



Together, We Create Change

This document shares the early insights from a unique collaboration between CAPITAL, a charity led by lived experience, and the West Sussex Drug and Alcohol Partnership. Co-produced by professionals and community members, this project reflects the power of working side by side to reimagine services with those who know them best.

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1. Overview

In West Sussex, it is widely recognised that engaging people with lived and living experience of drug and/or alcohol-related harm—along with their carers—is essential for shaping future support services. Their insights play a vital role in evaluating existing provision and influencing planning and delivery.

To embed this approach, CAPITAL was commissioned by the West Sussex Drug and Alcohol Partnership (WS DAP) in October 2024 to ensure that lived experience is central to the design, delivery, and monitoring of community-based support across the county.

This co-production work has been guided directly by the voices of individuals with lived or living experience and their careers. The recommendations we seek to address are based on findings from two key needs assessments, undertaken by CAPITAL on behalf of the WS DAP.

- [Drug and Alcohol Lived Experience Report](#) (April 2024)
- [Understanding the Experiences and Impact of Temporary Accommodation on Adults Who Use Drugs and/or Alcohol](#) (October 2024)

“The CAPITAL team were open, honest, and worked in the true spirit of collaboration. Time and care were taken to understand the scope, and aims, of our collaborative project, and CAPITAL provided a sound, robust report that has influenced the scope and planning of our future partnership activity. I look forward to working with CAPITAL in the future.” **Dan Barritt, Public Health Lead, West Sussex County Council**

In alignment with these findings, the programme also supports the delivery of the WS DAP’s twelve strategic priorities (2024–2027), and direct support to its “People Priorities”, which were direct recommendations from CAPITAL. The twelve strategic priorities include:

Children & Young People

- Multi-agency approaches to tackling exploitation, county line networks, and safeguarding victims.
- Targeted support for families impacted by substance use
- Strengthen education and policy guidance in schools and colleges

Criminal Justice and Community Safety

- Sustain focus on County Lines disruption and intervention
- Enhanced activity to improve continuity of care and the use of treatment requirements as part of community sentences
- Enable joined up working across criminal justice and wider support services

Treatment & Recovery Services

- Increase numbers in treatment and referrals from professionals from a range of settings through better pathways
- Enhance support for co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions
- Respond to emerging threats such as synthetic opioids and scale up naloxone distribution

Wider Determinants of Health & Recovery

- Expand employment pathways and progression opportunities
- Strengthen support to access and sustain appropriate accommodation
- Build alcohol care capacity across a range of local settings

People Priorities (foundations for co-production, recommended by CAPITAL)

- **Trauma-Informed Practice and Workforce Development**
Deliver training to frontline support staff on trauma, stigma, and inclusive practice. Promote compassionate engagement with people who use substances, grounded in dignity and respect.
- **Embedding Lived Experience in Decision-Making**
Commit to co-producing solutions with individuals with lived experience. Place them at the centre of service planning and invest in the development of peer leadership roles across the system.
- **Strengthening Peer Support Networks**
Expand peer-led provision within services and communities. Enhance access to harm reduction advice, substance use information and signposting to specialist support through peer connections.

2. Project Aims

As outlined in the WS DAP Plan 2024–2027, this initiative commits to co-producing community solutions with individuals who have lived and living experience of drug and/or alcohol harm. This approach aligns with key recommendations from The CAPITAL Project's report and directly contributes to the delivery of WS DAP's

strategic priorities around prevention, harm reduction, and recovery.

To ensure meaningful and effective co-production, the WS DAP commissioned CAPITAL to lead and facilitate the process on behalf of local communities. CAPITAL's involvement aims to safeguard against superficial engagement and promote inclusive, equitable decision-making, sharing power between statutory services, voluntary and community organisations, and those with lived experience. Core Aims of the Programme include:

- **Embed Inclusive Co-Production Practices**
Enable individuals with lived experience to participate fully in the planning, development, and delivery of community responses to substance use/dependency. Co-production will be underpinned by trust, transparency, and ongoing relationship-building.
- **Reduce Stigma and Promote Understanding**
Challenge stereotypes and prejudice associated with drug and alcohol use/dependency by creating space for honest dialogue, raising awareness through lived experience narratives, and encouraging community-level reflection and learning.
- **Strengthen Peer Leadership and Advocacy**
Support and develop leadership pathways for people with lived experience, enabling them to influence service design, take up representative roles, and contribute meaningfully to local policy and practice.
- **Foster Community Participation and Resilience**
Build community assets through locally driven initiatives that create opportunities for social connection, mutual support, and collective action. The aim is to empower communities to respond to substance-related challenges in ways that reflect their needs and strengths.
- **Champion Equity, Dignity, and Rights-Based Approaches**
Uphold values of respect and inclusion across all areas of programme delivery, ensuring people are treated with fairness and dignity, and that co-production reflects diverse lived realities.

