



together
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

TOGETHER ANNUAL REVIEW 2022



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Preface with Together Head of Service User Leadership, Sophie Howell

Since joining Together as the Lived Experience Leadership Manager in 2021 and now as Head of Service User Leadership, I have been continually impressed by the longstanding commitment and dedication to ensuring people with lived experience of mental distress lead their own journey to wellbeing. That has been grounded in the core ethos of the charity since it was founded by Reverent Henry Hawkins in 1879.

Throughout the years, the way Together define and evidence Service User Leadership has changed as the external landscape of what is recognised as the most valuable and effective way of working alongside people with lived experience of mental distress continues to grow and develop. With this in mind, in 2019, we developed a brand new definition of what Service User Leadership means to us at Together:-

Preface with Sophie Howell

“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.”

The development of this definition sparked the start of another exciting journey in this space at Together. Having the definition allowed time for us to reflect and think creatively about how we move forward with not only translating our definition into practice, but also ensuring it is embedded into the cultural life of the organisation.

Without developing the understanding of how to implement an authentic approach to Service User Leadership we are at risk of mirroring the challenges that many of the people who use mental health services often experience. Those can include power imbalances, not feeling heard or that they are not an active participant in decisions made that impact on their individual care.

Over the last year we have continued to build on our unique approach, ensuring that we create a shared understanding of the expectations of our staff and volunteers. They will support us to deliver a consistent approach in how we work alongside people, both in front-line services and our central support teams. One of the ways we have done this is through the development of a new set of Service User Leadership Principles and a Service User Leadership Strategy in early 2022. This forms the foundation of our practice and details our ambitions for the future of Service User Leadership at Together:

- [Download our Service User Leadership Strategy Map and Principles](#)

Our National Service User Steering Group (NSG) has been an integral part of this process. Our NSG consists of volunteers with lived experience of mental distress who have either once used, or currently use, a Together service, alongside those who have used other mental health services. In addition to supporting us to understand how best to move forward with key strategic pieces of work from a lived experience perspective, our members play a pivotal role in ensuring that we are held to account and uphold our commitments towards Service User Leadership.

Over the last year we have continued to celebrate the value and success of our work alongside the NSG. The group have worked collaboratively with us on the development of our Service User Leadership strategy and principles. Additionally, they have also supported our future thinking around the development and expansion of our peer support model and delivery of it.

As we move into the next year, we have exciting plans ahead for both the operational delivery, and the strategic direction of Service User Leadership at Together. We want to be able to showcase our success, reflect on the challenges and demonstrate our learning. We do that not only to inform how we work alongside people throughout Together, but also to reduce the stigma around people experiencing mental distress making decisions about their care and shaping how services are designed and delivered. By doing that we will improve both the quality and experience of the people who use them.

I look forward to sharing our progress.

Sophie Howell, Head of Service User Leadership at Together

Introduction with Linda Bryant

Introduction from our Chief Executive, Linda Bryant



We started 2022 more cautiously optimistic that we were learning how we might live with Covid and the impact of the pandemic rather than being daunted and continually worried by the unfamiliar and unexpected. We moved from reacting and anticipating towards adapting and embracing, incorporating new ways of working from the last couple of years.

And then, we found ourselves facing global and political instability from another source, as a result of the war in Ukraine. I don't think any of us understood at the start of the conflict how it would impact us and for how long, both in our personal lives and at work, requiring us to adapt again.

As a charity operating in the mental health and wellbeing space, it was also incumbent on us to do what we could to support the refugees from Ukraine who settled here in the UK. That was through helping organisations in the local communities in which we live and operate our services, as well as to lobby decision-makers to do all that we could to support and safeguard the interests of the adults and children who were likely to have

come to our country feeling vulnerable and distressed.

As the year progressed, inevitably we remained focused on the effects of rising inflation and cost of living pressures particularly for the people we work alongside. Our workforce recognised and responded to the concerns of potential financial hardship and debt and the impact that had on people's mental wellbeing.

I continued to work with other Chief Executives and networks to ensure that decision-makers within government departments understood how even more vital mental health social care services are. We work to help people to stay well in the community, which was particularly important as we faced the prospect of winter and increasing demand for services.

