

Together Annual Review 2018-19



Registered Charity No. 211091
Registered Company No. 463505

together
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



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Preface

by Jess Worner from Together

I was first involved with Together for Mental Wellbeing as a volunteer at a local service 10 years ago. I was a young woman who had experienced mental distress and had just gone through one of many breakdowns. By being alongside others with similar experience whilst working with Together, I began to see the strength I had because of my lived experience of mental distress, rather than despite it.



After my time volunteering, I was delighted to return a few years later as Together's first Peer Support Coordinator in 2013, before moving in to my current role as Peer Support Practice Manager 4 years ago. My own mental health has gone up and down since then, as most people's will. The one constant throughout has been the immense learning and strength I have gained from being part of an organisation that values the voice and insights of people with lived experience.

A big reason for that is Together's established and continuing commitment to service user leadership. We believe people using services should be in the driving seat for decisions on their own lives and support. Furthermore, we believe that the collective voices of people with lived experience of mental distress should influence and improve services, organisations and society.

Seeing the value of our own individual lived experience can be difficult and is something that we can rarely do on our own. People's experiences of mental distress are often devastatingly painful, and many continue to struggle with their wellbeing in a world and society that can feel 'maddening'. Really valuing our own and others' lived experiences often requires us to connect with each other, to feel a sense of solidarity, and to be able to make sense of what we're going through by sharing and learning with others who have had similar experiences. This is at the heart of peer support where people with shared lived experience of mental distress support each other on a mutual and reciprocal basis.

At Together we have worked with service users to collectively lead our approach to peer support. We have built on our network of Peer Supporters and Peer Support Coordinators, and continued to work collaboratively with service users, volunteers and staff to embed peer support within our services. This type of support has brought life changing mutual benefits for all involved. Those benefits include improved

confidence, improved ability to manage mental wellbeing, increased social networks, feeling more accepted, being more hopeful about the future, feeling more in control of our lives, and improved future prospects.

Peer support also takes place in a lot of other different ways that we embrace and encourage in Together. This includes friendships made amongst people using the same service; the solidarity when groups of people work together to collectively influence change; or the sense of belonging when we find a community that feels like home.

Too many of us in society are made to feel like we are broken people. We are not broken people. We are superheroes with heavy hearts, battling to stop the world from breaking us. It is by joining together in mutual kindness and solidarity, sharing and learning from our stories of survival, and celebrating our strengths and achievements; that we can piece ourselves back together and thrive.

Peer support is one way of valuing lived experience, and is a clear example of what can be achieved when we approach support in a service user led way. It is the core principle in our new strategy and I am excited about what more we will achieve by placing the voices, strength and knowledge of people with lived experience at the centre of everything we do in Together.

Jess Worner,
Peer Support Practice Manager
at Together





We have also been working to empower service users to inform and influence our governance and strategic leadership and we have looked to do this through having trustees with lived experience on our Board and an elected National Steering Group of people who use their experiences of mental distress to provide the support and challenge to ensure we 'live' our values at Together.

With all the fantastic work of the last few years, however, we have continued to face challenges in embedding service user involvement and leadership across our services and departments at Together. From talking with staff and service users, we struggle consistently and systematically to enable and empower people to lead their own care and support and to have a voice in how we do things at Together.

We needed to take some bold decisions and so the past year has been one of changes in Together's structures, including a restructure of our senior leadership team, to ensure that service user involvement and leadership becomes more explicitly part of our organisational DNA and not just the perceived responsibility of a specific directorate.



Over the last few months, we have also embarked on exciting work with service users and members of our National Steering Group to define our approaches to service user leadership, to set out and agree the benefits of working in this way and to re-affirm our organisational commitment to service user leadership and valuing people's lived experience of mental distress.

We will continue to be a charity that promotes a vision and a purpose that empowers people to develop their own insights, skills and potential in response to living with mental distress and enables their collective voice to improve policy and practice for all. We want a society that values those experiences and enables people to live the life they choose and to determine their own future.

We have many fantastic staff working for us and from visiting our services, I know that staff engagement is strongest at a local level – with their teams, service users and the community. I believe that the changes we are making across Together will ensure that service user leadership is truly everyone's business.