This model recognises the time, skill, and sensitivity required to facilitate true co-production. By resourcing CAPITAL, the programme commits to maintaining quality, integrity, and sustainability in its collaborative efforts.

2.1 Project progress highlights to date 2024-2025

October 2024

- Lived Experience Lead and Project Assistant recruited

November 2024

- Attendee list created
- First event held

December 2024

- Co-producing trauma-informed substance use training with Alcohol Change UK

January 2025

- Temporary Accommodation Report goes live
- Oversight Board recruited – first meeting

February 2025

- Second event held
- Panel recruited – first meeting
- First Theory of Change (ToC) submitted

April 2025

- MSc student (University of Sussex) joins the Oversight Group

May 2025

- Third event held
- Training co-production with Alcohol Change UK for housing support staff in West Sussex

June 2025

- 4 ToCs approved, projects underway
- 3 ToCs nearing completion
- Trauma-Informed Framework goes live

July 2025

- First round of project evaluations begins
- Planning starts for the next phase of co-production and training delivery
- More filming and focus groups underway with Alcohol Change UK
- Five projects now approved and two in stages of application

3.Lived Experience Reports 2024/2025

CAPITAL set up task and finish groups for both reports, using trusted partner hubs and Temporary Accommodation (TA) common

rooms. These familiar and trauma-informed settings helped participants feel more at ease. Each session lasted around four hours, including a one-hour lunch break, included peer support during and after the group, offered lunch and goodie bags for attendees, and ensured everyone had an equal chance to speak

If someone couldn't attend a group session, we arranged a one-to-one session instead, although only two people took us up on this offer as most felt more comfortable in a group. We kept people informed about how we were using their input and reimbursed them with a £25 voucher for their time. If participants agreed to future contact, we invited them to events and shared new opportunities. We first connected with one of our oversight group members through a focus group for people who have used (or are using) drug and alcohol support services in West Sussex.

Reflections and learning

Facilitating these groups wasn't always easy. Some people were facing significant personal challenges, which sometimes led to tears, anger, or disruptions. Originally, we planned to run a mix of online and in-person groups, but it was hard to confirm each participant's circumstances. So, we decided to focus on face-to-face sessions. Only two people requested a one-to-one.

We built strong connections with staff who supported their clients throughout the process. Overall, participation was good, and feedback was open and honest. Most attendees said they felt supported and more connected to their community by taking part.

3.1 West Sussex Combating Drugs Partnership Lived Experience Report

In 2024, the WS Combating Drugs Partnership (now known as the WS DAP) commissioned CAPITAL to undertake research relating to substance use/dependency-related issues in West Sussex. From March 14th – April 11th Six groups were held in five locations across the county and 58 people attended overall.

Key Findings showed an apparent lack of kindness, respect and understanding towards users in all areas, that impacts on their ability to become healthy and stop using. In addition, findings showed that:

- Trauma is the main catalyst for substance use
- Training is required for key support staff
- Better joining up is required
- The importance of peer support and connectors

Attendees recommended that peer support is available in key locations, one stop hub, better early-stage housing support and training for key support staff in how to work effectively with those with addictions.

CAPITAL recommends that we develop co-production commitment, peer leadership, user and carer involvement. That, we build capacity, join up with mental health, innovate peer services, develop hub networks, promote and build capacity of peer leaders and lived experience led training.

3.2 Understanding the Experiences and Impact of Temporary Accommodation on Adults who use Drugs and /or Alcohol

In June 2024, the WS DAP commissioned CAPITAL to conduct focus groups with people to gather their views and experiences. Between July-October 2024, CAPITAL hosted seven focus groups in six locations across the county, with thirty-eight people who use drugs and alcohol.

Mental ill-health was the leading disability reported, and most had lived in Temporary Accommodation (TA) for up to two years and had changed TA one to two times in the past year. Many had experienced periods of homelessness (living in caravans, cars, and tents) between TAs. Over two thirds of people reported the contributing factors for needing temporary accommodation were Co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions. Many of the people we spoke to had previous or current engagement with the criminal justice system. Poor mental health exasperated by relationship breakdowns, family issues, and domestic abuse were common, and many had faced eviction from family, friends, and partners.

Recommendations from the report include:

1. Ensure that all TA staff are trained in trauma informed approaches, that relate specifically to drug and/or alcohol dependence and associated stigma.
2. Upskill staff in TA and associated settings in having short, initial conversations that enable a better understanding of individual need.
3. Suitable family areas or arrangements should be considered in TA settings, as early as possible.
4. Immediate guidance should be given around house or common rules, and staff should be aware of local support services and

how to refer. House rules and up-to-date information about local services should be clearly displayed.

