



Registered Charity Number: 211091  
Registered Company Number: 463505



# TOGETHER ANNUAL REVIEW 2021



together  
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING





# Contents

## Introduction

- Preface
- Introduction

## What we do

- Our locations
- Our achievements

## About Together

- Our ambition for society
- Our purpose
- Our vision for Together
- Our strategy map
- Our Values

## Services

- Accommodation
- Community support
- Advocacy
- Criminal justice

## Stories from the charity

## News from 2021

## Looking ahead

- Looking ahead with Together Chair Dr Carol Cole



# Preface - Out of the Darkness and Into The Light

by Tanya Greenwood, person who uses Together's Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service

I was a scared, invisible person living in a constant darkness of despair. I had nobody to listen to me, no one to care for me and I was distrustful in the extreme. I felt completely out of control, that I was severely misunderstood, had no identity and felt immensely disempowered.

However.

Since the Norwich Intensive Support Team, part of the Norfolk Integrated Housing Community Support Service, became involved in my support around 3.5 years ago my whole life has changed. I've gone from not wanting to be here, not trusting anybody and not wanting to mix socially with constant fear, isolation and loneliness to the complete opposite...I'm now myself!





I love company, have genuine friends and have learned that I am a kind and caring person. I enjoy my curious nature, I'm in touch with my playful side and I am a lot happier. Together helped me to realise I am so much more than my mental health condition. I am a survivor, a sister, a good friend and recently a Peer Support Volunteer on a true recovery journey.

My Peer Support Workers offered me support from a lived experience perspective which began to help in a way I'd not experienced before from mainstream mental health services. I loved the fact they saw me as a whole person not just a product of my diagnosis. Along with my Counsellor, Helen, they supported me to find the most important coping strategy – having a purpose!

My Peer Support Workers patience and understanding was really life changing and supported me to develop trust in others. This enabled me to reach out to my friend Holly, who helped me to discover my love of craft and my hidden creativity. As my belief and confidence in myself grew so did my standard of craft. It gave me the freedom to experiment and not fear trying new things. In October, I was supported by NIHCSS to run a stall and lead a craft workshop for World Mental Health Day, something I never would have thought possible in the past. I will also be using my craft creations where I can to raise funds to support the work of Together and to raise awareness of their amazing work.

I have stopped self-harming and feel I have moved on beyond the limits I feel a diagnosis of personality disorder can impose on someone. I have found an identity beyond the often stigmatising confines. In the NIHCSS service, Peer Support is offered by staff with lived experience and this form of support played a huge role in putting the broken pieces of me back together and created not only a better person but a much happier and fulfilling life. This is an incredible thing for me because I have been supported by mental health services for most of my life.

One of my dreams is that there is an end to people suffering in silence. Through NIHCSS support and patience, I have learnt that we shouldn't be ashamed or fearful to ask for help. Let's be more open, every life matters and I am completely certain that I am in no way alone in thinking that. How many more people could benefit from the incredible work of Together and specifically Peer Support which offers a positive environment to support recovery? If we listened to our hearts and not to our heads how different our lives would be. We should live in a world where no-one needs to suffer, be judged, forgotten, lonely or isolated.

Together saved my life, brought hope, gave me a purpose, listened and cared enough to make an extraordinary difference to my life. I now have many exciting opportunities around the corner, I couldn't be prouder to be a volunteer in the wonderful hands of Together/ NIHCSS and have finally found my place in the world. A life that's not been listened to is a life worth nothing at all...Together, NIHCSS and Peer Support listened... and that is where my journey towards recovery really began. It's amazing what you can do when someone believes in you!

**Thank you Together, NIHCSS and to Peer Support and Volunteer Coordinator Claire Woodcock**





## Introduction from our Chief Executive Linda Bryant

As I look back on 2021, it was a year characterised by ongoing uncertainty as the Covid rates fluctuated, restrictions were put in place and lifted again, members of our workforce were required to be vaccinated whilst others were not. We journeyed towards Christmas for a reunion with family and friends but caution was still around us and lateral flow tests became a new tradition. Throughout, our staff and volunteers remained resilient and I am so proud of how everyone pulled together to ensure the people using our services were not only safe but supported towards better mental wellbeing.

