



Power sharing with experts by experience, for social work leaders

Summary of learning

May 2025



This is an informal summary of learning.

This report has been created by the Trauma Responsive Social Work Services Team (TRSWS) in Scottish Government and the Resilience Learning Partnership (RLP) to summarise their experience of creating and delivering a learning product for social work leaders and multi-disciplinary colleagues and partners.

TRSWS and RLP collaborated with the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and the involvement of children and young people has been crucial to the success of the co-design and co-develop stages of the Power Sharing with Experts by Experience learning product.

The purpose of this summary of learning is to share the approach utilised, the involvement of experts, and the benefits of collaboration in the design, development and delivery of a trauma responsive social work learning product. This summary of experience and learning has not been subject to external evaluation.

If you have any enquiries relating to this learning summary and our work, please contact TRSWS@gov.scot.

1. Context

Ensuring Scotland's social work services are able to recognise where people are affected by trauma and respond in ways which reduce risk of further harm and support recovery, is a priority for the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser within the Scottish Government.

This work aligns with the [National Trauma Transformation Programme](#) which aims to support the Scottish Government and COSLA's shared vision for trauma informed and responsive workforce and services across Scotland.

The Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser in Scottish Government collaborated with partners through the [Trauma Responsive Social Work Services \(TRSWS\) Programme](#) and has developed a workplan to:

- deliver a programme of implementation support and learning for the social work workforce including social work leaders, to embed transformational change across systems and services
- continue to draw on the expertise of those with lived experience of care and trauma to deliver the plan

[Resilience Learning Partnership](#) (RLP) is a lived experience led organisation and a partner in the National Trauma Transformation Programme. RLP work alongside organisations to help them explore and understand the role of lived experience when implementing trauma informed approaches across systems and workforces. They are an education and training provider, and a considerable proportion (82%) of RLP's workforce have lived experience of complex psychological trauma.

The [Children and Young People's Centre for Justice \(CYCJ\)](#) works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is rights-respecting, contributing to better outcomes for children, young people, and communities. A key focus of the organisation includes participation and engagement work to amplify the voices of children and young people.

2. Introduction

Power sharing in the context of trauma responsive social work services 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. This can create services and systems that are designed around people's needs.

Power sharing helps reduce barriers for people to access the support they need, ensure those services and systems are seen as safe, supportive, and trusted resources for those of us affected by trauma, and ultimately contribute to improved outcomes for people and communitiesⁱ.

This report provides a summary of learning through the collaboration between RLP and TRSWS (the project team) to co-design, co-develop and co-deliver a learning product, Power Sharing with Experts by Experience, suitable for social work leaders and multi-disciplinary colleagues and partners.

3. Methodology

There was a clear understanding from the outset that the development of this learning product would require a collaborative effort between experts by experience and experts by profession. The learning product was therefore, designed, developed, and delivered through close collaboration between RLP and the TRSWS team.

3.1 Co-design and Co-develop

Through the process of design, development, and delivery of this learning product the project team drew upon the expertise by lived experience of RLP and the knowledge and skills of working with psychological trauma in a social work context of the TRSWS team. The project team collaborated to gather the views of adult participants of RLP's experts by experience group. This included sharing information about the TRSWS implementation and learning programme to the experts by experience group and a facilitated discussion on why power sharing with experts by experience and trauma informed and responsive practice is important.

Participants shared examples of their experiences of working with social work services and how these experiences could have differed if a trauma informed and responsive approach been employed. This informed the decision to include examples of RLP's work at a strategic level¹ within the learning product to highlight the voices of experts by experience framing service design and development along with the views of individuals who have experienced trauma.

It was recognised early in the design phase, that the participation of children and young people, particularly those with experience of psychological trauma and of accessing social work services, was fundamental to the development of the learning approach and product.