One of the joys for me as the CEO is being able to talk with people who use our services and staff and volunteers across the organisation. That means I hear of the extraordinary successes and achievements that happen on a daily basis in our services.

During 2022, getting out and about to services after so many restrictions from Covid, I had the privilege of hearing so many remarkable stories from the people we work alongside. Many of those have experienced years of struggle and trauma, facing significant mental distress and other

challenges from addiction, to secure housing, to isolation, to stigma and discrimination. And then they meet our staff and volunteers who reach out to them, with kindness, compassion, resilience and a true sense of being on a journey together. As a close relative of a person living in one of our accommodation services wrote:-

"Ben (name changed) has really developed a lot more self-confidence, as he has been supported in so many other ways too, and this is, of course, down to all the wonderful staff. The whole team are so caring and patient, and always seem to be able to strike the right balance of support (gently suggesting when it's time to change clothes for instance), without being overbearing. They really seem to care about all service users, which is lovely to see."

Other highlights of the year for me included celebrating the Pearl Jubilee of Avalon, one of our accommodation services in Surrey which coincided with the successful completion of building works at the home that have enhanced the environment, house and gardens. People who use our services, staff, volunteers, family, friends, colleagues from local services and the local community gathered on a beautiful sunny afternoon to sing, hear poetry, eat delicious cake and enjoy each other's company.



We celebrated in other ways during the year including mental health awareness week in May when through personal stories shared on social media, our website and across the organisation, we highlighted the importance of 'Seeing the Whole Person'. The coverage focused on ensuring people led their own care and support and took into account every aspect of their health and social circumstances.

We also spent the year strengthening our ethos of Service User Leadership and valuing the voice of lived experience of mental distress. We launched a new Service User Leadership strategy reaffirming our commitment to people being supported to live the lives they choose, to determine their own futures and to collectively inform and influence as well as welcoming a new trustee to our Board who has lived experience of mental distress.

Linda Bryant, Chief Executive at Together



What we do

Our locations

We have
69
services
around
England



We have residential
& CQC services in
10 locations

We offer supported
accommodation in
13 homes

The average length
of a stay in our
accommodation was
1,476 days

We offer community
support through
14 services

Our criminal justice
staff work in courts in
19 locations

Our staff provide
support through
**14 forms of
advocacy**

We provide
support through
advocacy at
17 sites

Peer support is being
provided across our
services utilising people's
lived experience by
76 individuals

We work in
partnership with
36
local authorities in
~our services

Our Achievements in 2022

Figures refer to the period between January
2022 and December 2022

Our combined mental health services
supported

11,547

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



Our accommodation
services were used by

370

People, of which **16**
of those moved on to
live independently



Our community support
teams worked with

3,900

people, empowering them
to make choices through
involvement



Our criminal justice
services supported

3,276

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

2,645

people through our
community advocacy



About Together






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 clarifies the aims of the organisation. 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.

