



Mayday's Strengths-based Area Strategy

Creating fair and human public service systems alongside people currently facing the most barriers and being let down by public services.

July 2023

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Who is missing out on public services?

Despite the pressures of austerity, rising demand and workforce shortages, public services still work well for many people, much of the time. But current approaches consistently fail some people:

- ✚ People who experience societal inequalities like poverty and racism, get poorer access to support, and worse outcomes from services
- ✚ When people are in contact with multiple services, those inequalities multiply

So, for some of the people who have the most contact with public services, that support system stops helping and can become part of the problem, keeping people stuck in dependence or crises. Individual services attempt to create better support pathways, but what good looks like to the service isn't always important to people, particularly people from groups and communities who weren't part of designing that pathway. And people on multiple service pathways get pulled in different directions.

These dysfunctional relationships with services can lead to people being labelled as having 'Severe and Multiple Disadvantage', being 'hard to reach' or becoming 'High Intensity Users' of emergency services. Some people are repeatedly offered services which don't work for them, or remain stuck in services designed to 'move them on', others, often out of frustration, stop engaging with services, stop paying their council tax, or engage in anti-social behaviour.

How can we take a different approach, and get different results?

The ways we describe that unequal distribution of help tend to locate the problems as being with the person that services aren't helping: they are 'complex', 'challenging', or have 'severe and multiple disadvantage'. But people's lack of fit with services is never one-way.

We can never simplify service pathways enough to be easy for people who need to navigate lots of them, and who are likely to encounter prejudice, exclusion or oppression in those services and their wider lives. So, the 'integration' agenda can't fix these issues on its own. Instead, we need to tackle inequalities from the ground up. [The Mayday Strengths-based Area Strategy](#) is:

1	Find out who's being most let down in a local area, drawing on equalities data, listening and community organisations, to identify individuals most affected.
2	Use strengths-based Coaching to build trusting relationships, identify meaningful goals and co-design support that enables individuals to move on.
3	Use System Convening to identify themes from Coaching relationships to bring the learning - and people themselves - back into service design and workforce development.



Person-led,
Transitional &
Strength-based
Response
By Martin Ford



The roles for change - this work requires **Coaches** and a **System Convener**

Coaches work with individuals to find and try out approaches which might work. They work with the individual on their internal assets (confidence, skills, motivation) and support them as they connect and reconnect with others and build their own networks and community. They work together to communicate with and influence professionals and services the person is in touch with.

A **Systems Convener** identifies themes from this work, and brings citizens and people from different parts of the public service system together to codesign new approaches. They convene learning groups and hold multi-agency training and reflective practice sessions to build a local movement of professionals, leaders and citizens.

“They kept putting me through the same mental health pathway but it wasn’t working. Whenever I felt my mental health slip, I was told one thing – go back to your GP and start the whole process over again! Since I got involved in the work with Mayday, I feel more heard – which is the first step to healing. Now a commissioner is validating and hearing me too and we are potentially going to co-create a project. I feel more connected with others let down by systems, and I feel like this could be my survivor’s mission to create better systems that are led by the community.”

Feedback share by a person working alongside a Mayday System Convener

How does the approach differ?






The team proactively seeks out people who are experiencing some of the deepest inequalities, including those who are labelled as having Severe and Multiple Disadvantages, and people who are primarily experienced as ‘challenging’ by people working in services.

They form a relationship with them on the person’s own terms, which does not supplant other support relationships, but can work alongside them. Engaging, progressing and moving on are all done on the person’s schedule, and the support can be paused and restart. Moving on from the service is a key goal, but is achieved through positive relationships and outcomes, not through set timescales.