The project team collaborated with CYCJ to gather the views of children and young people to support the design of the learning product. CYCJ identified groups of young people they had a pre-existing working relationship with and ensured the participants' consent to engage in the work. The young people who participated were on the periphery of education and had experience of psychological trauma and of accessing social work services. This involved two sessions in two schools with young people of mixed age groups. In the first session, the programme was introduced to the young people and the team facilitated a case study exercise to introduce participants to the themes of trauma informed and responsive practice and services. In the second session, the team facilitated a discussion and gathered the participants' views on the following questions:

- What is good about participation, co-design, co-delivery?
- What does it feel and look like when these are done well?
- What does power sharing with people with lived experience mean to you?
- What does trauma informed and responsive mean to you?
- What do the trauma informed principles of trust, choice, safety, collaboration, and empowerment mean to you and can you share any examples of these principles being used?

The perspectives and contributions gathered from the RLP and CYCJ lived experience group members directly informed the content of the learning sessions.

¹For example, RLP co-chair the Community Justice Partnership (CJP) in Clackmannanshire and facilitate lived experience forums in both the CJP and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (for Clackmannanshire & Stirling).

3.1.1 Developing the content

The writing of the learning sessions involved wider members of the TRSWS team and RLP. The learning product that was developed consists of two three-hour learning sessions, designed to be delivered approx. 2-4 weeks apart. The aims of the sessions are to:

- enhance competence and confidence in promoting Power Sharing with experts by experience in the design and development of trauma informed and responsive services.
- support leaders to consider priorities and draft actions that will support planning to enhance opportunities for power sharing with experts by experience within your organisation.

The learning product was delivered to social work leaders who were part of the pilot sites of the TRSWS Programme. Most had therefore completed a number of learning sessions prior to participating in the new Power Sharing learning sessions. These included an Introduction to Trauma Informed Organisations, Systems and Workforces for Leaders (0.5 days), an Introduction to Trauma Informed Leadership (1 day), Exploring Organisational Readiness (0.5 days) and Worker Care, Support and Wellbeing for Leaders (0.5 days).

Leaders had also already been supported to complete a self-assessment utilising the [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland \(2023\)](#). The self-assessment helped local areas identify improvement priorities, with all sites highlighting the need to enhance power sharing with experts by experience. This learning product was created to help leaders who had completed this work to develop actions to enhance power sharing within their organisations.

3.2 Co-delivery

Colleagues from the TRSWS team and RLP facilitated delivery of the learning product, ensuring experts by experience and profession were present. The contribution of the leaders who were participants brought all three mechanisms for change together in one space - experts by experience, experts by profession and leadership.



The learning sessions were delivered by facilitators with a mix of knowledge, skills, and experience, including facilitators with trauma enhanced level knowledge and practice experience within a social work role, in addition to pedagogy experience. Prior experience drawn on in facilitation also included extensive real-world experience in implementing and delivering trauma responsive system change and delivery at an organisation, systems wide and team level.

Given the subject matter, facilitating this learning session required facilitators to have access to a suitable infrastructure that supports their wellbeing and attends to potential impact on self. It was important to ensure facilitators were suitably equipped and supported to safely undertake these roles whilst ensuring delivery in a manner that is boundaried and containing for facilitators and participants alike.

The team delivered the sessions in person to **38** leaders across three implementation sites of the Trauma Responsive Social Work Services Programme including those leading in Children's and Justice social work services.

Implementation site	Session 1	Session 2
Scottish Borders Council	11	9
Stirling Council	11	10
West Lothian Council	16	14

Table 1 - Number of attendees at each session by implementation site

4. Experiences and feedback

4.1 Views of children and young people

Contributions from the children and young people who participated in the school sessions directly informed design of the session content. As part of that, the powerful messages they provided were included in the content which was shared with leaders. In all the sessions, despite young people not being physically present, sharing their opinions through quotes contributed significantly to discussion. Examples of the quotes used in the sessions include:

Q. What is good about participation, co-design, co-delivery, power sharing? What does it feel and look like when these are done well?

“Don’t make decisions for them, but include them.”

“Stick to your word. Don’t make empty promises. Or over promise.”

“Don’t patronise us. If we have lived enough to have social work in our life, we’ve lived enough to have views on it.”

