

Greenwich – re-thinking day opportunities for people with learning disabilities

'It's been a journey!' Team 1 participant

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1. Summary report and recommendations

Over a nine month period the Ideas Alliance supported Royal Borough of Greenwich's transformation of their learning disabilities opportunities by running a collaborative design process with anyone who was interested in shaping the future service. The resulting proposals will inform a formal consultation planned for autumn 2021. This collaborative engagement process of the Council's learning disabilities service took place almost entirely online amongst challenging circumstances and in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic 2020-21.

What we did together

A first phase involved scoping the existing offer, the current context and what is important to a range of local stakeholders including people who use Day Opportunities' services and their families, those who might in the future and groups of staff. These stakeholders were then invited to join a series of three action-focused '100 day challenges' during April - June, focussing on developing and testing ideas in response to these important questions:

- 1) what is important to us (a team led by people with learning disabilities but including others);
- 2) what is the life we want to lead
- 3) how will we make that happen.

What we discovered

In the scoping phase we heard about **how things were**: the commitment of staff, providers and carers to supporting people with learning disabilities to live fulfilling lives; as well as anxiety, exhaustion, anger and cynicism. There were persistent questions related to the timing and speed of the change, and a legacy of mistrust between the Council and its stakeholders. **Important to people** were:

- the transition from education to adult services;
- a focus on individual enjoyments and the whole day experience;
- transport;
- mixing abilities;
- balancing the ambitions of & for people with learning disabilities AND
- the realities of day-to-day capacity.

During the 100 day challenge process, there was an overwhelming **desire to get involved** and get on with things – over 70 people attended the launch and each challenge team had an average of 15 people consistently attending meetings every fortnight. **Ongoing, open communication** between providers, families, Council officers and support organisations became key to current challenges and their solution. An improved range of inclusive **leisure activities** were selected as a priority for people with learning disabilities and their families, as well as **work** and **social** opportunities.

The results

The shifts in ideas, action, relationships and mindsets from where we started to where the 100 days ended are significant and will serve as a strong foundation for the ongoing transformation process.

- New ideas in action around activities and support include:
 - 1) a **hub and spoke model** for day support (potentially Sherard Road site) which provides a 'home base' for all to explore community activities as they are able;
 - 2) an ongoing calendar of **taster days** run by providers for families;
 - 3) four **One Stop Shops** visibly hosted within GLL leisure centres, collaboratively run by providers, third sector partners, people with learning disabilities and their families and Council officers;
 - 4) **Transport options and travel support** to be developed alongside the activities and included in taster sessions; a transport group is in place and the wider scope of work needs to be agreed;
 - 5) **High-level discussions with local business** and an employment group to develop more and better opportunities for paid work and volunteering;
 - 6) a **menu/database of opportunities outdoors**, also at evenings and weekends;

7) Developing **joint opportunities** through scoping and benchmarking work with other boroughs and national organisations.

- Underpinning all these ideas are transformed relationships and energy for ongoing collaboration including:

8) a carer-led carers forum;

9) a provider-led provider forum;

10) **a user-led engagement group**, hosted by a local service user support organisation which looks beyond Day Opportunities;

11) **Further engagement by those people with learning disabilities involved in the challenge themselves** including an upcoming citizen's forum;

12) **videos** and other materials which can be used as a tool for staff training, and in commissioning materials and processes.

13) **Co-creation of a charter**, building on the work of Oxleas in 2018 and working alongside the Heart and Soul group - based on what's important that services can sign up to

14) a **group of people eager to continue** meeting to progress ideas into completion.

What could you do now (our recommendations)

- Support stakeholders to take forward their ideas that came out of the 100 day challenge. The ideas are summarised in this report.
- Adopt a 'facilitation' role. Ideas and action need stimulating but not controlling. A facilitation role will entail bringing people together, assisting the process but not project managing.
 - Think about the community you're collaborating with, assist their collaboration – you've done this once already via the 100 Day Challenge and you can do it again.
 - Facilitate collaborative work by bringing people together and creating spaces for people to speak, disagree and act in line with your Co-production Strategy.
 - Facilitate people making a contribution. The potential of people with learning disabilities, their families and the staff that support them can be unlocked by a holding a firm conviction that they have a valuable contribution to make, with encouragement and facilitative support.
 - Consider bespoke support for staff to build their

confidence in facilitation and engagement; this is potentially a role for Link Workers