Linda Bryant
Chief Executive
Together for Mental
Wellbeing

A stylized, handwritten signature of Linda Bryant in white ink.



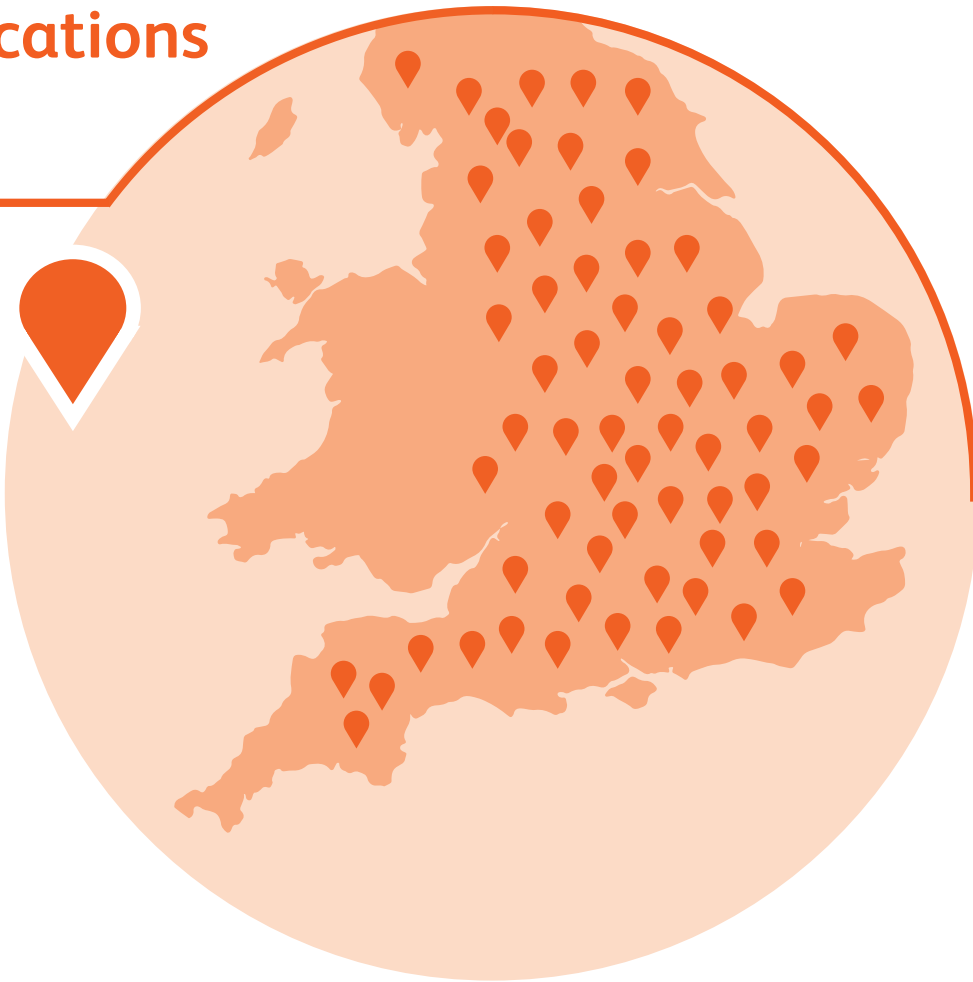
Introduction from our Chief Executive, Linda Bryant

Since Together for Mental Wellbeing was first formed in 1879, we have placed individuals experiencing mental distress at the centre of everything we do. Back in the late 19th century, it was considered ground-breaking to choose to work alongside people coming out of asylums, to offer safe havens instead of being sent to an institution, and to involve individuals in their own care.

What we do

Our locations

We have
78
services
around
England



We have residential
& CQC Services in
12 locations

We offer supported
accommodation in
28 homes

We provide advice in
14 areas
through advocacy hubs

We offer community
support in
18 regions

Our criminal justice
staff work in
27 different
courts and police
stations

Our advocacy staff
provide guidance on
120+ topics

The average length of
a stay in our
accommodation was
744 days

We currently have
More than 75
peer supporters using
their lived experience to
support others

We work in
partnership with
25
Local authorities in our
advocacy services

Our Achievements in 2018-19...