However, during the year, the pandemic continued to expose the significant inequalities, social injustice and exclusion that people face in this country. In October we saw figures that showed 500,000 people in the UK were facing severe financial hardship due to cuts in universal credit.

We have known for a very long time the effects that poverty has on causing and exacerbating mental distress. Policy decisions by those in power which impact the most vulnerable and on the lowest incomes need careful and compassionate thought. Without that, we will continue to see a perpetual cycle of inter-generational suffering for families and individuals who face extreme challenges on a daily basis just to get by. We know that 2022 will see more people struggling.

For 2021, the World Federation for Mental Health set their theme as 'Mental Health in an Unequal World'. We live in societies rife with inequalities and it was significant that in October, it was also Black History Month in the UK. It was a time for us to celebrate the achievements of people from African and Caribbean backgrounds and to reframe and rethink our responses to the realities of inequalities based on ethnicity in people's experiences of mental distress.

Evidence consistently shows that racism and discrimination of people from Ethnic Minorities is likely to lead to mental distress. And yet the pathway to mental health care can be unforgiving and unrelentingly adverse. Mental distress is under-recognised in primary care settings and yet Black people continue to be four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than White people.

We know through our criminal justice services at Together that mental distress experienced by Black people and people from Ethnic Minorities often leads them into contact with the police and the justice system. Despite significant progress in providing mental health support in justice settings, for many people who are already marginalised and discriminated against due to their colour, accessing mental health support in a criminal justice setting is often the 'safety net' - the failure of health and social care services to reach out to them before they find themselves in trouble.



Of course, our unequal world seen through the stark prism of 2021 is also characterised by other forms of discrimination including gender, sexuality and disabilities.

Our advocacy services at Together work with people who require support to represent their voice and ensure their rights are upheld. It was encouraging to see the importance of advocacy being referenced during the year in amendments to the Mental Health Act (MHA). It was important to us that we also joined with a number of voices in a concerted call to ensure access to advocacy is properly funded.

Achieving equity of access to mental health support is not all about ensuring everyone can see a GP or a mental health professional. It is about wider care and support in community settings that can help people to stay well and lead fulfilling lives. We see the impact in our community services where people are helped with the tasks of daily living that many of us take for granted. In our accommodation services where people live in a supportive space, learning how to cook, budget, getting a job or back into education and reconnecting with family and friends is all part of the journey toward independence.

This deeply personal and practical support plays a critical role in addressing stigma and disparity of opportunity, empowering people experiencing mental distress to be and feel part of wider society, a respected and valuable member of their local communities. The state must continue to have a role in providing what the most vulnerable people in our society want and need and so it was welcomed to see the start of the government's social care reform agenda. And whilst the government's social care reform agenda is welcome, vital system changes needed for mental health equality

must include greater financial support for community organisations and local councils. These are changes we hope to see in the future and they also need to focus on strengthening the public sector equality duty and making systems more accountable for tackling and reducing inequalities.

A highlight of my year were the celebrations across our services marking World Mental Health Day. I spent the day itself with our talented and dedicated staff in our Norfolk services, chatting with people we support and meeting an Alpaca or two and some rather lovely goats. Our work in Norfolk, in collaboration with Norfolk County Council and other voluntary sector organisations, has transformed mental health social care across the county and is a fantastic example of how we must never give up on people to ensure social justice and inclusion for all.

