienced abuse or neglect while in care in Scotland who are 'experts by experience'.

Alliance Leadership Team oversees the work of the In Care Survivors Alliance and its two services (Future Pathways and Redress Support Service). The team is made up of representatives from each of the Alliance partner organisations. These are Glasgow Psychological Trauma Service (also known as The Anchor), Health in Mind, Penumbra Mental Health and the Scottish Government.

1 This definition was developed in collaboration with Iriss. You can read more about Iriss in the Participants section of this report.

2 This definition was developed in collaboration with Scottish Recovery Network. You can read more about peer support in Appendix 2 of this report. You can read more about Scottish Recovery Network in the Participants section of this report.

Project background

About Future Pathways

Future Pathways aims to make life better for people who experienced abuse or neglect while in care in Scotland. The service works towards enabling people registered with the service to gain a sense of freedom, purpose, confidence, and independence. Once registered with Future Pathways, people work with a Support Coordinator. Together with their Support Coordinator, people are supported in a relational way to surface and plan for their personal outcomes. Support Coordinators then facilitate access to a range of resources - including commissioned services provided by a network of Delivery Partners, material support, and support to access and engage with existing third sector and statutory services.

Current approach to peer support

Peer support is a relationship where people with similar life experiences offer each other mutual support, especially as they move through difficult or challenging experiences.⁽³⁾ Currently at Future Pathways, if peer support is identified as part of progressing someone's personal outcomes, the Support Coordinator connects the person with existing external peer support services. People supported by the service can also periodically access opportunities to connect with peers at Future Pathways engagement events. People supported by the service can also participate in ongoing engagement initiatives with a focus on sharing creative projects with peers. Finally, people supported by the service also have opportunities to participate in the Future Pathways lived experience voice group, Voices for a Better Future. You can read more about the work of this group in the Participants section of this report.

Feedback from people registered with Future Pathways

In 2021 and 2022, Future Pathways conducted two independently led consultations to gather information about how people experienced the support they accessed. The CAPS consultation involved 70 people supported by Future Pathways and generated several conclusions. A clear theme was that opportunities for engaging with peers should be made available as often as possible in a variety of ways. Participants emphasised that lived experience should be represented at all levels of decision making at Future Pathways and that spaces for peers to connect with each other in safe environments

³ You can read more about peer support in the Key Terms and Appendix 2 of this report.

should be developed. Participants also fed back that opportunities to connect with others with shared experiences in the same care settings were sought. Similar themes were identified in the Making Pathways Together project (2022). You can read more about what we learned from these consultations in Appendix 1.

Wider policy context

Developing peer support opportunities for people with lived experience is a national priority. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan 2023-25 highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of people with lived experience and designing supports together.



“Mental health policies, support, care, and treatment are better informed and shaped by people with lived experience of mental health issues and staff practitioners.”

In the action plan, the Scottish Government commits to continuing to work alongside “survivors to provide services to those who have experienced childhood abuse”.⁽⁴⁾

In particular, Strategic Action 2.3 sets a priority on recognising the important role that people with lived experience can play and suggests that peer support should be championed across a range of settings.

In addition, the 2023 Evaluation of the Survivors of Childhood Abuse Support (SOCAS) Fund report ⁽⁵⁾ identified that 9 of the 29 services that the Fund supported between April 2020 and March 2024 included an element of peer support. The report notes



“With long waiting times and overstretched statutory and voluntary support services, peer groups are also seen as an inexpensive way of providing support to survivors who are waiting to access other services or provide continued support once their support from other services ends.” ⁽⁶⁾

In recognition of the broader focus on peer support and co-designing supports with people with lived experience, Future Pathways undertook this co-design project to explore how peer support could enhance the work of the service.

⁴ [Priority 10 - Mental health and wellbeing strategy: delivery plan 2023-2025 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/priorities-10-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-delivery-plan-2023-2025/pages/10-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-delivery-plan-2023-2025.pdf)

⁵ SOCAS, funded by the Scottish Government and managed by Inspiring Scotland, funds services which support adults who experienced childhood abuse.

⁶ <https://inspiringScotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SOCAS-evaluation-report-FINAL-150623.pdf>

Participants

The Co-designing Peer Support project was a collaboration between the Voices for a Better Future group, Iriss, Scottish Recovery Network, and Future Pathways. Fifteen participants contributed their lived and learned experience to this project. You can read more about who participated in this project below.

Future Pathways supports people who were abused or neglected as children while in care in Scotland. You can read more about [Future Pathways here](#). Three members of Future Pathways staff contributed to the co-design project, offering evaluation expertise, safeguarding support, and a strategic overview of the service.

Iriss is a charity that works with people, workers and organisations in social work and social care in Scotland to help them use knowledge and innovation to make positive change happen. You can read more about [Iriss here](#). Iriss led the planning and delivery of co-design group meetings, involving two members of staff. They bring experience of leading co-design projects within this sector and a commitment to sharing learning with the wider sector.

Scottish Recovery Network brings people, services, and organisations across sectors together to create a mental health system powered by lived experience. You can read more about the [Scottish Recovery Network here](#). The Scottish Recovery Network provided guidance and support to understand more about peer support, including how to share lived experience intentionally and helpfully.

Voices for a Better Future is a lived experience voice group. The group is made up of people who have accessed support from Future Pathways. Examples of the work of Voices for a Better Future include co-creating Health in Mind's new resolutions policy and working with the Procurator Fiscal to help develop support available to people involved in Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and people going through court proceedings to prosecute their perpetrator. You can read more about [Voices for a Better Future here](#). Nine members of the Voices for a Better Future group volunteered to participate in the co-design project. Members brought their lived experiences as people abused or neglected in care who have also accessed support through Future Pathways. Some members had previous experiences of external peer support services, and some had participated in previous consultation at Future Pathways.

This report is written from the perspective of the co-design group. Where the report refers to “we”, “us” or “our” it is referring to the co-design group overall. When referring to participants from Voices for a Better Future, we refer to “participants with lived experience”. When referring to participants from Scottish Recovery Network, Iriss and Future Pathways, we refer to “partner participants”. The project focused on exploring potential peer support opportunities at Future Pathways. Therefore, references to “the service” refer specifically to Future Pathways and not to the services of partner participants, unless specified.

Aims of the co-design project

One of Future Pathways' strategic objectives is to support people with lived experience of in-care abuse or neglect to 'improve their own lives and achieve their personal goals.' Consistent with this objective, we took a collaborative approach to co-designing peer support at Future Pathways by drawing on the lived experiences of people who have accessed support from Future Pathways, and the learned experience of partners with expertise in co-design and peer support.

Through the project, we aimed to:

- Explore the peer support and engagement opportunities that people accessing Future Pathways seek.
- Identify what these opportunities could look like.
- Develop ideas for Future Pathways to explore and test.

