

Together Annual Review 2020



Registered Charity No. 211091
Registered Company No. 463505

together
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING



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Preface

by Jess Levine former Together service user

I was a service user of a Together supported living scheme called Elva Court in Bexhill in East Sussex until very recently. I would like to reflect on my experiences within Together services over five years, and specifically to describe a project that I led at Elva Court over the summer called August Art Month.

Previously I had a number of chapters of mental distress, culminating in periods in hospital and I was timid, sad and lacking in confidence when I joined Elva Court in 2015. Through the input and dedication of the staff, I built a range of mood management techniques. The journey equipped me with life skills and has enabled me to live freely and independently without Together support, in my own home, in The Lake District with my fiancé. During my time at Elva Court I was really encouraged to explore a flair for teaching, as I like to share ideas and feel the value of therapeutic creativity is extremely important. This conviction comes partly from my own experience of being depressed but managing to lift my mood through creative activity.



Through attending art sessions offered by other services, I built a range of social skills which hadn't come easily to me historically. I find that having a focus and structure to the day, defined by creative activity, is fundamental to me enjoying good mental health now.

My lived experience was always given credence by the staff at Elva Court, and being visibly active in making art in my flat was always something the staff supported, valued and encouraged. I believe this was a motivating factor when the centre manager asked for my input on an activity for the tenants to lose themselves in, and hence August Art Month was born.

The manager and I submitted an application for money to buy art materials to deliver six sessions specialising in a different art form or technique each week. The grant was kindly awarded by Together and was followed by a period of planning to work out actual materials required, client ground rules, location, benefits to holistic health, staffing requirements and the broader ethos of the project. I wrote lesson plans and was provided with an extremely well equipped spare flat for the activity that allowed us to take an open ended and flexible approach. The other tenants were then invited to participate and the doors to the art room were opened.

The techniques covered were collage, geli plate printing, air dry clay, acrylic painting, marbling, charcoal and graphite drawing and brusho pigment inks. Tenants could dip in to techniques as they wished and all materials were available in each session. The room was decorated with images I'd sourced from the Internet or scanned from my own collection of artworks to act as a starting point or inspiration for participants. The atmosphere was relaxed while also being infused with a lot of commitment and concentration from those taking part. I thought it was important not to impose an agenda on sessions and looked to be adaptable and friendly so tenants could take the lead creatively. At the end of each session I would display all the art work produced and tenants would share their thoughts and feelings from the creative process.



The feedback on August Art Month was that it was well received and gave new opportunities for expression. Creating art is something I really care about and enjoy so it was a pleasure to give some of the other residents at Elva Court the chance to experience that too. Members of the Together team were supportive of the project, taking part themselves and really saw the benefits of creativity and the positive impact that can have on mental wellbeing. I was very pleased to see when I visited recently that some of the artwork that was created in the class is still displayed. I was also told that the team had inquired with a local housing association who provide art classes to continue providing that as an option as an activity for the tenants so I was proud to see people wanted to carry that on.

I learned a great deal from spending teaching time with the tenants and am now pursuing ambitions to teach in The Lake District, currently via video due to Covid restrictions. In the new year I will look to teach families and private students and am looking to engage with community arts projects. The August Art Month was a great foundation me moving on to this next stage of my life and the support I received at Elva Court and from the Together staff there was important to that.

For more information on my artwork go to www.jesslevineartist.com or https://www.instagram.com/jesslevine_art1st/





Introduction from our Chief Executive, Linda Bryant

I think most people would agree that 2020 was a long and challenging year. In March, when we entered the first lockdown, we had little idea of what was to come and how much resilience we would need to have as our way of life changed almost overnight. We have become accustomed to regular announcements that hugely impact our lives whether they are geographical restrictions or national lockdowns, closure of schools and universities or changes to some of things of life we hold precious, such as meeting up with friends and family.

The beginning of 2021 feels different in some ways and more the same in others. Whilst we will be living in another lockdown, the vaccination programme offers hope and whilst it will take time before enough of the population is protected, we are heading in the right direction to be able to come out of our own hibernations. During the last year, our services did all they could to continue their support of service users whether in person or online.



