

# Embedding Lived Experience in Dundee

August 2023



Ending  
domestic  
abuse

**Authentic  
Voice**

Embedding  
Lived Experience  
in Scotland

# Introduction

Dundee City Council's Protecting People team have identified the need to develop a robust trauma informed approach to ensure there are safe and meaningful processes in place for people with lived experience of trauma to contribute and influence decision making within local local multi-agency governance and strategic planning arrangements across Public Protection Partnerships. Stakeholders have sought to review the inclusion of people with lived experience of trauma in strategic forums, in partnership with the Authentic Voice project.

...to develop a shared understanding of meaningful engagement and create positive change

The **Authentic Voice Project** is a national project aiming to support local authorities and other community planning organisations to develop the knowledge, confidence, and tools they need to embed survivor voices and lived experience into local systems and service design processes. Dundee have chosen to partner with Authentic Voice as the pilot area for their leadership workstream focused on embedding lived experience into strategic forums across Scotland. This project began in 2022 and aimed to support leads to develop a shared understanding of meaningful engagement and create positive change. It would do this by:

  
**Develop**  
Develop a better understanding of the lived experience strand of work across the public protection partners.

  
**Gather**  
Gather and analyse current practices across the public protection partnerships regarding engagement with people with lived experience.

  
**Identify**  
Identify areas of good practice around engagement and areas for improvement to generate reflective leadership discussions on decision making and planning culture.

## Commonly used phrases

**Lived experience:** The experiences and choices of a person, and the knowledge and expertise that they gain as a result of that experience.

**Trauma-informed:** Being trauma-informed means being able to recognise when someone may be affected by trauma and collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that supports people's resilience. The key principles underpinning trauma-informed practice, services and systems are safety, collaboration, trust, empowerment and choice.

**Power sharing:** Power sharing is about collaboratively developing routine, safe and meaningful processes so that those of us who are affected by trauma are, when we wish to be, involved in decision making about how services and systems are designed and delivered. A trauma-informed and responsive organisation values and encourages a variety of knowledge and insight – such as knowledge gained through our own lived or living experience of trauma and that gained through our training and roles, as workers, experts, and leaders – and ensures that leaders, staff and people with lived experience of trauma have a seat at the table during decision making. It is also important to note that many people will inhabit more than one of these areas of expertise.

## Sharing power to co-create trauma-informed change.



# What we did

The project partners undertook several evidence gathering activities focused on developing a current picture of practices across the public protection partnerships regarding engagement with people with lived experience of trauma. These activities were carried out between January-March 2023 by SafeLives and the Improvement Service and consisted of:



## Checklist

A self-assessment checklist shared across the Public Protection partnerships which collected information around the themes of leadership, governance, and capacity in relation to ensuring people with lived experience of trauma have a meaningful contribution and influence in decision making. It was completed by a total of 35 respondents and a report of the results was provided.



## Interviews

17 semi structured informal interviews took place with a wide range of stakeholders, including statutory and third sector leaders, staff and community members. The aim of these sessions was to gather existing understanding and practice as well as consider what is needed to bring together strategy and lived experience to support effective power sharing/ engagement processes within Dundee's strategic decision making.

## Key reflections from pre-engagement activities

### Challenges and system barriers:

- There is a complex strategic landscape, with various partnerships, priorities, and expectations to manage. This complexity creates significant challenge.
- Stakeholders have limited knowledge of existing work. Clearer communication on what is currently being done is needed.
- There is a lack of consistency within and across partnerships, the efforts of individual partners may be different from the collective partnership.
- Staff capacity is very limited and new process are often seen as an additional task or add on to existing roles. There may be over reliance on individual expertise, which can end should a person change jobs.
- Considerations are needed around support for the workforce who may a) have experienced personal trauma and b) may experience vicarious trauma as a result of providing support to vulnerable groups.
- Action may be influenced by external drivers, such as government policies or funding, rather than priorities identified by people with lived experience of trauma.

### Strategic Leaders and Spaces:

- There is a leadership vision and appetite, but this needs to extend to practical applications which go beyond 'trauma informed practice' rhetoric towards trauma responsive knowledge and skills at various levels across the partnership workforce.
- Awareness raising is key, but must be carried out alongside available supporting structures and systems, such as trauma informed policies and procedures in order to truly embed the learning.
- Partnership meeting structures and reporting arrangements are not congruent to power sharing with people with lived experience. Currently there is a risk of tokenistic or very limited engagement, and an identified need to develop practical mechanisms to improve engagement and accessibility.