What we did: Phase 1

Preparation

Work in 2022-23 focused on synthesis of evidence and project planning. A planning and recruitment phase established the co-design group, including representatives from Voices for a Better Future, Future Pathways, Iriss and Scottish Recovery Network.

The co-design process was planned to start in April 2023. The process was underpinned with an appreciative approach, building on established work, and focusing on what is feasible within Future Pathways current remit. The planning process also ensured that activities were trauma informed.



“‘Being Trauma Informed’ means being able to recognise when someone may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm, and recognises and supports people's resilience.” (7)

Activities were undertaken in a familiar and safe location, as identified by group members. Time was allowed for trust to be built up. The group developed a ‘working together’ agreement to agree roles and responsibilities. You can see this in Appendix 3. Participants could choose if and how they would take part, with freedom to discontinue participation at any time without repercussion. Throughout the process we considered the imbalance of power between participants and other members, with check ins about questions that emerged, hopes, fears and communication preferences.

We were clear about how the information we gathered would be used. All participants were offered information in advance of participation and ongoing opportunities to discuss questions or concerns. To ensure all participants are physically and emotionally safe while taking part, questions were designed sensitively to the nature of discussing challenging experiences, so as not to cause distress or re-traumatise. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw or take time out at any time. Private space with support was available when needed.

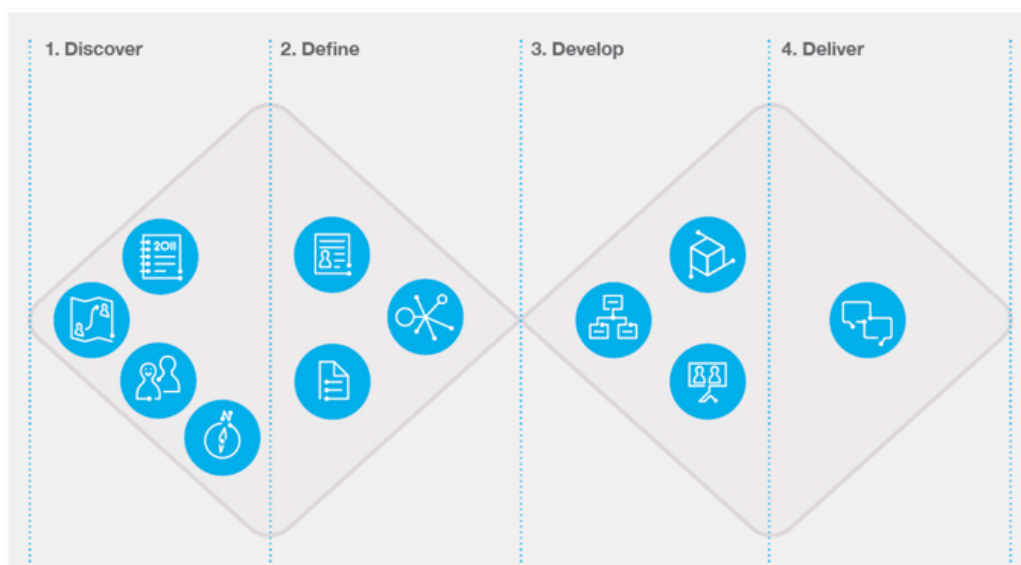
Confidentiality

Participants consented to any quotes or information used in this report and no identifiable information is included. Assuring participants of their confidentiality and anonymity supported relationships with participants, contributing to an atmosphere of trust and emotional safety. However, organisational risk and safety procedures applied throughout the project, meaning that if abuse were disclosed or suspected, this would be shared with agencies who needed to know. These outlying circumstances where confidentiality may not be guaranteed were made clear to participants before taking part.

Phase 1: Discover

Iriss led the co-design process using the Design Council's Double Diamond model as a framework for the process. (8) The project focused on 'designing the right thing', the first of the diamonds.

Figure 1: Double Diamond approach



Iriss led on project planning, workshops design and facilitation, along with write up and analysis of the data generated from the workshops. Future Pathways led the recruitment of the co-design group. Representatives from the Voices for a Better Future were invited to be core participants, representing the needs and interests of people registered with Future Pathways. Future Pathways provided administrative support which included booking venues and covering the costs of people with lived experience travelling to take part in the face-to-face workshops.

In co-design group meetings, relationship-building activities were designed to encourage connection and trust within the group. These activities modelled the importance of listening, being heard, and contributing. Prompts were chosen to facilitate the group to explore how sharing feels, what it can bring up, how sharing can promote connection, and how sharing can generate anxiety.

Figure 2: Example of a workshop activity



The co-design group also developed a ‘Working Together’ agreement which outlined the purpose of the group and the roles and responsibilities of participants. This was welcomed by participants, some of whom expressed concerns - related to experiences in a previous Lived Experience Voice group - about the group being disproportionately affected by the views of a minority. The working together agreement set out clear expectations to maintain motivation for meaningful, actionable change.

The group explored what peer support means and what the introduction of this type of support could look like at Future Pathways. During meetings, group members shared insights and ideas in small and large groups. Partner participants provided input about themes relevant to our work such as the background of the project, sharing lived experience intentionally, and our existing knowledge about people accessing Future Pathways’ support. All participants were encouraged to reflect and contribute individually and within groups. Throughout the project, the group consolidated and reflected on its learning, intended outcomes, and areas of uncertainty.

Figure 3: mind mapping activity about what ‘peer’ means.



The group then explored ‘the best of what is,’ by drawing together evidence and expertise about peer support and forming the co-design group. Relationships within the co-design group, were built by ensuring that the trauma informed principles - safety, collaboration, trustworthiness, choice, and empowerment - underpinned the group’s work together.

For example, it was ensured that meetings took place in spaces where participants felt comfortable. A hybrid approach to meeting in person and remotely was taken in response to participants’ preferences. In response to people’s feedback the group agreed different ways to gather feedback. The location of meetings also reflected people’s choices about how they wished to participate.

During this stage of the project, we learned about gaps in support for people accessing Future Pathways and how these gaps could be addressed.

Phase 2: Define

Through this project, the co-design group has identified peer support ideas that Future Pathways can test and explore. Learning materials will be developed to share our experience and insights more widely, with support from Future Pathways staff, including the Impact and Evaluation Lead and Communications and Creative Lead. Future Pathways will lead development of the ideas that emerge from the co-design process, subject to Alliance Leadership Team approval of additional activity and associated resources (the second double diamond).

Evaluation

The Future Pathways Impact and Evaluation Lead was involved in the project from the workshop planning in phase one. Ongoing evaluation supported the group to consolidate learning and provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their experience of the project. You can read more about how the evaluation of this project was undertaken in Appendix 4 of this report.

Importantly, participants in the co-design group with lived experience will be involved in identifying measures to demonstrate the success of the ideas which have emerged and are yet to be tried and tested. This will be based on what they hope these supports will achieve going forward.

