

Making it Real - Pause & reflect report. January 2021.

Introduction – our journey together.

Making it Real has been an inspiration behind our drive to enhance adult social care in Shropshire. In our work we echo the introductory words of TLAP's 'How to do Personalised Care and Support':

"Personalisation is rooted in the belief that people want to have a life not a service. Making it Real is a framework and set of statements that describe what good, citizen focused, personalised care and support look like from the point of view of people themselves.....The statements can be used to inspire and motivate organisations to keep getting better at what they do".

We have used the framework and statements as a prompt to inspire "good conversations" between local people, commissioners and service providers in order to make services better and ultimately improve people's lives.

Our approach to this task has taken us on an interesting journey, that at this moment has been interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In September 2020 our long standing Making it Real Board Chairperson also decided to step down from his role after seven years of committed involvement. Then at the end of 2020, I took on a secondment, working with an expert with lived experience; together we explored the ways in which Shropshire's Social work teams might work best with adults with a range of learning needs and or learning disabilities.

As we enter 2021, it is now a good time to review our journey so far and consider the next step for Making it Real in Shropshire.

The goals of Shropshire's Making it Real partnership are summed up in the words of our plan on a page.

Vision – 'People want to have a life not a service' - We believe that all Social Care Services should be devised and enhanced with the participation of people who use services, giving shared opportunities to solve problems and design services.

Key Outcomes - Social Care Services are responsive to experience and feedback from people who use services and their carers. People are able to influence service design and delivery and have more choice and control over the services they access, enabling them to live life to the full.

Over the last seven years Making it Real has brought together an exciting array of individuals and organisations to strive towards this vision. Our major operational focus has been to work in local Advisory Groups; feeding experiences, observations and recommendations in and out of a central Board. Importantly we have looked for opportunities to use the Making it Real values and statements across service and organisational development. People involved in discussions have included:

- Individuals and carers who use adult social care services (referred to as individuals with lived experience or Experts by Experience)
- Councillors representing adult social care and health and wellbeing
- Senior management within adult social care
- Healthwatch
- Staff from across Shropshire Councils social work and occupational therapy teams (previously People2People)
- Taking Part, local advocacy organisation
- Shropshire Choices, social care, health and housing information portal

- Crossroads Together (formally Carers Trust 4all – partner organisation supporting carers)
- Community Catalysts
- Social prescribing
- Direct Payments support team within Shropshire Council (and POhWER former commissioned support for direct payment users)
- Shropshire Partners in Care (SPIC)
- Community and voluntary sector organisations
- A range of Health services and organisations
- Think Local Act Personal

However, just before the pandemic we were seeing a decline in the numbers of individuals attending regular advisory group meetings and this format was under debate, whilst also seeing more in-depth involvement of Experts by Experience in work related to specific areas such as Direct Payments or Carer Support. It's now a good time to ask – what have we done so far and how do we go forward?

Where we began

The journey began in 2013 when people who had first-hand experience of adult social care were invited to give their views on the newly launched Making it Real framework, developed by Think Local Act Personal (TLAP).

TLAP launched the framework with these words:

“The purpose of Making it Real is to support change and improvement by setting out what good personalised and community-centred support looks like... Our ambition is that it acts as an encouragement, a guide and a resource to help embed personalised community-based support so that it becomes the mainstream: the way we do things around here.”

“It is not a step by step toolkit or a rigid performance management framework. Organisations need to decide for themselves how to make best use of it. By using Making it Real organisations can look at their current practice, identify areas for change and develop plans for action. It can also be used by people to check how well their aspirations are being met and supports co-production between people, commissioners and providers. There is not a fixed destination or end point and there will always be more to do”.

Shropshire grasped Making it Real. It's belief in 'good personalised and community centred support' tied in perfectly with the strengths based, community centred approach of Adult Services' predecessor, 'People2People'. As a partnership between Shropshire Council, People2People' and local people, we worked to make best use of Making it Real with the aim of enhancing the nature of adult social care services across the county. From 2013 to the present, we have tried to ensure that Making it Real is not rigid and that the framework works with us and for us. It's been revealing to work out how we best use Making it Real and there have been plenty of puzzles which still arise today:

- How do we use the 'I' and the 'We' statements?
- Are geographically based advisory groups the best? Should we hold on-line meetings? How do we get to hear new and varied voices of experience?
- How does our Making it Real Board operate? Who's best in it?
- How do we best use various partnership boards?

- Do we hold the authority to account? Do we work in equal partnership? Is that possible? Are we co-productive?
- What are the changes that we've brought about or inspired?
- How do we make it easy for citizens to be heard, to participate, to contribute creative ways forward?

Such questions need a constant focus, guidance, support, direction and redirection – but it is the relationship building that goes on behind these discussions that is all important.