Figures refer to the period between March 2018 and April 2019

Our combined mental health services supported

9592

encouraging them to make their own choices
towards living independent, fulfilling lives



Our accommodation
services were used by

529 People
and 51 of those people
moved on to live
independently



Our community support
teams worked with more than

3500

people empowering them to make
choices through involvement

Our criminal justice
services supported

2274

people in police
stations and court
settings

We are the oldest community
mental health charity in the country
and have been supporting people for

140 years



We represented
more than

3,000

through our
community
advocacy

About Together



Our ambition for society

Everyone who experiences mental distress is valued, can live the life they choose and determine their own future.



Our purpose

To work alongside people with mental distress to develop their insights, skills and potential and to promote their voices to improve policy and practice for all.



Our vision

A recognised charity leader in its field delivering high-quality mental health and support services, empowering service users to lead their own care and support, and enabling their collective voice to inform and influence.

Our value statement

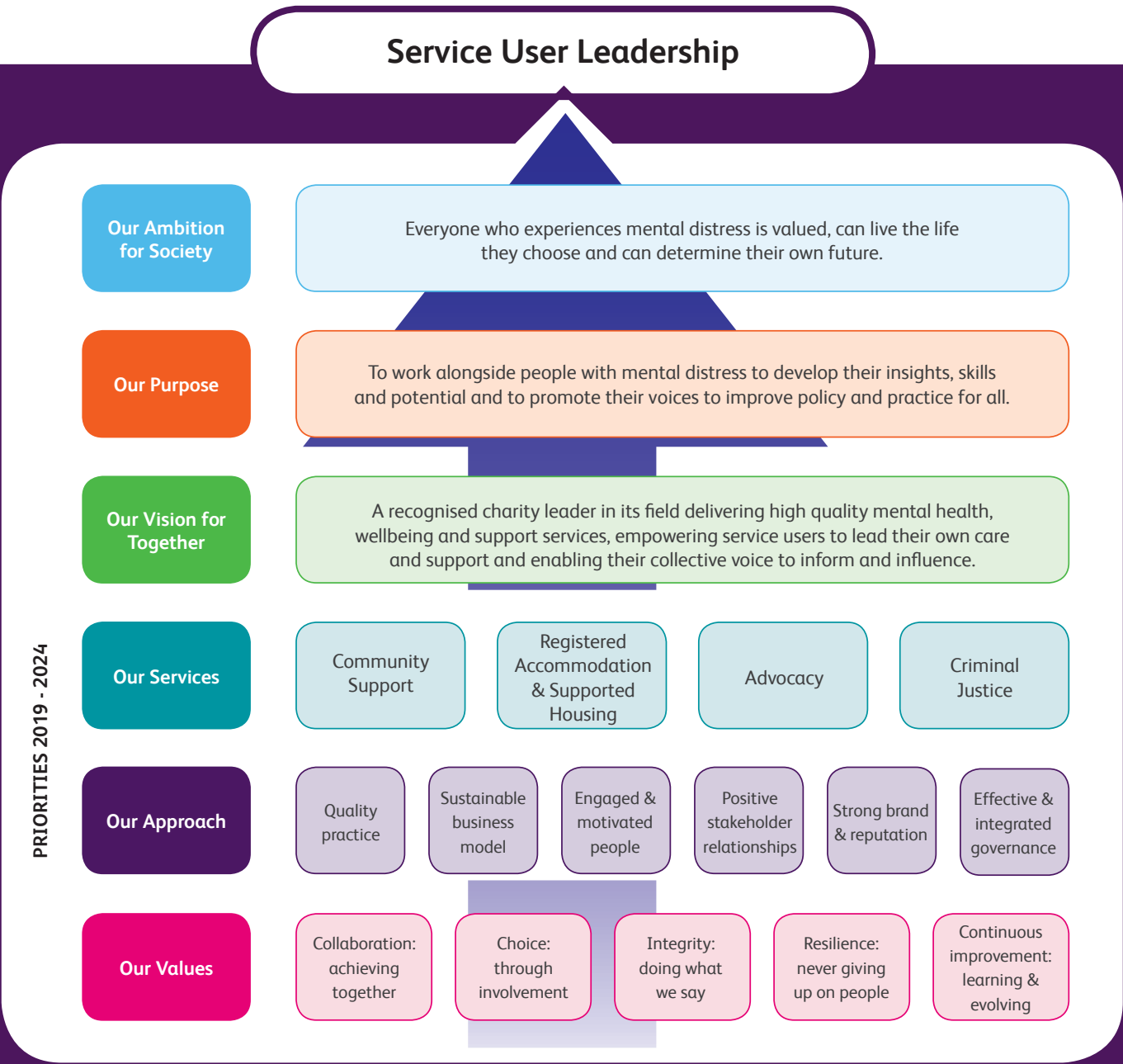
“We work together to facilitate choice through involvement, by doing what we say, never giving up on people, and looking to constantly improve how we work.”

