4   Learning From Golden Key's Support Model

Evaluation approach…

The purpose of this evaluation research was to understand what 'person-centred' and 'trauma informed' elements of client support mean in GK's practice, and additionally what enables the delivery of that support approach by the Service Coordinator Team who provide support to clients.

UWE facilitated two half-day face to face workshop sessions (November 2021 and January 2022), with GK's Service Coordinator Team, including focus group discussions with frontline staff and managers. Workshop one explored the key elements of person-centred and trauma informed support and what they mean in practice, through capturing Service Coordinator's activities in specific client cases. This approach aimed to avoid simply exploring the approaches in an abstract or theoretical sense. Workshop two focused on what enables Service Coordinators to deliver that support approach, referring back to the output from the first workshop. We also facilitated a 45-minute group face-to-face discussion (December 2021) to discuss staff support.

Learning…

The evaluation identified **three key areas in which Service Coordinators conceived of their practice as person-centred**, as follows:

1. **Client relationship is prioritised**
2. **Flexible and responsive support**
3. **Client led with worker collaboration**

For each area, we describe what it means in principle and practice with real practice examples drawn from Service Coordinator's client support.

Three key areas where Service Coordinators felt their practice was most influenced by being trauma informed were identified, as follows:

1. **Understanding how trauma affects the client/ their behaviour**
2. **Using that understanding to prepare and help <u>services</u> to be trauma informed in their support**
3. **Using that understanding to prepare and help <u>clients</u> to work with services**

A number of enabling factors were identified at the organisational level and for support staff capabilities, which underpinned GK's approach to person-centred and trauma informed practice.

4.1 What is GK's model of person-centred support

4.1.1 3 key elements of GK's approach to person-centred support

Through the Service Coordinator Team workshops, the evaluation identified three key elements in which Service Coordinators conceived of their practice as person-centred, as follows:

1. Client relationship is prioritised
2. Flexible and responsive support
3. Client led with worker collaboration

Figure 3 Three key elements of person-centred practice the evaluation identified with Service Coordinators
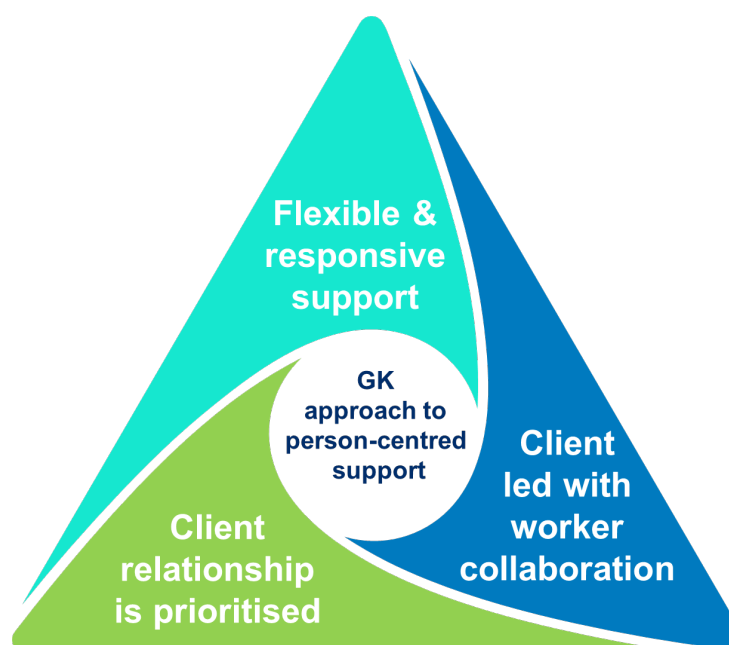
For each area, we worked with the Service Coordinator Team to develop an understanding of:

- What does it mean?
- What does it look like in practice?

The following sections cover each of the three elements in more detail.

> *"To be truly person-centred is to really recognise what is relative, and the concept of relative recovery."* **Service Coordinator Team member**

4.1.2 Person-centred element 1: The client relationship is prioritised

What does it mean to prioritise the client relationship?