### Opportunities and good practice:

- There are excellent examples across Dundee of lived experience work including the Workforce Lived Experience Group, Gendered Services Project, Charter co-produced with children and young people and the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards experiential data collection.
- Evidence of what has worked well should be spotlighted in a systemic way to highlight good practice, share learning, and remove siloed working.
- Impact measurement of the value and benefits of power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma should be continuous, varied and not 'one single output', and include case studies, formal and informal feedback loops.
- This work requires expertise and a dedicated resource; to avoid over reliance on external organisations to provide insight



# Leadership sessions

The project facilitated reflective discussions with public protection partnership leaders to review the findings from the pre-engagement activities. Project partners SafeLives, the Improvement Service, and Resilience Learning Partnership facilitated several discussion activities to support stakeholders to identify next steps and agree changes that can be made to the partnerships' and culture to continue to improve overall engagement with people with lived experience of trauma. Two engagement sessions were held in March 2023 with around 30 attendees from across Dundee's Public Protection Partnerships. The discussion focused on the following 'challenge' questions with stakeholders:



What does meaningful and influential involvement look like?

What does success look like in this for you?

What is the shift that needs to happen to do this/make it happen?

This report summarises the reflections and actions identified at these sessions. A summary video from the first session was also created.

[Click here to play ▶](#)

## Where we are now

Key messages from participants highlighted that:

- There is an increasing interest and appetite for embedding the voices of lived experience in strategic planning and improvement in Dundee, and there are several local examples of existing good practice where learning can be drawn upon and expanded on.
- Development of feedback loops should be prioritised, as there is currently a gap between gathering information, creating actions and communicating impact.
- Formal resource/expertise is required to robustly collate, analyse and feedback findings, voice and information. Actions identified by stakeholders included considering a central resource to co-design with people with lived experience of trauma mechanisms to embed meaningful and robust power sharing opportunities, reviewing lived experience involvement on committees and establishing a Short Life Working Group to develop and monitor actions.

## Where we want to be

Several themes emerged from the discussions around the considerations needed to embed meaningful and influential involvement of people with lived experience of trauma.

**Flexible and broad approach to engagement**

A multiplicity of approaches is required for people to participate in engagement and decision making. Involvement is a dynamic process as people's experiences will change as their engagement with services changes. People's priorities and their capacity for engagement may also change. Having a number of ways in which to engage with the co-design of services and systems can create a wider spectrum of lived experiences being amplified, as more people can be involved which could help a shift away from there being one lived experience representative. The journey of learning will be positively impacted by critically reflecting on what went right, but also where there's opportunities for improvement.



# Leadership sessions continued

## Clear structures and feedback loops

Consultation and engagement activities should have defined actions and outcomes related to them,- in order to be meaningful for participants. There should be clear expectations of both participants and organisations from the outset with the aims and parameters of participants involvement and a shared understanding of what is meant by, as one participant put it, 'power sharing in a trauma-informed way'. Power sharing should take place in a culture of kindness.

Multiple feedback loops must be present at every level of participation/engagement in order to link grassroots knowledge to strategic decision making. Feedback loops should focus on improvement and have buy-in at all levels and linked to actions and discussions. Work may need to be undertaken to support those operating in these spaces to hear critical reflections, which may feel disempowering or difficult, and consider how these can be used to promote a culture on continuous improvement.

## Culture change and reducing system barriers

Meaningful and influential involvement happens in a culture where strategies are based around asking questions of 'what matters to you' and what is it you want to achieve from our services?. This culture would have a visible commitment and a visible infrastructure for involvement of people with lived experience of trauma in strategic decision making.

A culture where the default assumption is that there is lived experience in the room, which provides the starting point for considering ways of working would be one where involvement was meaningful. This lived experience can be from professionals or those who access services and there is an understanding that there is a connection between these two sources of knowledge. This starting point would help normalise lived experience, create a culture where people felt more at ease to discuss their experiences of trauma and help conversations start from a place of what people care about, rather than being shaped by political/ economic/ organisational agendas.

A key factor in the variation in the scope of meaningful and influential involvement is whether the service is statutory or a legal intervention. Participants highlighted that being bound to what the Scottish Government sets limits the ability to action feedback from people with lived experience of trauma. To make involvement meaningful, the limits to what changes can be made to statutory services at local level should be clearly communicated. There must be a balancing of the organisation's priorities, demands and duties with the range of needs of people affected by trauma who use, work with and in our service, including staff safety.