- Commit to collaboration and recognise that it is valuable work. Value collaborative work with time, money and recognition.
 - It is important to resource this work by recompensing voluntary sector partner organisations, parents/carers and service users. The creation of paid opportunities for service users should be a priority.
 - Consider a dedicated coordination role to support the various engagement activities and groups, for example a secondment from within the service or local voluntary sector organisation.
- Avoid categorising service users as requiring either a building-based or non building-based service. The distinction between centre-based and non-centre based services is arbitrary and incompatible with proposals that emerged from the 100 day challenges about the multi-purpose use of buildings for people with a range of needs, interests and aspirations.
- Consider continuation of the 100 Day Challenge Champions as senior leaders who can validate the process, cheer lead the teams and unblock bureaucratic obstacles

for the work going forward.

***'We are not leaving here; we are taking it further' Team 1
participant***

2. Introduction

'Thank you - all the staff have been amazing!' Team 1 participant

We have had the immense privilege to be welcomed into Royal Greenwich (albeit online) to work alongside committed and passionate people - those that use services, those that care for them and staff that support them. We have witnessed the change in relationships between you, the lightbulb moments and the frustrations you all face. This is our opportunity to bring all the learning and amazing work achieved by everyone, together in one place and to help you to think about where you want to go from here and how.

You asked us to support you to transform the day opportunities offer, specifically moving away from building-based services to a more community level response. Your vision for people with learning disabilities was and still is, ambitious and admirable and was reflected by the people themselves and their families/carers when we listened to them during our first few months in Royal Greenwich. However, moving from a vision to reality takes a different sort of relationship between yourselves, the service providers and the people you support and this became much of the focus of second half of the project, through the 100 day challenges. We believe that the change in those relationships will now be the key to creating the

different market of opportunities for people; opportunities which they can access on their own terms but also, help to shape.

3. What we did together

'This feels like a step closer to co-production' RBG staff

Over a nine-month period we worked alongside you to run a collaborative design process with anyone who was interested in shaping the future service. This included Council staff, providers, people with learning disabilities and their families/carers. The resulting changes will inform a formal consultation planned for autumn 2021.

This collaborative engagement process of the Council's learning disabilities service took place almost entirely online amongst challenging circumstances and in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic 2020-21.

A first phase involved scoping the existing offer, the current context and what is important to different people in the system. Alongside an analysis of existing local data, we gathered insights from:

- **People who use Day Opportunities services and their families** – through written communication (e.g. 'easy read'), telephone calls, dedicated Zoom meetings and discussions with representative groups and individuals
- **People who might use Day Opportunities in the future** – parents of young people in transition and their groups

- **Groups of staff** – Day Opportunities team, community capacity officers, social work team managers, and placement officers (shared lives)
- **Local providers** – including those the Council works with closely already, and those they don't.

***'I have definitely made some good links with other providers that I wouldn't have if it hadn't been for the challenge.'* Provider**

Everyone involved in the first phase was then invited to join a series of three action-focussed '100 day challenges' during April - June, focussing on developing and testing ideas in response to these important questions:

- 1) what is important to us (a team led by people with learning disabilities but including others)
- 2) what is the life we want to lead
- 3) how will we make that happen

The challenges were open to anyone living or working in Royal Greenwich with an interest in improving day opportunities for adults with learning disabilities. More than 100 people signed up to take part.

These included:

- Adults with learning disabilities: people living independently or with families or in supported accommodation / those using

existing day services / those involved as representatives – ‘MPs’ of the People’s Parliament

- Family carers of adults with learning disabilities, and parents of young people in transition
- Potential and existing service providers: statutory, third and independent sectors
- Voluntary and community groups
- Advocacy and support organisations for people with learning disabilities and their families
- Staff from Royal Borough of Greenwich and its partner organisations: From senior management to front line workers in adult social care and health services / social work teams / other parts of the Council
- A range of other interested parties, e.g. University of Greenwich, local architects, residents.

Those who were unable to commit to the challenge meetings were able to keep in touch via a clickable webpage on the Greenwich Directory.

All of the above groups were represented at the initial launch events on 31 March and 21 April. Over 70 people attended the first launch, and 45 came to the follow up event. And the open event at Day 50 had 50 participants.

Within the three challenge teams there was also a diverse membership. Teams were 'self-selecting' and so in a few cases there was movement in and out of and across teams, and some participants attended more meetings than others. The aim was for a broad spectrum of participants across key stakeholder groups, rather than prescribed demographic representation.