As the year progressed we were able to move more services back to face-to-face support utilising robust infection control measures, adapted health & safety protocols and risk assessments. Throughout the year I've been immensely proud and appreciative of the kindness and generosity of all of our staff and volunteers, whether on the frontline or in our corporate support services. The resilience and tenacity has been remarkable but with that has come tiredness, loneliness and isolation. We listened to staff tell us about the challenges of daily life and we put in place additional support arrangements.

But we know it's not just staff, volunteers and service users at Together who have struggled with their mental and emotional wellbeing during this last year. Research is telling us of the rise in mental distress in the general population and some of the specific groups most affected including single parents, younger adults and people from black and minority ethnic communities, who have also been disproportionately affected by Covid 19.

This year also saw the tragic death of George Floyd in America, which was traumatic and unfathomable and led to thousands of people across the world to express their anger and to publicly protest. Talking with Black staff and staff from Ethnic Minorities in Together, we considered the 'why now' question over the last few months of 2020 - why is there now such a focus for organisations to consider and affirm their commitments to anti-racism and anti-discrimination when many thousands of Black people and people from Ethnic Minorities have died violently over recent centuries as a result of their skin colour. Without a doubt, the pandemic has played a role in starkly exposing the significant health, social and economic inequalities faced by Black people and people from Ethnic Minorities. And whilst our immediate world has shrunk as we are confined to our homes and immediate communities, we have had potentially more time and greater access through the internet to global, real-time news of the experiences of racism and discrimination in society.



At Together, we did re-state our commitment to being anti-racist and standing with all those who are against racism. But we know we need to do so much more – to change our culture and practice, create safe spaces to have the uncomfortable and challenging conversations, and to educate and raise awareness. We do this in the hope that we will also start to create the ripples outside of Together that will support change in the communities in which we live and work.

Over this last year, I have also thought a lot about the story of Together's founder, the Reverend Henry Hawkins. I wanted to re-connect to our roots and to be re-inspired by a man who was a quiet revolutionary of his time who changed the lives of hundreds of people locked up as part of the Victorian asylum movement. Not only did his progressive actions lead to people living independent lives in the community, he began a conversation in society which challenged ideas and thinking and began to persuade his contemporaries that people experiencing mental distress could lead full and happy lives and determine their own futures and aspirations and not only could they do this, but had a fundamental right to do so. Our very existence 142 years later is testament to his resilience, integrity and success in encouraging people to join with him.

The past year was of course a different kind of battle – with an invisible virus that has raged through our communities and impacted in every areas of our lives. It is no coincidence that the values of our founder, which are rooted in compassion and empathy, have been so evident in the amazing people who work at Together.

They have my heartfelt thanks.