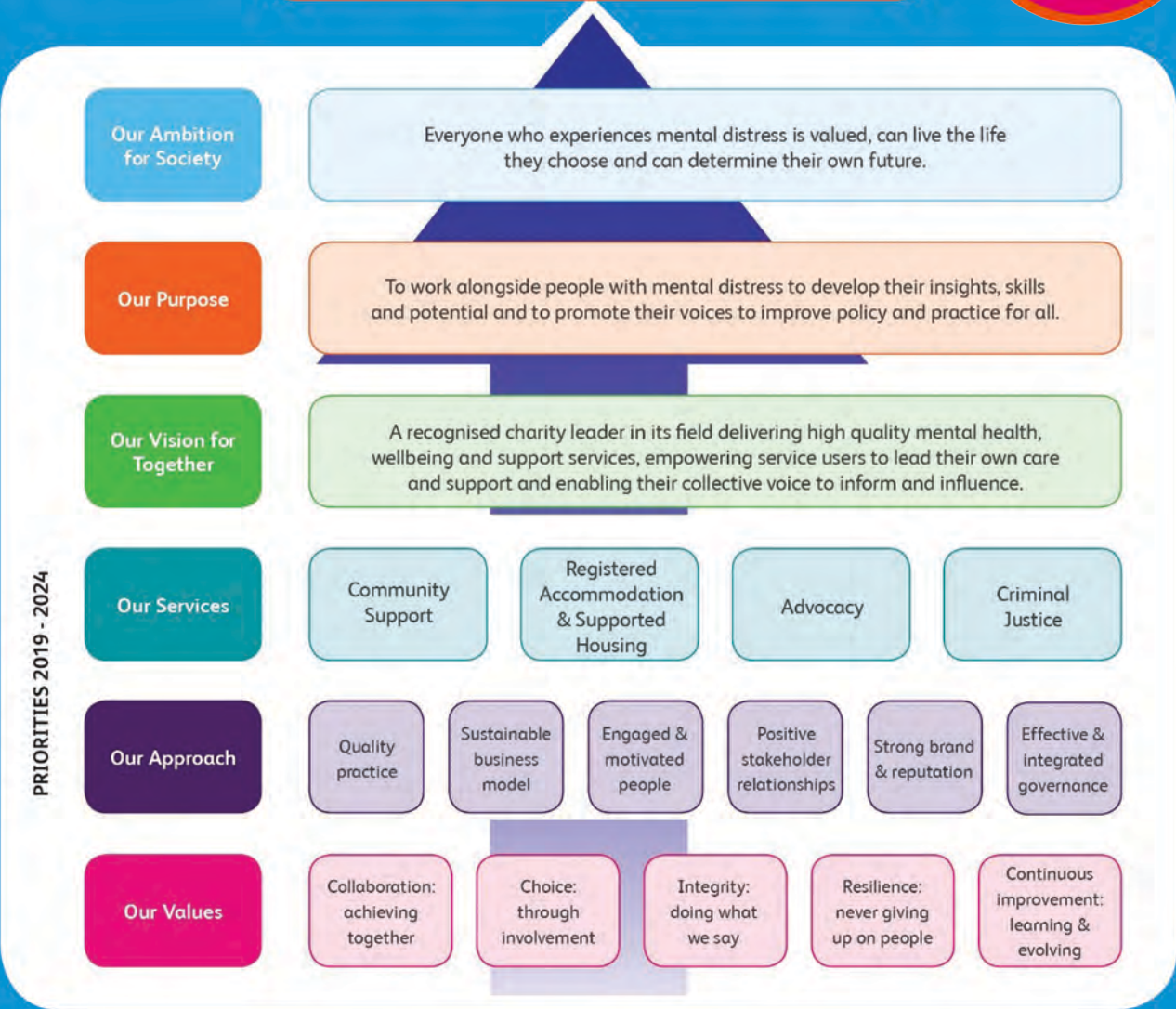


Service User Leadership

- **Our 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 Values



Collaboration: achieving together

- We utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of staff, volunteers and people who use our services 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 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

- 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

- 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

- 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 own 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.

“There is less and less support for people like me and others, but this is one service I can rely on for support. This is my go to place if I need help with any letters, or phone calls I have to make. It's very easy to get in touch if I need any help”

Person describing using NIHCSS Service

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. Consequently, these individuals are empowered 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.

“I've been living here for 5 years. The staff worked a miracle on me. I used to feel like a hunted wild animal and now I can say I've never been treated so well in my life before. They are very patient and caring and the management is excellent, full of ideas.”

Person describing living at Lawn Court

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

Service Manager, Melanie Murphy on ways her service supports people with the cost of living crisis

As the cost of living crisis continued across the country in 2022 our staff worked in different ways to support the people they worked alongside who used our services. This support covered a range of issues, including addressing the mental health impact caused by financial worries, or offering more practical help, such as connecting individuals with services that advise on tariffs and bills. **Melanie Murphy** is Service Manager at **Together's Advocacy Hub Knowsley** and shared an example of a way that she supported a person with the cost of living crisis:

"I was working with a person who had just been released from prison, she had a Corporate Appointee for her finances as she has a learning disability. A Corporate Appointee is a professional from an organisation that takes on the financial management of a person's funds, for example, a Local Authority, a solicitor or a qualified private company. The person was on a pre-payment meter at her flat for her electricity. The costs of being on a pre-payment meter are exceptionally high and a lot more than if people are able to afford to pay by direct debit. The people I work alongside are often unable to budget and save money to pay via direct debit when they are on Welfare Benefits, which means they are unfairly targeted with higher costs."