5. Practical budgeting tools and financial management support should be scoped locally and made visible and available to all residents in TA settings, including resettlement support.
6. Alternative TA solutions, which could be more sustainable, cost friendly, and community focused should be explored and considered (e.g., modular home solutions).

4.Co-producing Substance Use Trauma Informed Training

The WS DAP commissioned the co-production of trauma informed substance-use/dependence training with Alcohol Change UK, aimed at key staff in West Sussex. The training is also co-delivered by people with lived experience in a unique way, where attendees will *ask the expert* their views on trauma and substance use/dependence from a lived experience perspective.

We believe that training developed and delivered with people who have lived experience leads to more compassionate, effective, and inclusive services and communities.

A trauma-informed co-production approach

The training programme was developed through a trauma-informed (TI) co-production approach, with people with lived experience playing a central role in shaping its design and delivery. This ensured the training led by Alcohol Change UK authentically reflected real-life experiences and addressed the needs of service users. CAPITAL advertised the lived experience roles and once people were recruited, hosted a total of four focus groups led by Alcohol Change UK.

The participants were encouraged to talk about how trauma affects them specifically around substance use and contribute their ideas and suggestions for the training modules and content. They also reviewed the stand-alone toolkit designed to complement the training. Everyone had access to peer support, enjoyed lunch together, received goodie bags and were reimbursed for their knowledge and time.

All participants were offered the chance to partake in a training video and most of them did. (Links to videos in *Further Reading*). Trauma-informed features included:

- *Lived experience leadership*: Contributors with personal experience of alcohol/drug-related harm and trauma helped design content, language, and delivery methods.
- *Psychological safety*: Development sessions were facilitated with sensitivity, including emotional check-ins, peer support, and flexible participation.
- *Transparency and collaboration*: Regular feedback loops and open dialogue ensured all contributors felt heard and valued.
- *Empowerment*: Co-production roles included not only sharing experiences but also facilitating and presenting.

The training workshops

The workshops will be delivered to frontline staff, using interactive methods including group discussion. The staff attending will *ask the experts* their views on trauma from a lived experience perspective.

The initial training is aimed at professionals from: *Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Early Help, Probation, Homelessness support services, Job Centre Plus (JCP), Police, CGL (Change Grow Live), Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust (SPFT)*, and the training covers:

1. Understanding trauma
2. The principles of trauma-informed care
3. Trauma and development
4. The impact of trauma on behaviour
5. Why people use substances to manage trauma
6. Trauma-informed care in practice

Additional co-produced e-learning training is nearing completion. It will be compulsory for all current and future front-line housing support staff and will incorporate the lived experience stories.

5. The co-production project and community fund

The co-production project and community fund was commissioned by the WS DAP, in direct response to requests from individuals with lived and living experience of substance-related harm, along with their careers, to co-produce local initiatives. Their request was clear: strengthen peer support networks and invest in peer leadership.

Applications for the fund have been varied, innovative, and submitted from a wide range of sources. Throughout the process, we've adapted and improved the fund's operation based on ongoing feedback from our oversight group, events and partners.

Each application is unique and requires different levels of support.

How it works

The Lived Experience Lead and Project Assistant offer hands-on guidance through face-to-face and online meetings. They help applicants develop Theories of Change (ToCs) if needed and ensure feedback from both the Lived Experience Panel and the WS DAP is clearly communicated.

Some applicants required multiple meetings, while others progressed with minimal support. Applicants were asked to outline what, if any, WS DAP priorities their projects contributed to, alongside other information. Once projects are active, CAPITAL staff maintain monthly check-ins with lead peers to offer support and monitor progress. Data collection is intentionally simple and respectful. Attendance is tracked using initials only for confidentiality, participant feedback is gathered to assess impact, and overcomplicated monitoring is avoided to keep the process manageable for both peers and participants. This flexible and supportive model ensures that peer-led initiatives thrive without unnecessary administrative burden, while maintaining accountability and responsiveness to community need.

We're working together with an MSc student from the University of Sussex to create a simple, supportive document that helps guide the safe and fair distribution of the Community Fund. This fund is especially for people with lived or living experience of drug and alcohol-related harm—because their insights and voices matter most. The document might be a safety plan, a partnership agreement, or a friendly disclaimer, depending on what feels right for the situation. Whatever shape it takes, its purpose is to make sure everyone involved feels secure, respected, and supported. It's about building trust, working together, and creating a space where people with real-life experience lead the way.

