



BECOME AN EXPERT BY EXPERIENCE

What do Experts by Experience do?

They help gather information from their own communities and networks, about what people think is good and bad about services, and their ideas for improvement. e.g. from groups they attend, friends, their local community etc.

They attend meetings that allow them to share their own experiences, and those of others. They help services look for solutions to issues that have been identified.

What skills do I need to be an Expert by Experience?

As a minimum, Experts by Experience must have the following skills:

- Good listening skills and the ability to communicate well with a wide range of people
- Good understanding of health and social care, particularly in their area of expertise
- Commitment to working with people from a diverse range of backgrounds
- Ability to record information, and share that information with other people
- Ability to put themselves in someone else's position and understand things from other people's perspectives
- A flexible and positive attitude.

What support will I get as an Expert by Experience?

The service will ensure that people who get involved:

- Have a full induction to MHT and their role
- Can attend peer support meetings - we hold a bi-monthly peer support meeting for all service receivers and carers actively involved in MHT
- Have access to training - we will provide training opportunities that are useful and relevant to the role
- Are reimbursed for all out of pocket expenses in line with our involvement policy.



Mental Health Together had a stall at the Head High event in Derby helping to dispel the stigma around mental health

WELCOME

Welcome to the third edition of our newsletter. In this edition, we will be telling you about our new physical health project funded by Health Education England. We'll also be sharing some recent stories from our Experts by Experience (Experts) about the influence they have been having on local mental health services.

Launch of Physical Health Project

Earlier this year Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group secured funding for us from Health Education England for a brand new project focussing on the physical wellbeing of people with severe mental illness. People living with a severe mental illness face one of the greatest health inequalities in England. Their life expectancy is still significantly lower than that of the general population. There will be many reasons for this and we are keen to understand and explore them so that better and more effective support can be provided where necessary.

To lead this project work we have a new member of staff working alongside Niki Glazier (Engagement Lead) and Kath Dawson (Project Support Worker). We are delighted to be joined by Aileen Power who has a background in health and wellbeing and is passionate about putting the voice of experience at the centre of decision-making.

"It is an absolute privilege to be working alongside the Mental Health Together team and Experts. Everyone has been so kind and welcoming. This project is about giving people a voice in relation to their experiences of physical health checks, physical health services and their overall view of their own physical health and wellbeing. The ultimate aim of this project is to be part of the drive to improving the physical wellbeing of people with severe mental illness. I would love to hear from you if you would like to be involved in this journey to change things for the better."

Aileen Power (aileen.power@healthwatchderbyshire.co.uk)



Niki, Aileen and Kath

Would you like to become a member of Mental Health Together?

Our members receive a regular E-Bulletin and help us by sharing their experiences of health and social care services.

If you are not already a member and would like to receive information please contact us via email: enquiries@mentalhealthtogether.org.uk or call us on 01773 880786. You might also like to become a formal Expert volunteer (see the back page for more details).

Where are our Experts by Experience having an influence?

We have regular opportunities for our Experts to attend a range of mental health and social care meetings. They do an excellent job of speaking up about issues related to the experience of living with, or caring for someone with, a mental health condition.

We also receive opportunities for our Experts (and sometimes wider-membership as well) to participate in other one-off events. Over the past six months, there have been a number of opportunities to help Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust review and re-shape their services. Our Experts have attended workshops on all the following service areas: Older Adults, Working Age Adults, Perinatal Care, Substance Misuse, Rehab and Forensic and Eating Disorders

Here is some of the feedback from those who attended and shared their invaluable insights:

Rose Harrison - Working Age Adult Services

"Attending this event meant a lot to me. It was the first time, in many years of looking after my son who has schizophrenia, that I felt my voice as a carer was really heard and appreciated. Maybe that in itself is quite shocking but it was so good to be listened to properly for once. I felt that I was able to help bring a different perspective to this service review, mainly related to in-patient services. I stressed how important it is for staff to be kind and compassionate, to focus on hope and recovery and to have inspirational ward managers to manage the care of such very vulnerable patients."

Mel and Elaine Hammersley - Working Age Adult Services

"Being able to attend this workshop meant a great deal to us. After 20 years of experience of mental health services, as a person with complex mental health needs and her carer, we were finally able to sit down with clinicians at the same table and talk together. It felt so valuable to put across our perspective of services and also very enlightening to hear about things from the clinicians' perspective. We were able to share what it is like for us when Mel has to be sent out of area, far from home, for a hospital bed. We also talked about the need for reliable, consistent and joined up support in the community to give Mel the best possible chance of recovery and a good quality of life."



Georgie Lazzari - Eating Disorder Services

"I had a brilliant day yesterday. It was amazing to share experiences, represent many others in similar situations to myself and be their voice. The group were very welcoming and receptive of me and my words and it was reassuring to have Niki alongside me too. I felt hugely valued and important and like I was able to turn some negative life experiences into much more positive ones. As a result of attending the review I was able to make suggestions that were carried forward to the overall plan of action. These included more use of trained volunteers within NHS eating disorder services and an improvement in aftercare once a patient has been discharged. I also brought the BMI (Body Mass Index) criteria to the forefront of discussions, focusing on alternative rationale for admitting patients to services."

Ruth Grice - Older Adult Services

"At the two-day service review I felt every bit as valuable a member around the tables as those who held mental health professional positions. Together we worked on shared problems about mental health services for older adults and how we could achieve improvements for both service receivers and staff."

As a result of attending this event I was invited to visit the dementia assessment unit at Kingsway Hospital. We discussed the difficulties in caring for mixed age groups and challenging behaviour all in one building. I made some suggestions from my knowledge of sight support items. I was also able to suggest where they might find some willing volunteers to provide a coffee shop on the unit and I provided some edible flower seeds for the recreational occupational therapist to plant for patients to enjoy."



Gareth Harry - Director of Business Improvement and Transformation, Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

"We invited a number of volunteers, service receivers and carers to our workshops as Experts by Experience. Their invaluable contribution to the discussions on the development days was felt by all the attendees at the events. Mutual support for developing ideas into transformational changes produced some great work which has been incorporated into the strategy documents. Appreciation for their vital input extends across the Trust. Thank you to everyone who took part."