*Lucy Bryant*



# What we do

## Our locations



We have

**60**

services  
around  
England



We have residential  
& CQC services in  
**12 locations**

We offer supported  
accommodation in  
**13 homes**

The average length  
of a stay in our  
accommodation was  
**929 days**

We offer community  
support in  
**10 regions**

Our criminal justice  
staff work in courts in  
**24 locations**

Our staff provide  
guidance on  
**14**  
forms of advocacy

We provide advice  
through advocacy  
hubs in  
**16 areas**

We have peer support  
using lived experience to  
support others being  
provided by  
**51 individuals**

We work in  
partnership with  
**35**  
Local authorities in our  
advocacy services



# Our Achievements in 2021

Figures refer to the period between January 2021 to December 2021

Our combined mental health services supported

## 10,147

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



Our accommodation services were used by

## 458

### People

& 24 of those people moved on to live independently



Our criminal justice services supported

## 1171

people in police stations and court settings



Our community support teams worked with

## 4085

people empowering them to make choices through involvement

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

people 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

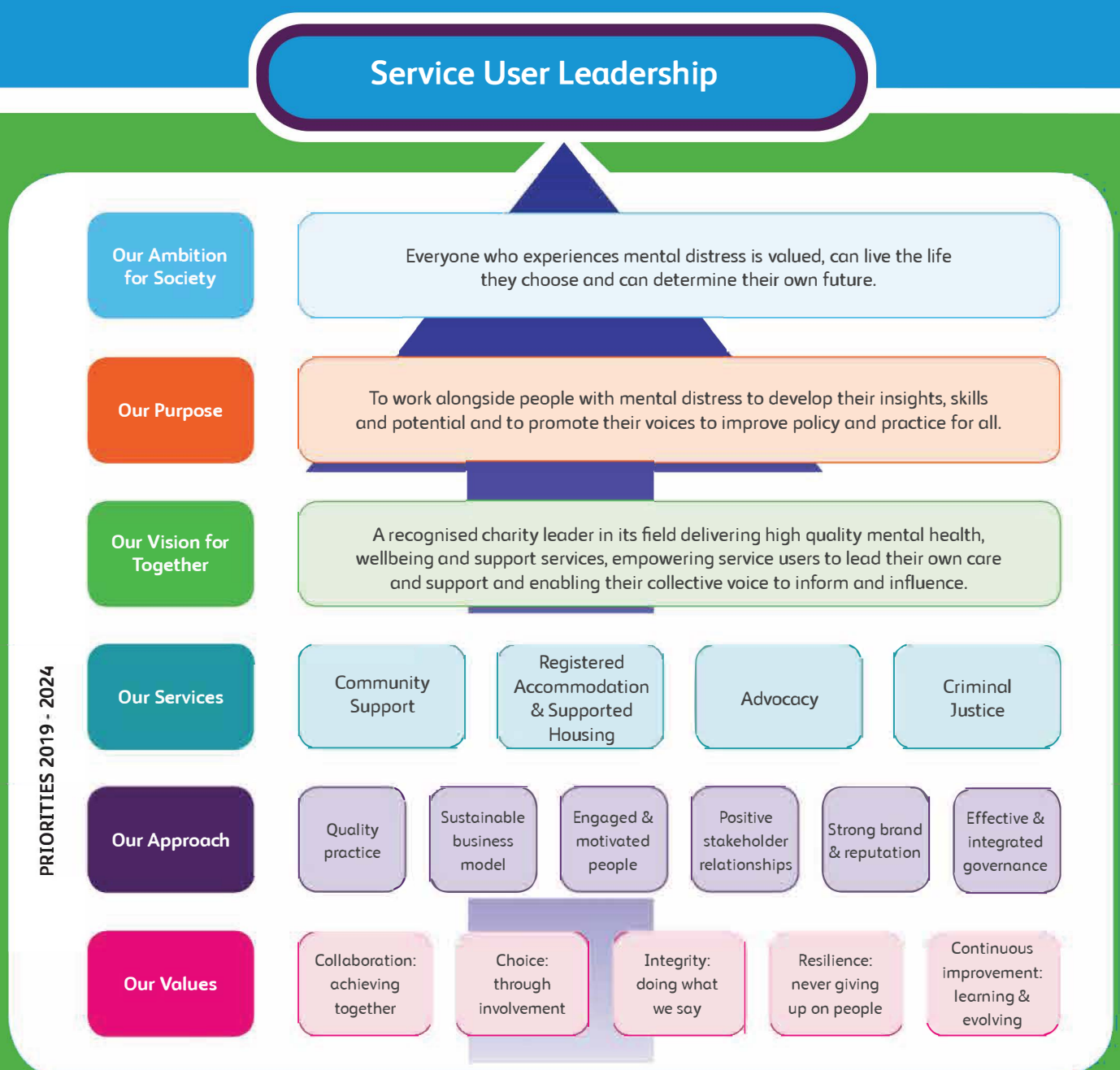
We work together to facilitate choice through involvement, by doing what we say, never giving up on people, and looking to constantly improve how we work.



