DOING IT YOUR WAY
TOGETHER’S STRATEGY
2014/15–2018/19
Why is Together’s role important?

Experiencing mental distress is frightening and can lead to long-term disadvantage. Mental illness still carries a stigma and people experiencing it describe negative reactions from others in society. Families and friends can also find it very difficult to know how to help.

This can lead to exclusion from employment, social activities and ordinary aspects of everyday life. A very small percentage of people with serious mental health needs are in employment. For some people, a long-term reliance on welfare benefits leads to poverty and to a loss in confidence and self-esteem.

It is a tragedy that the immense talents of many thousands of individuals are lost to society and people’s aspirations to be active members of their communities are denied. Without the scope to be involved in everyday activities and to feel valued, life can be very lonely.

However, we know that when people receive support to take control of their lives and to lead their own recovery, the outcomes can be very different. Most people can go on to lead active, happy and successful lives and be valuable members of their communities.

Together offers practical support and a range of quality services to help thousands of people to live without prejudice, one person at a time. This is our founding principle and continuing ambition.

Together works alongside people by using approaches to involvement and leadership that promote and support their wellbeing. We work with particularly excluded and disadvantaged people and those facing the greatest stigma.

We promote the value of lived experience by involvement, leadership and the impact of peer support.

Our mission

Together’s mission is to be the first choice for service users looking for quality, personalised services. We are trusted for our expertise in service user involvement and leadership. We will value and encourage service users’ contributions to every aspect of our work, working alongside them as they lead their journeys towards greater wellbeing. We will demonstrate that service user involvement works to improve people’s mental health, whatever their life situation and no matter how severely they are affected.

Our vision

Our vision is a world where each individual can play their part in breaking down the barriers that exist through ignorance and lack of understanding, and where everyone can live their life without prejudice.

“In the past I could go days without talking to anyone; I would just sit inside watching TV. Now, I find myself going out to a local cafe and having a sandwich and a chat. This has only started to happen since having support from Together.”
The Together way

Our way is to do things in the way that people using the service choose. Everything we do is informed by the expertise and experience of the people who use our services.

Our approach to support is to recognise the talent and expertise of people who use services. We encourage them to build capacity, take as much control as possible and lead their support as much as they are able. We see our support as part of a pathway that will help bring the individual to the place where they wish to be. We help people to build their confidence and self-esteem. Our services are delivered safely, effectively and are valued by the people who use them. We champion and practise service user leadership and peer led support, leading to better outcomes and stronger communities.

We work with individuals to define the outcomes that are important to them and to measure how these are being met.

We challenge stigma and discrimination alongside the people who use our services, through showing positive outcomes and sharing stories of success.

We value a range of creative and positive partnerships that support us in our mission and create more opportunities for the people who use our services.

We aim to create an environment that is healthy and enabling for service users as well as for staff and volunteers. We expect volunteers, staff and service users to benefit positively from their time with Together.

Our work is underpinned by sound financial management, value for money and cost effectiveness.

“I’ve now got a better structure to my days. I’ve met some wonderful people and it’s given me so much confidence and self-esteem. There’s no stigma, I have something regularly to look forward to where I can just be myself, and be amongst people who don’t judge me but who make me so welcome.”
Our values

**Individual centred and holistic**
We always take people as they are, seeing beyond their diagnosis. When we support people, we take into account every aspect of their lives. We aim to support social, emotional, physical, spiritual and economic wellbeing.

**Choice**
We adapt to reflect people’s changing circumstances, knowing that the quality of the journey to wellbeing is what’s important. People’s hopes, aspirations and ideas influence all our work and determine our future – we do our best to meet individual needs, whether they are traditional or innovative.

**Valuing and involving**
Everyone is important to us – those who work for us, those who use our services, people in local communities, supporters, carers and those who work in partnership with us. We value difference and want everyone to be treated with personal dignity and respect, free from discrimination or harassment. We believe everyone has a positive contribution to make to wider society and we encourage those who have experienced mental distress to take their rightful place.

**Quality**
We aim for high standards in all we do. This means that our business is conducted with openness, honesty and accountability. We aim to be efficient and effective.

**Future positive**
We believe that everyone has the potential to achieve personal fulfilment and an improved quality of life. Mental distress can be heartbreaking and life-altering, which makes it so important to appreciate and enjoy those things that bring happiness. We celebrate courage and achievement. We expect life to get better.