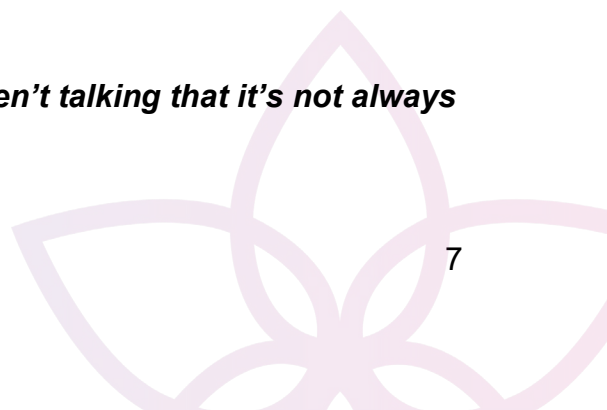
“Sometimes we get asked to do too much participation stuff, and nothing comes from it. If you’re not going to use it to change things, don’t bother asking.”

Q. What do the trauma informed principles of trust, choice, safety, collaboration, and empowerment mean to you and can you share any examples of these principles being used?

“Everything should be about responding to trauma. Not just knowing about it. Don’t expect young people to tell you what’s hurting them if you aren’t willing to try and help them.”

“People understand behaviour is a symptom of a problem and telling people just to stop doesn’t work.”

“Professionals know when we are in a bad mood or aren’t talking that it’s not always about them.”



4.2 Participants feedback from sessions

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire before attending the training, and again after completing the two sessions. Below are some of the key areas examined. The questionnaires were completed anonymously therefore we cannot match pre and post data. 74% of attendees completed the pre-training questionnaire, whilst 82% of attendee completed the post-training questionnaire.

	Completed pre-training questionnaire	Completed pre-training questionnaire
Scottish Borders Council	8	7
Stirling Council	10	10
West Lothian Council	10	10

Table 2 - Number of completions of training questionnaires by implementation site

4.2.1 Professional information

The questionnaire asked some basic professional information (job role and which population best describes the people accessing your services). To ensure anonymity, information going forward will be summarised across both sites.

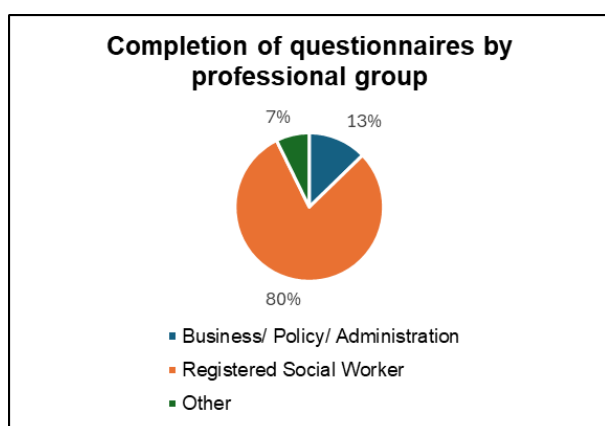


Figure 2 - Completion of questionnaires by professional group.

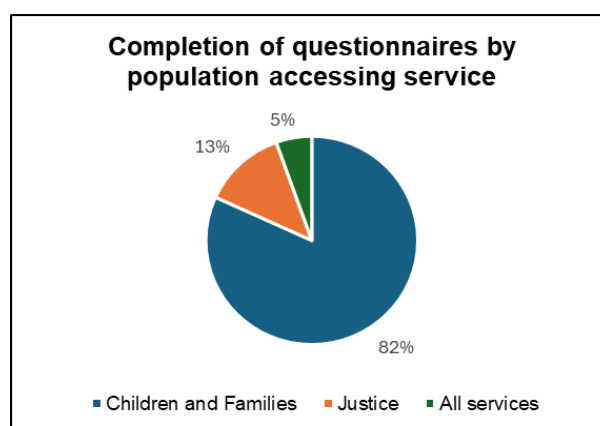


Figure 1 – Completion of questionnaires by population accessing service.

4.2.2 Intended learning outcomes

Participants were asked to rate their views on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree on the five intended learning outcomes before the training and after completing the two sessions. The results are reflected in the tables below.

