

Using peer-led research to understand lived experience and improve how services work together

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BACKGROUND

Multiple compounding needs (MCN) refer to overlapping challenges such as:

- Homelessness
- Substance use
- Poor physical and mental health
- Contact with the criminal justice system

In Portsmouth, at least 4,678 people (2017) were estimated to be experiencing MCN, likely an underestimate and now higher.¹

Why this matters?

People experiencing MCN often face:

- Fragmented services
- Poor coordination between support services
- Repeatedly having to retell their story

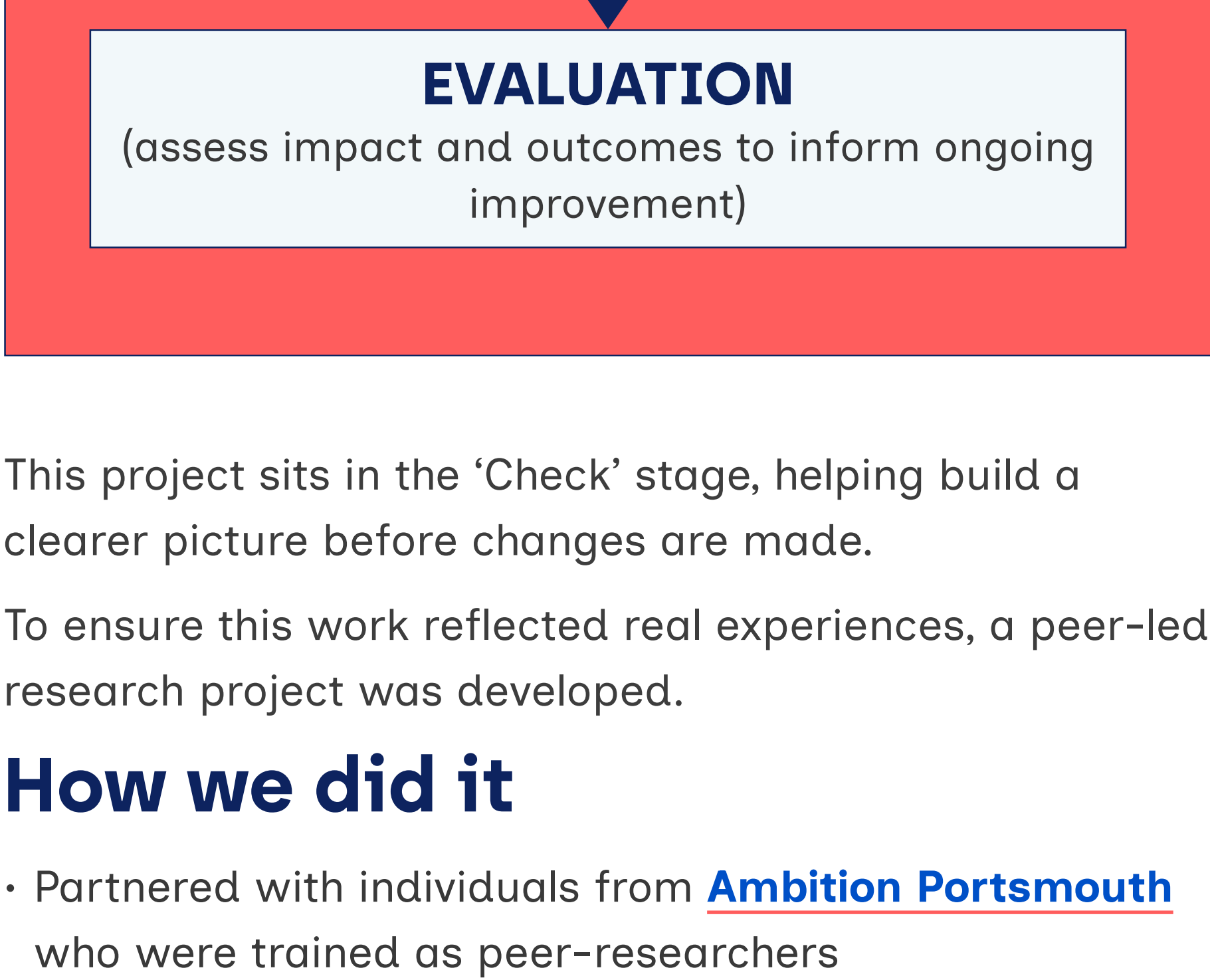
This can lead to missed opportunities for support and increased risk of harm

1 Safer Portsmouth Partnership. 2017. Adults with Complex Needs – Modelling Prevalence in Portsmouth.

METHODS

A collective approach

Nine local services came together to develop a shared approach to service improvement, supported by Portsmouth City Council’s in-house Systems Development Service (SDS).



This project sits in the ‘Check’ stage, helping build a clearer picture before changes are made.

To ensure this work reflected real experiences, a peer-led research project was developed.

How we did it

- Partnered with individuals from [Ambition Portsmouth](#) who were trained as peer-researchers
- The research method was co-produced, ethical and trauma-informed

Explored three key questions:

1. What is it like to use these services?
2. What does good support look like?
3. What matters most to people?

Data collected included:

- Short demographic survey
- Interviews

Analysis:

- Thematic analysis
- Development of vignettes to bring findings to life

9 participants (aged 20–56 years)

FINDINGS

What we found at a glance

Participants reported a history of 7 different needs on average	100% had experienced poor mental health	Participants had used an average of 11 different services
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What good support looks like

Participants described clear examples of what helps them feel supported.

- Person-centred support
- Compassionate, trusting relationships
- Community and peer support
- Continuity of care
- Timely, responsive services
- Easy-to-navigate systems
- Access to the right resources

It’s about recognising a person, not just an issue, but everything that makes them who they are.

What isn’t working

Participants also shared challenges in services

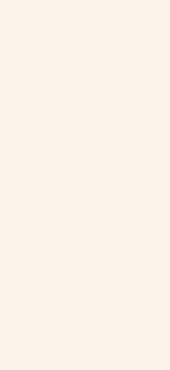
- Lack of personalised, holistic care
- Difficult to navigate services
- Lack of respectful, supportive interactions
- “Referral culture” (being passed between services)
- Limited availability of support
- Poor continuity of care (e.g repeating stories)
- Lack of trust in services

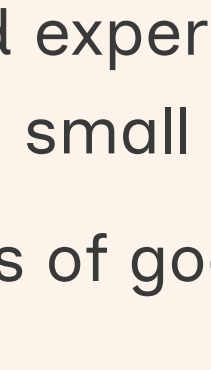
I was a bit worried about meeting someone new and explaining again what I’ve been through... it’s hard to explain it.

What matters most to people

Beyond services, people spoke about what really matters to them.

 Stable housing	 Relationships	 Independence
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 Peace and stability	 Opportunities to work	 Security
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 Having someone to celebrate achievements with

CONCLUSION

What this means for improvement

- Findings show that people’s lives don’t fit neatly into services and support must reflect the full complexity of their experiences.
- Findings reflect the lived experiences of people in Portsmouth (based on a small sample)
- Both gaps and examples of good practice were identified.
- Insights were shared with senior leaders and councillors as part of the improvement process, helping to build a shared understanding of how support is working in practice.

NEXT STEPS

A commitment to move into a system re-design phase

- Re-design is now underway
- Key principles have been shaped by lived experience