"We appreciate that everyone in the team comes from different walks of life" (Team 1 participant)

Following the launch, the challenge teams met every two weeks and were facilitated by us to be self-managing. The first half of the 100 days was spent properly defining the question and developing ideas. The second half was focused on action with members of the group following their plans and connecting with others outside the group and then returning to the challenge sessions to report on their progress, be appreciated for their efforts and head off again with revised plans or next steps.

4. What we discovered:

In phase 1 scoping we heard about **how things were:**

- There are existing strong relationships and care from a passionate, committed group of carers who champion their needs and those of their loved ones.

- There are committed staff with deep care and strong relationships with and understanding of the people they work with and ideas for change.
- There is a sense of community amongst staff, centre-based services, carers and people who use services
- This strong commitment to improving services is combined with anxiety, exhaustion, anger and cynicism due to Covid related issues (closure of building-based services, health anxieties) and uncertainty about the future of day opportunities. This was particularly prevalent amongst families and people with learning disabilities but also staff and some third sector partners.
- A legacy of mistrust between the Council and the wider sector, particularly parents, carers and other family members. This mistrust seemed to arise from a lack of transparency and mutual misunderstanding.
- Persistent questions related to the timing and speed of the change with concern that there was insufficient time for people to understand and prepare for change.
- Confusion and concern about the nature of the personal reviews, finances and future plans with scepticism about the intent for the changes; was this to improve services or save

money? This was compounded with the sense of a constant 'chipping away' of services.

- People with learning disabilities and their families/carers have often felt a lack of control over their own lives and the way they want to live them.
- Many people had strong views about day opportunities as the use of these services has been the way they have lived (and worked) for many years.
- There is a need for a holistic, cohesive solution which creates a structure that works for the whole family, for the whole day, consistently.

'I learned about how things you take for granted are challenges for others' Provider

We also discovered **what is important to people:**

- The period of transition from education to day opportunities – often described as 'falling off the cliff' with uncertainty and anxiety about 'what next'?
- An integrated and differentiated sense of what's possible: ambitions of & for people with learning disabilities AND the realities of day-to-day capacity
- People want to contribute and be part of developing, designing and delivering things. They can assist in the market

development and ensure the focus remains on those things that matter most to them.

- A focus on individual interests and enjoyments – enabling people to live the life they want to live with their friends, family and the wider community with the focus on a whole day experience rather than ‘activities’.
- The limitations of current transport options which often dictates what people can and can’t do and leads to people having to leave activities early, turn up late or not attend at all.
- Bringing people together with mixed abilities, in safe environments and with confidence.

In phase 2, the 100 days challenge enabled us to amplify the messaging around what really mattered to people:

- An overwhelming **desire to get involved** and get on with things – over 70 people attended the launch and each challenge team had an average of 15 people consistently attending meetings every fortnight.
- **Ongoing, open communication** is at key to current challenges and their solution: providers want to know what families want directly from them; families want to speak to each other directly and on their own terms to share learning and support; Council officers benefit from hearing directly and honestly from families about their challenges and frustrations and wishes.

- An improved range of inclusive **leisure activities** are a priority for people with learning disabilities and their families, as well as **work** and **social** opportunities. Quick win = providers are keen to develop these in dialogue with families.

5. The results

The shifts in ideas, action, relationships and mindsets from where we started to where the 100 days ended are significant and will serve as a strong foundation for the ongoing transformation process.

Ideas into action

“It’s what we do after this that matters” (Team 1 participant)

The three challenge teams worked in parallel and in collaboration to generate ideas for future activities and support to improve the lives that people with learning disabilities and their families would like to lead.

The teams took their lead from the participants and ‘what’s important to us’ discussion being explored in challenge team 1. Team members made personal videos talking about their lives and their hopes for the future which were shared in the challenge meetings.

Challenge Team 1: What's important to us?

- Friendships, relationships and a social life
- Getting a job/taking part in things
- Transport and support to help us have a full day
- Staying safe and well (healthy)
- Having hopes and dreams for the future
- Having our own interests and choices
- Building our self-confidence
- Including everyone – all ages and abilities
- AND being given support and time to deal with change



IDEAS
ALLIANCE

A wealth of ideas was created and discussed within the teams. Iteration of the ideas began during the 100 days, and initial testing with colleagues and peers, but detailed planning and consultation will be the next step, facilitated by agreement from teams to continue meeting to progress ideas into completion. The main strands for ongoing development are set out here, but is not exclusive and other ideas are already being taken forward by individuals and organisations involved in the challenges.