- Ensure sufficient time/investment in understanding clients' needs and preferences
- Invest in building the client's trust in the relationship (particularly at the start)
- Listen to clients without an agenda or preconceived aim, other than understanding them
- Aim to understand previous barriers to service engagement and negative experiences
- Be responsive to cues of how to best communicate with clients as the relationship builds
- Worker should be reliable, consistent and persistent; 'predictability breeds trust'

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Meet regularly, keep showing up even where it seems client is not ready to engage
- Go for a 'coffee' with no agenda or offer to drive to appointment in order to talk on the way
- Allow space for client to 'rant' and let off steam
- Being extremely patient, playing the 'long game'
- Identify opportunities for personal budget to build engagement /trust
- Spend time during meetups to actively listen to clients' problems, views and needs without trying to achieve a particular recovery outcome
- Avoid assuming knowledge of the client and relying on info/reports from other services
- Spend time during meetups to understand past experiences of services and how client responded
- Communicate in a way that makes sense for the client, using language the client can relate to
- Worker does as promised and communicates carefully so clients expectations are realistic

4.1.3   Person-centred element 2: Flexible and responsive support

What does it mean to provide flexible and responsive support?

- Be adaptive and flexible to meet the client's needs over time
- Continuously self-evaluate approach, considering alternative /creative approaches if existing approach is not working
- Consider a range of possible contact methods and support approaches (timing/location/frequency) that suit clients
- Worker should be contactable and responsive
- Support recognises and responds to 'windows of opportunity' rapidly
- Worker does what has been agreed (client expectations are managed so this is realistic)
- Assertive and persistent approaches to engagement with no penalties for disengagement

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Arrange support session frequency to meet the client needs, and check in to see if it is OK
- Remind client about appointments so they are aware
- Consider meet-up locations, days and times carefully, to suit client and help them feel comfortable and safe (Café? Near/at home? Open space? Drop-in? Fast food restaurants? Journey/walk? Community space? Mobility/travel considerations?)
- Daily welfare 'check-ins' during difficult times
- Let clients know they can contact worker outside the agreed meeting times if needed
- Picking up the phone, returning phone calls ASAP if unanswered, keeping client well updated
- Accept that sometimes clients may be in a bad place and need to cancel sessions
- Talk to the client about their preferred contact method and frequency
- Being there when client needs support more intensively as needed – e.g. through traumatic life incidents/crises
- Dropping by a clients' house/hangouts every day or at different times to catch them once
- Investing considerable time to resolve specific problems the client has identified positively
- Advocate/negotiate with other services to gain flexibility for clients

4.1.4 Person-centred element 3: Support is client led with worker collaboration (towards harm reduction and recovery)

What does it mean when support is client led with worker collaboration?

- Client is supported to set the focus and pace wherever possible
- Worker supports client to understand choices and empowers their decision making
- Worker takes a collaborative co-creation approach of working alongside the client - doing <u>with</u> not 'to' or 'for'
- Worker carefully avoids colluding with risky (often normalised) client behaviours
- Client is supported to overcome challenges, focusing on their strengths
- Support is non-judgemental in approach
- Worker believes and acts that the client is the expert in their own journey and experiences

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Spending time sorting out what is important to the client, setting goals with the client and focusing resource to progress those goals
- Support sessions and pace of progress are within timescales the client is comfortable with
- Promote/find choices for the client throughout all interactions regardless of the work
- Take a collaborative co-creation approach of doing with, not to or for
- Respect clients' choices and withhold judgement (e.g. about what to focus on, through crises, whether and when to engage with support)
- Support the client to be confident being 'in the room' with services and help them have a voice to express their needs
- Consulting with the client about what is working during engagement, and asking the client to help direct the worker when supporting a particular issue (e.g. on pace and activity).

4.2 Complexities in providing person-centred support

Through the focus group discussions, a number of complexities and challenges emerged to taking a person-centred approach, with broad consensus within the group. These are summarised below (in no particular order).

4.2.1 Managing dependency

Service Coordinators discussed that a concern in their client support was how to build a trusting relationship whilst avoiding the long-term dependency that could negatively affect the client's engagement with other services. The level of trust and understanding between the Service Coordinator and the client may be one of the only positive relationships in a client's life. The person-centred approach can mean that support is focused on any aspect of a client's life, which can involve providing a high level of personal and practical support depending on a client's needs.

"Over dependency becomes an issue because you're ultimately trying to improve engagement with the system, but because of that very new emphasis on trust, emphasis on relationship, with needs being met psychologically based on adverse childhood experiences, attachment…but then it's apparent that we've just stopped some of those engaging with

4.2.2 Building relationships and understanding needs for clients who have very high substance misuse, heightened emotional states, or learning difficulties

Service Coordinators highlighted that building a relationship with clients can be more challenging when it takes time to find ways to communicate effectively with the client, or the client is not able to express their needs. They agreed that this was more often the case with clients who: sustain very high drug/alcohol use, or are frequently in heightened emotional states, or those with learning difficulties, particularly ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) or autism. Building relationships with these clients requires a highly skilled and adaptive communicator and often takes longer. There can also be challenges here related to judging a clients' mental capacity to make their own decisions about their safety and managing related safeguarding action.

