

ROBERT WHITE

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Below outlines my experience of the recent St Martin's Frontline Network Conference where I was kindly asked to facilitate a workshop on the theme of: **Increased targets and pressures associated with these**

EXPERIENCE

Despite arriving late for the event (sorry about that!) I joined a table with my co-facilitator from Lankelly Chase to hear about the experiences of frontline staff. Immediately it became clear that there is significant frustration from teams about the level of reporting they have to do, accompany this with a reduction in funding and continuing pressure to work with more and more complex people and it felt like we were heading into the perfect storm. Members of the group talked about a range of frustrations from unnecessary and complicated evidencing of outcomes to unrealistic periods to work with people before having to move them on to unsustainable housing options or no housing option at all.

The second workshop that I facilitated had similar frustrations. What was most stark for me was the disappointment that frontline workers did not have time to offer support or genuine interactions with their caseload, instead spending more and more time on paperwork and reports, something they perceived as coming down from Commissioners of the service. We were lucky to have a few different perspectives in the group and it was evident that the perception of government led regulation and 'red tape' was suffocating their ability to be the best front line workers they could be.

LEARNING

Fundamental to the learning from my experience is that we, as a collective, have to have a stronger voice. It felt like there was a lack of ability to escalate and challenge some of the status quo and it was clear to me that we all have a role to play. Organisations do not appear to empower their frontline workers to have a say in delivery. Commissioners do not do enough to genuinely listen to concerns and develop real responses. The frontline worker does not shout loud enough or challenge their working practice – it is clear that we all need to do more.

From the second group my biggest take away was to communicate better. Many of the challenges I heard about could be so easily resolved if there was better feedback on why decisions were made, where people fit into those decisions and what role their service plays in a wider pathway.

ACTIONS TO TAKE FORWARD

- Westminster Council Commissioning Team to develop a suitable and sustainable feedback tool
- Build in frontline feedback into regular contract monitoring meetings
- Developing whistle blowing procedure that is fit for purpose
- Host annual event to recognise achievements and good practice

CALL FOR HELP

If anybody would like to support us in developing our actions or has any great ideas on how to better communicate, please do get in touch using the details above.