What we learned

This report summarises what peer support opportunities people seek at Future Pathways, a proposed approach to these opportunities with key principles, and what Future Pathways could explore going forward. It also shares what we learned about the experience of co-designing.

Gaps in Future Pathways' current support

This project helped identify what kind of support people with lived experience feel is missing from Future Pathways. At the beginning of the project, participants with lived experience expressed uncertainty about what peer support involved. While a few had engaged with peer support such as befriending, or peer-led Facebook groups previously, most people had never accessed peer support. Through a series of facilitated discussions, participants with lived experience articulated the purpose of new peer supports at Future Pathways. Three themes emerged from these discussions.

Sharing and hearing stories

Participants sought opportunities to share their stories and hear the stories of other people with lived experience of in-care abuse or neglect. Participants described peer support as an opportunity to share wisdom, leadership, and inspiration with others with lived experience. Participants were also keen to share what has helped them in their recovery and guide people to discover what is right for them.

The group felt it was important to recognise that, despite shared experiences, we are all different and therefore cannot assume that what supports recovery for one person would do the same for someone else. Participants described how powerful it can be to have a peer listen to you, hear your story, and empathise with you. Participants recognised that some people with lived experience are not able to talk to friends or family members about their experiences and the impacts of their experiences, making it all the more important to create spaces to share and hear stories of lived experience.



“We can be there to cushion the blow, help them through it, help people understand their emotions. [...] it’s an avalanche of emotions.”

(Participant with lived experience)

Participants stressed that this type of support was not about fixing people or being perceived as 'broken'. Rather this was about creating opportunities to be heard and to listen. The group highlighted the importance of telling hopeful stories about supported recovery.⁽⁹⁾

Community and connection

Participants sought more opportunities to feel part of a wider community of people with lived experience. They felt opportunities to meet, have fun and learn together were missing at Future Pathways, and they felt more interaction with a community of peers would enable them to grow in confidence. Participants shared that making connections with people who understand them and their experiences has been one of the most valuable outcomes of the Voices for a Better Future group, which enables them to work alongside and connect socially with peers in a supported forum.



“It’s very powerful. It’s someone seeing someone who used to be where they are now.”
(Participant with lived experience)

Influencing and advocacy

Participants sought more opportunities to influence services and policy at Future Pathways and beyond. Some participants also felt there should be opportunities to help people advocate for themselves (for example by making a complaint) with Future Pathways and other services. This motivation was not only focused on responding to harm after it has occurred, but also addressing abuse in the care system overall.



“I feel that the work we are doing is desperately needed.”
(Participant with lived experience)

Participants recognised that influencing change linked with their own motivations to make a difference and express their own agency through activism. It must also be noted that this interest in influencing change aligns with the remit of the Voices for a Better Future group.

⁹ This observation is comparable to the Papageno effect, the association between media reporting on suicides and subsequent suicides themselves. Most research indicates that there is a causal relationship between the quantity and quality of media reporting about suicides, and actual suicide rates. This research supports the observation that sharing positive stories of recovery can be highly impactful.

Mutuality and choice

Through group discussions, participants identified the characteristics that would be important when developing peer supports at Future Pathways.

Mutuality

Participants shared that accessing support from peers, and supporting peers themselves, would be mutually beneficial. Both giving and accessing support from peers could support someone in their recovery by promoting a sense of connection and purpose for both parties.

Participants also acknowledged that accessing support and supporting peers would not necessarily be appropriate or helpful to everyone at all times. Participants with lived experience reflected that it is important that peers supporting others are at a stage in their own recovery where this is beneficial to them, as well as to the person accessing support. The group acknowledged that setbacks in recovery, or changes to personal circumstances and outcomes may mean someone steps back from supporting a peer for a period if it were no longer mutually beneficial. The support available must therefore be a choice. It must be an option, among other types of support available, including support coordination.

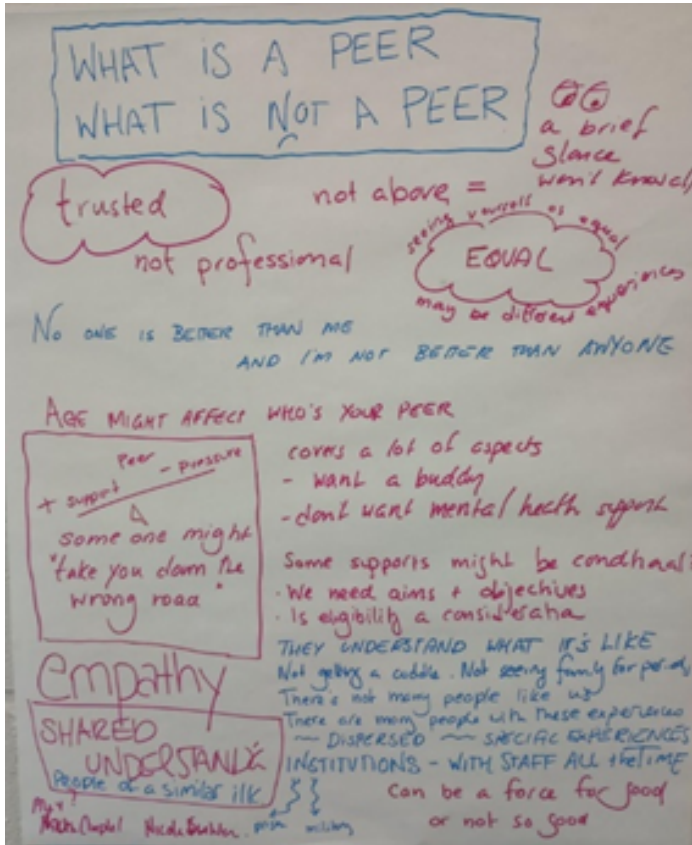
Valuing equality and difference

Participants with lived experience identified peers as others with whom they did not experience a power imbalance, and who have a shared understanding of similar experiences. People reflected that they felt included and seen with peers. People shared previous experiences of engaging with professionally led support which left them feeling misunderstood or not heard. Participants with lived experience reflected that feeling on equal footing and being conscious of how factors - such as age gaps - can prompt unintentional paternalism, should be embedded in our approach to developing new supports.



“A peer is someone you respect, and have confidence in, someone who isn’t on a pedestal.”
(Participant with lived experience)

Figure 4: activity exploring what ‘peer’ means.



While seeing everyone as equal, participants also recognised that people have different needs and pathways to recovery. The group grappled with the challenge that different people have different perspectives on what new supports should look like and how to go about it. For example, the group discussed whether support should be regular, frequent, project-based, online or in person, available in groups or on a one-to-one basis. The group identified that, for some people with lived experience, accessing support in group settings can be difficult and this could present a barrier to accessing support. Participants also recognised that people’s needs can evolve. At the start accessing support from peers may be difficult, but over time this can change.