"As the person had a Corporate Appointee, who set up a direct debit for her, they got on a cheaper tariff for her electricity. The Corporate Appointee was able to do that by reducing the weekly allowance issued to the person each week. Other people managing their own finances are unable to do this."

"A Corporate Appointee is a professional from an organisation that takes on the financial management of a person's funds, for example, a Local Authority, a solicitor or a qualified private company. The Corporate Appointee must act in the best interest of the person they support. Often a person is at risk of financial abuse and is unable to manage a bank account due to their inability to manage their own funds."

"As a Together Independent Advocate I represent a person's wishes and support options to identify the least restrictive option that enables the person to be protected but also access some funds for their personal use. One of the protective options available is the Corporate Appointee. Without this safeguarding of representation, a lot of vulnerable people wouldn't be supported to have the best tariff arranged for them."

"A person can go under the radar for safeguarding support, unless they are looked after by services like our Advocacy Together Hub, Knowsley. Energy companies are targeting people who do not get help to set up Direct Debits and are placed on a high tariff instead. There is no help for poor people without them being identified by key services. There are lots of lost people out there without any help."



Interview with Together National Steering Group Member, Shaun O'Brien



I am one of the 7 volunteers that currently make up Together's National Steering Group (NSG) and I have been a member for just over a year. The NSG is a group of people who have lived experience of mental distress. We use that lived experience to support the organisation to provide direction and inform decisions.

At Together volunteers carry out crucial roles across our organisation and we wanted to look in more detail at the work they do and thank them for it. Shaun O'Brien is one of those volunteers and is a member of our National Steering Group, who use their lived experience to offer strategic input and oversight to Together. We spoke to Shaun and he started by telling us a bit about himself:

"My name is Shaun. I am 33 years old and I live in Hampshire on the south coast. I have a diagnosis of Bipolar and I first came into contact with Together as a service user. In 2020 I had been placed by the local council into supported accommodation, as I was homeless and my mental health was out of control."

"As I used Together's services they also helped me connect with other local services to get support around my addiction to drugs. I can happily say I am now over 1 year and 10 months clean, and my mental health is currently in a really good place. I have been stable for a while and have even been discharged from my local community mental health team, which I never felt could be possible."

"Since I joined the NSG, we have both collectively and as part of separate working groups, worked on a vast array of projects and decision making. This has ranged from advising on the wording of policies and documents, to helping write Together's current 'My Wellbeing Plan'. A couple of us were also recently part of the interview panel for the new Director of Operations and Quality role within the charity. One of our main projects over the last 6 months has been supporting the direction of Service User Leadership, including the launch of the new Service User Principles."

"For me, being part of the National Steering Group has been a great honour and I have found the personal development and growth to be immeasurable. It has given me great confidence within myself and on my journey. It has helped to show me how valuable I am and that I am more than just a diagnosis. It has shown me I can use my life experiences, both the positive and the negative, to help make a positive impact on the people around me and within Together."



News from 2022



Peer Support Coordinator Samiha Abdeldjebar, on wild swimming and the benefit to her mental wellbeing

For World Mental Health Day 2022 we asked people to provide tips for aiding mental health and wellbeing to share with others experiencing mental distress. Samiha Abdeldjebar is Peer Support Coordinator at our Willow Tree House Accommodation Service and so uses her own lived experience to support people. She explained the hugely positive impact wild swimming has had for her in benefitting her mental wellbeing.

I have loved outdoor dipping and swimming ever since I was a small child. Since then, I've gone in everywhere I could – from the Mediterranean to Windermere Lake, Loch Etive to the Irish Sea. Yet I had never swum through the coldest months – until last year, the winter of 2021-22. I took it on as a charity challenge, mostly to raise funds for a cause I cared about, but also as a form of cast-iron commitment: if people were donating money to support my endeavour, then there was no chance I could let them down by chickening out.

Last winter was difficult – two years of pandemic had finally got the better of me. I was chronically exhausted, apathetic, unmotivated. I was struggling to manage my anxiety and bipolar disorder. After months of social isolation, health fears, uncertainty and the constant wall of grim news, I was languishing. Not ill, not quite, but I seemed to have lost a vital part of myself, and didn't quite know how to find my way back to it.