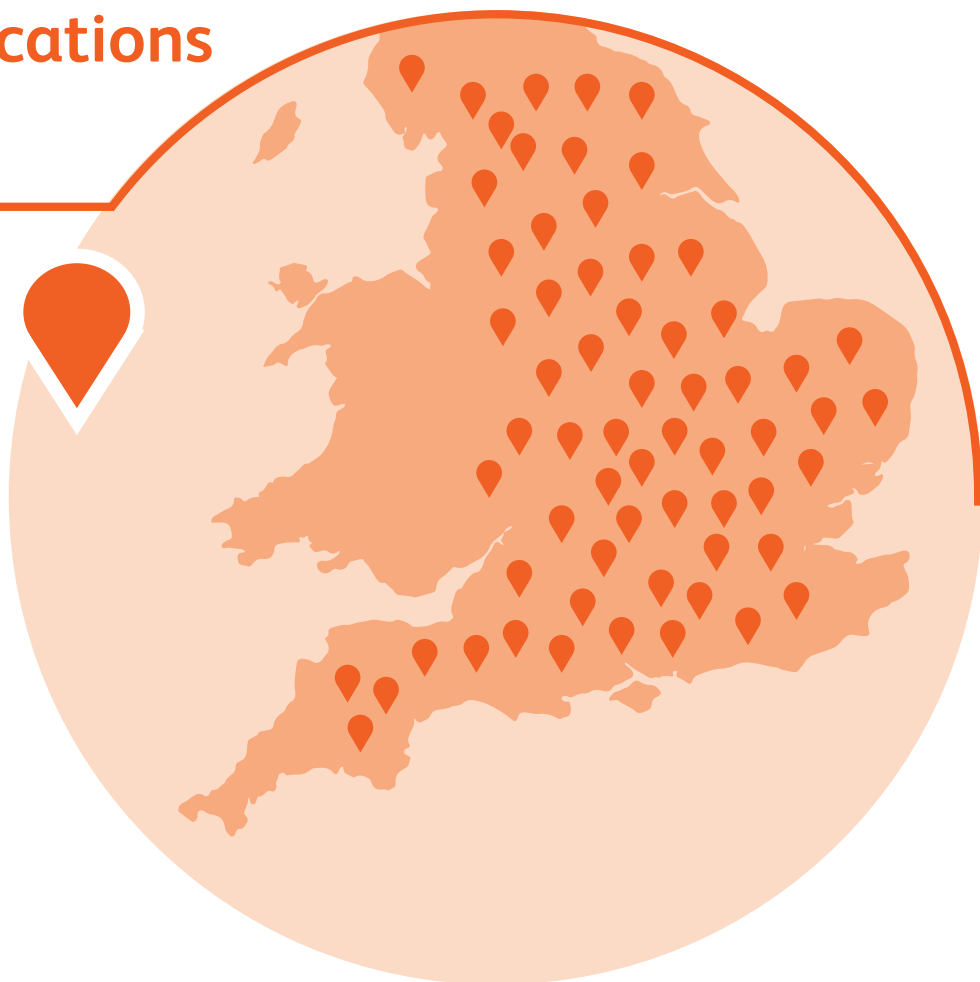
Linda Bryant
Chief Executive
Together for Mental
Wellbeing



What we do

Our locations

We have
76
services
around
England



We have residential
& CQC services in
12 locations

We offer supported
accommodation in
29 homes

We provide advice in
14 areas
through advocacy hubs

We offer community
support in
14 regions

Our criminal justice
staff work in
24 different
courts

Our staff provide
guidance on
10
different advocacy
types

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

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

We work in
partnership with
31
Local authorities in our
advocacy services

Our Achievements in 2020...

Figures refer to the period between December 2019 and December 2020

Our combined mental health services supported

8825

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



Our accommodation
services were used by

498 People

and 41 of those people
moved on to live
independently



Our community support
teams worked with more than

4000

people empowering them to make
choices through involvement

Our criminal justice
services supported

1296

people in police
stations and court
settings

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

140 years



We represented
more than

2400

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.”