“Different people need different types of support. What I need is different to other people’s needs. We should create different options. Everyone is different.”
(Participant with lived experience)

Intentionality

Participants highlighted that supporting people in an intentional way was central to the kind of supports they wanted to see at Future Pathways. The group were introduced to the CHIME framework. CHIME stands for Connection, Hope and optimism, Identity, Meaning, and Empowerment. The group reflected on how this framework could support intentional sharing of lived experience. (10)

Figure 5: activity about sharing lived experience.



Participants consistently highlighted the importance of maintaining boundaries to prevent support becoming harmful or triggering those accessing support or those supporting others. Boundaries around the modality of support, the frequency of support, the longevity of peer relationships, and the safeguarding and guidance mechanisms around support were described as “safety nets”.

Participants reflected that everyone was entitled to have boundaries about what they choose to share or not share, and that therefore we should be aware that we may only see the parts of someone they allow us to see. Participants felt that support that was purposeful and strength-based would promote connection and hope.



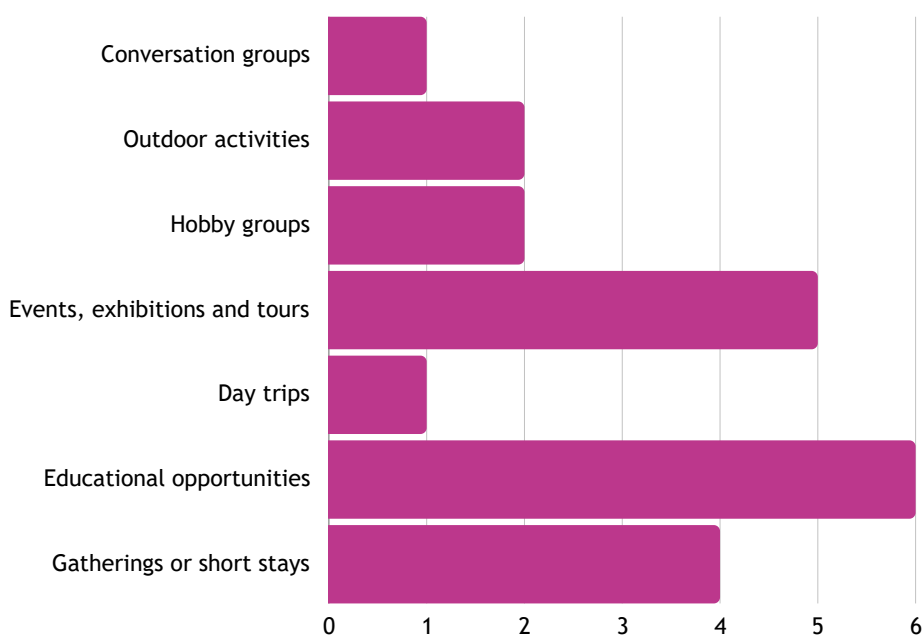
**“It’s about what you can do, not what you can’t.”
(Partner participant)**

Ideas for Future Pathways to explore

During co-design group meetings, participants with lived experience generated a range of support options that would meet the gaps in support people experience at Future Pathways. Suggestions included a range of options. Some suggestions, such as developing supports for people applying to the Redress Scheme were outside the scope of Future Pathways activity. It was clarified that Future Pathways could only fund supports that fit within Future Pathways' remit. It was highlighted that another service, the Redress Support Service was established to help people with the application process.

Participants were then encouraged to select three options to explore in more detail from ideas they had identified previously. The exercise did not require participants to commit to action and did not aim to identify a definitive solution. Rather, this exercise was about envisioning new kinds of supports more clearly. While factors such as potential funding were unknown, participants were encouraged to focus on this initial design so we might develop an evidence base for potential funding to grow this area of our work.

Figure 6: peer support options selected to explore further.



While at least one person selected each of the options, more people voted to expand on the idea to develop peer learning opportunities than any other theme. This was also noted by a partner participant in feedback.



“The main theme that connected them all was peer-led learning. People felt that they had missed opportunities in life. They wanted to give this back through peer-led learning.”
(Partner Participant)

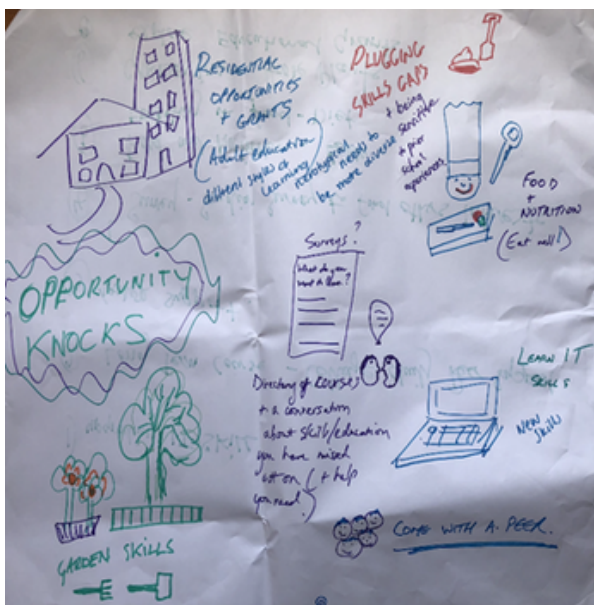
Five people opted to further explore the option of developing events, exhibitions or tours which would use creative outputs to influence positive change. Four people selected the option of gatherings and residentials, and four people in total selected options related to exploring activities (outdoor) and hobbies (creative). Only one person selected the option of conversation-based support. Given that the group had identified that opportunities to share and hear stories were missing in Future Pathways' current support, this may indicate that people would prefer opportunities to share and hear stories in a less direct way than conversation-focused activity. Below is a summary of each of the options the group explored further.

Learning together

For participants, providing opportunities to learn alongside peers presented an opportunity to address a practical need for skills and learning within a community of supportive peers. (11) Participants envisioned that this option would involve two strands:

- Accessing courses about topics that were of interest to people supported by Future Pathways (examples included computing skills, food and nutrition, and gardening or nurturing indoor plants). The group discussed accessing these opportunities through an existing education provider such as a college or training company. The group also considered that some peers may wish to lead learning opportunities.
- Signposting people to learning opportunities available externally to Future Pathways (such as grants for adult education) and supporting them to access these.

Figure 7: exploring opportunities to learn together



11 People who experienced abuse or neglect in care often miss out on learning due to disruptions to their education and/or because of the impacts of their experiences.