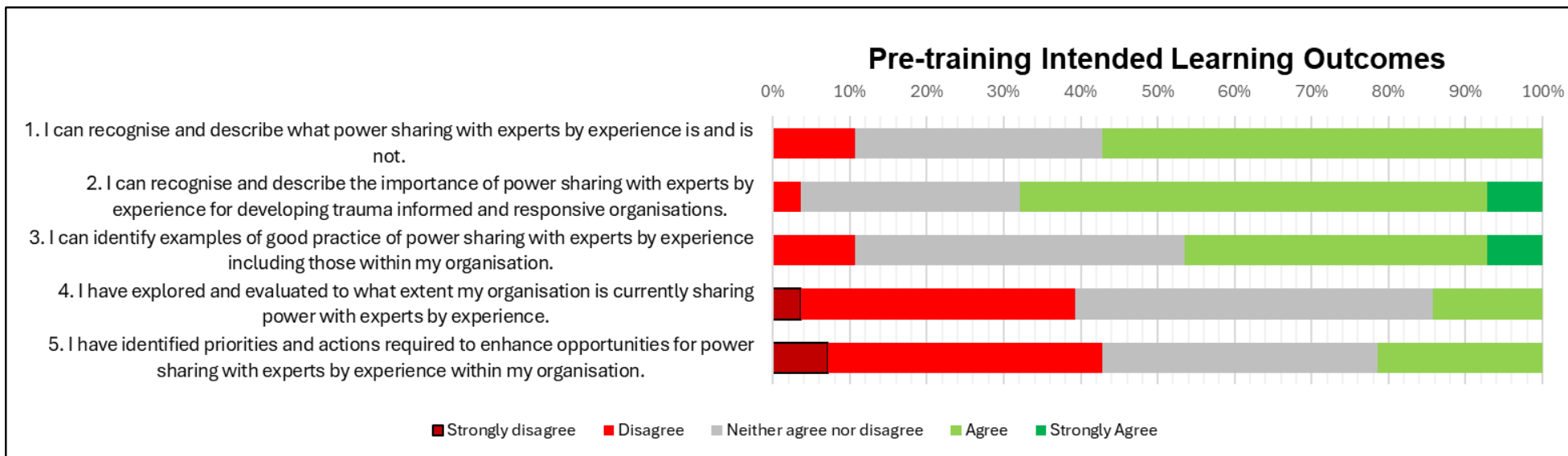


Figure 3 - Graph highlighting responses to pre-training Intended Learning Outcomes

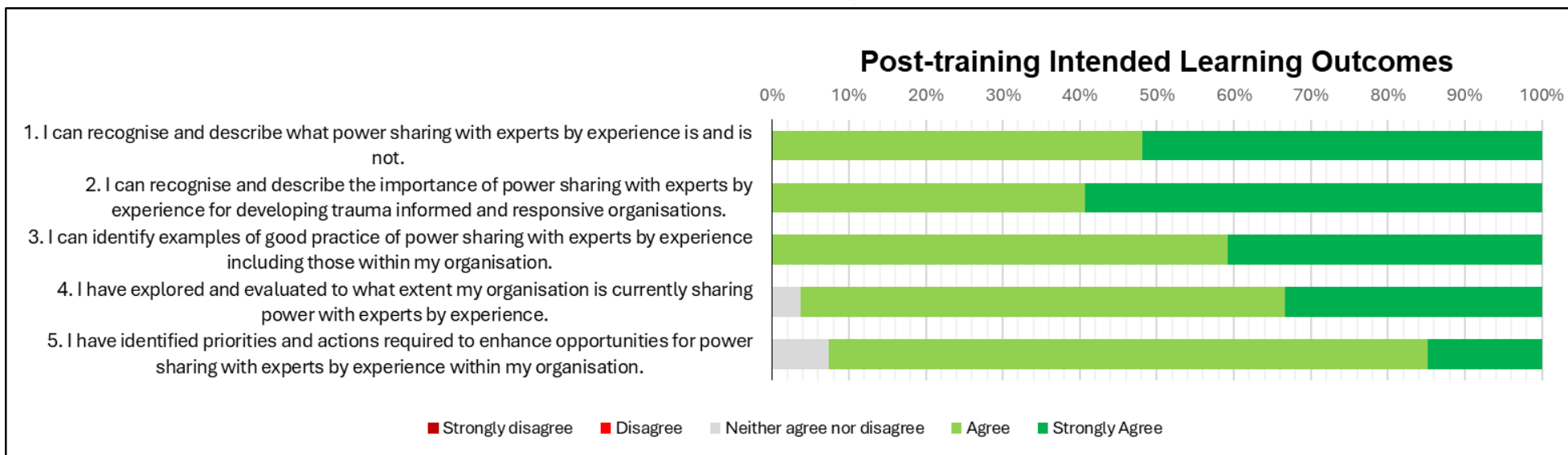


Figure 4 – Graph highlighting responses to post-training Intended Learning Outcomes