Our strategy map

We have been working to develop a new 5 year strategy. To effectively communicate that we have developed a strategy map which is our roadmap for the future reflecting our ambition, purpose and vision. It is a new way of presenting our strategic and operational ambitions for the next five years and brings clarity about what the organisation is here to do. Within the map, Together staff and volunteers will see how their roles and responsibilities will contribute to the vision

for the organisation, and how they will support better outcomes for the people who use our services.

Our 2019-2024 strategy is shown below and was developed from the top down as we defined our ambition, purpose and vision. When reading the map it is designed to be read from the bottom up, starting at the foundation with the drivers of our behaviours and attitudes, our values.





Our values



Our value statement (page 8) and set of five values are the behaviours that guide the way we work.

Collaboration: achieving together

"If you have any concerns, they are quick to listen and will act accordingly. On a more personal note, they have helped me in my recovery by getting me connected with local services."

Service user at Hopewell House supported accommodation scheme

- We utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of everybody to achieve the best outcomes.
- We actively raise awareness of mental wellbeing and the benefits of service user leadership, supporting people to participate in local society.

Resilience: never giving up on people

"I love working with the Advocate and I always know she will be honest whether we want to hear it or not. She is always passionate about making sure a person's rights are respected and I really value her opinion and approach"

Clinical Psychiatric Nurse on Advocacy Together Hub Knowsley

- We care passionately about empowering people to use their knowledge and experiences to lead their journeys to better wellbeing.
- We are passionate about everyone's access to better wellbeing and hold the hope for a better future.

Continuous Improvement: learning and evolving

"I've come so far, I know I'm getting support from other services now but none of that would have happened if it had not been for Berkshire West Your Way helping me to find them, I want to thank all of you."

Service User, Berkshire West Your Way

- We are curious and deeply inquisitive about people and our work.
- We actively seek and learn from feedback and make changes to deliver the best we can.

Choice: through involvement

"I am very grateful to all at Together's Elva Court Accommodation Service for investing in me, and seeing my strengths and skills over and above my diagnosis and my history."

Jess, service user, Elva Court Accommodation Service

- We champion knowledge gained through lived experience and embrace the positive impact this brings on creating options and supporting choice.
- We work with compassion, respect and creativity to encourage people to solve problems and find solutions.

Integrity: doing what we say

"Being involved with York Pathways has saved me in more ways than I thought was possible. They gave me hope when I had none and they have done everything in their power to help me to stay well."

Sophie, Service User, York Pathways

- We create trusting relationships and environments by considering the whole person, individual situations and not over-promising.
- We ensure that we always say what we mean.

This is a summary version of our values, to see the complete description visit our website



Our services

Community support

We look to reach the most in need – including children and young people – who experience the greatest stigma in the community as a result of multiple disadvantages.

Our models of personalised community support provide **person-centred, flexible services** with an emphasis on ensuring that those accessing our services lead their support.