Participants proposed several areas of consideration related to this option. Firstly, that it would be helpful to reach out to the wider population of people accessing support from Future Pathways to discover more about what people wanted to learn. Secondly, that it was important to ensure learning opportunities were accessible to people with different learning needs and preferences, for example whether someone had dyslexia, or gaps in their education that they were sensitive to. Finally, that it would be important to take a trauma-informed approach to this option, recognising that some people supported by Future Pathways have had negative or abusive experiences in educational institutions.

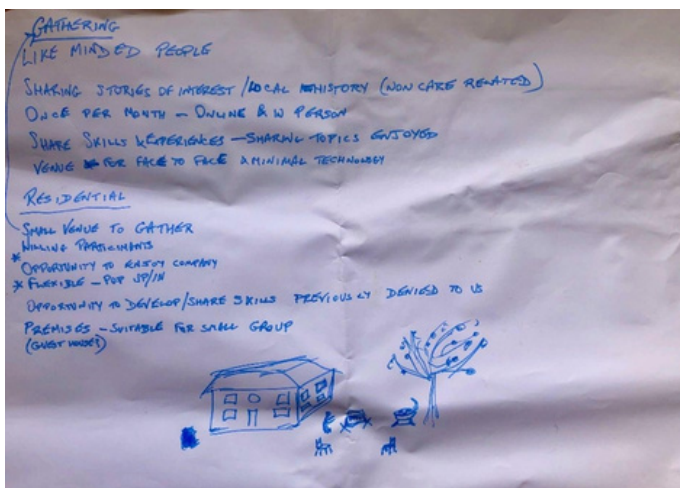
Gatherings and residentials

For participants, this option focused on building a sense of community and connection. Participants described this as an opportunity to connect with like-minded people and develop and share skills and experiences that are not related to their past experiences in care. In some respects, therefore, this option aligned closely with some aspects of the 'Learning together' option.

Participants envisioned that this option would involve two strands:

- Opportunities for regular (e.g., monthly) gatherings in person and online to share interests such as local history.
- Opportunities to experience a low technology residential stay in small groups (of four to five people) with a focus on experiencing peace, connection, and learning. Examples of activities included a ceilidh and outdoor activities.

Figure 8: Exploring gatherings and residentials



Participants proposed several areas of consideration in relation to this option. Firstly, that the option should allow for people to engage as much as they felt comfortable (for example, to choose the duration of their stay). Secondly, that ensuring that accommodation was appropriate for the group was important. Finally, the group highlighted the need to consider how to manage demand for these opportunities.

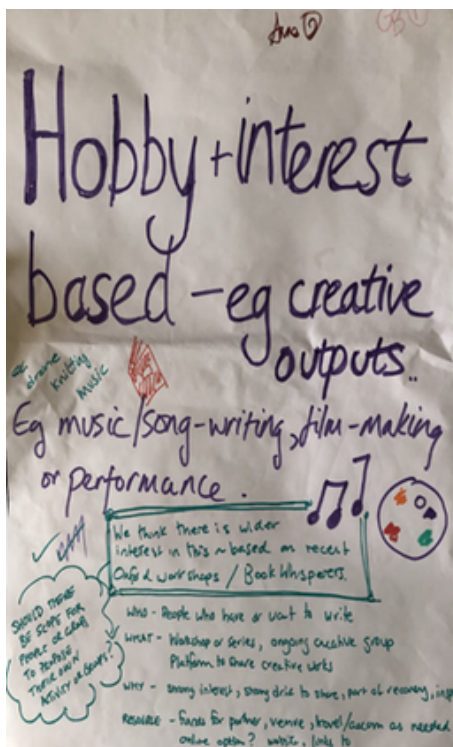
Hobby and interest-based opportunities

This option aimed to provide people with lived experience the opportunity to share their experiences in intentional, hopeful, and creative ways to support their own and others' recovery. Participants felt that this option could also support Future Pathways existing communications work, by expanding awareness of Future Pathways and influencing positive change among our audiences.

This option builds on writing workshops previously facilitated by Future Pathways in collaboration with Oxford University, and on ongoing opportunities to share creative projects through our website and newsletter. The group felt that this was an area of interest, and that engaging in creative supports and projects can be deeply meaningful for people supported by the service. Participants felt this option could develop over time, starting with the delivery of a series of creative workshops aimed at bringing peers together to create outputs which express and share their stories with peers. This could evolve into an ongoing creative group, focused on developing creatively and sharing stories more widely with peers. It might also include creative projects that could be widely shared, not just with peers but also with the wider world, with the aim of encouraging understanding and influencing change more widely.

The group highlighted that developing this option would benefit from support from the Delivery Partners that Future Pathways currently work with to provide access to creative supports, such as The Book Whisperers. You can read more about [The Book Whisperers](#) here.

Figure 9: Exploring Hobby and interest-based opportunities

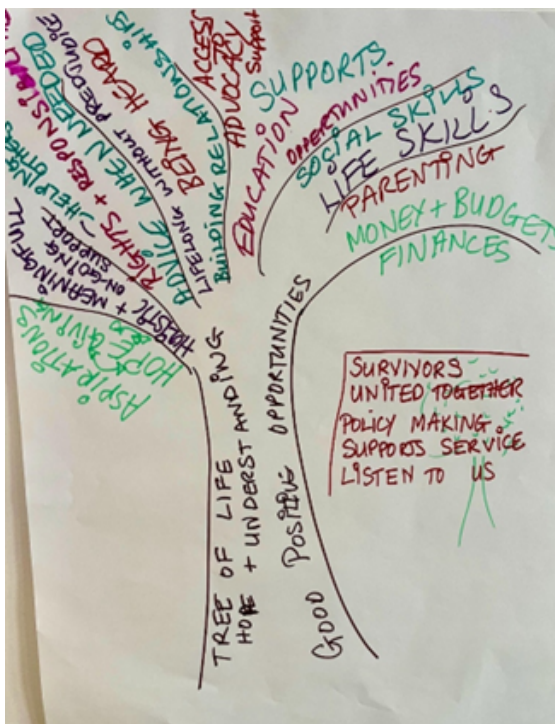


Events, exhibitions or tours

This option was focused on influencing wider positive change and advocating for themselves and others with lived experience. Participants described this option as an opportunity for people with lived experience of in-care abuse or neglect to come together and use their voices to support each other and influence services and policy makers, with the intended outcome of promoting hope, understanding and positive opportunities with and for peers.

Participants envisioned this option as ongoing and evolving according to need and opportunities to champion and shape change. For participants, this option was about aspiration, rights and responsibilities, access to advocacy support and advice when needed. Some ideas generated within this option overlapped with other options, indicating shared agreement for supports that focused on being heard, building relationships, and peer learning.