# 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.



# Our values

## Collaboration: achieving together

- 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

- 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.

## Choice: through involvement

- 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.

## Continuous Improvement: learning and evolving

- 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.

## Integrity: doing what we say

- 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.



# 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.

***"What you guys do has been very helpful, people need to be able to speak to someone who listens and is there for you. Thank you for the support, its nice to be able to talk to someone and be listened to!"***

**Person who used Criminal Justice Service on the support it provides**

## 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**.

***"Of all the support workers and professionals I have she is by far the best. She does all of their jobs and goes over and above to make sure I'm OK and everything is sorted out."***

**Person who used Northampton Intermediate Floating Support Service describing their Together worker'**

## 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 the charity



## Interview with Senior Independent Mental Health Advocate Kerry Davey

For Advocacy Awareness Week 2021 we wanted to show the vital work advocates do throughout Together and spoke to Senior Independent Mental Health Advocate Kerry Davey about her role. The below is an extract from the interview where Kerry described how she works alongside people and what her focus as an advocate is:

*"I work across medium and low forensic (secure) services for adults as well as the inpatient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), for those aged 12-18. This means I work with a range of individuals, from young people who are often in hospital for the first time, sometimes under a Mental Health Act (MHA) Section or informally, to adult patients who may have spent many years in a secure hospital environment. The people I work with have a wide range of needs and it is important that as an advocate, I tailor the service to meet these needs, taking into account how the individual is able to access and engage with it."*

*"With the young people of the CAMHS service, much of my work is around supporting them with understanding their rights under a MHA Section, or understanding what it means to be there informally. When young people come into hospital, in addition to often being acutely unwell, they are perhaps away from home and their families/caregivers for the first time. With this group, I aim to work in way that provides them with reassurance that there is an independent adult there just to listen to them and help get their thoughts and needs heard by their care team. Young people have limited rights to their own decision-making and can often feel powerless in an already frightening situation."*

*elements they can have input into, such as utilising their appeal rights and ensuring that they have an avenue to have their views heard.*

*When working with young people, it is really important for advocates to be a regular, visible presence on the ward so that they can develop a rapport. Many young people will have social care involvement, may not be living at home and could have experienced many professionals coming and going. As a result, becoming a reliable, familiar face is a really important part of the role."*

*"When working across medium and low secure services my approach can be quite different. Many patients will have a clear understanding of advocacy and what support the service can offer. Other patients may not have used advocacy before or not felt that there was anything an advocate could do to help them. It is those patients less familiar with advocacy in particular who will benefit from a thorough introduction to the service, as well as regular reminders at Community Meetings or drop-in sessions on the ward."*

*"Whilst I do some work with these patients around their rights under MHA Section, I support people more around getting their views heard in relation to their care plans and the pathway they are on."*



***"I find one of the most important things to focus on with this client group is fostering hope. Many people who have been in hospital a long time lose hope that things will change, or that they will be listened to and advocacy can often support them to look at options or approaches they have not considered previously."***



# Interview with service user Frankie for LGBTQ+ History Month

For LGBTQ+ History Month in February we wanted to share the lived experience of one of our service users who is part of the LGBTQ+ community considering what the month means to them. Frankie is a resident at Together's Boudicca Court Supported Accommodation and was kind enough to share his experiences and thoughts on the month.