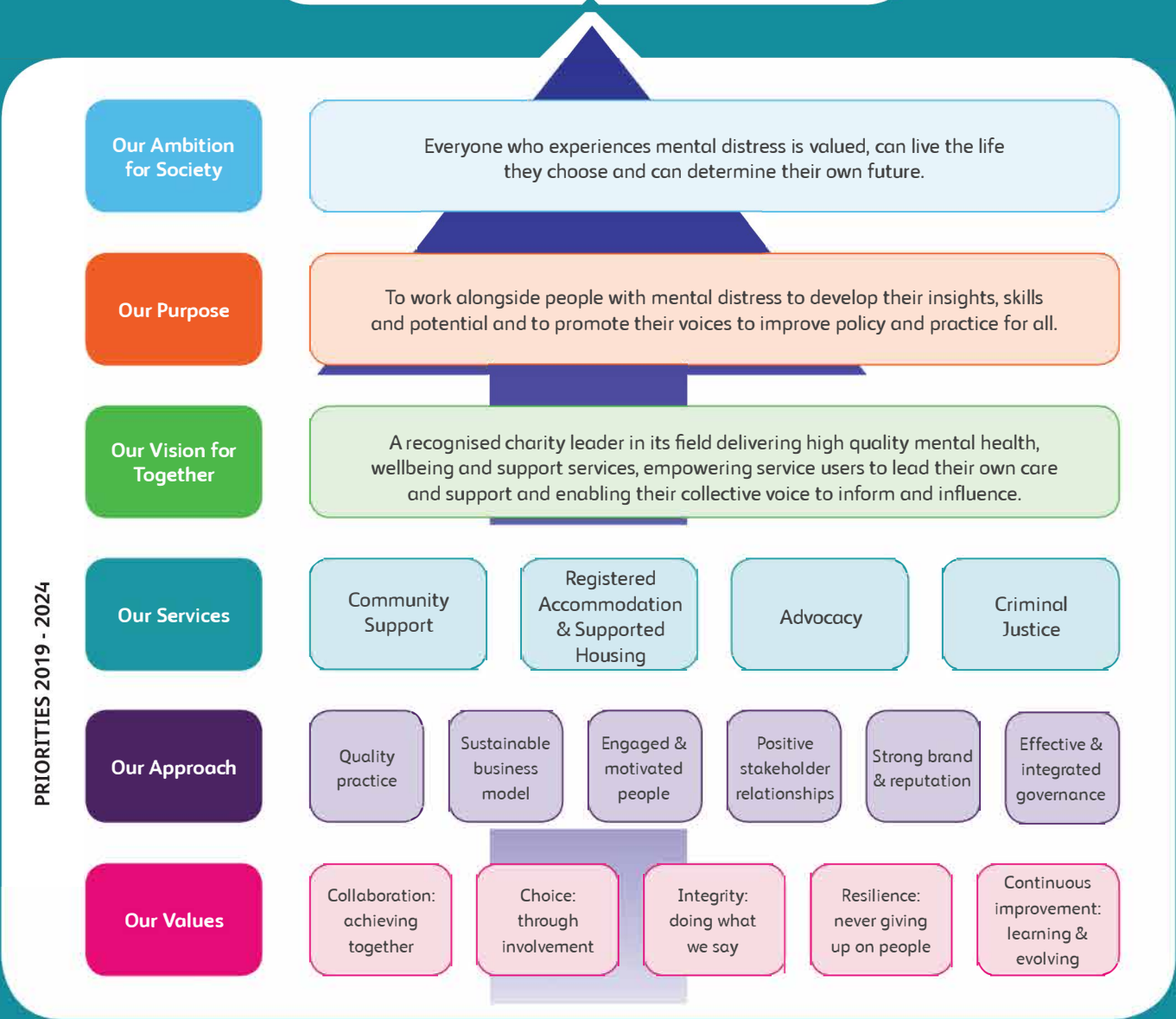
Our strategy map 2019-2024

To effectively communicate our strategy, 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 and brings clarity about what the organisation is here to do. Within the map, Together staff and volunteers can see how their roles and responsibilities contribute to the vision for the organisation, and how they can support better outcomes for the people who use our services.

We designed the map to be read from the bottom up, starting at the foundation – our values, the key drivers of our behaviours and attitudes.



Service User Leadership



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 our 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 court settings, and for our innovative approaches to supporting people under the sentence 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 work alongside people experiencing 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

Mental Wellbeing Week 2020: Gardening at Scotter Road Accommodation Service

The residents of Scotter Road had been planning some gardening activity in early 2020 but Covid-19 and lockdown meant planned trips to garden centres and horticultural ideas had to be put on hold. That was disappointing, although as restrictions went on they came to appreciate the value of having outdoor garden space and looked forward to when they could but produce to improve the space. Residents at the property were keen for a project to fill their time, and as restrictions were relaxed a little, everyone wanted to have a nice space to promote safe visiting options in the garden. Being able to see people face to face in a safe, social distancing friendly space was a great motivation.

When the local garden centre finally opened, staff and residents managed to obtain a nice selection of potted plants and bedded those in with their own home-grown compost. They arranged a variety of flowers in pots around the garden to complement the natural fauna and flora already present. Everyone enjoyed the gardening and found it was a great activity to do together with residents volunteering to continue with ongoing upkeep of the space. The flowers look lovely and each day make staff, residents and visitors alike smile and it's also encouraged everyone at the service to get outside more to enjoy fresh air.

Flowers and plants provide a symbol of hope for many and the colours and patterns brighten up the view which residents can enjoy all year round. We all felt a sense of achievement in seeing the garden grow and felt instant gratification in seeing them all nicely arranged in pots. Plants need both the sunshine and rain to grow and bloom which staff felt was a reminder that the difficult, rainy times are as essential to growth and beauty as the sunny days. We saw blossoms that a few months ago, were tiny shoots in bare, winter soil that have weathered storms to get to where they are now which was a reminder of resilience we've developed. At Scotter Road, food is never too far from our agenda and as in previous years something else we grow is a rhubarb crop which continues to be the envy of many and to provide a generous harvest. It also goes rather nicely with pears from the tree in the garden for a crumble later in the season. Yum!