Being open, transparent and reflective about when working in a trauma-informed and responsive way may be more challenging. For example, addressing power imbalances, needing to balance priorities or identifying policies/ processes that may impact some aspects of their delivery of a trauma-informed and responsive approach. This might include aspects of policies/ processes that limit individual choice and control (e.g., safeguarding procedures) or instances that some might feel are potential breaches of trust, such as when information might need to be shared e.g. around child or adult protection.

## The role of leadership

The key role of elected members in these feedback loops was a topic in the discussions. Elected members can support actions emerging from lived experience to be considered at a strategic level across different areas of community planning. They may also have their own experience to inform policy and strategy, and it was acknowledged that leaders with lived experience of trauma can play a role in opening up space for inclusion of these experiences in decision making. With this lived experience, they bring valuable expertise and knowledge to leadership practice, whether or not they publicly speak about this. Leaders can take responsibility for, and use their role, to create spaces and places for power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma across the organisation.

# How do we get there?

## A sense of opportunity in Dundee

Participants highlighted that people are becoming more comfortable talking about their own lived experience of trauma, and that there is increase in shared language and supportive attitude and a language around power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma. One participant talked about how in their meetings/ discussions the question is always raised of how can people with lived experience of trauma be involved in decision making. There is a palatable appetite and a desire from people on wanting to be involved. The sense of collective trauma during the pandemic has changed conversations about the impact of services. There is more consideration of asking people about their experience of moving through services, particularly at transition points. There is an opportunity to develop this way of thinking into strategic conversations.

## Overcoming assumptions

Learning from people requires overcoming assumptions about what people with lived experience of trauma can do and focusing on perceived limitations, and instead adopting a strengths-based approach. Starting from the place of what people can bring helps overcome these assumptions. A process of learning about how to embed lived experience of trauma starts from being open to hearing and listening by a perspective of strengths

Starting from the place of what people can bring helps overcome these assumptions.

A key barrier to removing the sense of 'them and us' is organisational risk aversion. A strength-based approach also enables people to have the confidence to disrupt and to stand up to political pressures. Shifting from focusing on risks/limitations involves reducing hierarchical bureaucracy to remove the 'them and us' culture. Feedback loops were highlighted as important to demonstrate how learning is a continuous and dynamic process. Learning requires voices are heard, collated, linked to each other, amplified, used and acted upon. The creation of opportunities to hear positive stories as well as challenges could help with learning so that strengths in systems can be highlighted and built upon.

## Key stakeholders and learning opportunities

Knowledge and expertise from people with lived experience of trauma can be gathered indirectly by utilising local project expertise that already exists and using methods of feeding this learning and information into strategic decision-making spaces. 'Inviting people in' cannot be solely about asking individuals to bring their experience to a process. It must be about recognising those with lived experience are integral stakeholders within systems, rather than simply those who access services.

The session highlighted learning opportunities from ongoing projects and existing partnerships with knowledge of the community such as:

- Workforce Lived Experience Group
- Charter co-produced with children and young people
- Equalities sub-group of the Violence Against Women Partnership
- Experiential data in Dundee Alcohol and Drug Partnership
- Trauma Champions and workforce lived experience groups
- Neighbourhood services and specific interest community groups.
- Gendered Services Project
- Local Community Planning Partnerships
- Learning disability strategic planning group
- Care at Home and care homes sector
- Navigators programme



# How do we get there? continued

## Actions - Lived Experience of trauma and Strategic Spaces

Many participants highlighted that having a **representative** for people with lived experience of trauma on strategic partnerships\* was important for embedding voice. However, there is a concern that having lived experience representatives on committees is the go-to approach when people consider how to embed lived experience in strategic planning and improvement and that continuous exploration is needed on how to do this ethically, safely and robustly. Participants wanted to ensure that a more strategic view is taken to develop a consistent and joined-up approach across Dundee's partnerships.

Having a representative for people with lived experience of trauma on strategic partnerships

**\*This can take the form of many different models of engagement**

- An individual with their own lived expertise
- An individual representing a panel or existing community with a range of views/experiences
- A representative from a lived experience led organisation

There was consensus that there is already information being gathered from people accessing services across the system but there is a gap in using this information to inform action. Participants suggested a key action of investing in a coordinator role for embedding lived experience that includes analytical capacity. This would provide an overview of the whole system and identify opportunities to come together to share understanding. This could involve:



Collective contribution from all partners so what is already gathered from people's experiences can be understood and shared, and what easy ways there are of collecting and sharing existing information.

Identifying gaps in knowledge by understanding whose voices are not being amplified.

A remit to ensure any new activity doesn't add to the burden of reporting and to existing data that is not currently analysed and actioned.