**Working alongside**
Everyone needs to feel able to cope with everyday life to enjoy a feeling of personal wellbeing, which is rarely the same for two people. However, we know that anyone can experience mental distress at some point in their life – severely, enduringly or temporarily. Our aim is to work alongside each individual in a way that helps them through the period of distress to achieve a feeling of wellbeing.

**Listening, learning and adapting**
We embrace the specific expertise brought by people who use mental health services and embed their voice into the way we work, always adapting our decisions to meet their best interests. We listen to all our stakeholders and translate best practice into action.

“I now feel useful for the first time in years, and this really is a wonderful feeling. I know I have to be aware of relapses, but the support process helps me identify if I’m slipping, and the action I need to get back and keep on track.”
Our recent achievements

Three years ago, we began a sustained and ambitious transformation of all our services to fully embrace the principle of each individual directing the support they receive and leading their own recovery. Starting with our community support, we worked alongside service users to design Your Way, a highly flexible, personalised approach underpinned by five ‘elements’ that put the individual at the centre of their support. Your Way is now available at 21 sites across the country and has helped thousands of people to engage meaningfully with their communities and achieve the goals that really matter to them.

Following this success, we applied similar principles to our accommodation based services, trialling and then rolling out Progression Together, an approach that emphasises increased independence, progression and community involvement. We support people living in our residences to exercise choice about the nature of the support they receive, the outcomes they work towards and who they work with to achieve them. An increasing number of our services are supporting people with complex needs to move on from hospital settings and begin their journey towards increased independence in the community.

We have been awarded grants by the Department of Health to formally evaluate and develop both our Your Way and Progression Together services.

Crucial to both these models is peer support, where people use their experiences of mental distress to help others towards recovery. We know that when peer support is offered on an equal and reciprocal basis, it helps people take huge strides towards better mental health and achieving the life they want to lead. By providing training and support to peer supporters, and by fostering an environment that champions and encourages peer support, we have begun to embed it as an indispensable part of our offer across the board.

The support we provide in courts, police stations and to people on community orders has expanded significantly as funders, criminal justice agencies and the government recognise and take advantage of approaches we have been developing for 20 years. We have been selected by the Department of Health to lead a partnership to deliver a Liaison and Diversion trial site in London as part of a nationwide initiative to ensure people’s mental health needs are addressed when they come into contact with the criminal justice system. NHS England, which is funding the trial, will draw on our specialist expertise and experience to work with the Department of Health in rolling this work out nationally.

All these achievements and developments are underpinned by a commitment to service user involvement and leadership that has guided our work for ten years, since the creation of our Service User Involvement Department. Upholding and valuing the choices and views of those we support, and ensuring they continually shape and direct the support we provide, has been at the heart of everything we do, and will remain so as we continue to expand our services and reach even more people in future.

“I would not have had the confidence without the dedication, professionalism, understanding and patience of my Together team.”
Our goals for the future

1. To grow the organisation and expand the support we provide by retaining and refreshing current service contracts and developing new services within a sound financial framework.
   - Invest in relationships with new commissioning structures and local plans.
   - Services will be in line with Together’s values and beliefs and the aims of service users, and be financially viable.
   - Services will evolve to meet the changing aspirations of the people who use them.
   - Engage positively with a range of partners.

2. To support the most vulnerable people and those facing the greatest stigma by providing the next step in support for people moving from secure or locked services.
   - Emphasise increasing choice and control, promoting independence and supporting community engagement.
   - Use self-directed support to help service users to plan and implement the next stages in their lives.
   - Provide highly flexible packages of support in the environment most suited to the person.

3. To provide high-quality accommodation with support at a fair price and with recovery-based outcomes.
   - Ensure consistent, personalised, quality support and clear outcomes that are valued by service users.
   - Provide a high-quality physical environment that reflects our values and affords respect and privacy.

4. To expand services to people with mental health needs who are also involved with the criminal justice system.
   - Engage in the pathway that includes street triage, police liaison, court liaison and diversion, and provide support to individuals to re-engage with their communities.

5. To reach more people in a community setting in a way that promotes independence, peer support and leadership.
   - Ensure that services can be purchased by individuals in a flexible way.
   - Make services available to people wishing to self-fund.
   - Provide free services to people in need and who meet Together’s criteria.
   - Ensure on-going development and evaluation of our Your Way model.

“From being completely house-bound because of suffering severe panic attacks when trying to get out, to now having a life. Although I still find it difficult to go out, I now have the confidence, courage and the will to manage my anxieties.”
Together exists to support people with experience of mental distress to take control of their lives and to make a positive contribution to their community.

Thank you to the users of Together’s services pictured and quoted in this publication.