The wellbeing benefits of the gardening were that it was lots of fun, and a great team effort between staff and residents which also kept us occupied when we all had a lot of time to fill.

After the initial day there was also a sense of ongoing purpose that came with watering and maintaining the plants as well as a sense of achievement when we saw them bloom. The activity lifted our moods and made the space more cheerful ensuring more visitors could come to the property which is so important to individual and collective wellbeing in the property. Plus your own home grown produce always tastes better!



Together advocacy volunteer Catherine Horbury on securing a new role with NHS England

Together has a hugely valuable team of volunteers throughout our services that carry out vital roles providing support to people who've experienced mental distress. Catherine Horbury volunteers with Together's Wakefield Advocacy Hub working on co-produced projects and providing valuable insights from her own lived experience as a person with Down Syndrome. As well as finding time to take up two other volunteer roles on top of her role with Together, Catherine has also just been appointed to a permanent role as an Operations Delivery Network Co-Lead in Yorkshire and Humber for NHS England. We spoke to Catherine along with Volunteer Coordinator Ella Allen to ask about volunteering, the value of lived experience and her new role with NHS England.

Catherine first worked with Ella and at the Patient Experience and Lift Up Friends Groups in Wakefield as part of the Living Well Project. Catherine explained the aim of those groups is to "support service users in Wakefield with a Learning Disability who want to improve their environment". One of the main pieces of work at the Living Well Project that was developed was a questionnaire to ensure the right health checks were in place for service users. Catherine took a leading role on this and told us that only two or three of the questions were developed by others in the project team. All the others were suggested by Catherine and another person with learning disabilities.

That survey is used throughout the area now and enables service users to express their views on the suitability of the health checks they receive through a questionnaire that is accessible. With regard to developing that questionnaire Catherine explained:

"People with learning disabilities are vulnerable and have views that matter and need to be heard. Lived experience is really important to work out the right approach and means the people involved gain new skills."

Catherine has gained other experience from the volunteering roles including presenting on her life experiences, training others and organising the meetings for the patient experience groups. In addition to working with Together she is also a Ward Befriender at Pinderfields Hospital for people with Dementia and volunteers at meal times in a care home locally.

Catherine is excited to take up her new role as Operations Delivery Network Co-Lead in Yorkshire and Humber for NHS England. She will be looking at issues faced by people with learning disabilities in the community and seeking to improving outcomes around accessing services, consistency in care and representing views. Together wishes Catherine all the best in her new role knowing her enthusiasm and valuable insight will continue to be an asset.





Recovery Worker Paul Appleby shares his lived experience

Paul Appleby is a Recovery Worker with Together's Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service (NIHCSS) having previously used the service himself and volunteering there. Paul had been a long term sufferer with his mental health in the past experiencing severe depression and high anxiety, which led to him being housebound and developing agoraphobia. He tried to access services initially speaking to different GPs who referred him to NHS services and other charities but found the provisions there didn't feel comfortable and weren't effective for him. Paul then began using the NIHCSS service and found the service worked well:

"They catered to my needs properly and seemed interested in me as an individual setting goals specific to me. Those goals were small to medium to large, which made them feel achievable and they could range from standing out in the garden to going on a trip on my own at first. After that we reassessed those goals as time went on and set new ones which felt like it worked for me."

Paul felt the team saw him as a person rather than someone with an illness and there was a lot more humanity to the approach than he'd felt with other services. Attending group sessions was something that he found really useful and as he did that the peer support team noticed that he was getting involved and saw potential for him to become a volunteer. The peer supporters were supportive as he took some time to consider if volunteering felt like it was something he could manage and he decided to go ahead.

Considering his own lived experience Paul explained he's learned to release emotions and to talk to people about the way he feels as previously he kept that to himself which has been a big step. Learning from and helping others in group sessions is something he enjoys as he gets a lot from listening to other people's experiences. Paul has since become a permanent member of staff and says the team he joined have been really supportive and helped him adjust. He had worried about completing paperwork and dealing with pressure but the support from his manager and team have been brilliant.