Frankie started attending a peer support LGBTQ+ group run as part of Together's Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support Service in 2020 and at that stage was still known by his female name and used female pronouns. Frankie disclosed to Together staff and peers in the group that he identified as male earlier last year and started to explore this. Frankie decided to change his name and title by deed poll and so identifies as female to male transgender, and as gay.

Frankie is a member of Norfolk's Police and Crime youth board and has used his lived experience of having a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder to explain the stigma and discrimination he has faced. He did an interview on local radio for Pride week around coming out as transgender and had mentioned to Together staff how peer support had helped him feel inspired to be able to do that.

We began the interview by asking Frankie about the influence the LGBTQ+ peer support group has had for him. He explained

***"The group has been really helpful and it's been good to get feedback from people with similar experiences both of mental distress and who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community too. That made it easier to open up and share things with them and I've been attending regularly since last May."***

Frankie described how he hadn't been sure how people would react when he decided to come out as being transgender having previously identified as bisexual but still feeling he needed to make a change. He explained how he'd overhear strangers making assertions about his gender which was difficult to take. Frankie had been worried about telling his mum of his decision but said

***"she was great and really understanding"*** which was really important for him. When asked whether he feels his mental health is in a better place having come out, Frankie asks his support worker at Boudicca court, Jo, what she thinks. Jo responds positively and Frankie says ***"maybe, it's hard to tell with everything with Covid going on but hopefully"*** graciously reminding the interviewer of the fairly big issue of the time they'd temporarily forgotten about.

In considering a question on whether identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community has had an impact on his mental health Frankie pays tribute to staff at Boudicca Court.

***"Everyone there has been really understanding and they really are just there to help"***

We want to say a big thank you to Frankie and to Jo for taking part in the interview and offering so much insight.





## Service user Jasper Thomson shares lived experience of mental distress and the criminal justice system

The theme for World Mental Health Day 2021 was 'Mental Health in an Unequal World'. At Together we wanted to explore the topic with the people that use our services by sharing their lived experiences of mental distress and inequalities or discrimination they have faced.

Jasper Thomson previously used our Criminal Justice Community Link Services and shared open and frank lived experience of mental distress in an interview with us. Within that Jasper explained issues he has faced with alcohol abuse and how they have led to problems with offending that meant he came into contact with the criminal justice system. He first became aware of Together when he was recommended the service by his solicitor as he was facing prison charges relating to assault.

Jasper gave an insight into some of the struggles he faced when being released from prison on probation as that happened without him having access to the medication he had been prescribed whilst in custody.

He was also given accommodation initially only for that to be taken away after a short period and he relayed how he had to move to London solely because of a greater availability of mental health services showing some of the added difficulties he faced in trying to reintegrate into society.

Jasper shared how he felt he had struggled with his mental health for a lot of his life and things had got worse whilst being in prison, leading him to self-harm. He described himself as being ***"in a sorry state"***. The first contact Jasper had with Together was meeting Honor Sibthorp Prottis, Forensic Mental Health Practitioner at Highbury Magistrates Court when she told him she ***"liked to write reports"***. Jasper explained he'd previously said no to support when offered but on this occasion he told his story and he was then referred to Community Link Worker Paul Richardson.

On being referred by Honor and then supported by Paul Jasper says they have ***"changed his life"*** and while he says they won't take credit for it and will say he did it himself he is clear that they enabled him to make those changes. On Paul specifically, Jasper said he ***"helped me in so many ways with every obstacle that has been thrown up."***

Paul's work alongside Jasper culminated in representing him in a Crown Court Case, which led to the decision being taken for Jasper to be on a 2 year suspended sentence and to receive mental health support in the community rather than facing more time in prison. On the Crown Court appearance and Paul representing him Jasper said:

***"Nobody's stood up for me like that before in a professional sense and I can't describe how it's made me feel."***

Jasper concluded the interview by explaining he can still refer to Paul on email if he has a problem with the care in the community he is receiving and they will look at solutions together which is a hugely beneficial approach.