4.2.3 Finding 'windows of opportunity'

Service Coordinators used the term 'window of opportunity' within the team. This refers to points (often time limited) where a client who has previously not engaged, or refused particular support, may be willing/able to engage due to a change in themselves or their situation (e.g. during crisis, before benefits due when sober, wanting to rebuild a family relationship). Service Coordinators are consistently trying over time to identify and act on windows of opportunity. The personal budget has been frequently used as an important resource when there is a window of opportunity to ensure the Service Coordinators can deliver rapidly to support the client, and build trust in the relationship. The ability for Service Coordinators to respond quickly to 'windows of opportunity' is one reason why Service Coordinators believe a responsive approach is suitable for GK clients.

4.2.4 Being client led but offering constructive challenge

Through the focus group discussions, it emerged that while the concept of being client led sits at the heart of the person-centred support approach, this doesn't translate into Service Coordinators always doing exactly as the client wants without challenge. Service Coordinators felt that having a good understanding of the client and a relationship where the client trusts that the Service Coordinator cares about them, their well-being and recovery, underpinned the Service Coordinator's ability to challenge clients' choices. In some extreme cases this might mean a Service Coordinator would need to initially assess whether a client has the mental capacity to make their own decisions about their care or treatment.

Much like coaching, a Service Coordinator may help clients to break down the steps involved to get to a goal and help better understand what it might be like to achieve the goal to inform the client's choices. Service Coordinators also bring their own understanding of the client and their own experiences to conversations with clients. For example, if a client was saying they wanted to take a direction which the Service Coordinator felt could have a high chance of failure, be emotionally destabilising, or lead to unmet basic needs (safety, shelter, food), they would raise these concerns with the client and challenge their choice.

Service Coordinators agreed that they aim to work collaboratively, with the client in the driving seat so if the client wanted to proceed after discussion, they would generally support them to progress as best they could and try to ensure the client could learn from whatever happened.

4.2.5 Managing risks and safeguarding

Through discussion in the workshops, it became clear that Service Coordinators feel they are commonly dealing with high-risk situations where the client is unsafe, and these can become normalised in their roles. They are also working closely with clients that have experienced trauma who often have an altered sense of what is safe. It can be extremely challenging for Service Coordinators to judge safeguarding decisions, and particularly where they must also balance taking a non-judgemental client led approach. This area is frequently brought to reflective practice sessions.

> *"I think it's hard, particularly because of trauma, a lot of people that I work with have a very altered sense of what a threat is. And my understanding of that is often quite different often to theirs, and so I'm trying to understand why they feel safer being with this perpetrator rather than that one, it is really really challenging. Particularly when I just want them to be away from all of them, and be in a safehouse or be somewhere safe. Where my client would potentially be like 'this is OK because it's not as bad as that'..."* **Service Coordinator Team member**

Service Coordinators approach risk management by taking a dynamic and relative ("nuanced") approach, responding proportionately for each client, responding where they observe changes in client behaviour patterns and using positive risk taking approaches. The group felt that this can mean in some cases that there is a higher tolerance for risky behaviours than statutory services might accept.

> *"The team needed to hold a 'positive risk taking, harm reduction and trauma informed mindset' to enable engagement… a risk adverse approach could act as a barrier to building positive relationships with clients. This approach shows a higher risk tolerance and therefore a lower risk reporting rate in comparison to a service working with people who present with less risky behaviour. The comparatively lower risk recording rate was relevant to the cohort needs. This approach had no effect on serious incident and statutory safeguarding reporting, and all standard processes were adhered to accordingly..."* **Service Coordinator Team manager**

The team felt that standard levels used within some organisational risk reporting systems were not feasible to administer for the high level of risk common for their clients. Service Coordinators also escalate risk through statutory processes (e.g. formal safeguarding processes, multi-agency risk assessment conferences). However, Service Coordinators report that with some clients, processes can still often leave GK mainly holding the risk management.

4.2.6 Supporting recovery but avoiding collusion with risky behaviours

Service Coordinators used the phrase "collaboration not collusion" to refer to how they managed the balance between empowering a client's choices towards harm reduction and recovery whilst avoiding collusion with their risky behaviours. They discussed the challenges of being client led and providing intensive support for clients with risky behaviour. For example, a client experiencing domestic violence may normalise the situation in terms of their own safety and prioritise other needs, while the Service Coordinator is trying to withhold judgement, empower the client's choice, manage risks, and provide personal support to the client.