We have seen our approach develop over time, reflecting those local discussion and joint working. Developments have also reflected national discussions around such issues as the need for close working relationships between social care, housing and health. This emphasis can clearly be seen in the revamped Making it Real framework launched in 2018.

Locally, our initial approach spoke boldly of holding the local authority to account and of checking progress towards personalisation and community-based support. As relationships and understanding have developed our partnership has developed too so that the focus of our work has become equal involvement in open and honest discussion about developments.

Highlight – what we've achieved over the years

At a Peer Review session in 2018, an Expert by Experience from Birmingham asked the simple question – 'so what changes have you seen come about due to your work?'. A simple yet powerful question that had us scratching our heads asking what have we achieved? The line from discussion or comment to change is not always easy to follow and it does not always originate at a single point. Some of the major journeys can be summed up like this:

- **From consultation over the TLAP 6 themes to participation in the Directors Management Team (DMT).**
- **From Essential ingredients to Vision and Values and a Strategy and Vision that are fuelled by Experts by Experience.**
- **From checking progress markers and holding the council to account to being part of the conversation and looking to jointly solve issues and problems.**
- **From commenting on services (e.g. Direct Payments and Carers Support) to jointly delivering training and then participating in focus groups to bring about change.**

It has taken time to establish the centrality of 'Making it Real' in Shropshire and our journey is by no means complete. The goals behind Making it Real have started to exert an influence that means we can see a tangible impact. Highlights are many, even though rarely do we find a simple fix that solves all issues. Importantly there is an understanding that we need to be in a constant state of restlessness about personalisation, a state of mind that always asks, 'how can we do things better?'

The following list gives some of the highlights and achievements of Making it Real inspired discussions:

- The establishment of the advice and information website, Shropshire Choices and its initial look were heavily influenced by MiR.
- Customer care training for all front-line staff was inspired by a piece of work identifying the 'essential ingredients' of adult social care.
- Peer review of 'Let's Talk Local' drew heavily on the 'essential ingredients'.

- Important transformations of the Finance Pathway which were informed by user experiences.
- The devising of a MiR stamp of approval became the basis of the Adult Social Care Vision and Values.

What is important?

The essential ingredients of adult social care:

- ✓ **An experience that is personal**
- ✓ **Active listening and understanding**
- ✓ **Real conversations, not just ticking boxes**
- ✓ **Effective use of resources**
- ✓ **Making own choices / taking own risks**

- Vision and Values for ASC, developed from extensive discussion and feedback on the 'Essential ingredients of ASC'.
- A Vision and Values document that includes the '3 C's' – a guide to the behaviour expected of staff on a daily basis (Creative / Caring / Conscientious).
- The Vision and Values of Adult Services document was produced in conjunction with the ASC Vision and Strategy for 2018-21. The development of the ASC Strategy was shaped by MiR discussions and Experts by Experience.
- The development of a 'warts and all' approach to the annual Local Account magazine. As a way of reporting on the work and developments of adult social care, the style and content of the Local Account has been directed by MiR.
- A small editorial partnership group involving an Expert by Experience was established to coordinate the Local Account
- National recognition for Shropshire's 'Local Account – our story continues...'
- Social Work Team of the Year (2018) awarded to ICS – their application was supported by an extensive statement from an Expert by Experience.
- MiR representation to and discussion with the MP for Ludlow (at the time of discussion he was Minister of State at the Department of Health).



- Rewrite of Social Work Factsheets with an Expert by Experience. Complete overhaul of documents which are now regularly updated by teams and downloadable from Shropshire Choices website.
- MJ Awards – Excellence in Community Engagement. MiR reached final 6 out of 60 entrants. Katie Stone and Jon Hancock representing Lived Experience.
- Initial MiR involvement in a safeguarding project that is about involving people who are affected by abuse. Development of a pack of resource cards for professionals that help ensure individuals are fully engaged.
- Two successful Partnership Summit events that looked at 'Doing Co-production differently'. Events engaged with a wide range of organisations and individuals.

- Following the PACC development of a simplified 'Plan on a page' document, MiR has produced its own and encouraged other partnership groups to adopt this idea.
- TLAP invite to talk about the development of MiR in Shropshire at the same event as Caroline Dineage (then Minister of State for Care)
- Inspiration to involve Community Catalysts in Shropshire in the effort to grow small, local social care enterprises and diversify the care market.
- Carers presented experiences and ideas to the MiR Board which then developed into a 'deep dive' review of carer support in Shropshire.
- Support of the Carers Lead to review support services.
- Making it Real Chairperson involved in face to face discussions with Director of ASC and Housing.
- Making it Real Chairperson involved in regular Directors Management Team meetings (DMT).
- Partnership development and delivery of two Direct Payment sessions to 185 people. The sessions were delivered in partnership between people who use direct payments, Think Local Act Personal and Shropshire Council.