4.2.3 Reflections on feedback of the intended learning outcomes

Reflecting on the graphs above, following the training individuals reported that:

- **100%** could recognise and describe what power sharing with experts by experience is and is not (up from a score of 57% before attending training).
- **100%** could recognise and describe the importance of power sharing with experts by experience for developing trauma informed and responsive organisations (up from a score of 68% before attending this training).
- **100%** could identify examples of good practice of power sharing with experts by experience including those within their organisations (up from a score of 46% before attending this training).
- **96%** have explored and evaluated to what extent their organisation is currently sharing power with experts by experience (up from a score of 14% before attending this training).
- **93%** have identified priorities and actions required to enhance opportunities for power sharing with experts by experience in their organisation (up from a score of 21% before attending this training).

4.2.4 REACTS

In the post-training questionnaire, individuals were also asked to provide reactionary feedback on the session. **100%** found the session useful and would recommend to others. **100%** also said the session leaders led the session effectively and felt supported by the session participants and leaders.

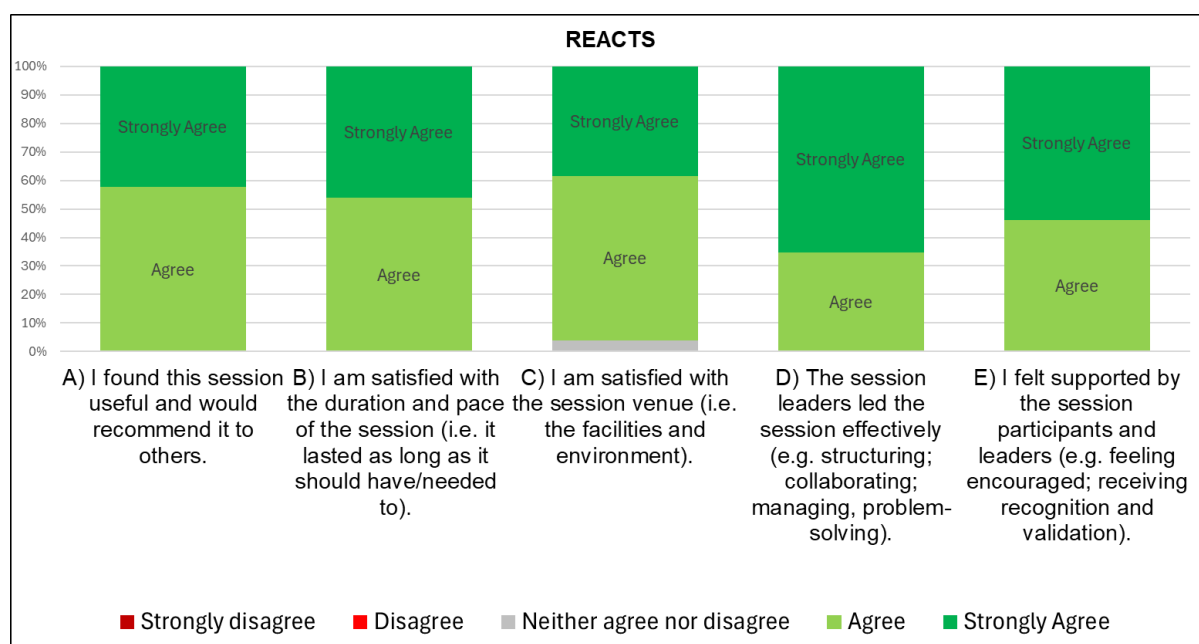


Figure 5 - Responses to REACTS questions.