Our blended approach of **practical and emotional support** creates opportunities that lead to like-minded people inspiring and empowering each other, building more resilient communities, and developing safe and responsive services.

Criminal Justice

We are highly regarded nationally as a provider of liaison and diversion services in police and court settings, and for our innovative approaches to supporting people under the offender management of probation.

We deliver services that aim to better **identify and respond to the needs of people experiencing mental distress** who come into contact with justice services. Individuals often have circumstances and backgrounds that are highly complex and marginalising. As a result they can experience a range of vulnerabilities such as homelessness or drug and alcohol dependencies.

We work in **collaboration** with a range of professionals to safely divert people away from custodial settings which are often likely to be detrimental to their mental wellbeing. This then empowers them to be able to make their own choices and access care and support in the community.



Accommodation

Our accommodation services help people recovering from severe mental distress by giving them the **opportunity to live in communities** with support, as part of a pathway from environments such as hospitals.

Our registered accommodation services provide **tailored, round-the-clock practical and emotional support**.

Our supported housing services focus on enabling people to manage their own tenancies, which means they can develop the **confidence to maintain a home of their own in the future**.

Advocacy

We have a strong reputation in delivering statutory and community advocacy services including independent mental health and Care Act advocacy and end-of-life-care.

We have **highly trained and experienced staff** who are committed to representing people in a respectful, dignified and compassionate way to make their views heard and break down prejudice.

Working closely with other agencies we are **trusted to deliver advice and support** that is in the person's best interest and ensure people feel safe and comfortable.



Stories from around the organisation

Group support from the community mental health outreach team in West Norfolk

In 2018, Together as the lead provider, along with four voluntary sector organisations, was commissioned by Norfolk County Council to deliver a range of services with the aim to transform community mental health support across Norfolk. The following case study is taken from a support group in the region.

William had been living in his own flat and had been supported over the previous year to maintain his tenancy. He had been at risk of eviction due to rent arrears but successfully won an appeal to receive benefits payments. He now has a repayment plan in place for his debts that is affordable and he maintains this with minimal prompting. The landlord is happy with the repayment scheme.

Together has supported William to attend recovery college courses. Initially this was with support for the whole session and but gradually the level of support was reduced to the point where he was able to attend the classes independently. This increased William's confidence and empowered him to consider attending different groups. Social isolation has always been an issue for William and he has very little family support locally. He is currently accessing Together's peer support group, a walking group and a service user involvement group.

The group sessions have led to William developing friendships within the group and members contact each other independently outside of the sessions. We have reduced the 1-1 community support hours for William as his involvement with groups has increased and he benefits from those experiences.



"The support that I have received has definitely been valuable and I have enjoyed learning how to make decisions for myself and having choices. My previous support decisions were made for me and I just went along with it."

Service user's commenting on Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service



Lawn Court Sports Club



This feedback on Lawn Court Sports Club was provided by Relief Worker, Kyma Brett:

Lawn Court Sports Club is a residential accommodation project that was set up by Matt Salt and Dan Ritson in the seaside town of Bexhill-on-Sea in East Sussex in August 2013. The sports club works towards improving the mental wellbeing of our members through physical activity and social inclusion. We fight to reduce stigma around mental health and work in conjunction with community football teams from around the country to achieve that goal.

The service users I work with at Lawn Court attend sports club training sessions and football matches regularly. The way the sports club has evolved over the last few years has really boosted the all-round morale of residents, service users and staff alike as well as creating many awesome bonding experiences.

When the team returns from a match, their adrenaline and collaborative achievement is shared around the building. They reflect on their experiences in the game and discuss how they can adapt their approach. By attending matches the team and their supporters have met various celebrity footballers and played on exclusive football pitches and that has sparked excitement and enthusiasm.

The team have been invited to travel to football matches around the country and meet other mental health sports groups. The club Facebook social media group is very active and provides constant updates so all members to maintain involvement even when they are unable to attend.

Service users have told me previously that attending football sessions has been a key motivating factor in getting out of hospital and staying well.



I have also seen how interactions taking place (offsite) on the pitch have positively enhanced therapeutic relationships between staff and service users. This off-site environment and collaborative interest facilitates opportunities for individuals to access peer support discretely. These interactions build confidence, social skills and collaboration.

