

## SERVICE CO-DESIGN METHODS: USER STORIES



### What are user stories?

User stories describe a service user, the reason why they need to use your service and the features the service requires to meet their needs and expectations. User stories are associated with an approach to project management and service design and delivery called 'agile'. YoungMinds uses an adapted version of the original user story method as a tool to help services understand what children, young people and families need from them to have a positive experience. YoungMinds initially used them to involve CYP and parents and carers in designing new transitions process for services, and has now widened their use to incorporate them in lots of different service design and improvement projects within mental health.

### When to use user stories?

User stories can be applied to a whole tool or service, such as a new app being developed to support service users- or they can be applied to a specific part of a service or pathway to engage children, young people and parent carers in designing this aspect of it. This second approach is how YoungMinds has mostly used them with services.

### Why do we use user stories in CYPMH?

User stories break down the desired patient experience into clear, deliverable goals and criteria. This allows services to improve iteratively by making small changes to keep moving towards the desired experience. Because of their clarity and detail, user stories remove the risk of misunderstanding between children, young people and their families and services.

For example, a broad statement from service users and carers like 'we want an improved assessment process' could lead the service to make assumptions about what an 'improved assessment process' would look like. This is likely to be based on their own views of what is and is not working. They may put time and effort in and be committed to improvement, but ultimately there is a risk that what children, young people and families need improving is something that has not been noticed or prioritised by staff. Not because staff don't care, but because by nature of their different experiences and perspectives- staff, children and young people and parents and carers simply see things differently.

### What does a user story look like?

A user story has two parts. The first part is the story itself. A user story always includes these elements:

1. the person using the service (the actor)
2. what the user needs the service for (the narrative)
3. why the user needs it (the goal)

They are usually written like this:

As a... [who is the user?] I need/want/expect to... [what does the user want to do?] So that... [why does the user want to do this?]

For example:

*'As a service user I want my transition to be well-planned in advance so that I have good continuity of care.'*

The most important part of a user story is **the goal** as this helps you centre the user's experience and understand the purpose of what you are doing. If you are not sure of the goal, you need to re-engage with your service users and carers to ensure you understand what matters to them and that what you are planning do will actually add value for them.

The second part is the acceptance criteria. This is a list of outcomes that you can use as a checklist to make sure that the user goal has been met.

An example of user stories and acceptance criteria related to transitions are:

**As a service user I want to be taught coping skills so I can maintain the management of my own mental health after I leave the service**

- It should be with my peers so I can develop my social skills
- I should be able to practice the skills in the session as I learn them
  - I should be supported to practice the skills at home

**As a service user I want to be informed about adult services so I can feel prepared**

- The differences between child and adult services should be introduced so I understand them in advance of change
  - I should be informed of any waiting times for adult services

**As a service user I want to be aware of transition processes from the start so I know what to expect**

- Transitions should be spoken about in a way that feels planned and supported
  - Transitions should be an open and on-going conversation
  - I should be able to ask questions about transitions at any point
- An overview of the full process should be given at the start of accessing a service

### **How to co-produce user stories with children and young people and/or parents and carers**

1. Determine the focus of the user stories i.e. are they for a whole service or resource, or are they related to a specific part of a pathway or service? Sometimes the focus may be determined by an external factor for example a CQUIN around a specific aspect of service delivery that you want to involve service users and carers in meeting. Sometimes the focus will be set by children, young people and families identifying an aspect of the service that needs improving, either through feedback or a process like EBCD.
2. Recruit service users and/or carers to develop the user stories. It is useful to initially work with these two groups separately and develop separate user stories and acceptance criteria based on the different experiences and needs of the two groups. Hold a workshop of 1-3 hours with up to 10 participants to develop the user stories.
  - a. It is useful to start with general activities to enable the participants to share their experiences and what is good and bad about the service now. These insights will provide a rationale for the user stories and also help the group stay focussed when you develop the stories as they will have already had a chance to share their experiences- they will also hopefully in doing so, generated ideas of good practice that could be used within the acceptance criteria.
  - b. Introduce the user story format to the participants, making sure you use examples to enable understanding. Co-create 1-3 examples with the group collectively then ask the group to develop user stories as individuals.
  - c. Ask participants to share their user stories and group them by theme as they do so to generate a list of up to 8-10 user stories.
  - d. Break participants into small groups to draft acceptance criteria for a set of the user stories. Once complete, have the groups review one another's acceptance criteria to create their final agreed versions.
3. Recruit staff for a workshop to review the service user and carer user stories. Share insights about current patient experience from the workshops with staff to explain the rationale for the stories. Work with staff to identify any acceptance criteria they think it could be challenging to meet and explore if there are any that are unfeasible.
4. Facilitate a workshop with representatives from the CYP, parent carer, and staff groups to prioritise the stories, and decide what to work on first. It can be useful after this meeting to turn the stories and criteria into a log that you can track progress against and so that as you meet one criteria, you move onto the next prioritised one.