5.1 Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) explains how and why a project is expected to create change. It includes the situation, goals, what is needed (inputs), what will be done (outputs), and the reasoning behind the project. A ToC is helpful because:

- It helps people understand what they are trying to achieve.
- It shows what to measure to track progress.
- It makes it easier to plan and check if things are working.
- This method simpler than filling out many forms.

- They can be short or detailed.
- Some people may need more help than others to complete theirs, and a ToC offers flexibility.

Overview of the current funded projects: February 2024-July 2025

5.2 Out of Hours Art Project-Creative Space

People requested a safe space to go when organisations are shut as this is an issue when people need support from others at weekends and evenings. An Out of hours peer led art group (Creative Space) started in February 2024 for those who have used/are using drugs and/or alcohol, living in temporary accommodation or homeless.

Update: The art group was one of the first successful applications for the community fund. One of the key attributes was a free art set for all attendees. The ToC also featured costing in for travel for two group outings and the group have already planned their first together in August. The group also featured at the summer VCSE event in July focusing on art and loneliness.

5.3 The Voice of Lived Experience

People with co-occurring conditions are underrepresented in society. Many experience challenges connecting with services due to past trauma and a lack of genuine understanding from service providers. Their authentic voices and personal journeys are seldom heard, leading to missed opportunities for effective support and advocacy.

This project led by staff at Stonepillow aims to elevate and validate the voices of individuals with co-occurring conditions by ensuring they are heard and integrated into decision making processes. The focus is to improve connections between lived experience individuals and both statutory and non-statutory services.

Update: This project is live and to date seven people have contributed to the lived experience voice and have recently enjoyed a life discovery day together.

5.4 Women's Wellbeing Program

The plan and proposal for this project was developed in response to insights and feedback from women engaging with a recovery coaching programme running in West Sussex this year. They identified a range of unique gender specific needs that can be better supported in a woman only environment. They recognised

the importance of a Women's Wellbeing Programme in West Sussex, and primarily one which engages and supports service users allocated within the Temporary Accommodation model as a priority, with a wider capacity to support women with a range of complex support needs.

Build on Belief's WWP (Women's Wellbeing Programme) is aimed at addressing the specific needs of female service users falling into the Temporary Accommodation model and will address the vicious cycle and link between substance use disorder, homelessness, employment loss and mental / physical health. The initiative will provide a safe, supportive, and empowering environment for women seeking peer support - empowering the individual to rebuild their life through life-skills development, community, and peer support - creating a maintainable and transformative change for women, whilst offering a holistic recovery model that promotes long-term stability and working towards the freedom of independence.

Update: This started in late June, and we are looking forward to our first feedback session in coming weeks.

5.5 Guidance Vs Grooming. TikTok Series (You remind me of myself when I was your age)

Many young people (10-18), particularly those from marginalised groups, are exposed to conflicting role models online and in their local communities. The line between criminal grooming and genuine mentorship is often blurred by street language, trauma bonding, or material rewards, leading to harmful pathways.

Guidance Vs Grooming will challenge the glamorisation of grooming and manipulation in marginalised communities by providing a compelling, youth-led digital story that teaches viewers how to identify red flags and positive guidance in real life. Kent, Surrey and Sussex Police are aiming to link in with this work

Update: We have been having monthly meetings with colleagues from the police for advice and support of this work.

5.6 East Grinstead Women's SHARE Group

There is a need to find solutions to cuts in finances and services, to help women and their families access support. At present, overloaded GPs; Drug & Alcohol services; Mental Health support, and other resources have been severely impacted. People feeling

isolated with higher cost of living & lack of financial funds in households leaves many feelings overwhelmed & desperate.

East Grinstead Women's SHARE has been funded to support women, over 18 years of age, through weekly peer-led meetings, with talks & themes, plus openness and confidentiality to discuss problems & support other women, in turn helping our next generation of children to feel better supported. A creche will be provided to encourage mothers who struggle to attend meetings.

Update: East Grinstead women's SHARE was our final agreed project at the time of this evaluation and is soon to be fully funded and active in the community.

5.7 Projects in Application Stage

Pot Roast

There are people in our community who are unable to cook healthy meals as take away meals do not always have enough nutritional content which is important for good physical and mental health. Pot Roast aims to provide cook and eat sessions at a local hub using food bank parcels as a healthy alternative to take away meals for people in assisted housing, temporary accommodation or those experiencing homelessness.

High on Health

There is a growing normalisation of nutrient-deficient behaviours around drug and alcohol use - particularly the widespread use of high-sugar, carbonated, or chemically loaded mixers during poly-substance consumption. While these combinations are often socially accepted or even glamorised, they contribute directly to chronic health conditions such as diabetes, liver damage, and accelerated mental health decline.