If it hadn't been for my weekly winter swims, would I have been able to come back from this strange affliction? How long would it have taken? Those minutes in the chilly waters of the river or the quarry, reconnected me with the intensity of what I used to have, could still have – excitement, wonder, playfulness, joy. I don't claim that it was easy. On the mornings of my swims, my

insides would twist with something akin to terror. I was taken over by a primal fear – after all, immersion in winter when the air is cold, the water colder still, goes against all our instincts. Breaking that barrier felt like a triumph. At a time when I was feeling weak and disappointed in myself, the act of braving the cold gave me back my sense of self, some measure of strength, agency and self-belief. If I could immerse myself in that dark, freezing abyss, then I could get through the next few days. It was like having a hidden superpower.

Many swimmers, like me, describe the positive impact on mental health. The rush of hormones such as dopamine and endorphins act like a potent antidepressant. The icy sensation helps us deal with anxiety and panic attacks. As we submerge our bodies in cold water, our heart rate and blood pressure rise, and this leads to a reaction very similar to hyperventilating. We must then regain control of our breathing, and gradually slow it down. This trains us to react more calmly in stressful environments, when we would previously have gone into full fight-or-flight mode. Many of us also find we have a better night's sleep after our winter dips or swims.

And finally there is the finding of a community; there are now outdoor swimming clubs or groups all over the country. You might come across one while on a walk along the beach – they will be huddled together in their dry robes after a dip, sipping hot chocolate, cheeks flushed with contentment. It is probably one of the most body-positive and inclusive communities you will ever find, welcoming swimmers of all ages, body shapes and abilities. One of the great boosts for my mental health was seeing a woman in her 80s set off at a brisk pace into the river on a winter morning, then giggle delightedly with her mates afterwards.

I simply can't think of anything more life-affirming.



Launch of Together service: 'Southwark Community Sanctuary'

We were delighted to announce the opening of our new crisis service, the 'Southwark Community Sanctuary' in September 2022, commissioned by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM).

The service is a safe, welcoming and supportive space for anybody aged over 18 years old experiencing emotional distress and struggling to cope. The Sanctuary offers peer-support led crisis support to those experiencing a range of mental health issues. That can be for an individual who needs support with thoughts of suicide and self-harm or simply wanting a non-judgemental space to talk. Our wellbeing workers help users to create safety and wellbeing plans, develop coping skills and support them to access services in the community to promote their wellbeing.

The Southwark Community Sanctuary staff work with a trauma-informed approach, led by the needs of each individual and engaging with users to deliver recovery-focused support. The service promotes autonomy by connecting people with Southwark's diverse offering of community resources to manage and maintain their own wellbeing. Those accessing the Sanctuary can also spend some time at our peer support service to connect with others who share similar lived experiences. Additionally they can attend peer-support led groups and even contribute to the peer support community at Together during their recovery journey.



Commenting on the new service, **Director of Operations & Quality, Emma Edwards** said:

"We are so excited about this new service, which will be such an incredible resource for the community in Southwark. Over the years, our Southwark Wellbeing Hub has supported positive outcomes and has become a vital resource for those experiencing mental distress within the borough. Our new Community Sanctuary will enable us to develop our support offer to people further when they need us more than ever and we are immensely proud to have been chosen as the provider to do that."

Welcoming the opening of the new Community Sanctuary, **Service Director at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, Peace Ajiboye**, said:

"We are very pleased to be working in partnership with Together for Mental Wellbeing, and to have commissioned a new service, the Community Sanctuary, which will be an important part of the mental health support network available to people in Southwark. This service is open in the evenings and at weekends providing a compassionate and supportive space for people to access at times that can be difficult as other services may not be available. It is important to be able to provide this alternative option to people in Southwark who are experiencing mental distress."





Together hosts a Criminal Justice Recruitment Fair virtual event

Together feels too many people pass through the criminal justice system without their mental health needs being recognised. With more than 70 % of the prison population experiencing some level of mental distress, it's crucial that specialist services exist to ensure that people get the care and support they need to break the cycle of offending. With that in mind, Together's Criminal Justice service decided to host a virtual event in October 2022 where people could find out more about the services, ways they could join the team and make a difference in people's lives.