The sports club facilities opportunities to support healthier wellbeing and develop social skills. Sports club participants find their commitment to the team provides them with a sense of belonging and purpose. All these factors are key to facilitating opportunities for active lifestyles for the service users and supporting them in their mental health recoveries.

"I really appreciate all of your support, help, guidance and always doing your very very very very best to help and your hardest to try and put me on the right track and everything you do."

Dulcie, service user at Lawn Court Accommodation Service



Criminal Justice Service intervenes for Jonathan and Carrie

Service user Jonathan and his mother Carrie (names have been changed) gave an interview to BBC Radio 5Live as part of a special programme. The interview focused on Jonathan's experience of living with mental distress and the impact that contact with the criminal justice system had on him and his mother. Following a freedom of information request, the 5Live special report focused on a 30% increase in incidents over four years involving a police response to an individual experiencing mental distress.

Jonathan had been involved in a fight and was facing the prospect of prison time when Community Link Worker, Paul Richardson first made contact with him. Paul was able to ensure Jonathan received a mental health assessment, following which he was given a diagnosis of a learning disability which was then taken into account in his dealings with the court. Paul also looked to secure supported housing for Jonathan and supported him and his mother to receive the help they both needed and avoid the detrimental impact that going to prison would have had on him.

In describing his support of Jonathan, Paul commented:

■ **I think cases like Jonathan's are exactly the types the Bradley Report, which focused on vulnerable people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system, had in mind when it was published back in 2009. From the moment we were involved with the case we worked on two key priorities, getting Jonathan assessed by the relevant qualified professionals and presenting the findings from that assessment to the court.**

Those actions had a direct impact on the Crown Court case and resulted in diversion from any custodial sentence. At the same time we moved to support Jonathan to make positive steps in his daily life. Those included sourcing a place in learning disability supported accommodation and securing an approved learning disability budget which Jonathan will have for the rest of his life.■

"I'm very grateful, trust me. I felt like I was in hell & then Paul came along & heaven seemed to be opening up a little bit and stress seems to disappear. Which is good, because I was really stressed."

Carrie, Jonathan's mother on the support provided by Paul

Examples of the work of our Advocacy Teams

People that use Together's advocacy services are often vulnerable and require support around their mental capacity. As a result it is difficult to obtain consent to share any specific case studies around the work the team carry out. The following case study, instead, features fictional characters and situations that embody the experiences that staff working in our advocacy services have had to show the ways they support service users.

Patricia referred herself to Together's Advocacy service and is a Carer for her husband Harold, who has Dementia. Harold's health is failing rapidly and Patricia feels isolated with her problems of debt and feels overwhelmed by what the future holds for her and her husband. She is exhausted from her role as a Carer for Harold and is very confused, feeling unable to focus on any tasks and unable to see a way forward. Patricia doesn't meet the criteria to receive support from a paid advocate and so is diverted to Together's Advocacy Hub Volunteer Scheme where she meets a Volunteer Independent Advocate (VIA).

The VIA is fully trained and uses the self advocacy framework to support Patricia to identify her priorities and review her own skills. The VIA uses person-centred planning tools to engage with Patricia and supports her to design her own action plan, also helping with calls or emails to appropriate services if required.

During her time working alongside Patricia, the VIA recognises that she hasn't had a Carers Assessment, which is her right under the Care Act 2014. Because of this Patricia is able to access support from a Care Act Advocate to support with her carer's assessment. The VIA also discovers that Patricia's husband, Harold, is eligible for a Care Assessment.

Both Patricia and her husband request a Care Act Advocate to be present at the Care Act Assessment.

At this stage the VIA closes the case with Patricia as they have supported her with the issues initially identified and now pass their observations on to the Care Act Advocate.