High on Health aims to provide enjoyable, health-positive alternatives to young people. Disrupting harmful consumption patterns that empower them to make better choices without requiring total abstinence from day one.

Projects at Initial Enquiry Stage Only

- Ford prison
- Carers Support

5.8 The Panel

Our panel is made up currently of two individuals with both lived and living experience, offering a unique perspective in appraising community project applications, which are submitted in the form of a ToC. Drawing on their insights, the panel evaluates each proposal to determine its relevance and potential impact on the community. Prior to meeting CAPITAL staff at a panel meeting, the panel reviews each application thoroughly. If the ToC receives the panel's approval, the application proceeds to the WS DAP for further evaluation.

Upon approval by both the panel and WS DAP, CAPITAL releases the necessary funding and provides ongoing support with promotion, delivery, and evaluation. The panel remains engaged throughout the process and receives timely updates via email—including feedback and comments made by the WS DAP—at each stage of the project's development.

6. The Oversight Group

The Oversight Group, a collaborative blend of six individuals with lived or living experience, WS DAP commissioners, and CAPITAL staff, was established to guide the overall direction of the co-production project. Their formation was rooted not just in expertise but in a shared commitment to shaping work that truly reflects community voices.

More recently we have included a university student who is helping us to support the safe distribution of the community fund. From the outset, the group worked together to create a Terms of Reference, setting a clear framework for their role and responsibilities. Monthly meetings provide updates on progress, offering lived experience opportunities, and cultivating space for open dialogue.

Throughout the project, each member brought unique insights and perspectives, helping to shape the work with authenticity and relevance. The group didn't just identify risks or challenges—they explored them together, fostering a sense of shared ownership and trust. Their contribution has been central to the project's evolution and success. This Oversight Group has exemplified the power of inclusive collaboration, reminding us that lived experience isn't just valuable—it's vital.

"This project has been inspiring, empowering and resourceful, not only to myself but to others who have connected and engaged. I have been amazed how the close connections have formed between professionals and people who use or have used, drug and alcohol services, ensuring co-production is going the right way."

7. Events

Face-to-face meetings are more than just a preference, they are a necessity in mental health and addiction support. Feedback and research consistently highlight the powerful benefits of face-to-face interactions, especially in spaces designed to support those navigating addiction or mental health challenges. For many participants, being physically present with others creates a deeper sense of connection and understanding that simply isn't replicated online. Face-to-face meetings:

- Make individuals feel **more supported and less alone** when engaging in person, with many reporting a stronger sense of community and trust.
- In addiction recovery settings, **promote honesty and vulnerability**, critical ingredients for long-term recovery.
- A number of studies have shown that **regular in-person attendance reduces relapse rates**, boosts motivation, and builds enduring recovery networks.
- When it comes to mental health, **seeing someone's face and body language adds emotional nuance** that's hard to replicate digitally — making it easier to share, empathize, and feel understood.

By including dedicated in-person events from the outset, the WS DAP and CAPITAL clearly recognised this need — ensuring opportunities for genuine human connection, peer support, and lived-experience-led recovery spaces.

7.1 Event One – November 5th 2024

We kicked off with our first event at FieldPlace Manor in Worthing where we explored the possibilities of the overall project. We heard from people with lived experience and heard their stories. We further asked attendees to complete initial theories of change to explore how the community fund could be put to good use. These ideas were then shared with our oversight group as potential community projects. The event was attended by people with lived and learnt experience and those from professional communities such as West Sussex Mind, Stonepillow, and Turning Tides.

Feedback

“Meeting and speaking in person to people with lived experience of drug and alcohol addiction really hammers home the importance

of this work. Communicating from behind a screen doesn't do justice to the real human beings struggling to recover and those fighting alongside them to provide support."

"It was very moving to hear people's stories. It was brilliant."

7.2 Event Two – February 14th 2025

At this hybrid event we explored the progress we had made so far and delved into the temporary accommodation housing report that was released around the same time. We asked attendees to split off into groups and explore the common themes of the housing report. Our commissioners took us through the West Sussex Management of Co-occurring mental health & substance use conditions protocol. We also heard a moving lived experience story from Javel who talked about his life experiences with drugs & alcohol and his time in prison.

Feedback

"Very informative and helpful especially during this difficult time for people in temporary accommodation and the rise in homelessness. Without people's voices and experiences there would be no changes. With people getting together and speaking out then hopefully the current system will change for the better. The situation as it is at present is very concerning... we really need to make our voices heard and get an outcome."

"Javel's story had a real impact, as I worked with gang members in a previous role, and not enough work is carried out to prevent young people being groomed into gangs."