Figure 10: Exploring events, exhibitions and tours



The support needed to progress

Professional support

Throughout the project, participants with lived experience reflected that developing peer supports at Future Pathways should include support from professionals where relevant. The group highlighted the qualities that they would look for in such a role and observed the importance of taking a supportive and empowering approach. Participants with lived experience shared that their experience of engaging with Voices for a Better Future was enhanced because the group is supported and facilitated by non-peer professionals who can support if safeguarding issues arise. Participants fed back that having non-peer professionals present helped them feel safe. One participant reflected on previous experiences of participating in a lived experience voice group without this support. They felt the presence of non-peer professionals at Voices for a Better Future was crucial to ensuring that the group remained a positive space. In two out of three interviews, participants with lived experience stressed the importance of activities being supported by a non-peer professional.

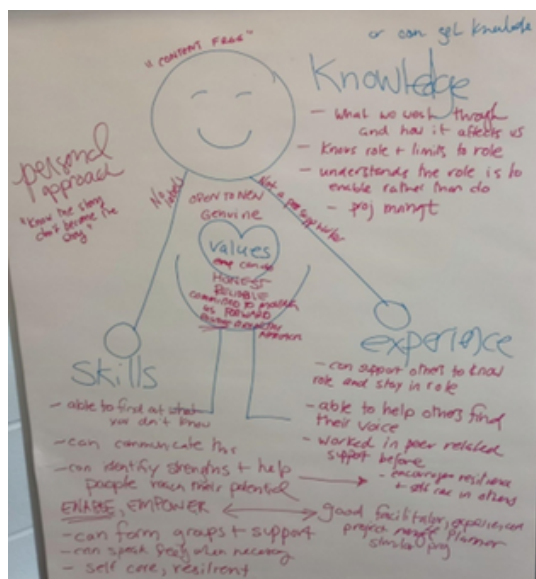


“We would need someone to organise, and support it though, a professional. [...] We would feel it is ordered if it was professionally organised. It means there is a safety net. Someone could step in if needed, or if someone is triggered.”

(Participant with lived experience)

Currently at Future Pathways, engagement activities are planned, led, delivered and/or facilitated by a wide range of roles, but no existing roles have a specific remit to develop or support peer-focused activity. Participants with lived experience felt that a non-peer professional supporting this work should have a blend of different skills, experiences, values, and knowledge. Participants with lived experience told us the professional should “understand that the role is to enable, not to do peer work” and should be able to “help others find their voice”, and “identify strengths and help people reach their potential”. Participants felt this person should be “enabling and empowering” and take a “positive strength-based approach”.

Figure 11: The knowledge, experience, skills and values of a peer support development role.



Feedback indicates that it is important to strike a balance between supporting, facilitating, and leading supports which involve peer-to-peer engagement, while also empowering people with lived experience to feel greater agency to shape these supports independently.

Participants consistently expressed concerns and queries about support for people providing peer support. For example, questions were raised about support to maintain boundaries and access safeguarding support. This feedback indicated some uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of those involved in developing and delivering new supports. In interviews, participants with lived experience stressed the importance of addressing these concerns in order to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all.

Learning more

Throughout the project, participants reflected that learning more about people accessing support at Future Pathways would be beneficial when designing supports to meet their needs. During one meeting, Future Pathways shared a summary of what is known about the demographics and life experiences of the people supported by Future Pathways. Participants with lived experience fed back that learning more about the demographics and life experiences of people accessing Future Pathways support, and particularly the inequalities which people who experienced abuse or neglect can face, would help inform the focus of the supports we should design. For example, information about demographics and life experiences would help participants determine how to ensure supports were accessible, and whether we should develop supports for specific groups, such as people who are parents, or the families of people who experienced abuse or neglect.

When developing options, participants reflected that asking people supported by Future Pathways to complete a survey about their interests and learning needs would ensure opportunities were reflective of the needs and interests of people supported by the service. Currently, Future Pathways offers people accessing support the opportunity to provide information about their demographics and life experiences. However, the group's feedback indicates that inviting wider input when developing peer supports would increase their confidence that the supports being developed would meet the needs of people accessing support at Future Pathways.

Resources

Participants were advised that the co-design project intended to provide an evidence base for future decisions about resources. Participants recognised that many practicalities about how support would look - including frequency and modality of support - would be impacted by resourcing of peer support at Future Pathways. When discussing how we could address the current gaps in Future Pathways' support, participants consistently raised the point that options were caveated by potential budget restraints which could impact staffing, location, Delivery Partner involvement and peer involvement (given the costs of expenses such as travel and accommodation). At the time of writing, the indicative budget for the next year's activity was not known, but it was clear that the scope and scale of peer support initiatives would be impacted by the resources available

Finally, participants with lived experience reflected that it can be hard for people with experience of in-care abuse or neglect to reach out for support, which could present a barrier to people accessing these supports. The co-design group consistently highlighted the importance of raising awareness and engaging people with peer support options through various communications including leaflets, posters, and digital media. Participants also reflected on the value of celebrities with lived experience in raising awareness and championing the support available. This feedback may indicate an interest in increasing involvement in Future Pathways' existing communications.

Participants' experiences of the co-design project

We asked participants with lived experience and partner participants to give feedback about the experience of participating in the co-design project. Here is a summary of what we learned.

Motivations

Participants with lived experience fed back that they were highly motivated to take part in this project. For participants with lived experience, this motivation centred around making a difference to others who experienced abuse or neglect in care - both those who access Future Pathways, and those not accessing the service including young people who are still in care or leaving care.

Participants with lived experience expressed how important it was to them to “get it right for people,” “not let people down”, and ultimately “prevent what happened to us continuing.” In interviews, participants with lived experience emphasised their hopes for this project.



“Peer support really has a huge amount of potential. It could really be a gamechanger and become a new chapter for Future Pathways.”
(Participant with lived experience)

During the project, participants shared experiences of knowing people who had died, having been unable to access or engage with support (although it was not clear whether this was support from Future Pathways or from other services). Participants with lived experience were highly motivated to mitigate the risk of people in need of support “falling through the gaps” between services. Participants felt that it was important to make support more accessible to people who may be unable or may struggle to engage with existing support at Future Pathways, which is delivered through support coordination. Peer support was considered a potential way to do this.

Partner participants shared a mutual commitment to contributing to meaningful change. Partner participants expressed their motivation to work together to address the need for peer supports at Future Pathways. Partner participants felt that collaboration and sharing expertise would enable us to achieve this outcome.



“A common desire was to enable this to happen in Future Pathways, and not just happen, but to be brought to life in the best possible way, in tune with our ethos and values.”
(Partner Participant)

Overall experience

Overall, participants with lived experience fed back that co-design group meetings were positive experiences. In feedback and interviews, participants with lived experiences used positive descriptors such as “excellent” about group meetings. When asked how they felt during in-person meetings, participants who engaged in interviews used words like “calm” and “relaxed” and expressed that meetings were comfortable and enjoyable. One person told us they “loved” participating in co-design meetings.