4.2.5 Post training questionnaire – free text boxes

While completing the post-training questionnaire, participants were asked to reflect on what they intended to do with their learning from the sessions. Some examples include:

- “Consider how we can strengthen power sharing in our service and bring some of these ideas to the steering group.”
- “Keep looking for opportunities to share power at all levels”
- “Consider ways in which this learning can be taken into operational practice “
- “Review and develop the actions in Priority 2 of the Action Plan.”
- “Do further reading and have staff discussion around our implementation of this in day to day practice.”
- “Be more mindful of how I work with people and my professional authority.”

While completing the post-training questionnaire, participants were also asked to provide their views on the most helpful aspects of training. Some examples include:

- “Quotes and videos from people with lived experience ”
- “Reflecting on power sharing at all levels of organisation.”
- “Examples of putting what we have learnt into practice.”
- “Knowledge of the subject from facilitators and intro of new concepts”
- “Discussion regarding bringing this to front line staff.”
- “Time to reflect and learn from the experience of others. Being encouraged to think with a changed perspective.”
- “The action planning discussion and focusing on next steps.”
- “Exploring how to position and potentially move activities up the ladder of participation.”
- “The space and support to consider what power sharing is, what we do well and how we can develop this more.”

While completing the post-training questionnaire, participants were also asked to provide their views on how the sessions could be improved. Some examples include:

- “More interaction”
- “More practical strategies“
- “Use some more operational examples and look at these through the trauma lens”
- “More team leaders in attendance from across the service”.

To ensure effective feedback loops are in place for this work, feedback from session participants will be shared with the young people who contributed to the design and development of the workshops. CYCJ will facilitate and deliver a session with the young people in which the feedback from leaders will be included and any questions or comments on this feedback will be gathered. The questions or comments on this feedback will be included in our learning from this process and responded to by CYCJ, RLP and the TRSWS team.

4.3 Feedback from co-producers

Designing and delivering a new learning product specifically for leaders to explore power sharing with people with lived experience required us to model the sharing of power whilst working in partnership with others. As part of our own learning, it was critical that we prioritised time to come together to reflect and learn from our experiences of co-design, co-development, and co-delivery.

Developing a new product in partnership brought about unique benefits and allowed us to consider any challenges experienced, what we might do differently in the future or what others might need to consider if they were developing similar learning sessions.

Facilitated reflection with those involved in the co-design and delivery helped capture the following on what helped:

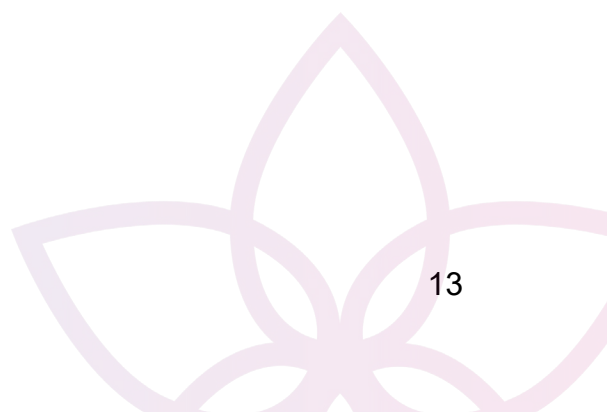
- Pre-existing relationships with the partners with shared values and a joint sense of purpose was seen as pivotal to the success of the development and delivery of this learning product.
- The designers/facilitators embodied the trauma principles in their approach throughout the project.
- Space and time for multiple members of partner organisations to meet in person helped foster trust, establish relationships, and provide opportunity to broaden understanding before developing specific areas for the work.
- Partners clearly communicated requests, detailing specific information was required, and deadlines. This created clarity of expectations
- Collaboration with partners at all stages was effective.
- A shared sense of professionalism and mutual respect for each other's expertise, a willingness to defer to others in areas they were less experienced, was valued by all which ensured contributors felt valued and useful and not experienced as tokenistic.
- Young people were included in a way that felt relevant, accessible, and genuinely open. Clear communication supported buy-in.
- The young people who participated were given ample choice, had opportunity to opt in/out, freedom to express whatever they wanted, and option to redact.
- School staff were excited by the potential impact of the work, and the ability of the young people to influence high level projects which could lead to meaningful change.
- Engagement with the young people involved was done ethically, compassionately but with a commitment to change and to feedback.
- Effective communication about how and why their input would be used.