The team described examples of how the "collaboration not collusion" principle helped them to shape the boundaries of their client support activity and manage client expectations (e.g. *if you do this behaviour, I will have to walk away today*). Other challenges were highlighted for individual support workers around sustaining a non-judgmental approach whilst having clear boundaries.

4.2.7   Providing unusual and alternative support

Being client led can lead to some quite unusual support activities which can challenge Service Coordinator's ideas about what support should look like.

> *"[Client name] was the perfect example of this. I was being very client led with him, and there were times where we were chasing round Broadmead looking for a button for his coat. And I'm thinking, but we need to get your housing things sorted, that's the priority. But for him in that moment in time, he was very clear, 'No, I need to replace a button on my coat'.* **Service Coordinator Team member**

4.3 What is GK's model of trauma informed support?

4.3.1   3 key areas of GK's approach to trauma informed support

Through the Service Coordinator Team workshops, three key areas were identified where Service Coordinators felt their practice was most influenced by being trauma informed, as follows:

- Understanding how trauma affects the client/ their behaviour
- Using that understanding to prepare and help <u>services</u> to be trauma informed in their support
- Using that understanding to prepare and help <u>clients</u> to work with services

For each area, we have worked with the Service Coordinator Team to develop an understanding of:

- What does it mean?
- What does it look like in practice?

The following sections cover each of these areas in more detail.

4.3.2   Trauma informed area 1: Understand how trauma affects the client and their behaviour

What does it mean to understand how trauma affects the client and their behaviour?

- Recognise the value of understanding the client and their background holistically/ systemically
- Draw on psychological theories and professional experience to make sense of behaviour
- Use insights as a foundation for support work
- Expect relationship 'rupture' and be prepared to repair relationships
- In an established relationship, initiate conversations which help client de-escalate and reflect on triggers and causes for their behaviour

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Try to understand challenging behaviour and what is going on for the client
- Differentiate and recognise when someone may react in a certain way due to their experiences of complex trauma, with support from psychologist through clinical supervision
- Develop psychological formulations, with support from psychologist through clinical supervision
- Make time /space to repair the relationship the next day/as needed with a client after an outburst or verbal abuse
- Be prepared to expect some non-engagement, boundary pushing, and challenging behaviours
- Being forgiving and patient with challenging client behaviours (have a thick skin!), allowing for emotional instability, don't take it personally or react to it directly
- Providing consistency in the relationship; being there each day/ week in the same place/time
- Being mindful of the language used to avoid triggering distress
- Understand the past trauma and acknowledge the client thoughts/ needs, but never directly addressing trauma, allowing it to be disclosed naturally
- Looking at cycles of abuse and understanding how clients may be re-affirming/ re-producing patterns of behaviours.
- Avoid interpreting responses as attention seeking or inappropriate anger (and therefore requiring anger management)
- Ask client questions about their behaviour/responses, when their anxiety isn't heightened - identifying what clients are doing and discussing with them can empower them
- Turn off call waiting to avoid triggering client when they call many times and thinks they are being ignored)

4.3.3 Trauma informed element 2: Prepare and help <u>services</u> to be trauma informed in their support

What does it mean to prepare and help <u>services</u> to be trauma informed in their support?

- Advocate so client can access support, services are flexible, and meet clients' needs
- Prepare service to work with client before support
- Support service to work with client during support
- Support multiple services to work together to support the client in joined up way

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Asking other services to be flexible to better meet client needs, explaining why this is important (e.g. explain client's anxiety and persuade to not block client if they miss a session)
- Build relationships with professionals to gain flexibility and help them support client
- Reassure professionals that the client may sound aggressive but is just anxious
- Prepare services to act ready for a window of opportunity (e.g. client is sober for a few days)
- Help service understand the client's needs, triggers and how client behaviours are related to the client's past trauma/cycle of abuse in preparation for engagement
- Prepare workers to not make conversation about sensitive topics (e.g. family, history)
- Using appropriate inclusive, positive, and strengths based language which is not stigmatising

- Challenging negative language about the client (e.g. they are chaotic, making unwise choices, don't want support, attention seeking, manipulative)
- Constructive discussion and challenge with other professionals to help reflect on their understanding/assumptions and work out challenges together (explore understanding, try to reframe assumptions and change mindsets)
- Communicate with professionals to join up provision within/ between services
- Offering additional capacity to enable the service to take a more assertive approach (e.g. joint working, shared assessments).
- Continued translation of service/client communication, being a 'broker' or 'mediator' who speaks both the service and clients' language

4.3.4 Trauma informed element 3: Prepare and help <u>clients</u> to work with services

What does it mean to prepare and help <u>clients</u> to work with services?