Taking on the permanent role hasn't really changed Paul's approach to engaging with people and he ensures he talks to them as human beings in the way that was important to him. He explained he looks to acknowledge there are problems and tries to see them from other people's point of view and feels this will help combat stigma around mental health. Paul feels he is learning and developing new skills gaining more perspective from being in different kinds of situations. One example of that was attending an LGBTQ+ peer support group as while not part of the community himself Paul does have friends who are. He hesitated initially as he was concerned about whether those in the group would be OK with someone joining who wasn't from the community specifically. As it turned out, it has been the best group he's attended learning loads from it and the people were welcoming and appreciative.

A story from Together's criminal justice on suicide prevention

For World Suicide Prevention Day 2020 Together shared a story from our Liaison and Diversion Team who assess the needs of vulnerable individuals in courts and police custody. By helping people tackle the underlying causes of their offending, the likelihood of re-offending can be significantly reduced. There are many reasons why someone can experience suicidal thoughts and that can be caused by psychological, social and cultural factors, sometimes combined with experiences of trauma and loss. David (name has been changed) is a young black British man who received a conviction as a teenager and was

sentenced to 4 and a half years. He was referred to Community Link Worker, Paul Richardson by his probation officer (PO) for mental health and housing support having been released from prison with no discharge plan meaning he was homeless. David had experienced mental distress previously and was considered to be vulnerable with the situation he found himself in putting a great deal of strain on him. Paul provides further details of his story here:



When I started working with David he was living in temporary shared accommodation provided by the local council. The PO raised concerns with social services and the local Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) as she felt David needed further support to be able to live independently and was vulnerable. Other agencies felt he did not meet their thresholds for support so that's when I got involved. Initially David was reluctant to work with me as he'd had a bad experience of working with people in the criminal justice system. He experienced paranoia and often isolated himself. He had been prescribed anti-depressants, found it difficult to cope in the community and felt his wellbeing had deteriorated since being released from prison. I ensured decisions about the support David would receive were led by him and this made him more open to engaging with me.

David told me the priority for him was his accommodation so I made an appointment with the local council to try and secure a permanent tenancy. It was important to David to find a property that did not require him to share with others as he found this distressing but the council said he wasn't entitled to private accommodation. That was because he didn't have a formal mental or physical health diagnosis and so wasn't considered a priority.

I continued to liaise with housing and health services about concerns David and eventually he was offered a one bed flat to himself. Unfortunately one day, I got a call from David to say he was in crisis and was on a ledge looking to end his life although he didn't say where he was. I immediately contacted the police and his PO providing his address. Because of my relationship with David and my knowledge of him I told emergency services he didn't like to travel and was likely to be either at home or close by.

The police called me whilst they were with David as he had stated he wanted to speak to me and they felt I could help resolve the situation safely. I spoke to him and he agreed to comply with emergency services averting the danger to himself. He was assessed by the mental health team and detained under the Mental Health Act. The experience was a traumatic one but the intervention did mean David had improved access to healthcare and support. Whilst in hospital, family members David had lost contact with visited and started rebuilding relationships which he felt improved his quality of life. His family, the PO and the crisis team reported that Together's support and intervention had been invaluable to David.

News from 2020

Support Together staff are providing service users during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic brought huge changes to daily life with restrictions and advice from the Government and the NHS. The effects of the pandemic and restrictions that came with it were magnified for the people that use our services at Together who have previously experienced mental distress. The pandemic has been different for each individual and our staff sought to maintain our core principle of service user leadership to see how they could help people cope and maintain their wellbeing. As Covid restrictions continued we looked to share the ways our staff were adapting to continue providing mental health support to the people who use our services. We work alongside a wide range of people and in varied situations that were affected in different ways by lockdown. Included here are a selection of responses shared by staff from different teams:

Moni Noszkay, Project Manager and Independent Statutory Advocate, Rochdale Advocacy Hub

"I was offering independent statutory advocacy to a vulnerable individual who has been assessed as being on the Autistic Spectrum. The service user struggled to understand the reasons for lockdown and it substantially affected their routine causing distress. The individual has an addiction issue with alcohol and part of their routine was to walk to the shop once a day which their care plan supported an agreed amount of alcohol."