The event featured details of the different services Together's Criminal Justice Team run, from liaison and diversion in courts to specialist teams working with specific conditions. There was also information on all the roles available as well as career paths, presentations on Together's values and information on equality, diversity and inclusion and learning and development. Attendees also had the chance to ask any questions about the services and roles within them and speak to people currently in teams.

The event was free to attend and open to registered mental health practitioners, professionals with mental health qualifications and students studying Mental Health Nursing, Psychology, Social Work or Occupational Therapy considering their first role. The team also encouraged people with lived experience of mental distress, the criminal justice system or both to attend as

as this is highly valued in Together's criminal justice services



Henry Hawkins Lectures to begin in September 2023



Together is excited to announce that in September 2023 we will be hosting a thought provoking event focusing on mental health, called the 'Together Henry Hawkins Lecture'. The event series will celebrate the legacy of our founder Henry Hawkins and promote what people tell us is important to their mental health. The lectures will feature high profile speakers, from the world of arts, culture, healthcare and academia.

The first lecture will focus on the subject of the Arts and mental health. The session will explore the positive impact that art in all its forms can play in the lives of people living with mental distress.

We are thrilled to announce guest speakers for the evening will include Dr Simon Hackett who is Senior Clinical Lecturer in Mental Health at Newcastle University and Angela Samata, who is an arts and mental health consultant, Bafta nominated television presenter and founder member of the Speakers Collective.

At the event we will be displaying artwork created by people who use Together services and there will be performances on the subject of art and mental health from students of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. As a charity we are very excited to launch this new series of events and look forward to welcoming guests in September 2023.

For more information on attending the event or for details of future dates, please email henryhawkinslecture@together-uk.org

Looking Ahead with Dr Carol Cole



Looking ahead with Together Chair, Dr Carol Cole

As we came to the end of 2022 at Together and emerged from the turbulence of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a real sense of normality returning. As a Board of Trustees we were able to meet together again in person, enabling us to focus on tackling new challenges for the charity amidst the cost of living crisis, inflation and ever more acute pressures on public finances. However that sense of normality was slightly constrained when the first in-person Board meeting had to move back to being online due to a strike by rail workers, but luckily we are now all well practiced in the art of the virtual world.

As a Board, in collaboration with the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), we are continually striving to mitigate these external factors that directly affect our staff, volunteers and of course the people we work alongside in our services. This why I, and other trustees, endeavour to get out and about to visit our services, so as to really understand the daily realities for people - those people who work for us and the people the charity supports. These visits are humbling but also affirming and bring home the amazing efforts of our staff and the extraordinary achievements of those they support.

The challenging circumstances experienced in our communities and wider society in the past year, which continues into 2023, means the wellbeing of our staff and the individuals who use our services is at the forefront of our minds. As a charity we strive to support our valuable and skilled workforce to be resilient, with a particular focus on looking after their mental wellbeing as well as working hard to ensure our workplaces are enjoyable, welcoming and inclusive. This accords with our equally strong commitment to support those who use our services.

Our mission, vision and values have served us well in recent years and trustees, along with the ELT and wider organisation, will be working together over the next year to build on our strengths and develop a new corporate strategy to guide us over the next five years.

We are positive about the future opportunities ahead of us, to continually improve what we do and to work in partnership with others to reach more people in need of care and support. We are proud that we continue to be known for our commitment to Service User Leadership, the golden thread that will continue to run through our future strategy, whereby people in our services are empowered to lead their own care and support, inform and influence the decisions we make as an organisation that most impact on them and champion their voices for change.

We are excited to be revisiting and reaffirming our past whilst also looking to the future in 2023, through our first annual Henry Hawkins Lecture in September as part of an ongoing annual lecture series. This inaugural event, in partnership with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, will be focusing on art and mental health following a generous donation by the artist Antony Gormley. It will be a fantastic evening of expert guest speakers, contributions from students from the Guildhall and an exhibition of artistic creations by people with lived experience of mental distress and who use our services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff, volunteers and the board of trustees for their hard work and commitment on behalf of Together. I would like to give special thanks to John Banks, our former trustee treasurer, whose term as a member of the board came to an end this year. We benefitted hugely as an organisation from his knowledge, expertise, and experience. Along with fellow trustees, I was delighted to welcome two new trustees, David Betteridge and Paul Breakwell, and I look forward to working with them, and all members of the Board during 2023.



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