How our model differs to traditional approaches:

Area	Traditional support work	Strengths-based & person-led
Referral	Appointment, eligibility & assessment. Support planning early on.	Meet safely on your terms. Get to know each other first.
Support	Led by service's priorities and timetable.	Person-led goals & schedule. Brokering opportunities & access to personal budgets.
More help needed	Refer on to multiple specialist services.	Coach draws on and works alongside experts from other agencies.
If things don't work	Aim for service user's engagement and compliance.	Support individual to challenge and change what doesn't work.
Endings	Signposting to underfunded services. Cliff edges at the end of support.	Option to pause / vary support. Build alternatives to reduce need for us.

The Systems Convening role differs from other system change roles through:

-  Being grounded in coproduction with people who are not usually included in it, led by those people not by services' priorities
-  Being open to challenge and change inequalities in services, rather than aiming for 'compliance'
-  Combining a new individual support approach, with system-wide change
-  Collecting individual-level outcomes data for learning and to influence system change, rather than as a management tool; recognising that relationships and empathy can be more powerful system-change tools than data alone
-  Using the Learning Cycles approach (pioneered by [Human Learning Systems](#)) which codesigns experiments and then embeds what works better, rather than setting up time-limited pilots

“When you are put on this conveyor belt of support, your attitude is questioned. They have their ideas of what you need, and what the next step is, but that wasn’t my idea at the time. Services got frustrated with me, because ‘progression’ for them, was frightening for me. I needed services which would build a system with me which worked for me, and where I felt more in control. It’s only when you have experienced what it’s actually like to be homeless that you can really understand how people think and feel.”

[Navigating Invisibility and Regaining Control - Mayday Trust](#)

What are the outcomes?

The outcomes aimed for through this approach are:

- ✚ The local system has a clearer view of the experiences and goals of groups and communities they have the most distant or difficult relationships with, and adopt learning organisation approaches
- ✚ Individuals report experiencing much more ‘human’ relationships with their coach than other service relationships: “I felt listened to and in control for the first time in years”. Wellbeing and service use information is collected and used
- ✚ Individuals build their own communities and community capacity. Coproduction becomes more inclusive and responds to intersectional exclusion and oppression
- ✚ New personalised support pathways influence service design and commissioning towards ‘personally tailored by default’: strengths-based and person-led approaches which both offer more and ask more of people, putting them and their communities more in the driving seat
- ✚ Behaviour changes can be seen across the system, and the area develops a strong shared narrative for systemic change. Staff feel more listened to and systems and practice more values-aligned
- ✚ Harms caused by dysfunctional systems are avoided, reduced or mitigated, including ‘failure demand’, repeated re-traumatisation, no-outcome service interactions (e.g. gatekeeping) and crises which are caused by punitive behaviours (evictions, exclusions, sanctions)
- ✚ Complaints and disputes reduce and are more likely to be settled informally



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NEW SYSTEM
ALLIANCE
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A comprehensive programme of systems change support offers

Our Strengths-based Area Strategy is part of a portfolio of system-changing work:

- ✧ Our new [Strengths-based Membership Network](#) for strengths-based practitioners and their organisations includes lots of resources for recruitment and practice, and is becoming a thriving community of practice for practitioners across the country. We can also provide organisations with design, recruitment support and training programmes to embed coaching or strengths-based and person-led practice into their teams, and we deliver [PTS Response](#) coaching ourselves
- ✧ Our [Wisdoms](#) deep listening approach enables organisations to codesign a listening exercise with people who are often unheard, focusing on what matters most to them, but generating recommendations and actions for organisations and local leaders
- ✧ [System Reflects](#) are stand-alone sessions for teams to experience reflective practice and learning organisation behaviours, through a facilitated session reflecting on their work from a strengths-based and person-led perspective, and generating their own ideas for change
- ✧ The [New System Alliance](#), in partnership with Platform in Wales and Homeless Network Scotland, brings people and organisations together across the UK into a free network with monthly events, bulletins, and a directory of strengths-based organisations

Find out more:

Visit our website: www.maydaytrust.org.uk

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Join the New System Alliance: www.newsystemalliance.org