A capacity to analyse qualitative data, as participants highlighted that it was the small details in the feedback people gave that often made a large difference.

An engagement remit to build and maintain relationships with existing lived experience groups and communities to improve whole systems information gathering and strengthen feedback loops

The coordinator role could help with joining up approaches to embedding voices of lived experience of trauma. Examples include a joined-up approach to funding across all partnerships, systems and data sharing amongst services working and exploring opportunities to pull together budgets. They may support a whole system approach to exploring the integration between statutory and third sector services and identify opportunities to lever in additional resources.



## How do we get there? continued

A key output of this post would be to provide support in supporting committees/ partnerships and people with lived experience of trauma with co-design of meaningful and effective power sharing processes.. Participants highlighted the following considerations around safe and meaningful power sharing:

Being clear about expectations of people with lived experience, expectations of the committees and expectations of single agencies.

Having practitioner representatives on committees with a clear remit for advocacy and reflecting what they are hearing from people accessing services. This must be balanced with being clear and considerate about practitioners' capacity to be involved where they can add real value.

Reviewing who sits on committees to ensure all voices are being amplified, to ensure a diversity of frontline workers and lived experience voices. This consideration would contribute to moving away from a model of having one person be representative of all lived experience of trauma.

Taking a trauma informed approach to the meetings by paying attention to how and where people feel comfortable and safe. Considering changing meeting locations to somewhere informal, ensuring the language used in meetings to be more accessible, the format of meetings and what procedures should be in place to support the involvement of those with lived experience of trauma (e.g., internet access, childcare, transportation, remuneration).

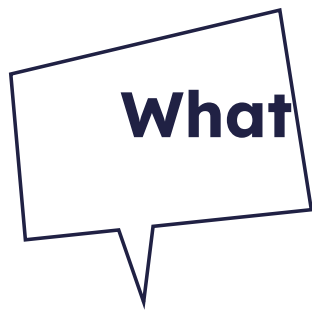
Considering various mechanisms for lived experience involvement across committees such as through a panel that can feed into similar committees. It should be explored further whether all committees are the appropriate places for lived experience representatives. Different committees have different scopes for the meaningful participation of practitioners and those who use services.

# Commitments and next steps

A Short Life Working Group was recommended develop practical actions to progress this work. This group should contain representation from all existing partnerships.

There was consensus that there needs to be a commitment to the work of embedding lived experience in strategic planning and improvement. This commitment needs to be supported by a dedicated resource that links the grassroots to leadership to ensure meaningful power sharing across all organisations and partnerships. Commitment must be demonstrated through ensuring protected time and space for staff at all levels to undertake this work.





# What does meaningful work relating to embedding lived experience of trauma mean for...

## People with with lived experience of trauma?



- A multitude of ways for people to engage based on what suits their needs and what they are interested in.
- Engagement linked with action so that people can see change has resulted from their contribution.
- Beyond feedback, success means living a meaningful life and the opportunities to live life to their full potential.
- Beyond feedback, success means people have positive, trusting relationships with systems which contributes to healing and having opportunities to live life as they intend.

## Practitioners?



- A culture that provides the conditions for meaningful work to flourish requires shared understanding amongst professionals and leaders of what embedding lived experience of trauma means to their work.
- When people enter the workforce, they are encouraged to bring their whole selves to work, and lived experience of trauma should be supported and valued in their practice and organisation .
- Appropriate and sustainable training around embedding lived experience for staff and ensuring engagement with relevant institutions and employers to embed this into curriculum.
- Training should be provided to continue the development of practice in undertaking trauma and lived experience work.
- Professionals are supported by systems that fosters a sense of empowerment as change is both made and seen.

## Leadership?



- Leaders should promote a culture of continuous improvement across public protection and ensure that robust feedback loop exist between those who access services, service providers and senior leaders.
- Lead by asking challenging questions around representation and visible voice, offer opportunities for greater power sharing, ultimately nurturing a culture whereby diverse lived experience is visible throughout all systems and processes.
- Clearly demonstrate investment both financially and otherwise for the workforce to invest time to carrying out lived experience work safely, robustly and in a trauma informed manner
- A trauma-informed leader is visible, accessible, connected and has a genuine interest in what people have to say. These leaders understand the importance of the wellbeing of their team or organisation as much as the strategic leadership or development of their organisation.



# What will success look like?

Throughout the activities, participants shared their reflections on the values, practices, and leadership needed to support meaningful power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma across Dundee's partnership.