## Interview on Peer Support with Alison Wilcox from Berkshire West Your Way

In March of 2021 we caught up with Alison Wilcox who shared her own lived experience of mental distress and the impact peer support through our Berkshire West Your Way service had in helping her to manage her mental health. Alison described how the peer support group provided a community that then made her decide to become a peer supporter herself and how that process has gone.

Alison started by detailing the mental distress she had experienced which had included depression following a bereavement in her family that had also placed strain on the relationship between her and her family. At this point she searched for mental health services in the area and hadn't actually heard of peer support before and stated she wished she'd heard of it earlier. She explained how she had spoken to her GP previously and had tried talking therapy but peer support was:

***“Something different, this was talking to somebody who understood what I was saying with no judgment”***

The relationship with Alison and her peer supporter developed and Alison looked forward to their conversations feeling they could talk about anything from how she was feeling, to discussing her dog and what was new in her life. The conversations Alison was having with her peer supporter were over the phone, she described how they felt relaxed and comfortable, and the peer supporter felt like a friend.

Alison started to attend group sessions with Berkshire West Your Way specifically on Self-Management and found those useful explaining:

***“Everyone was sharing their experiences and ideas and they were all quite open and you could say as much or as little about your experiences as you wanted to.”***

On the group itself, Alison noticed that while it included practitioners and people training to be peer supporters it just felt like a group of people sharing experiences and there was no hierarchy.

Alison said she thought peer support was just people helping each other in a kind way and decided it was something she wanted to be part of. She took part in training to become a peer supporter and felt while she was giving back to her community by helping others it was also a way for her to take care of her own mental health which she described as ***“a win win!”***.





# News from 2021

## Rochdale Advocacy Together Hub has Contract Extended with Extra Service

In September 2021 we were pleased to announce that our Rochdale Advocacy Together Hub service had their contract to provide advocacy support extended by the local authority. The previous Independent Advocacy contract was delivered by Together from 2016 to 2021 which included Statutory Advocacy, NHS Complaints Advocacy and Generic Advocacy.

The new contract that Together was successful with in May 2021 saw a new model of delivery added. The new contract included Statutory Advocacy and NHS Complaints Advocacy alongside a new Volunteer Scheme. The Volunteer Scheme delivers to the same principles of the Your Voice Advocacy Service that was previously developed by Operations and Development Manager, Tracy Moss and Project Manager, Moni Noszkay in the community. Tracy and Moni delivered the Your Voice Advocacy Service from 2012 to 2016 in Rochdale, which trained local volunteers to support their peers with person-centred Self Advocacy skills.

Moni Noszkay was chosen to develop the new Volunteer Scheme and that will eventually include a Together pilot programme for Peer Support in Advocacy. Commenting on the new contract Operations and Development Manager, Tracy Moss said:

***"Moni and the team have worked very hard to achieve the new opportunity. Together enjoys dedicated staff who work hard to progress existing services in Together and to develop new opportunities.***

***Good work Moni!"***



Describing the advocacy service and reacting to the news of the contract being awarded, Rochdale Advocacy Together Hub service user Michele Reynolds reflected:

***"My life has changed since I found out about advocacy. I have Epilepsy and I was not able to get access to the service I needed as my illness makes it difficult for me to talk on the phone. My Advocate was patient and understanding, they spoke to Adult Social Care on my behalf and explained my rights. I am in a better place but not yet getting the service I need."***

***"My Advocate says they will represent me until I reach my target which is to get a care package and a change of housing. I did not want to be transferred to another advocate because my advocate knows me well and I don't have to explain myself all over again. I felt sick at the thought of my advocate being taken away. I am very pleased that they got the contract with Rochdale. When my advocate is away from work I am still able to talk to anyone in the Advocacy Team which makes me feel very confident in the service."***

## Together awarded new contract to provide mental health advocacy with St Andrew's Healthcare

We were delighted in the autumn of 2021 to be awarded a new contract with St Andrew's Healthcare to provide mental health advocacy. That contract means our advocacy teams work with service users and their families around their rights and care options. The independent service was contracted for 3 years.