Activities and support

A hub and spoke model for day support: For example, the Sherard Road centre acts as home base for those with complex needs, as well

as those with more independence to go out into the community.

An ongoing calendar of taster days run by providers to maintain an active dialogue with families and help them test out activities on offer.

Four One Stop Shops visibly hosted within GLL leisure centres – collaboratively run by providers, third sector partners, people with learning disabilities and their families and Council officers.

Transport options and travel support to be developed alongside the activities and included in taster sessions (starting with working with the RBG Road Safety team).

High-level discussions with local business (initiated by the Champions) to develop more and better opportunities for paid work as well as volunteering for people with learning disabilities; using the videos produced by Challenge 1 participants as inspiration for others seeking to lead an independent and working life.

Creating a **menu/database of opportunities outdoors; also at evenings and weekends**; harnessing the potential of currently unused buildings and staff able to work independently with individuals.

Developing **joint opportunities** with other boroughs and national organisations.

'This will take a lot of hard work and time to get right - but we must not give up' RBG staff

Underpinning all these ideas are transformed relationships and energy for ongoing collaboration

Mistrust began to shift as people communicated honestly from their different perspectives and relationships and understanding developed. In particular the role of the **Champions** in the process, grew people's confidence that they were being taken seriously and trusted. The Champions role was to cheer lead and support the teams, trying to unblock barriers where they arose to take forward ideas with other key decision makers within the system to open doors and build consensus. From the teams' perspective, it was very important to have them there and listening in the first instance; people felt valued and validated and this was almost more important than the Champion's task of unblocking and moving things on. It would be wise for RBG to ensure the role of the Champions is continued in some form.

People told us of strengthened and new connections between families, providers and Council officers based on an understanding of their common goals and struggles. They have plans underway to continue growing these transformed relationships:

A carer-run carers forum: initially conceived as an advisory group

for both service users and their carers, this would provide social interaction and peer support for families both of existing service users and those coming through transition; it would work alongside and complement existing carer support, for example that offered by the Parent Participation Group and build on relationships developed with families using the day opportunities service.

A provider-run provider forum: this would build on the new links created between providers during the challenges, broaden the scope of organisations and settings involved, and create opportunities for unique and focused collaborations.

A user-led engagement group, hosted by a local service user support organisation. This would work with existing structures and groups, such as the people's parliament and the ACE group of young people in transition.

Further engagement by those people with learning disabilities involved in the challenge themselves: For example, the MPs will be holding a dedicated citizen's forum for people with learning disabilities to discuss the challenges and the ideas generated; one service user has been 'inspired' to develop their own '100 day challenge' with other service users.

Using the videos and other materials produced (especially from Team 1) as a tool for staff training, and in commissioning materials and processes.

Co-creation of a charter based on what's important that services can sign up to.

A mechanism to support the teams to continue to meet throughout the transformation process, and a web-based experience for ongoing wider communication and engagement (building on the Greenwich Community Directory webpage created for the challenges).

Undertake **bespoke challenges or other co-production exercises for specific elements** identified to be investigated further, such as an improved processes and policies for direct payments.

“We are not leaving it here, we are taking it further ...” (Team 1 participant)

6. Some of the achievements

The original specification for this piece of work was ambitious and detailed a range of outputs that the 100 days challenges have started to develop and will take time to properly come to fruition. One of the aims of collaboration is to test out ideas and ensure that whatever is being created, is what is truly needed and aligns properly with what matters to the people. The 100 day challenges achieved this objective and enabled everyone to take a step back from the agenda and learn to work together first and foremost. Without these the relationships and the commitment to work together, many of RBG's ideas may not get off the ground.