## Lived Experience

Lived experience should be embedded within strategic decision making, it should be non-tokenistic and supported by leadership that is trauma informed.



## Structures

Structures should be set up with empathy and compassion at the forefront, utilising trauma informed practice to ensure no further harm is caused.



## Work

Work should be ambitious AND realistic, with the underpinning decision-making processes being marked by honesty, openness and transparency.



## Change

There should be change from advocating for people to creating spaces where they can self-advocate should they wish to, and also having access to mechanisms to represent their needs. Therefore, success is people feeling empowered to participate in decision-making, in a way that works for them.



## Collaborate

Working in a collaborative way requires a change in the mindset of professionals and leaders from thinking they are the sole provider of support and care to recognising that they are part of a collective group of supporters and carers.



## Visible

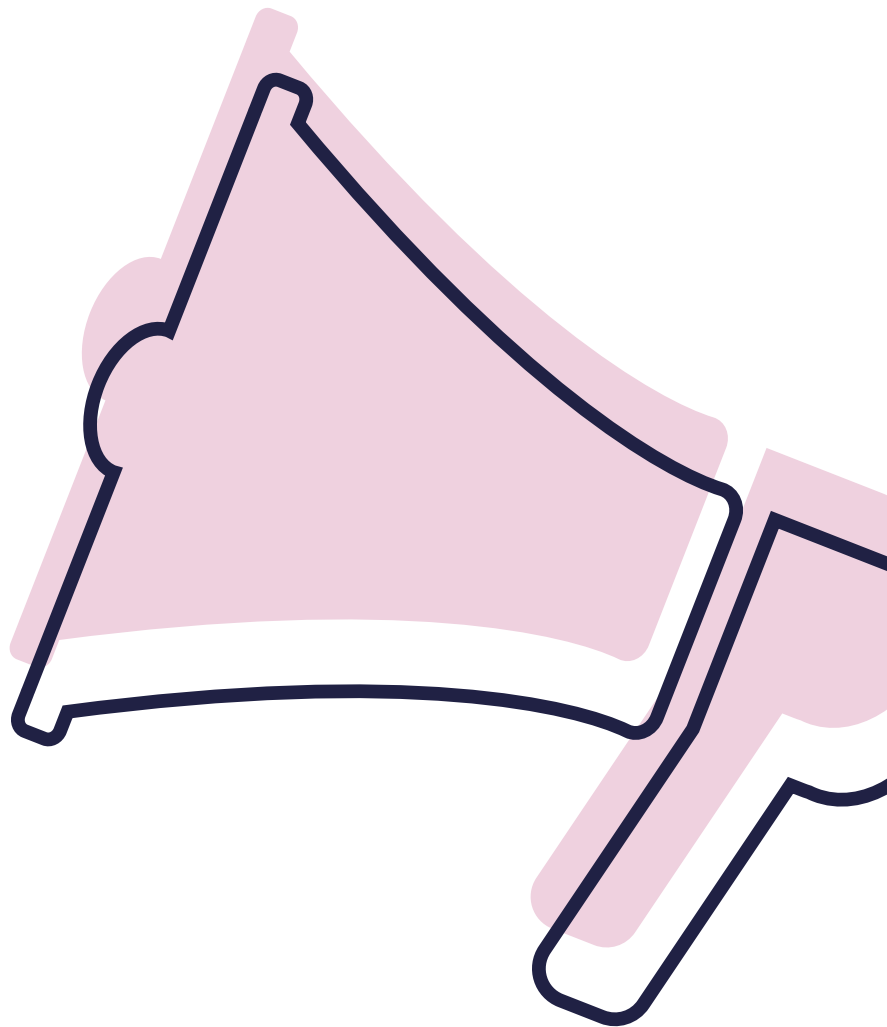
This work should be visible with distinct purpose and definition.



# Measuring impact

There were many considerations across discussions on how measurement is key when looking at impact of hearing and sharing experience and voice. Consideration must be given to recognising that involvement can have both immediate tangible change, and long term 'softer' outcomes. Focus should not just be on measuring impact but also on valuing people's feelings and experiences of the process. It can be challenging when capturing the impact of the culture change that results from embedding lived experience. robust actions, outcomes and measurements can go some way to provide evidence of impact, and these should be flexible to reflect developing ideas.

It was agreed that the suggested actions will be considered and developed in further detail and that measurement of impact will be a key priority to embed in any future work. The Authentic Voice Project will also continue to support Dundee's work.



# Get in touch

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## More info on our website

[www.authenticvoice.scot](http://www.authenticvoice.scot)

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