



## Co-Production in Action: COVID Response series

### Hear Our Voice in Lockdown: Online Conversations

ICF Learning Disabilities and Parents and Carers

**As both statutory and third sector services and organisations across the social care sector in Cwm Taf Morgannwg diversified their priorities as part of the COVID-19 response effort, many co-production activities were placed on hold, as decision makers focused on crisis management strategies to stop the spread of the virus and keep citizens safe across the region.**

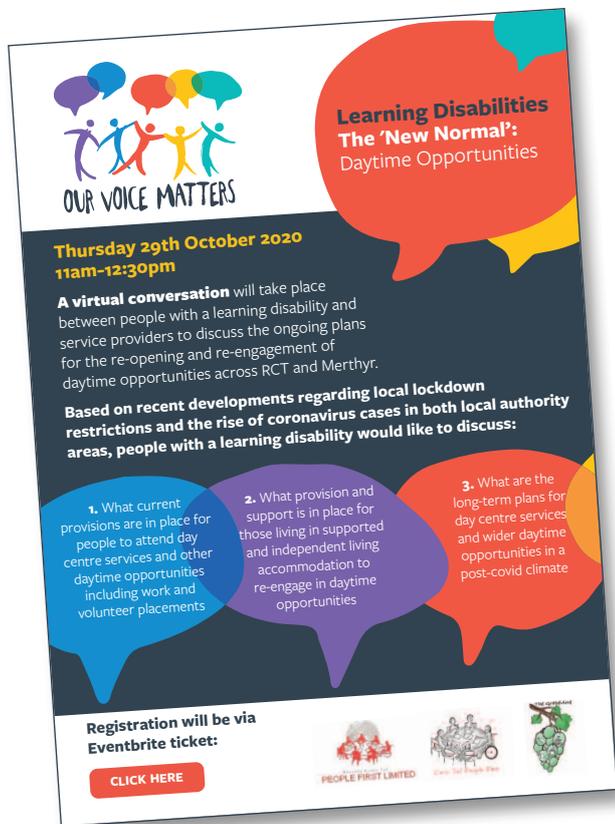
However, as lockdown measures became part of daily life, and the creation of a new normal started to emerge, it became apparent that conversations with citizens were crucial in understanding how the needs of people with lived experiences had changed as a result of COVID-19 and how these experiences and needs could shape the future planning of longer-term service delivery. In addition, a mechanism for service providers and decision makers to effectively communicate their plans to citizens was needed. Therefore, with the support of the Our Voice Matters project, Cwm Taf People First, RCT People First, People First Bridgend and The Grapevine, started to design a suitable virtual platform for critical conversations to take place with relevant local authority departments and service provider representatives.

To ensure that people with a learning disability and parents and carers were fully equipped to participate in these conversations, the support organisations with the Our Voice Matters project delivered a range of training sessions and pre-conversation meetings to help increase both the technology and self-advocacy skills of those wishing to contribute. This also helped to focus the conversations and keep people on track to deal with one theme at a time.

During these pre-engagement activities, it was identified that the Zoom platform was the platform of choice for people with learning disabilities, and therefore was adopted as the communication tool to host the Hear Our Voice in Lockdown online conversation series.

The first formal online conversation to take place under the Hear Our Voice in Lockdown series was held on the 18th June 2020 as part of learning disability week as an opportunity for people with a learning disability and parents and carers to come together and share their experience pre lockdown and during lockdown with a range of service providers and decision makers. Audience members for this first virtual event came from all over the UK, and the conversations that developed highlighted the unique resilience people with a learning disability had for dealing with periods of isolation and finding creative ways to stay connected.

Although this first virtual conversation was considered a success, key learning came from it that allowed the Hear Our Voice in Lockdown series to improve its effectiveness and increase the representation of conversation contributors.



## Engagement Tools utilised:

- Pre-engagement/Empowerment Activities
- Citizen led agenda setting
- Personal storytelling
- Co-evaluation of process
- Collaborative support from partner organisations

## Why is this co-production:

- Empowerment and opportunity creation to give everybody a voice
- Development of individual responsibility and ownership generating a sense of self-worth and purpose
- Working in the best interests of ALL involved: Needs Driven Initiative
- Viewing people with a learning disability and parents and carers as EXPERTS of their lives and valuing their opinions, thoughts and ideas to challenge decision-makers to consider the citizen experience to shape their future thinking
- Creating opportunities for Collaboration between different statutory and third sector organisations, and further collaboration between service providers and citizens.
- Ongoing and continuous cycle of evaluation that informs the future development of the project and learns from its mistakes.

Ongoing co-evaluation of the process has played a critical role in making sure that conversations are inclusive, accessible (albeit virtual) and valued by all who attend, and has allowed people with lived experiences to work as equal partners with decision makers and service providers to set the agenda and co-deliver opportunities for discussion and collaboration. As a result, the Hear Our Voice in Lockdown series has held a number of further online conversations looking at plans across the three local authority areas for the re-opening of day centre services; guidelines surrounding extended household ‘bubbles’ for people who live in supported and independent living accommodation; the importance of friendships and peer support both in and out of lockdown; and essential review of the Social Services Learning Disability Team across Rhondda Cynon Taf. These conversations have ensured that the voice of people with lived experiences are at the heart of the future planning and priorities of social care services for people with a learning disability and their parents and carers across the region.

Information gathered from these virtual conversations has been analysed and the collective findings, along with specific quotes from people with lived experiences has now been shared with key regional partners to feed into the Regional COVID-19 Impact Assessment and Citizen Priorities Report.

“I really think my voice was heard because they all listened to me and everyone was asking questions, and everyone was nodding” **Session Panellist** – Showing Resilience Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

“Having breakout sessions meant we were able to hear from a wide range of individuals about their experiences. Being able to ask questions was also really valuable” **Session Attendee** – Showing Resilience Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