The following progress was made against key specification outputs:

- *Create a framework of meaningful activity options from which individuals can select their preferences* – one of the most ambitious ideas created by the teams was the One-Stop Shops. There is now a committed, mixed group of people who want to help make these a reality; the confidence of this group can only be strengthened by designing and developing further ideas. The process of creating further meaningful activity options will be springboarded by these One Stop Shops. Furthermore, RBG now knows what truly matters to people so that any day opportunities developed with them will be properly meaningful.
- *Put in place mechanisms for individuals and groups to micro-commission their own services* – there was a great deal of discussion in Team 3 regarding the process of payment and the difficulties that were currently faced by families/carers and service providers alike. Members of this team showed a commitment to work together with RBG to start to unpick where the barriers were and to co-create a more simple commissioning process. RBG's role will be to facilitate the co-creation process, ensuring everyone who should be involved is present.
- *Support staff to foster and support entrepreneurial service users to establish micro-enterprises* – this was the most ambitious output and perhaps too ambitious to deliver during the time of the project. The most important aspect of this idea is to ensure the service users feel empowered and confident enough to start to think differently about their part to play. Additionally, support staff also need to think differently about their role and the role of the service users in creating a different range of day opportunities. The 100 day challenges have started to shift this

thinking by introducing a new way of working together and demonstrating the power of harnessing everyone's strengths and abilities. It will take time to establish these micro-enterprises, but the environment has been created by the challenges, within which they can flourish.

- *Employ a communication strategy to ensure staff, service users, families, etc are aware of the options and opportunities that exist* – this output was discussed in great detail as communication came up time and again as a barrier within the system. A range of ideas were developed to start to change this, including the One Stop Shops, the user and carer groups, the provider run forum. Most notably, RBG and families/carers need to work together to understand how communication is received and understood by people, to be creative about how they communicate and to be committed to the idea that the communication should be two way.

7. Conclusions

Lifting up from the many individual actions initiated, the 100 day challenge has shifted collective mindsets that will inevitably inform the ongoing transformation. From 'centre based services' being limited to those with complex needs to a recognition that most people with learning disabilities would benefit from a mixed ability home base or 'hub' from which to explore community activities. From adversarial, risk-averse communication and 'doing for' to an experience of the benefits of connecting as humans, open dialogue and enabling people to do things for themselves where possible. And finally, a potential future, already begun, where RBG play a facilitative, connecting role that enables others to design and run

activities and inform and support each other to lead the lives they want to.

'It is absolutely right that we should involve people in designing and delivering services' RBG staff

Top tips

- Never do for people what they can do for themselves.
Remember people may do things differently and/or better.
Some people may need some support to do things.
- Be collaborative in action as well as design – for example when piloting new ideas.
- Build resilience into the system by considering strategies for keeping things going when someone leaves.
- Regularly take a step back to pause and reflect on existing plans.
- Trust people to take forward and test new ideas. You can think of this as giving people permission to innovate.
- Welcome challenge to what you are doing, how you are doing it and what you are thinking. Use existing forums and possibly propose or open new avenues for ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders.
- Remember that the loudest complainers can become the most passionate natural leaders. A collaborative approach as outlined above will create the necessary conditions for these leaders to emerge.
- Continue to set goals – never see an individual goal as an end in itself.

- Consider continuation of the 100 Day Challenge Champions as senior leaders who can validate the process, cheer lead the teams and unblock bureaucratic obstacles for the work going forward.

To facilitate

verb (used with object), fa·cil·i·tat·ed, fa·cil·i·tat·ing.

to make easier or less difficult; help forward (an action, a process, etc.)

to assist the progress of something.

Roles of a facilitator ...

1. **Motivator:** From the rousing opening statement to the closing words of cheer, you ignite a fire within the group, establish momentum, and keep the pace.
2. **Guide:** You know the steps of the process the group will execute from beginning to end and carefully guide the participants through each step in turn.
3. **Questioner:** You listen carefully to the discussion and quickly analyze comments to formulate questions that help guide a productive group discussion and challenge the group when appropriate.
4. **Bridge Builder:** You create and maintain a safe and open environment for sharing ideas. Where other people see differences, you find and use similarities to establish a foundation for building bridges to consensus.

5. **Clairvoyant:** Throughout the session, you are attuned to signs of strain, weariness, aggravation, and disempowerment, and respond in advance to prevent dysfunctional behaviour.
6. **Peacemaker:** Although it is generally better to avoid direct confrontations, should it happen, you step in quickly to re-establish order and direct the group toward a constructive resolution.
7. **Taskmaster:** You are ultimately responsible for keeping the session on track. This entails tactfully cutting short irrelevant discussions, preventing detours, and maintaining a consistent level of detail throughout the session.
8. **Praiser:** At every opportunity, you should praise participants for good effort, progress, and results – praise well, praise often, *praise specifically*