"I like the fact the CAPITAL project work with professionals and people with lived experience, I have never experienced it before as a professional, and I think it should be done all the time for people's development and learning. So, people with lived experienced get treated with respect all of the time."

7.3 Event Three – May 16th, 2025

On Friday 16th May we held our third event in the drug & alcohol partnership series at Field Place in Worthing. For this event we initially held regular planning groups to coproduce the day. This event had a focus on creative recovery, and the power creativity holds within the recovery process. We celebrated recovery with poetry readings, lived experience stories and art activities. We also heard from some of our latest community projects as well as

hearing updates on the latest news from our commissioners and CAPITAL. We welcomed attendees from community sector organisations as well as CAPITAL members and peers.

Feedback

“Meeting and speaking in person to people with lived experience of drug and alcohol addiction really hammers home the importance of this work. Communicating from behind a screen doesn’t do justice to the real human beings struggling to recover and those fighting alongside them to provide support. “

“This was very emotional for me as I have supported my daughter for a very long time now with her cocaine addiction and the support I felt was amazing.”

8. Quantitative data

Community Engagement and Impact: A Collective Story

From the very beginning, this project has been driven by the voices, expertise, and lived experience of the community. Through carefully designed structures like our Oversight Group and appraisal panel, we’ve ensured that collaboration was not just encouraged—it was essential.

Over the course of the project, we engaged with:

- **58 individuals** who use or have used drug and alcohol support services, along with their carers—bringing critical insight into service delivery.
- **39 people** with lived experience of temporary accommodation—offering firsthand understanding of housing insecurity and its challenges.
- **9 co-production contributors** who joined our Oversight Group and panel, playing a pivotal role in shaping solutions at every stage.
- **106 participants** across three major community events, including carers and individuals with lived and learnt experience, whose ideas inspired the development of new approaches and projects.
- **11 co-producers** of trauma-informed training with Alcohol Change UK, deepening the reach of compassionate, person-led support.
- Our community fund enabled the launch of **five peer-led projects**, with **two more currently in development**—each born from the insights and energy of those with direct experience.
- To maintain momentum and connection, we held **10 meetings** with our Oversight Group and panel members, creating

consistent opportunities to share updates, explore risks, and celebrate successes.

9. Partnership working

Throughout this project, collaboration has been the cornerstone of progress. We've built strong working relationships with a wide network of partners, each contributing vital knowledge, resources, and lived experience expertise that strengthened our co-production efforts. Together, we worked closely with:

- **CGL and Build on Belief (BoB)** to enhance access and support for individuals navigating substance use challenges.
- **Changing Futures** to address complex needs and push forward systemic change.
- **StonePillow and Turning Tides** to reach those experiencing homelessness and unstable housing, amplifying their voices in project development.
- **Drug and Alcohol Carers** to ensure carers' perspectives were woven into our understanding and planning.
- **Pathfinder** to provide integrated support across mental health services.
- **Sussex University**, offering academic insight and evaluation expertise that added rigor and depth.
- **Prison services and Police**, whose involvement enabled greater understanding of justice system interactions and community safety.
- **Alcohol Change UK**, a key partner in trauma-informed training and in shaping compassionate approaches to alcohol-related harm.

These partnerships have not only informed project decisions—they've created a diverse ecosystem of support, innovation, and mutual learning. Each organisation brought with it a unique lens and shared commitment to improving lives through co-production.

“My experience of bringing together trauma informed practice into West Sussex has included being part of the initial conversations about the roll out of training in drug and alcohol services. I was very impressed by the way that the conditions and values set out at the start of the training were a great example of partnership working and co-production and the values led activity by the assembled team has led to so great feedback and outcomes from the training that has had a positive effect on the rest of the programme within WSCC.” **Louise Patmoore-Changing Futures Programme Sussex, Systems Change Lead & Trauma informed care Programme lead**

“We’ve had the pleasure of working with CAPITAL on two recent projects in West Sussex Collaborating with CAPITAL colleagues has been straightforward and professional and the projects have been massively enhanced by their support. The contributions that CAPITAL have made in co-production have been invaluable to us and I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend CAPITAL to anyone who wants to make co-production meaningful and genuine so that the voice of lived experience can positively impact on their work.

Jane Gardiner- Alcohol Change UK

10. Meetings attended

Co-production project Oversight Group

A core decision-making body where peer-led insights steer direction. Members contribute to funding decisions, strategic planning, and project development, ensuring transparency and integrity.

Co-production project Panel Meetings

A peer-inclusive forum where small project proposals are reviewed. These meetings help us ensure grassroots initiatives are evaluated fairly and guided with the community’s best interests in mind.