Similarly, partner participants shared that they valued the opportunity to collaborate with partners and participants with lived experience who shared common values, and who brought different perspectives and expertise to the table.



“[We] share a lot in terms of values, but we are doing different work and have different perspectives. This [...] helped ensure that we had the understanding to do what is a nuanced piece of work.”

(Partner Participant)

Partner participants consistently highlighted that they learned from one another during this project, and that collaborating with others who valued the co-design approach and who were committed to the outcome of the project was particularly valuable.



“The clear shared goal meant that we were able to bring what we could offer and be humble about learning from others.”

(Partner Participant)

What worked well and how we could improve

Participants shared what worked well and what we could improve about the co-design project. We received feedback about where and how we met, the format of our meetings, what we discussed during meetings, and participation in the meetings.

Location and modality of meetings

Participants with lived experience consistently fed back that meeting in-person was valuable to them, repeatedly highlighting that seeing each other in person meant a lot to them. This may have been heightened due to this group having worked together exclusively online in their capacity as members of Voices for a Better Future group.

However, travel arrangements were sometimes challenging for participants with lived experience who lived in different parts of the UK, and who had different accessibility needs and preferences about the location of meetings. Some participants with lived experience expressed concern about the costs incurred by Future Pathways to enable them to attend meetings. This was addressed through reassurance about the value of their time and contributions and the importance of this project.

We also received feedback that where we met was important. Generally, participants with lived experience fed back positively about the venues we used for in-person meetings. One partner participant shared that they felt the “setup of the room” and small details like making sure there were fidget toys and spaces for people to socialise, participate, or spend time alone were important.

Feedback also indicated that different people experience environments in different ways. For example, one person described one of the venues as “schoolish”. They suggested considering how factors like how chairs and tables are positioned, and the comfort of seating can affect people’s associations with the space and therefore their experience of the meeting. They also suggested that we ensure a quiet, private space is available for people to use when needed, recognising that the topic and discussions can bring up difficult feelings or memories. For this reason, private space and an available staff member were a supportive and valued resource.

Format of meetings

Generally, people fed back positively about the format of the co-design group meetings. In interviews and in responses to a feedback survey, we asked participants with lived experience what worked well about the project. Respondents consistently highlighted that the format of our meetings were enjoyable and encouraged meaningful discussion. People repeatedly fed back that relationship-building activities were enjoyable, with one person describing them as “fun and not stressful”. Respondents also shared that they were able to discuss and dissect their understandings, and hear from others, which enabled them to see where they agreed and where they had different perspectives. One person highlighted that they observed that people who were typically quiet during Voices for a Better Future group meetings expressed their views more openly during co-design group meetings. They also shared that they felt able to contribute honestly during meetings.



“I felt I could say anything. I could speak up if I disagreed.”
(Participant with lived experience)

Participants with lived experience generally preferred working in smaller groups as speaking in front of everyone in the group could be intimidating. Likewise, people shared that they preferred not to give feedback about the meeting in person as it made them feel “on the spot”. We explored other ways to seek feedback in response to this.

Figure 12: working together in small groups.



Conclusion

This collaborative project enabled us to identify what was missing for people accessing support at Future Pathways and develop a better understanding of how the service can respond to the need for peer support at Future Pathways.

The co-design project involved fifteen participants who had a range of views about what peer support could involve at Future Pathways. However, several key themes emerged from our work together. We learned that people with lived experience seek opportunities to share and hear stories of recovery; connect with others; and use their voices to influence positive change within and beyond Future Pathways. We also learned that peer support at Future Pathways must be well supported and must focus on empowering people supported by Future Pathways to continue tapping their potential to evolve peer supports over time. Our learning therefore echoes the wider recognition - for example within the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan - of the importance of centring lived experience and developing peer support opportunities in services for people who experienced childhood abuse.

In many ways, the collaborative approach of the co-design group mirrored the very support participants with lived experience identified was deeply needed. This project involved creating and participating in supported forums to share perspectives and expertise, create connections, and influence wider positive change. This project therefore demonstrates that collaborative co-design which combines the voices of those with lived and learned experience can help to amplify the voices of people with lived experience, and evoke a ripple effect of learning, reflection, and improvement. As such, it is clear that future work to develop peer support at Future Pathways must continue to invite and hear perspectives from people supported by the service, the Future Pathways' support coordination team, and our wide network of partners.

Our next steps

The next steps of this report were developed by Future Pathways staff in response to the evaluation of the project. While the findings and next steps of this project were not co-designed, all participants were invited to review the findings and conclusions and comment.

Responding to identified need

Future Pathways should review where peer support would complement and expand our existing support offer and propose a plan for how peer support will be visibly incorporated into the service model. The plan will be directed by the findings of this co-design project which indicate that peer supports at Future Pathways should focus on three strands: influencing service design and delivery, sharing and hearing stories of recovery, and connection with peers. The plan will also include resource requirements.

Taking a co-design approach

Work in this area must continue to centre the voices of people with lived experience alongside input from non-peer partners with relevant expertise. We are mindful that the findings of this project are not likely to be representative of all people registered with Future Pathways. We are also mindful that the Future Pathways' support coordination team, and many of the service's partners offer further expertise and experience in peer support which we could benefit from. Future Pathways should continue to take a collaborative approach to developing peer support, by working closely with people with lived experience, partners, and the Future Pathways staff team. Continued collaboration must underpin any future work. An opportunity was observed to help make existing peer learning and support resources more visible and accessible.

Sharing our learning

Through this project, we learned more about the experience of co-designing with people with lived experience, and identified ways that we can develop Future Pathways as a service to better meet the needs of people accessing support. We must reflect on and share our learning from this project to enhance the wider impact of this collaborative project.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Learning from previous consultations.

Since 2020, Future Pathways has undertaken two independent consultations with people supported by the service. The CAPs consultation was carried out by an independent advocacy service, and the Making Pathways Together project was carried out in collaboration with Journey Associates, a company that helps services improve their work. Future Pathways also developed an impact report called Stepping Stones in 2023. Writing this report involved gathering further feedback from people about their experiences at Future Pathways. Through these projects, people supported by Future Pathways provided feedback about what works and what could be improved at Future Pathways. The feedback received indicates that people supported by the service have various perspectives about what new peer supports at Future Pathways should look like. Two key themes emerged from the feedback received through these consultations.

Firstly, people sought more opportunities to influence and lead service design and delivery. For some people, peer support was about people with lived experience accessing opportunities to advocate for themselves and others by leading or influencing service design and delivery. This includes contributing to Future Pathways' communications materials and helping create engagement events.

Secondly, people sought opportunities to connect with others with lived experience with Future Pathways' facilitation. For some, peer support meant accessing opportunities to connect with peers in a way that is organised, led and/or facilitated by Future Pathways staff members. There were also requests to be supported to connect with peers with shared experiences in particular care settings. For some people this was about accessing safe spaces to share their stories, with the primary purpose of connecting with others.