- Understand the complexity of the service landscape from the client's perspective
- Help client understand what to expect and prepare them to engage with a service
- Negotiate permission to advocate for the client with service(s)
- Support client to work with service(s)

What does it look like in practice supporting clients?

- Slowly explaining and introducing local services so client can get their head around it
- Helping client understand how support will be provided, describe the process and what can be expected
- Manage situations to avoid escalation and emotional responses which lead to disengagement during support, develop plans together to deal with tricky situations or emotional responses
- Translation for client, explaining jargon clearly (e.g. medicalised, specialist terms)
- Gaining consent to make referrals and share information with a service on behalf of the client to smooth assessment processes to avoid the assessment putting client off
- Making 'in person' introductions between a client and local service professionals
- Explaining the client's legal / statutory / service rights relevant to their situation
- Allowing time for briefing and debriefing to support clients to understand what is happening
- Recognise blocks and barriers within the system so the client views them as system problems rather than problems in themselves or responses to them personally

4.4 What enables GK's model of person-centred and trauma informed practice?

4.4.1 Organisational enablers to person-centred and trauma informed practice

Through the Service Coordinator Team workshops, we identified a number of factors at the organisational level, which underpinned and enabled GK's approach to person-centred and trauma informed practice (grouped together as many were shared or enabled by each other). These are as follows:

Organisational enablers to person-centred and trauma informed practice	Enabling role/rationale
• **Staff have flexibility and autonomy in how they approach their client support to respond to individual's needs** • **Small caseload allocation with generous resourcing**	The ability of staff to respond to each client's individual needs relies on staff having a high level of autonomy and flexibility to shape the approach they think will work best for each client. To provide responsive support, caseloads need to allow for rapid and extreme changes in support needs which are common with clients. Service Coordinators need to be able to respond quickly to 'windows of opportunity' which can lead to breakthroughs with client relationships and/or their service engagement.
• **Staff well-being is prioritised in decision making and processes** • **Organisation has processes to support staff with vicarious trauma (e.g. time off, rapid debriefing after incidents, training staff how to recognise in themselves)** • **Monthly supervision with experienced clinical psychologist** • **Regular management support supervision with line manager** • **Clinical psychologist and team manager are supportive and nurturing** • **Access to immediate incident support and debriefing** • **Flexible staff working patterns** • **Compensation (i.e. salary, benefits) reflective of skill and role demands**	Taking a flexible and responsive approach to client support requires organisational processes in place which are fair, trusting, and sustainable for staff to maintain their work life balance (e.g. clients may have crises 24/7 and staff can take time back if needed). This also supports staff well-being and resilience. The Service Coordinator role is highly demanding at the best of times and client support can involve staff being in situations where they experience vicarious trauma, abuse and emotionally demanding situations. To avoid burn out, staff well-being needs to be prioritised with organisational processes in place to recognise issues, protect and support staff. Support from a clinical psychologist aims to protect staff well-being, helps develop understanding of clients (and formulations) and supports a trauma informed approach.
• **Peer support available from other team members, including access to varied specialist expertise** • **Shared in-person team working spaces**	Colleagues who have shared experiences, are valuable to support each other personally and professionally in this demanding role. Staff have accessed important support ad-hoc from colleagues in the shared physical office (more so outside the pandemic). Service Coordinators work with clients who have very varied needs. While not everyone needs to be an expert in every area, staff have found it valuable to have specialist expertise within the team to refer to.
• **A learning culture is prioritised, particularly opportunities for learning from both failures and successes**	GK clients have complex needs which can mean they get 'stuck' where the system is not able to support them through the normal routes. A learning mindset and openness to challenge is important to support