"Last week I got to meet Cat, Kate and Clenton from TLAP at a development session in Shropshire looking at how we might be able to make DPs a 'game changer' for people's lives. The TLAP event was an interesting insight for me. It allowed me to be involved in discussions, sharing ideas with people from across all departments involved in DP provision and management, as well as those of us in receipt. Together we have a common goal for an enriched and positive life. I have to say, it's so nice to see the genuine desire to evolve the DP system. It's been easy from the outside to feel isolated and that the people behind the concrete don't care. How wrong have I been!" (Quote from Caroline's blog about involvement in the Direct Payment sessions)

- Joint presentation with Experts by Experience to the HWBB about involvement in and impact of the Direct Payment sessions. Session had a major impact on Councillor understanding of strengths-based community support.
- A series of Direct payments task and finish groups have tackled issues such as the language used in the communication of financial information, the recruitment and retention of Personal Assistants.
- The 'Mend the Gap' project accessed regional funding so that Experts by Experience, staff, SW students and a representative from Wolverhampton could work together and promote better understanding of support planning.
- The development of the Direct Payment vision was driven by Experts by Experience. That vision has become key to the coproduction of the Direct Payments policy.
- Paid Expert by Experience worked together with Development Officer (Personalisation) to review options for best support of adults with learning disabilities and / or a range of learning needs and Autism (report summary and full report to be shared widely and next steps to be taken forward in 2021)

- Expert by Experience involvement in the interviews for the new Executive Director of Adult Services. “Being involved in the interview process for the Executive Director of Adults was interesting and in its way demanding at the same time. Having access to the applications in detail made a huge difference in getting a ‘feel’ for the candidates, which was then clarified and expanded when we spoke directly to them. The process of being involved in the interviews was straightforward, everything was explained at every stage, there was no pressure, and the procedure was professional and even-handed throughout. I felt a great sense of responsibility to get my bit right!” Feedback from Jane about her involvement in the interviews).

What got us here? What were the drivers?

The following 5 key sentences sum up Making it Real at its best in Shropshire as well as the nature of the people involved over the last seven years.

We are:

- **Real people** who are so much more than just users of services, staff or elected councillors. This means people who are artists, carers, cat breeders, crime thriller readers, cyclists, decorators, designers, dog lovers, football fans, jazz fanatics, parents, perfectionists, wild swimmers, workaholics and worriers.
- **With commitment & passion** (committed to change, to enhanced services, to our communities and to involvement and a shared responsibility to solve problems, design services and change people’s lives and experiences for the better)
- **Working in an equal partnership** (shared ownership, responsibility and aspirations)
- **Involved in something that is not easy** (involves challenge, perhaps a healthy nervousness, can be frustrating, hard work and long term)
- **That makes a difference** (this is important as we start to see change but also in terms of people having more say and being heard as part of the ongoing discussions)

The establishment and achievements of MiR can be put down to a number of key factors:

1. A physical and ideological commitment from the Local Authority to develop relationships as well as coordinate MiR. Without the human resource to coordinate practicalities such as calling meetings, organising venues and dates, agreeing agendas, reporting through notes and ensuring that the relationship between the MiR Advisory Groups and the MiR Board are strong; MiR would not exist. Relationship building has been central to maintaining involvement and enthusiasm.
2. An incredible commitment to involvement and change from Experts by Experience. Key figures have been central as critical friends to Shropshire Council. Their insights through their lived experience have been invaluable to change. Seeing change happen is then the best motivator.
3. Clarity around the relationship between the MiR Advisory Group and the MiR Board. As the Board became more proactive there developed a better balance between listening to, responding to and guiding the MiR Advisory Groups. Terms of Reference and then a Plan on a page focused the work of the Board and highlighted the value of establishing ‘Making it Real’ across the organisation.
4. An understanding that we need to create the right conditions for co-production to succeed. Simply stated our work is all about people, so we’ve been building

relationships, engaging in good conversations, sharing and developing values and principles that focus on being human. We have not been afraid to try things out, to realise that we haven't always got the answer and understand that listening, and learning are central to successful development.

Co-production is about collaboratively problem-solving, just like any bit of good teamwork. Good co-production is so much about how we behave, how we create the right environment, and build positive long-term relationships.



5. Having a driver or a goal that we are working towards and this is expressed well by the Making it Real framework's 'I' and 'We' statements. The framework has provided aspiration, and when we mix that with the aspirations of citizens (whether that be people who use services, carers or staff) it creates a heady and powerful force.

The Making it Real Board's major responsibility has been to ensure that co-production with people who use services and their carers is a reality and central to future developments. We believe that all social care services should be devised and enhanced with service user participation, giving shared opportunities to solve problems and design services. It's important that these opportunities can be found in a variety of ways and times to suit people's everyday lives.