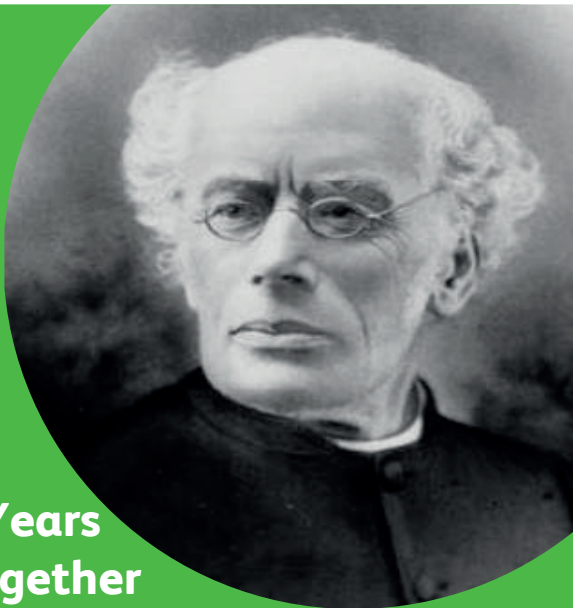
CARE ACT ADVOCATE

Patricia is referred to the Together Advocacy Hub and the Care Act Advocate (CAA) by adult social services for the Carers Assessment. Patricia requests that a referral is made by social services for the CAA to also be present during her husband Harold's Care Assessment. She feels this will benefit them both as Harold has substantial difficulty in understanding the process. Patricia considers the knowledge the CAA has will be vital in helping her and her husband understand the impact a Care Plan will have on their daily routine.

INDEPENDENT MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE

As a result of a rapid decline in Harold's health, he is sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Patricia becomes increasingly unwell while waiting for the input of social services and feels she can no longer support her husband at home. She feels unable to act on behalf of her husband with decisions on his future care and support. The Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA) meets with Harold on his ward to offer independent support and help him understand his position and rights under the Mental Health Act. The IMHA will support Harold at Ward Rounds until he is discharged.

News from 2018-19



140 Years of Together

During the year 2019 Together celebrated our 140th anniversary since being founded by the Reverend Henry Hawkins. Our incredible heritage has supported thousands of people to achieve greater wellbeing and ensure they can access all life has to offer. We strive to enable people who use our services to go about their lives, being part of their communities, connecting with people and making their own choices with individuality and independence.

Our founder Henry Hawkins called these “Life’s ordinary associations” and felt they were key for people to be supported to be part of society and to avoid becoming marginalised or institutionalised from repeated hospital admissions. Today this could be referred to as living ‘ordinary lives’ and we believe all of the extraordinary people we support now and in the future, who live with mental distress have this fundamental right.

Born in 1825, the Reverend Henry Hawkins worked for over 40 years as a Chaplain in asylums, supporting the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of patients. Driven by his belief in the common humanity of all people, he worked tirelessly to improve the lives of people in asylums. He introduced new ideas and inspired like-minded people to volunteer to connect patients with their families, communities and the wider world.

In 1879, through his foresight and perseverance, the Reverend Hawkins founded our charity with the aim of breaking the cycle of recovery and re-admission. He looked to support people who seemed well, left the asylum and then were re-admitted because of a lack of support or purpose in life. He did that by offering people practical and emotional support to prevent them becoming unwell again.

Through the founding principles of the charity, Reverend Hawkins challenged societal thinking. He proved that with the right practical and emotional support, people could lead fulfilling lives without prejudice and without being defined by their mental distress.

We are deeply proud of what Henry Hawkins achieved and his unique legacy continues to drive and influence our beliefs and aspirations for the future.



Service user leadership in Together

Together has a strong reputation and brand associated with working alongside people in our services to lead their own care and support. Over the past year, many of our staff, service users, volunteers and Trustees have been involved in developing our new strategy for 2019-2024. During that process we identified legacy areas that were important to take with us into the future including service user leadership.

While there were some amazing examples of service user leadership across the organisation, our approach wasn’t consistent. As a result service users were not getting the best possible service they could from Together. We also needed to be confident that our approach to service user leadership made a real difference to the lives and ambitions of the people we work alongside.

In order to do that we needed to clearly define the terms ‘involvement’ and ‘leadership’, what we mean by ‘lived experience’ of mental distress and why this is important to service users.

