

Understanding and using experiences of social care to guide service improvements: translating a co-design approach from health to social care

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Plain language summary

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Local councils need to find new ways of using people's experiences of social care to improve services. We explored whether a way of improving health services can improve social care services.

'Experience-based co-design' is a complicated name. It means working with people who use health or social care services to improve that service, and interviewing people as part of this process.

Accelerated experience-based co-design uses existing interviews instead of new interviews. To see if the approach works in social care, we chose the topic of loneliness because many of us experience loneliness.

We worked with Doncaster City Council because it has been focusing on loneliness.

We interviewed 37 people across England and recorded what they said about loneliness. We made a film about their experiences that showed examples of good or poor care. We call these touch points.

We held three workshops in Doncaster. Workshop 1 was with people who work in social care as paid workers or volunteers, and workshop 2 was with people who use social care services. In both workshops, people made a list of types of support that needed improvement. Both groups attended workshop 3, watched the film and decided what to focus on from the two lists.

Two groups were set up to work on improving support for loneliness in Doncaster. Each group met seven times. One focused on taxi services, and the other group focused on supporting people to do activities they did before the pandemic. A researcher attended these meetings and talked with everyone involved to see how this approach worked. At the end, there was a celebration event.

We found that loneliness is complicated. We found the approach to improving support does work in social care, but it needs some changes because social care is not like health care. We suggest ways the approach can be done differently.

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