"I attended a Multi-Disciplinary Team Meeting involving multiple agencies and family to develop a Protection Plan to allow the service user to continue daily activities as safely as possible. It was considered that the service user required this journey as an essential as part of their routine and our team ensured they were kept safe when out in the community. We created a plan to remind the individual to use hand gel when they got back from the shop and a Social Story was prepared to encourage understanding about social distancing."



Jo Jones,
Team Leader –
Acting Locality
Manager,
Boudicca Court
Residential Service
NIHCSS

"At Boudicca Court we have weekly car-park bingo. We are starting a movie night tonight in the car park as well as we were donated a 90" screen and loaned a projector and this will be done weekly. We are also having a coffee morning quiz in the car park each week starting next week, organising a social distancing walking group and a weekly comedy evening so Monday to Friday the residents have something each day."

Adrian Tarka, Peer Support Coordinator, Offender Personality Disorder Pathway, London Criminal Justice Forensic Service

"In helping peer supporters work with clients during the pandemic and the restrictions, it has been important to continue to provide service users with options as part of a service use led organisation. One choice has been ensuring that as we can't see each other in person, people have flexibility over how they communicate and whether that is via text or phone call. People have varying coping strategies for distressing times and while some may prefer to hear the sound of someone's voice for emotional support, others may prefer a quick check in via text."

"I have found it useful to use reassuring language with the peer supporters and to acknowledge that this is a period of adjustment for service users, peer supporters and Together staff alike. That has helped to create an environment of mutual support and interdependence for all involved in the peer support service and ensured if they have any additional concerns brought about by social distancing they can communicate those. I have personally found the maintenance of a personal routine on a daily basis helps to sustain a sense of normality. I also appreciate the opportunity to communicate with colleagues over Microsoft Teams whenever possible in order to bring some semblance of personal feeling to interactions."

White Cube and artist Antony Gormley releases charity edition and names Together as a recipient of proceeds

In May 2020 world leading contemporary art gallery White Cube launched an Antony Gormley charity edition to support mental health charities and food banks. Together for Mental Wellbeing were delighted to be named as one of the recipients of the proceeds for that. The release coincided with UK Mental Health Awareness Week 2020 and the piece itself was called Together (2020), a charity edition of 250 and priced at GBP 2,000 each.

The piece, 'Together' depicted an image of community at a time when everyone was experiencing isolation and provided a representation of the reunions with loved ones that all were fervently hoping would may soon be possible. The proceeds from the sales were donated to Together for Mental Wellbeing alongside two other charities. They were the One to One Project and The Trussell Trust, who are both supporting people coping with the physical, financial and emotional consequences of the lockdown. In describing the piece Antony Gormley said:



"I made this image to support some of the charities doing heroic work during this pandemic, helping people in both body and mind. These open silhouettes suggest human spaces in space. They touch each other – the touch of others, so important to us, is denied during this time of isolation. This work was made as a single puddle of coffee. It runs through the bodies and, like blood, pools, coagulates and dries."

This time of enforced isolation has also been one inspired and connected care: unity in separateness. Through the web from Torquay to Taipei we have become one mind, committed to each other's well-being. Never before has the collective body of humankind been so conscious of its collective wellbeing. What we share through digital technology we can also feel through our common embodiment. We are part of a united system of life, we are together."



"At Together for Mental Wellbeing, we have been overwhelmed by the recognition of our work by Antony Gormley and White Cube through their incredible generosity in donating a share of the proceeds of Antony's artwork, Together (2020)."

Covid-19 and the impact of lockdown has impacted on everyone across the charity – staff, volunteers and the people we work alongside, the service users. We have had to learn new ways of connecting with each other, talking with each other and caring for each other."

This wonderful artwork depicting unity and togetherness has lifted our spirits and re-energised our efforts to build new communities of support and hope within Together and within the places in which we live and work."