We are proud of the strong reputation we have in advocacy and our advocates work to the latest best practice guidelines. We are committed to providing the highest quality support available to people in three of secure facilities located in Northampton, Essex and Birmingham.

Our advocacy services help people who've experienced mental distress make their views heard and break down prejudice. It's part of our commitment to service user leadership and valuing lived experience in how services are delivered.

People who want to use the service can contact Together's advocates any time they wish. They can confidentially discuss any concerns or issues they may be having during their stay. Patients can access the free service via phones which are available on all the wards.

## New Berkshire West Breathing Space service providing mental health crisis support

We were thrilled to announce the opening of a new service in August 2021, which provides crisis support to people who are experiencing mental distress. Berkshire West Breathing Space is located in central Reading and will be open from 5.00pm until 11.00pm Fridays to Mondays including Bank Holidays. People who wish to use the service can call or text, arranging to meet in a safe and comfortable space.

Berkshire West Breathing Space was commissioned by Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and is run by Together for Mental Wellbeing, incorporating our core principle of service user leadership and valuing lived experience.

The need for the service was identified during a review of the Mental Health Crisis Services in the area by Berkshire West CCG. People experiencing mental distress said there was a need for a signposting service with more face to face interaction at times of crisis. The service provides a safe and supportive environment promoting independence, opportunity and recovery. The team, including peer supporters, work alongside people to identify what they perceive their needs to be; develop safety plans, explore coping strategies and provide support.

On the new service, Together Chief Executive, Linda Bryant said:

***"We're proud to have secured this contract with St Andrew's and we're looking forward to working closely with the patients, helping to give them peace of mind when they need it most. People who use our services are at the heart of everything we do. They influence and shape support they receive from us, and the way our services are run."***



***"We're excited to be implementing this new service in Reading and are pleased to be providing crisis support in the area to compliment the great work our community support team at Berkshire West Your Way already do in the community. This service will provide crucial and responsive support to people experiencing mental distress at times when other services aren't as readily available."***





## Together responds to reforms to the Mental Health Act

In January 2021 the Government launched a White Paper on reforming the Mental Health Act (MHA). It set out the key proposals in reforming the Act, following the independent review led by Sir Simon Wessely and published in 2018, of which Together was an advisory group member. Detention under the MHA affects a relatively small number of people who require mental health care, but it has a significant impact at a time of extreme distress. The experience can, itself, lead to lasting trauma if people are not treated with dignity and respect. This is why we responded to the consultation.

Service user leadership is our core principle and central to all that we do at Together, with people being empowered to lead their own care and support. For this reason the strong focus on choice in the reforms was particularly welcomed but we need to understand the detail on how these will be enacted.

We work alongside people in our services who have spent many years in secure hospital settings, many of whom having waited months to be discharged. Despite being well enough to live in the community they have previously been unable to due to an absence of suitable accommodation. As such, we welcomed the renewed focus in the reforms on the treatment of people in the least restrictive settings. However, we were concerned that without community alternatives with the right levels of support and help, secure hospital settings would remain the default pathway for support and care.

We were pleased to see a commitment to the expansion of the role of advocacy. A focus of this should be on taking a person-centred approach to supporting people with a learning disability or autism who experience mental distress, many of whom are often inappropriately detained. It was also reassuring to see culturally sensitive opt out principles incorporated. However, this is all contingent on long-term funding and so further clarity is needed.

The reforms also focus on people experiencing mental health crisis in the criminal justice system. Far too many people are remanded inappropriately in prison in order to access treatment and support. Having operated liaison and diversion services in court settings for 25 years, we particularly welcomed the commitment to speeding up the process in magistrates' courts. This will enable the diversion of people requiring mental health treatment under the MHA directly from the court to a healthcare setting as well as the more timely transfer of people already in prison to mental health inpatient settings.