The feedback received through these consultations indicated that people supported by Future Pathways have different perspectives on what peer support means and involves. However, it was clear that people felt there was a need for additional ways for people to engage with peers through Future Pathways. It was also clear that these would not replace or make less necessary the existing ways that people can engage with the service, such as support coordination or the Voices for a Better Future group. Rather, this feedback was about widening and enhancing the offer of support at Future Pathways, to better meet the needs of people supported by the service.

Appendix 2: Peer support

One of the partner participants in the codesign group is the Scottish Recovery Network. The Scottish Recovery Network brings people, services, and organisations across sectors together to create a mental health system powered by lived experience. One of the ways the Scottish Recovery Network does this is by helping services develop peer roles and approaches. Their involvement in this project helped us understand exactly what peer support means.

The existing body of research demonstrates that peer support can have many, diverse benefits for people accessing services.(12)

- Peer support can help people feel more hopeful about recovery.
- Peer support can help people feel more empowered, and can promote self-esteem, and confidence.(13)
- Peer support can help people integrate into communities and develop skills. For example, accessing peer support can lead to people becoming more involved in communities. There is some evidence that peer support can help people in their recovery from addiction challenges and to engage consistently with employment, training and education opportunities.
- Because peer support services are focused on relationships rather than tasks, people accessing peer support can experience greater feelings of acceptance and understanding.
- Peer support can help reduce stigma, a common barrier to recovery.
- Peer support services may also be health-promoting. There is evidence that peer support is linked to reductions in people being admitted or readmitted to hospital. This may be because peer support helps people to transition to their home and community after being in hospital, or to make a plan for maintaining their health.

12 Repper and Carter 2011

13 Davidson and colleagues, 2012

Moreover, all Future Pathways' alliance partners have experience of integrating peer support into their work:

- 26% of team members at Penumbra Mental Health are employed in peer support roles.(14)
- NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde provides the opportunity for NHS and HSCP (Health and Social Care Partnership) staff to access support from trained peer support workers.
- Health in Mind offers the SQA professional development award in mental health peer support. Health in Mind also facilitates in-person and online peer-led support groups which offer people with depression and anxiety the opportunity to access confidential local support, connect with others in a similar situation, and explore positive ways of coping with depression and anxiety.
- Scottish Government also recognises the valuable contribution of peer support. Peer support plays an important role in Creating Hope Together, Scotland's Suicide Prevention Strategy for 2022-2032 (15), and in Scottish Government's Peer Support in Perinatal Mental Health Action Plan (16) as well as in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan: 2023-2025.(17)

As such, there is an ever-growing body of evidence to support the positive impacts of peer support for people accessing services. This evidence, alongside the feedback we have received over several years from people supported by Future Pathways, indicated that developing peer support at Future Pathways, with the support and expertise of our network of partners, has the potential to bring significant benefit to the people accessing Future Pathways.

14 Making a Difference, Penumbra Mental Health 2023 impact report. [Impact Report 2023 \(penumbra.org.uk\)](https://penumbra.org.uk)

15 [Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention strategy 2022 to 2032 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

16 [Peer support in perinatal mental health: evidence review - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

17 [Priority 10 - Mental health and wellbeing strategy: delivery plan 2023-2025 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

Appendix 3: Working together agreement

We discussed and agreed on the draft working together agreement generated from discussions on 31 May 2023.

1. We will build positive relationships and are a valued resource to one other.
2. We will listen to understand - questions are encouraged; we will speak up as well as step back to allow others to talk.
3. We will share our lived experience in ways that are helpful and of service to others (we want to build something).
4. We are honest.
5. We are sensitive to others' feelings and will hold each other to account - mindful of the impact we have with our words, body language, facial expressions and tone.
6. Ideas are for sharing, but personal information is confidential (unless someone's safety is at risk).
7. We will talk things out to help us reach decisions together.
8. We will reach out to others - to check our ideas or to seek advice outwith the group if helpful.
9. We will champion and raise awareness of Future Pathways to support other care survivors.
10. We will look after ourselves and each other, taking time out if we need to and taking up the help available; our mental health and wellbeing matters.

Appendix 4: How we evaluated the co-design project

Sources and methods

The evaluation of this project was undertaken by the Impact and Evaluation Lead at Future Pathways. This evaluation is largely based on analysis of a range of qualitative data gathered throughout phase one of the project and at the end of phase one of the project. Sources include:

- Feedback survey - Participants with lived experience could provide feedback by completing a feedback survey reflecting on the progress of the project. We received four responses to this survey. These were all received in September 2023.
- Ad hoc feedback - Participants could give feedback throughout the project by individually email, and as a group during a Voices for a Better Future meeting attended by the Impact & Evaluation Lead.
- Summary reports - Throughout the project, Iriss created regular reports about the progress of the project. These reports summarised what the group was exploring and points of consideration for future meetings.
- Reflective logs - five partner participants completed reflective logs about their experiences of supporting and facilitating the project. Responses were analysed thematically. Reflective logs were completed in January 2023.
- Interviews with participants with lived experience - three participants with lived experience participated in interviews about their experience of contributing to this project. Interviews were conducted in January 2024 and reflected on phase one of this project. Responses were analysed thematically.

Following our evaluation of the project, we developed a set of findings and recommendations for service improvements at Future Pathways. You can read these in the Conclusion and Our Next Steps sections of this report.

Risks and assumptions

Throughout this project, we considered the factors that could positively or detrimentally influence how participants experienced the project and what we learned. We identified several risks (factors that could hinder our learning) and assumptions (factors that would enable the project to achieve its outcomes). Here are some of the risks and assumptions we surfaced throughout the project:

We worked with an existing group of people who had accessed Future Pathways' support, the Voices for a Better Future group. On one hand, we identified that having pre-existing relationships could help participants with lived experience feel more comfortable about contributing to the project. Seeking participation from within a pre-existing group could also be a more efficient approach than recruiting participation from across a wider group of people accessing support from Future Pathways.

On the other hand, pre-existing relationships between participants could make it more likely that participants mirror how they participate in other forums. This could mean that some participants' voices would be less represented than others' in this project. Also, seeking participation from an existing group risked creating confusion between the remit of the co-design group and the remit of the Voices for a Better Future group which is significantly broader. Finally, membership of the Voices for a Better Future group is not representative of the total population of people accessing Future Pathways support. Our approach therefore presented the risk that our learning would not necessarily reflect the views of people who access Future Pathways support.

Finally, we planned to test out and refine our ideas, on the assumption that available resources would enable this. This assumption was based on previous discussion with the Alliance Leadership Team. This also presented the risk that expectations about the scope of the project could not be met. During the project, unanticipated budget and staffing constraints meant that it was not possible to test the ideas group members generated.