For example, in 2018 we recorded a discussion with Ron, who is a seventy year old carer ('I ask Ron what he thinks of Shropshire Council') in which he said " ...I say to people – you can't be me, you can't stand in my shoes, but you can listen to me. That's all I want. I want a council that listens, is honest and also progressive. A council that is human facing. They are moving in the right direction but I still get information or messages that are in 'office talk'. I say to people, what do they mean by this? I don't get it. Eliminate the frustrations, be clear in what you say and then make sure the services that you do offer, work properly". The message was clear and echoed others saying the same thing. Efforts have been made to eliminate 'office talk' from letters and messages and this task is ongoing.

Also, held in 2019, a series of Direct Payment development sessions looked at making Social Care more human; at understanding the simple fact that we are all equal, and opening shared opportunities to problem solve and find solutions to people's wellbeing.

Opportunities such as these, along with Making it Real meetings and importantly the one to one discussion that takes place during social care assessments and support planning should all be carried out as 'good conversations', with the stress on listening and sharing experiences and ideas. This is key to Making it Real and when issues are raised, and ideas are good they need to be grabbed and taken forward together.

It was interesting to see that Ron also spoke of a “call to ask ‘how are you getting on?’ That’s something that would be great from my council”. How interesting to see that with the Coronavirus pandemic this approach has been taken up wholeheartedly. It’s a good idea now, and it will be important that we make sure that we have the open and honest discussion that decides whether it’s taken forward.

What issues do we face?

We’ve had successes and frustrations over the years and the successes are beginning to outweigh the frustrations. However, it’s important to remind ourselves of the frustrations and the issues that we have faced over time.

Here are a few:

- **Reliance on individuals:** We are not yet systematic in our use of Making it Real. Much of our work became personality driven, depending on the enthusiasm and drive of a small number of people. The long-standing Board Chairperson decided to step down in September 2020. His involvement has been critical to the positive development of Making it Real in Shropshire and he offered many important insights.

It is a good time to ask, how can the creativity and insight that was offered by the Chair’s interpretation of Making it Real be embedded across services, organisations and staff? We need to remind ourselves in everything that we do that the Making it Real ‘I’ and ‘We’ statements can become the basis of the ‘way we do things’ in Shropshire.

- **Limited numbers involved in meetings:** Involvement has been irregular. Numbers attending Advisory Groups have dropped off at times and discussions have not been regularly refreshed. Numbers were strong when key individuals with lived experience inspired others to attend. This period also tied in well to a time when members of the Community Enablement team also encouraged involvement. Embedding Making it Real fully into service planning may give the opportunity to programme a variety of opportunities for co-production without relying solely on meeting feedback.
- **Maintaining interest and involvement in meetings:** Our partnership groups do not always work effectively together and so discussions in Making it Real Advisory Groups meetings have at times become repetitive and not necessarily the best venue for discussion of the dominating issues. We have striven for positive discussion, but this has not always been the nature of conversations. If discussions are inflexible, not open to change or alternative views, they can become difficult and alienating for others in the room.
- **MiR is not just about MiR Advisory Groups and the Board** – it is an approach that looks to involve people who use services in the discussions about the developments of those services. This has worked well when taken up with commitment and drive, for example in the Direct Payment developments. It has not worked well when it has been dismissed as a luxury.

What is next? Future plans?

We have reached a phase of change for Making it Real in Shropshire. It’s time to clarify how we can work and have the best impact over the next few years.

I think that these lines from a recent social care future blog / #socialcarefuture, sum up perfectly the future that we can all agree on and strive for together.

“We want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us. That’s the social care future we seek”.

How we create the right conditions, environment and opportunities to discuss getting that outcome is what we need to sort in the coming months. **It would be good to discuss where we have come from, what we have achieved and how we best go forward with enthusiasm as part of a (series of) ‘pause and reflect’ session(s) that we run in early 2021.** With the support of TLAP it would be good to consider our options and prepare for the future together as citizens and not just people who deliver and people who make use of services.

Good ideas have already been put forward for discussion, including:

- Increased joint working with children’s and health services such as a Social Care and Health Academy.
- Increased online or blended meeting opportunities such as armchair discussion and feedback using new technology or videos (as proposed by carers lead).
- A move from the general Making it Real Advisory Group approach to focussed task and finish opportunities (e.g. Direct Payment support).
- A variety of opportunities to directly comment on services i.e. making the most of service feedback opportunities and / or assessment and support planning discussions.
- Embedding the Making it Real framework into all planning opportunities and designing people ‘in’ to developments from the outset.
- Making it Real as a free-standing user led organisation (or with VCS support).

As we move into 2021, it will be good to discuss and take them forward together.

Stewart Smith – Development Officer (January 2021).