On the reforms Together Chief Executive Linda Bryant commented:

***“Depriving someone of their liberty to access mental health care and support should be a last resort. It requires decision-making based on compassion, respect and dignity and rights-based practices with the person at the centre. There is much to welcome in these long overdue reforms to the Mental Health Act. However, more clarity is needed in a number of important areas, including how reforms will systemically address the disproportionate use of detention of Black people under the Act.*”**

***Committing to better assessment and after-care is a good step but the root cause of high numbers of Black and Asian people being detained owe a lot to the racial inequalities that persist throughout our society and need structural change. Ultimately without long term funding, reforms will fall short of their intentions, ‘to put patients at the centre of decisions about their own care and ensure everyone is treated equally’, particularly where mental health and social care needs intersect.”***



# Looking ahead with Together Chair Dr Carol Cole



As we reached the end of 2021, it continued to be a strange and uncertain time for all of us at Together. We saw the spread of new variants of Covid-19 and the re-introduction of measures to combat that; any return to normality seemed a long way away. Throughout this past year I have been mindful of the impact that this ongoing uncertainty has had on our service users. I therefore want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our staff for their commitment to Together's work in continuing to deliver the best possible outcomes for people who use our services through the challenges of the last two years.

Throughout the pandemic, we've seen its impact on individuals' mental and physical wellbeing, including in some tragic cases, the loss of life. The effect on societal wellbeing too has been significant. We know that one in four people experience mental distress each year and the pandemic has served to exacerbate the experiences behind this stark statistic. The effects of Covid-19 mean we can expect growing need from the people we support, but it also represents new opportunities to refresh and reinvest in our services, improving the lives of the people who use them and ensuring that the voice of service users is at the heart of all we do.

During the year, our trustees have had virtual sessions to hear more about our services and to engage with staff and service users. This has included meeting with and hearing from our services in criminal justice, Norfolk Integrated Housing and Community Support, Wavelly House and CaRFAS. I would like to extend a particular thanks to those staff and service users for their time and insights shared. Virtual sessions have provided such valuable opportunities for us to hear from people but they are no match for in-person visits and I hope that will become more possible in the coming year. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff and volunteers at Together for the strength and resilience they have shown in reacting to the numerous changes we've faced.

Our teams have shown expertise, good nature and compassion in all that they do. On behalf of the Board, I would like to commend them for their extraordinary hard work, patience and enthusiasm. Working together for mental wellbeing - just as it says in our name - is at the heart of our vision. I would therefore also like to thank the people who use our services, for trusting us to support them and enabling us to learn from their valuable lived experiences, as we seek to improve what we do and how we do it. I would like to acknowledge the important role which the Board of Trustees, all of whom are unpaid volunteers, play at Together, bringing insight, expertise and integrity that ensures we can continue to thrive. They make a huge difference to the way the charity is governed and we are hugely grateful for the direction and leadership they provide.

In particular, I would like to say a special thanks to Lisa Goodwin, former trustee. Lisa served three terms of office on our Board, a total of nine years, with her third term coming to an end in March 2022. Her insights, wisdom and humour were invaluable to the Board's work and are greatly missed. We are fortunate to be joined by a new trustee on our Board, Vicky Johnson, who was appointed in June 2022. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Vicky to the Board. As we all emerge beyond Covid, Together's vision and mission will be more relevant than ever. I believe we are well equipped to respond to both the challenges and the opportunities ahead, so that we can ensure that everyone who experiences mental distress is valued, can live the life they choose and can determine their future.



**Together for Mental  
Wellbeing**  
**52 Walnut Tree Walk**  
**London**  
**SE11 6DN**  
**T: 020 7780 7300**  
**E: [contact-](mailto:contact-us@together-uk.org)**  
**[us@together-uk.org](mailto:contact-us@together-uk.org)**

**Registered Charity No. 211091**  
**Registered Company No. 463505**

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