• **Monthly facilitated reflective practice sessions with around 5 people** • **Flat non-hierarchical communication and openness to challenge**	staff development and experimentation to find different solutions for clients that work for them. The Service Coordinator team has found regular reflective practice sessions protect space for reflection which is key to learning. It is helpful to ensure each group has some very experienced staff attending.
• **Engagement expectations, key performance measures, and client progress goals do not drive client support** • **Minimal affiliations with other services**	Any organisational goals and affiliations can drive support in ways which mean that choices are made that are not directed by the client's choices and best interests. Clients who have repeatedly been let down by or refused access to services, can feel more able and willing to engage with GK where there are fewer expectations as they see less risk of failure, disappointment and/or rejection. Clients have also told the evaluation they like GK is 'for them' and independent of other services.
• **Personal budget availability (or a fund serving a similar purpose)**	When GK clients are 'stuck' (i.e. have needs which cannot be met by services), the personal budget can be used for a quick intervention that helps 'unstick' the situation. Its use can enable more flexible support and can help build trust in the relationship.
• **Risk management approach (assessment and mitigation) is strongly informed by each client's individual context and positive risk taking**	When risk management is considered at organisational level, it can lead to an aversion to taking risks which can lead to GK clients getting 'stuck'. Service Coordinators report that finding ways to move forwards through 'positive risk taking' is an important tactic to 'unstick' clients.
• **Training in particularly relevant psychological theories and resources.** • **Training in strengths-based practice** • **Positive strengths-based language dictionary/glossary**	Service Coordinators have found training to understand particular relevant psychological theories has helped them take a trauma informed support approach with clients. Members highlighted training in cycle/stages of change, formulations, relationships/attachment theories, psychologically informed environments, trauma informed care, Knowledge and Understanding Framework – KUF.

4.4.2   Staff capability enablers to person-centred and trauma informed practice

Through the Service Coordinator Team workshops, factors were identified at the level of individual capabilities and skills for the Service Coordinator client support staff, which underpinned and enabled GK's approach to person-centred and trauma informed practice, as follows:

Staff capability and skills enablers to person-centred and trauma informed practice	Enabling role/rationale
• **Listening skills** • **Empathy / Compassion (understand other perspectives)** • **Patience / Consistency** • **Non-judgemental** • **Resilience** • **Life experience ('being street-wise') which gives confidence to build relationships with diverse range of GK clients** • **Assertiveness**	A number of core characteristics and skills were identified as underpinning the ability to build and sustain relationships with GK clients whilst maintaining professional boundaries.
• **Verbal communication skills**	Verbal communication, particularly the ability to speak and build rapport with people from a wide range of backgrounds is important for communicating effectively with clients and professionals.
• **Coaching skills**	A particular skillset commonly used in coaching appeared important to the role; the ability to set goals, understand options, support decision-making and planning, encouraging. When Service Coordinators are supporting clients in a client led way, there are many similarities with the approach and skills required for effective coaching to empower the client to move forwards in their areas they choose.
• **Understanding psychological theories,**	Service Coordinators have found their understanding of psychological theories helps them to build client relationships and take a trauma informed support approach with clients. Members highlighted training in cycle/stages of change, formulations, relationships/attachment theories, psychologically informed environments, trauma informed care, Knowledge and Understanding Framework – KUF.
• **Collaborative approach** • **Building supportive and nurturing working relationships within/ outside GK**	Much of the Service Coordinator's activity requires working collaboratively with clients to be client led, and with service professionals to join up services and help support the client together. Service Coordinators create reflective spaces for and with professionals, where they try to make sense of the trauma, and 'sit with the complexity', working through things together
• **Constructively challenging** • **Openness – being curious and transparent**	These behaviours underpin a learning mindset and support a non-confrontational way of working with clients and service professionals.

• **Thinking systemically** • **Creative thinking, experimentation to work in different ways**	The Service Coordinator role supporting clients is for the whole person, not bounded to a particular need area. Thinking systemically to understand the connections between client experiences/behaviours/problems, with wider contextual factors can help to identify different creative solutions for the client to move forwards. Thinking creatively is useful to generate alternative ways to help a client progress.
• **Broad knowledge across Severe Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) services of access, provision, and legal considerations** • **Specialism in particular area(s) of SMD subject and/or service knowledge**	Service Coordinators draw on a broad knowledge of services accessed by SMD services users to support clients and services to engage with each other. Specialist knowledge can support particular GK clients and also contribute towards the team knowledge pool which strengthens the overall team approach.
• **Independent travel (car/bike)** • **Willing to work flexible working patterns**	Service Coordinators need to be flexible and be able to travel independently to support the client flexibly.
• **Commitment to social justice**	Service Coordinators share a belief in the importance of their client (and systems change) work contributing to a social justice agenda and tackling structural inequalities. Members bring different commitments to the team which helps build their overall understanding of different perspectives (e.g. stigmatised or minority communities).