



Able to trust, the real person came forward and engaged

#walkthefrontline



“The Peer Mentor connected fully with the service users incredibly quickly. It meant we were able to engage with the real person, the person who finds it difficult to trust others. They felt comfortable enough to be honest with us. The result was they got the support they needed in that moment of crisis or to continue on the path to a positive future.”

Bel Sixsmith's story

Inspector Bel Sixsmith, Connect and Build Manager, Birmingham Partnership, West Midlands Police, joined Birmingham Changing Futures Together to #walkthefrontline. “It was a really valuable experience.

“The presence of an Peer Mentor makes a huge difference. I saw the person I shadowed form a bond with the service users we met almost instantly. Understanding the anxieties and decision-making processes of the service users, they balanced the power between service and service user, putting them at the heart of the process.”

Bel recognises the deeper connection with the Peer Mentor meant the service user was less defensive. “We have made very positive steps towards creating and working within a psychologically and trauma informed environment, in which we focus on the whole person instead of just the presenting issue. But when faced with an authority figure like a police officer, they put on their metaphorical armour. They may be more confrontational and are certainly reticent to tell us the full story. I saw the Peer Mentor dissolve these defences, enabling us to get alongside the service user and support them as they tackle their immediate issues.”

During her visit Bel met an individual in crisis with the aim of getting them to accept and engage with support, and another who is in recovery and working hard to maintain the positive change.

“The approach was straightforward and practical. Because of their trust in the Peer Mentor and the calm approach of the support worker, the service users disclosed information I think they would have withheld under other circumstances. It meant we could discuss some very difficult subjects, including relapses with drugs and alcohol.

The relapses were not condoned or condemned. Instead they were acknowledged and accepted, with the discussion then moving onto the way forward. Faced with a judgemental or authoritarian approach, a service user isn't likely to be as honest. They will cover it up, not get the support they need as a result, and quickly spiral into self-destructive behaviour. I could see this approach changed that path.

“It seemed the service users felt the team genuinely had their back. And the team never gave up hope. They know the time has to be right for change and so were willing to persevere until that moment came.”

Bel concluded: “The experience was really thought provoking. It would be valuable for all frontline officers to #walkthefrontline and learn about the stories of people they encounter every day.”

The Birmingham Changing Futures Together
Birmingham Changing Futures Together is part of an England-wide programme set up by the Big Lottery Fund using money raised by National Lottery players. It improves the effectiveness of service provision to those with multiple and complex needs by bringing together organisations in the sector, identifying and sharing best practice and establishing new approaches.

The No Wrong Door Network

At the heart of the Changing Futures approach, the No Wrong Door Network is a group of organisations working together to ensure service users can access a whole system of support through one referral.

Lead Work Peer Mentor

Our dedicated Lead Workers, skilled in helping people navigate the support services available, work alongside Peer Mentors with lived experience. This unique combination creates a tailored and empathetic approach, which bridges the gap between services and those who use them.

Contact the BVSC Birmingham Changing Futures Together team for more information.

www.changingfuturesbham.co.uk