Co-producing Co-production Discussion Forums

Spaces for reflection and learning on co-production best practices led by Changing Futures, Possibility People and CAPITAL Here, we exchange ideas, explore barriers, and champion the evolution of co-production models rooted in mutual respect.

West Sussex Temporary Accommodation Action Group (TAAG)

We contribute lived experience perspectives to inform housing support strategies. Discussions often focus on improving temporary accommodation standards and linking recovery to stable housing.

Trauma-Informed Community of Practice

A collaborative learning space that allows us to embed trauma-informed thinking across all services. We share what works, spotlight lived experience training and help shape county-wide cultural change.

Sussex ICS Trauma-Informed Leadership Group

Working at a leadership level to influence integrated care systems. We advocate for strategic policies that put trauma awareness at the heart of healthcare and support systems

Sussex Peer Support Network

A dynamic group connecting peer workers across Sussex. It provides a space to share practice, explore training needs, and amplify the value of peer-led recovery support.

West Sussex Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)

A specialist advisory group where people with lived and living experience review service changes and developments. Their recommendations inform policy, influence commissioning, and ensure services stay responsive and person-centred.

West Sussex Drug and Alcohol Partnership Board

Oversight of the Drug and Alcohol Partnership Board Priorities where services and organisations unite under a shared vision so that health care, Policing, social care, housing, education and voluntary sectors all work together.

Alcohol Harm Reduction and Prevention Sub-Group (WS DAP)

A subgroup of the West Sussex Drug and Alcohol Partnership Board who are tasked to address system priorities to reduce and prevent alcohol harm.

Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams (NMHTs)

We regularly present to NMHTs, sharing lived experience insights to help shift service understanding, reduce stigma, and build trust. These presentations support closer ties between community members and clinical teams, influencing trauma-informed approaches and recovery-focused care at a local level.

11. Risks and Mitigation

Working with people who have multiple and complex support needs—including recovery from drug or alcohol use/dependency, experiences of homelessness, and ongoing mental health challenges—requires flexibility, patience, and deep understanding. These lived realities can affect consistent engagement and availability. Potential challenges include:

- Individuals may be unwell or off sick.
- Meetings or planned activities may be missed due to personal circumstances.
- Small teams are particularly vulnerable to absences, which can impact timelines and delivery.

What We Do to Support People

We approach these challenges proactively, maintaining a compassionate and inclusive ethos:

- We involve a broad network of people with lived and living experience to create a stronger and more flexible team.
- We offer emotional and practical support when people need it most.
- We create working conditions that are fair, adaptable, and comfortable:
- Plenty of notice is given before meetings.
- Communication is tailored to each person's preferred method—email, text, call.

Keeping the work relevant

To keep engagement high and the project purposeful:

- We design work that stays meaningful and empowering for those with lived/living experience.
- We collaborate closely with support workers to maintain connection and continuity.
- We stay in active dialogue with partner organisations to ensure alignment and **Emotional Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma**—Working closely with trauma, addiction, and justice-involved experiences can weigh heavily on peer workers and team members.

Specific risks and mitigation ideas

- Burnout, emotional withdrawal, or reduced capacity to engage. **Mitigation:** regular reflective spaces or supervision with trauma-informed facilitator. Peer check-ins or wellbeing days. Training on boundaries and managing emotional impact
- **Sustainability and funding instability** is an ongoing concern. Small teams and community-led work can be vulnerable to shifting budgets, and can lead to project delays, reduced resources, or missed opportunities. **Mitigation Ideas:** Diversify funding streams (e.g. grant writing, local business partnerships), document impact through testimonials, metrics, and media to support future funding bids and share commitment.
- **Leadership transitions or staff turnover.** With a small, passionate team, any change in leadership or staff can have ripple effects, including loss of momentum, disrupted relationships, gaps in knowledge. **Mitigation Ideas:** Shared documentation of

processes and contact. Shadowing and mentoring within the team. Clear onboarding for new members

- **Equity in participation and representation.** Some voices may be more heard than others, especially when lived experience is diverse across race, gender, and class, which could lead to limited perspectives or unconscious exclusions. **Mitigation Ideas:** Proactive outreach to underrepresented communities. Accessible meetings and formats (e.g. language, tech, timing). Rotating facilitation or storytelling to give new voices a platform.
- **Community perception and trust.** As peer-led work scales up, there's a risk of being seen as part of “the system” rather than community-rooted, which can reduce trust or engagement. **Mitigation Ideas:** Keep communications transparent and authentic. Highlight lived experience leadership in all materials. Maintain grassroots connections and informal check-in. This mindful approach allows us to nurture resilience in our team, remain agile in our delivery, and honour the lived experience that drives everything we do.

