

# Integrating Psychologists into Voluntary Sector (Second Step) Teams: What We've Learned in Somerset

## Background

- Second Step, a mental health and housing support charity in the Southwest of England, employed psychology teams into two of their Somerset services: Step Together and Family Safeguarding
- The Psychological, Adversity, and Trauma (PAT) informed approach (developed by Second Step) is based on the idea that “we are all the product of our experiences” (Second Step, 2020). Instead of asking “what’s wrong” with a person, it asks “what happened” in their life, recognising that how people act and cope often comes from their difficult life experiences.
- The Step Together service offers support to people experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantages in Somerset. The psychology team consists of two psychologists.
- The Family Safeguarding team in Somerset offers support to parents who are working with children’s social care to improve their family situation. The psychological team consists of a Senior Psychologist, and a Family Systemic Psychotherapist.
- Across both services the responsibilities of the psychological teams are to provide reflective one-to-one and group spaces, formulation, direct client therapy work, developing training and resources for staff, and some provide external consultation to partnering agencies.
- This service evaluation aims to qualitatively explore the benefits and challenges of having psychologists working within these teams.

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## Evaluation Question

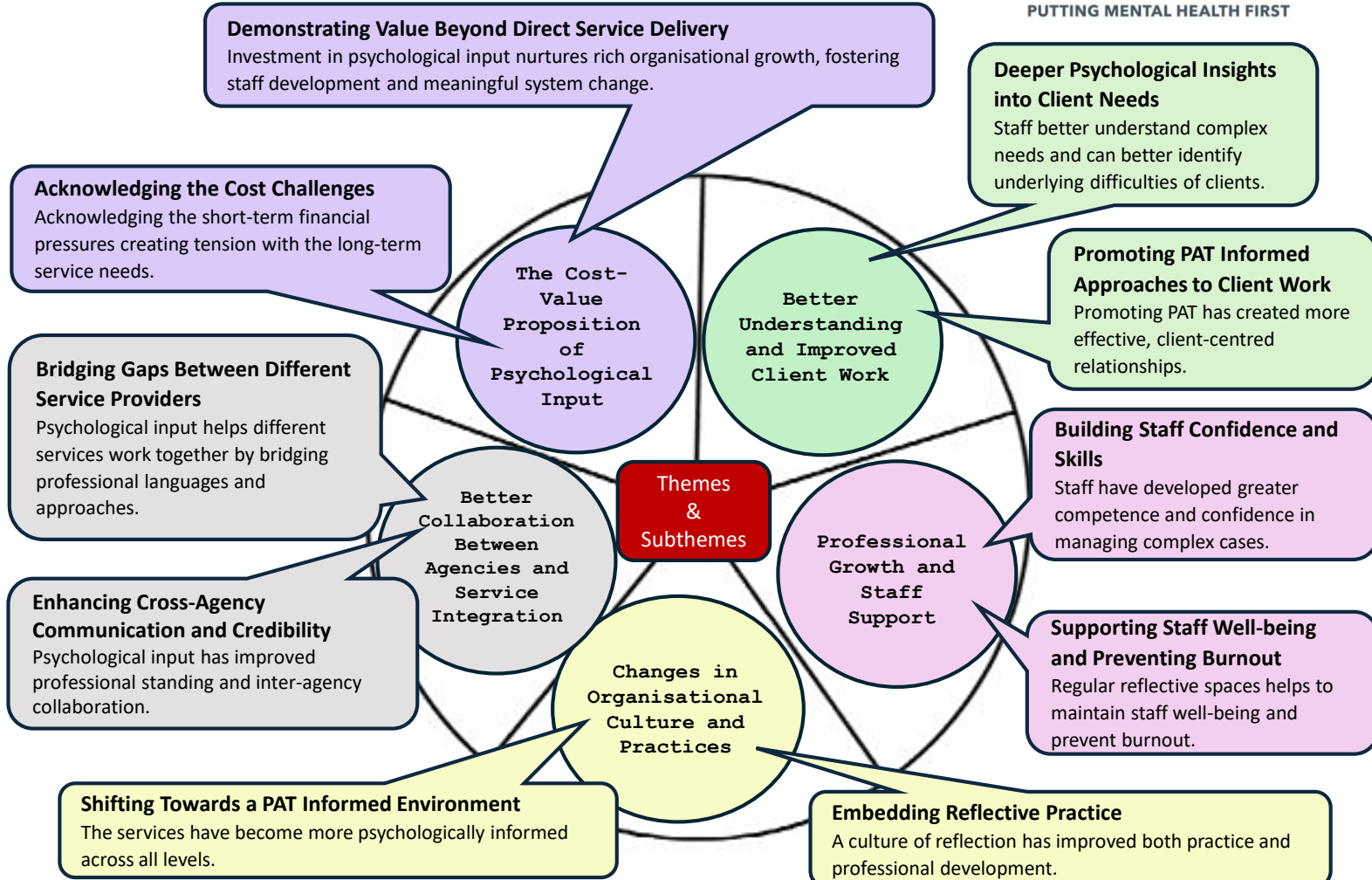
“What can be learnt from having psychologists working within homelessness services and safeguarding services in Somerset?”

## Methods & Participants

- Eighteen participants were recruited to four focus groups, conducted via Teams: i) client-facing staff and ii) managers from Step Together, iii) combined client-facing staff and a manager from Family Safeguarding Team, and iv) psychologists across Second Step.
- A semi-structured interview guide focused on experiences of working with psychologists exploring the benefits and challenges was used.
- The Teams sessions were recorded and transcribed, and Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to develop emerging themes from the data.
- Ethical approval was obtained from Second Step, the organisation overseeing the services. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to involvement.

## Conclusions

- The stories shared by the staff show psychological input has helped create empathetic, trauma-informed environments, and foster deeper relationships between the staff and their clients. Staff talked about feeling more confident in managing complex cases and being more resilient, crediting this growth to the supportive spaces and reflective practices that psychologists provide.
- Having psychologists on board has sparked changes in organisational culture, weaving reflective practices and psychological thinking into the everyday work of the service. This has led to better conversations between agencies and boosted credibility within the wider networks these services reside.
- Whilst staff were open about the financial challenges of keeping psychologists in their roles, their stories consistently showed that the benefits outweigh the costs. The wide-ranging impact of psychological input on service quality, staff growth, and overall improvements highlights its real value.
- Looking ahead, keeping and possibly expanding this model of integrating psychological support has both opportunities and challenges. However, the overwhelmingly positive experiences shared suggest that continuing to invest in psychological input holds significant benefits in providing high-quality, responsive services to the populations that use these services.



## References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Second Step (2020). *Becoming Psychological, Adversity and Trauma Informed - Second Step Bristol*. [online] Second Step. Available at: <https://www.second-step.co.uk/about-us/psychological-adversity-and-trauma-informed/> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2024].