By establishing these definitions, we will ensure that the people we work alongside lead their own care and support and inform and influence every level of the organisation.

The definitions of these terms need to resonate with our service users, staff and volunteers while supporting our strategic ambitions. As a result, the National Steering Group, a group of people with lived experience of mental distress some of whom use Together services, have led the process.

This is the first time we have truly attempted to identify a corporate understanding of what we mean by service user leadership.

We can now describe the benefits of working in this way and how the voices of people with lived experience can directly inform and affect policy and practice, both within Together and externally

“*I was encouraged to visit a local park for a walk and a visit to the cafe there by staff member RB. At first, I did not want to go but RB explained it is a fairly nice day and two other service users who I know were going as well. I went to the park and really enjoyed the experience.*”

Service user from Norfolk Road Accommodation Service



Mental Distress and Criminal Justice Films

Throughout the year we shared our film series on mental distress and the criminal justice system. The films show the varied and multifaceted reasons people can become involved with the criminal justice system and what we can learn from their lived experiences. The people featured in the films had all used or volunteered with services provided by Together and they were involved in all stages of the production of the films, reflecting our core principle of service user leadership. The films were produced by Flexible Films with illustrations by Jolie Goodman and music by Eve McDougall who also starred in it, with her band, the Invisibles.

The individuals in the films talked about their various experiences of mental distress, including trauma, homelessness and their struggles with drug and alcohol dependency. They relay their stories in an open and candid way on how they came into contact with the criminal justice system and the impact that had on them.

In commenting on the process of making the films, Brandon, who featured commented "I felt part of a team, it was good to make edit decisions together". While Abbey, who also starred in the films, added that "the illustrator understood my story but also added her own vision and the result felt really meaningful". The stories told in the film highlighted shared experiences of the criminal justice system, including people feeling that wrong assumptions were often made about them by professionals.

It was also suggested that more training around mental health was needed for police to help their understanding of how to respond to someone experiencing mental distress. Individuals also talked about the need for better care planning after release and that some health professionals added to an individual's trauma by being overly clinical in their approaches.



"All the people featured in the film were involved in all stages of the production and this gave us a feeling of empowerment and huge achievement. Thank you Together, for giving us the opportunity to tell our stories, we hope it might help others. I've learned how important it is to share experiences to connect with others and the power of doing things together."

Christine Pearson, Peer Support Coordinator, Together for Mental Wellbeing

Looking ahead



Chair's ambitions for the future

I am excited about the future of Together and our plans to continue to develop high quality services that ensure the people who use them lead their own care and support. We are in a time of new commitments and new ways of thinking about mental health and wellbeing that has seen an increase in awareness among the public and greater focus from Government and other political parties. As mental distress in our society becomes more of a priority, there is an even greater responsibility on services, policy makers and organisations, like Together, to ensure the voices of people with lived experience influence approaches to the delivery of responsive health and social care.

The NHS Long Term Plan encourages more of us to talk about mental health and to fight stigma and prejudice while also promoting more community support, particularly for children and young people. However, challenges remain, with funding pressures across health and social care building against a backdrop of growing need for those seeking mental health care and support. Together will continue to strive to support people from communities across the country and utilise the experience throughout our teams whilst evolving and learning from the people that use our services.

The plans outlined in our new five year strategy focus on delivering and developing the services we believe are vital for people living with mental distress. Our values, approaches and services will enable the people we support to lead the way, to determine their own future and to inform wider policy and practice. This is what we see as our purpose and vision for Together and what we will seek to achieve in partnership with others.

And thanks to...

I would like to thank all the trustees of Together who give up their time to support the organisation to deliver its strategic ambitions and to reach more people experiencing mental distress. I want to particularly mention and thank those trustees who have stepped down over the last year, namely:

- Helen Davies
- Alison Faulkner
- Beth Lawton MVO
- Chris Munday
- Carole Murray

I am delighted to also welcome new trustees who joined the board this year:

- Louise Bushby
- Angus Cameron
- Judy Clements
- Jo'anne Cutting
- Deirdre Evans
- Donald Mungall
- David Shakespeare



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