Formulation FAQs:

**Why do we do a formulation?**

**We often work with people who can leave us feeling confused, uneasy, saddened, or frustrated, and although this is completely normal in the line of work we do, we often spend little time thinking about why this might happen. Normally the feelings we have about the people we are working with are directly influenced by the behaviour they display, good or bad, but because we spend such little time thinking why that person does that thing at that time, we usually overlook what the person might be trying to tell us, and we may end up re-traumatising them and us in the process.**

**This is where a formulation can be really useful.**

**What is a formulation?**

**A formulation helps us to better understand the people we are working with by making connections to identify what they might need from us and what we might need from them in return. Formulations come in all shapes and sizes, some models are more focused on a specific event i.e., a ‘risk incident’, others are much broader and look at a person’s whole-life story to help us to understand how they got to where they are now, and some models focus more on the way that the people we work with interact with us and the world to help us to understand their experiences of us and others they come in contact with. What model you use depends on what suits you best as a team or individual, and there’s nothing wrong with taking a bit from each model if it’s what you need.**

**Who is involved in a formulation?**

**Ideally the people we work with would also join us to ‘formulate’, as they are the experts in their own lives. How you do this can be different. It might be helpful to involve the person from the very beginning, explaining to them why you want to look at a formulation; to better understand what they might need from you. It may be that as a team you first bring together some ideas amongst yourselves, then you may sit down with the person and say, “this is what we think might help, what do you think?” and use their feedback to inform what happens next. Although this is what we would hope for, we also know that sometimes doing this piece of work together with the person can be difficult for many reasons the person might say no or feel unable to tolerate doing the work right now, or the staff may feel unable to be truly honest with how they find working with the person. In this case formulation work can still happen and you can select a model to suit what you need. It is important to remember that if the person is not directly involved, we cannot assume that the information in the formulation is completely accurate, therefore it is always best to get the person involved where possible.**

**In terms of who else would be involved, it's usually helpful to involve staff who know the person the best, and/or who will continue to work with the person moving forward, no single person should feel they have to know everything about a person before doing a formulation as it is a space for learning from each other.**

**How long does a formulation take?**

**This depends on which formulation mode you chose to use, some models you may be able to fill in relatively quickly, some other models take much longer.**

**What happens when I’ve finished it?**

**All formulations should be thought of as a ‘working’ document, it’s not an activity you complete and file away somewhere never to be looked at again. A formulation should be used to inform the way we work with people and updated depending on what we learn about the person and ourselves, ideally a formulation should follow someone’s journey. It is also helpful to remember that a formulation is an opinion and cannot be considered an exact science, this means by doing a piece of formulation work we still may not know or fully understand people, but we can be certain we are trying to do the best we can.**

**It’s important to know that a formulation is not a prescribed treatment or a quick fix to a problem you or a person may be experiencing, it is a process. The hope is that by going through the process of formulation you might find new ways of continuing to work with a person based on a deeper understand on their and your own needs.**

**Just like in life, there are no guarantees here.**