Co designers were also able to reflect on what we may wish to do differently, or more of with regards the design and delivery process which included the following:

- It may have been helpful to have the opportunity to engage with proposed leader participants in the design phase. This may have helped shape the product to respond to specific gaps in confidence or knowledge.
- More time with young people when seeking their contributions would have been preferred to help build stronger, more meaningful relationships.
- Possibly consider a less restricted environment such as a community setting for engagement of the young people who contributed. Whilst engagement was good, consideration of a more neutral venue to meet may bring even richer engagement.
- Consideration of the timeframe for sharing back the outcomes of the sessions to those young people who contributed their time and helped shape the product. This is sometimes unavoidable but important to offer opportunity to feedback to young people how impactful their views and contributions were received by leaders. If too long a period elapses between their contribution to development to delivery, we risk them not feeling connected to the product.
- Consideration could be given to including the voices of professionals with lived experience in the thinking about how we meaningfully capture these voices and incorporate into this learning product or as a further addition to the two sessions.
- Co designers also reflected the need to refine the learning materials/product based on early feedback and reflection.
- Perhaps delivering a version of the completed product to the young people themselves or to their school staff to be further evaluated by the young people.

Although the learning product was developed for a social work context, the core content appears suitable in its application to a wider audience. Any adaptations are anticipated to be minor and easy to make, for further testing of the product.

As one learning component within an extensive programme, consideration would need to be given to prior learning in advance of accessing the Power Sharing sessions if this were to be delivered out with the TRSWS programme.



5. Key learning points

Partners involved in the co-design and delivery indicated that relationships were key to the success. During the early preparatory phase, time was taken to develop a shared understanding of the work and purpose, which was complemented by shared values. Partners reported a mutual respect for contributors' differing areas of expertise and a clear commitment to use these as appropriate.

The balance of knowledge, skills and expertise was varied in the team of facilitators delivering the learning sessions and this contributed to providing a safe and containing learning environment. The balance of lived, professional and leadership experience within the facilitation team significantly contributed to the overall delivery of sessions, and the ability to respond credibly with a depth of experience to questions and examples that came from those attending.

The learning sessions were well received by social work leaders across the three sites, with the vast majority reporting having achieved all the intended learning outcomes. Feedback indicates participants made direct links to their local areas priority action plans for creating more trauma informed systems and workforces. Feedback provided in the post-training questionnaire also indicated leaders felt more confident to develop specific actions for improvement and intended to incorporate these into their plans. This included stated intentions to make system improvements in power sharing with experts by experience and considerations as to how best to action and implement these. The aims of the learning session (as outlined on page 3 of this learning summary), appear to have been met.

Participants were able to identify current examples of good practice in power sharing in their organisations and reported positively about their learning on the subject matter.

Whilst the product was designed, developed, and delivered to a social work leader audience, core content may be directly suitable to deliver to a wider audience.

6. Next steps

The project team will take time to refine this learning product based on this early feedback and our learning. We will continue to deliver this key learning product as part of the wider implementation and learning programme.

Early indications from pilot sites have highlighted that this has been a valuable addition to the implementation support, giving space and opportunity to reflect on what power sharing is in the context of social work services. A strong demonstrable commitment to power sharing with people who access social work services has been evident. It is an area that requires additional attention to support leaders to create the conditions to improve power sharing at all levels within the systems people access.

Consideration will be given to the following:

1. Opportunities to enhance the TRSWS offer of implementation support to local areas, to help them make some of the practical changes they have identified within their actions plans, ensuring they can draw on experts by experience, profession, and leadership.
2. In TRSWS pilot sites, how might some of the key messages from the learning be communicated with front line workforces
3. Feedback from social work leaders experiences will be provided to both groups of experts by experience who contributed to the design and development of the learning product. Any further questions or comments from this will in turn be included in our learning.
4. The necessary requirements for safe and effective delivery of the learning sessions, including specific criteria for facilitators involved in delivery.
5. How might the learning sessions be used out with the TRSWS Implementation Support and Learning Programme. This will include any necessary pre-requisite learning that would need to have taken place prior to participation, changes to content for a non-social work audience and to explore what a suitable approach to widening delivery would involve.

ⁱ A Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland (2023)