Together develops definitions of service user leadership and lived experience

At the start of 2020, for the first time we set out to clearly describe what we mean by Service User Involvement and Leadership and its benefits at Together. We also wanted to further explore how we understand lived experience of mental distress and harness the knowledge and expertise the experience brings to our organisation. Establishing these definitions was a vital element towards our goal of embedding Service User Leadership at all levels in Together, and empowering the collective voice of people with lived experience to inform and influence, both within Together and externally.

The start of the process was informed by people with lived experience, some of whom use our services and others who do not. They included the views of Peer Support Coordinators across the organisation, all of whom had lived experience of mental distress and were working closely with service users at Together.

Following the initial scoping work, meetings were held with the National Steering Group (NSG), members of which all have lived experience of mental distress and, as a group, acts as a 'critical friend' to support the organisation through sharing their expert insights and knowledge. As a result of energetic and informed discussions with the NSG an updated version of the definitions were produced which were tested with service users, and staff.

It was clear that service users wanted to be supported to lead their own care and support and staff wanted to work in ways that empowered service users to take control of their lives and determine their own futures. Service user leadership is also attributing power and value to the lived experience of mental distress. We believe that people's personal knowledge is hugely valuable in establishing the best way to support them and empower them to make their own choices.

We listen to people who have a range of views and who have experienced mental distress in different ways, evolving our services and support to ensure we meet their particular needs and learning from the collective voice. People's lives will have been affected in ways that are unique to them and we learn from their insights to inform our practice in Together through that lived experience perspective.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the new definitions and which amplify our commitment to service user leadership and lived experience.

Service User Leadership

Service user leadership empowers people to make choices that affect their lives, lead their journey to wellbeing on their own terms and to collectively influence and improve services, organisations and society.

Lived Experience

A person who has experienced mental distress, and who can draw on their unique knowledge and personal insights to connect with others, influencing and informing from a lived experience perspective

Looking ahead



2020 and beyond...

As we emerge from 2020, a year where the scale and impact of covid-19 was hitherto almost unimaginable, we find ourselves globally, nationally and locally, in uncharted territory. The pandemic has served to highlight the fact that health encompasses not just physical but also mental wellbeing. And not just individual but societal wellbeing too. Health, in its widest sense, is a priority for us all.

Even before covid-19 struck, we knew that 1 in 4 people experienced mental ill-health each year; that the UK had one of the highest self-harm rates in Europe; that up to 50% of people with a severe mental illness also had problems with substance use and that mental ill health cost the UK economy approximately £70bn in lost productivity, benefit payments and health care expenditure: more than twice the cost of cancer, stroke and heart disease combined. Covid has undoubtedly exacerbated these issues: we can expect growing need from the people we support, alongside new opportunities to reflect on, refresh and reinvest in our services, improving the lives of our service users and giving voice to their needs.

Throughout 2020, staff and volunteers at Together for Mental Wellbeing have worked tirelessly to rise to the myriad challenges thrown at them. They have done so with skill, good humour and aplomb. On behalf of the board, I would like to thank them for their extraordinary hard work, patience and good humour. Working together for mental wellbeing - just as it says in our name - is at the heart of Together's vision. I would therefore also like to thank our service users, for letting us into their lives and enabling us to learn together with them along the way, as we seek to improve what we do and how we do it.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to the board of trustees, all unpaid volunteers, who bring their experience, expertise and energy to ensure the charity can continue to thrive for the benefit of its beneficiaries. They make a huge difference to the way the charity is governed and we are lucky to have them.

And thanks to...

In particular, I would like to welcome on board our three new trustees:

- Ian Jones
- Sarah Morton
- Kathy Pearce,

all of whom bring lived experience of mental distress, thereby helping ensure we remain focussed on the needs of our beneficiaries and whose appointment is testament to this commitment.

As a great believer that every problem is also an opportunity, I hope the pandemic will facilitate enhanced appreciation and implementation of Together's vision: that everyone who experiences mental distress is valued, can live the life they choose and can determine their future. Maybe now, with the learning from Covid to inform us, we stand a slightly better chance of realising that aspiration. Our service users face what might be among the most difficult times in their lives. As we all emerge beyond Covid, Together's vision, mission and relevance will be greater than ever. I believe we are well placed to respond to the challenges, but more importantly, the opportunities ahead.



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