12. Next Steps: 2025–2026

As we look ahead, our focus remains clear: supporting and empowering people with lived and living experience through meaningful action. These next steps reflect our shared values—connection, courage, and community—and build on what we’ve already learned together. The road ahead is shaped by collaboration, and we walk it side by side. Our vision for the coming year builds on the strength of community-driven initiatives and lived experience. We remain committed to empowering voices, shaping services, and fostering meaningful connections.

Supporting Community Projects

We will continue backing peer-led projects across local areas, and monthly support meetings will offer space for guidance, feedback, and connection.

Strengthening the Community Fund

We aim to raise awareness and involve the right people. We will explore options to increase available funding through additional sources.

Building Impactful Events

Guest lists will be reviewed and personalised invitations sent. In-person events will be prioritised, in response to community feedback.

Police Collaboration

We will work continues with Kent, Surrey & Sussex Police. People with lived experience of gang involvement are supporting work with young people to identify grooming risks, and families seeking guidance and support.

Probation and Prison Partnerships

We aim to strengthen ties with probation services, continue ongoing collaboration with Ford Prison and other institutions, and work with the Regional Drugs Lead to offer work opportunities to those in the justice system.

Sussex University Project

We're partnering with Sussex University to create a safe and fair process for supporting people with their projects, including the funding to deliver them. The project is led by CAPITAL staff and our Oversight Group, and our shared learnings will shape future initiatives.

Trauma-Informed Awareness

In partnership with Changing Futures and others, we're helping Sussex become a trauma-informed county. We've contributed to the Sussex Trauma-Informed Framework 2025, and Community of Practice meetings remain a key space for learning and sharing.

Focus groups with Alcohol Change UK in 2025 will help develop training for housing support staff, and people with lived experience will co-design and deliver the training, and their stories are being filmed to support future learning.

Volunteering and Lived Experience Leadership

Co-production continues with our oversight group at monthly meetings, and we'll ensure they are informed of all opportunities and training. Our panel will keep reviewing peer-led projects for suitability, and we're exploring ways to include commissioners in this process for greater transparency.

A new volunteering strategy is being developed, and support and training for peers and volunteers will remain a top priority to develop capacity of new peer leaders from community projects, together with others with lived experience working in drug and alcohol services.

13. Conclusions

We know that change isn't just possible—it's happening. It's found in the growth of peer-led projects, the conversations sparked at community meetings, and the courage of those sharing their stories to educate and inspire. By continuing to listen, learn, and lead with lived experience, we believe West Sussex can become a model of compassionate and inclusive support. The work carries on—and so does the hope.

Quotes from the Team

"This project has been a valuable learning experience from the start. I'm on my own recovery journey from addiction—nearly eighteen years strong. Like many of those who contributed, I believe trauma was the catalyst for my drug use, and peer support and lived experience have been vital parts of the solution.

Peer support played a key role in my recovery following a traumatic childhood and early adulthood. I now live with a diagnosis of complex emotional needs (EUDP), and I see how stretched our services have become—long waiting times, limited support, and financial cuts that continue to deepen. But peer support offers a cost-effective, community-based solution. It's been a pleasure working alongside people with lived experience who are deeply passionate about our work and the opportunity to give back—an act that helps them as much as those they support.

I've seen confidence blossom when people are supported, given a chance to shape projects, and welcomed at our events. Across West Sussex, peer support is expanding, with small projects connecting and evolving. We are learning from both our mistakes and our triumphs. And we believe this could be a blueprint for change in the future". **Sara Shepherd- Lived Experience Lead**

"Being part of the Drug & Alcohol Partnership Team at CAPITAL has been a joy and it's been amazing to see so many people in the community who are ready, willing, and able to support people with lived/living experience of drug & alcohol harm. As a person in recovery myself I have yet again learned the power of connection to others in similar circumstances and how healing it can be to share experiences for the greater good of all. It's been amazing to see the variety of projects coming through with many and varied ideas on how to support people in this area of need, particularly when cuts in services have been so profound this work therefore is essential.

It's been particularly impactful when we have held events seeing so many people from a broad range of backgrounds both personally and professionally, listening to lived experience stories and hearing updates on how projects and the management of the community fund is progressing.

Overall, the fund appears to be creating the impact required and that's supporting people in the community in various ways to navigate their way through what are some of the toughest times of their lives and it's an honour to play a part in the fund's overall success so far." **Mark Mills- Project Assistant**

14. Further reading

WS DAP pages on the CAPITAL website for reports, films of people with lived experience, and more information on the community fund:

[Drug & Alcohol Partnership - CAPITAL](#)

Sussex Trauma Informed Framework

<https://www.sussex.ics.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2025/07/Sussex-Trauma-Informed-Framework-2025-Final.pdf>

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