Mind in Brighton and Hove’s LiVE Project

The Role of the Voluntary and Statutory sector in supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing Services in Brighton and Hove.

Consultation Report

May 2016

“The psychiatrist can be like someone with their head under a car bonnet – you’re not able to see what’s going on or what’s happening. Working with the third sector is more holistic – like having an expert in the car with you, explaining what is happening and teaching you to drive”

-LiVE Project Member
Introduction:

Mind in Brighton and Hove’s LiVE Project supports people with lived experience of mental health issues and their carers to share their views and experiences to help develop health services in Brighton and Hove. During April and May 2016 the project organised a consultation to explore the views of people with experience of mental health issues regarding what the role of community and voluntary sector services should be in supporting mental health and wellbeing within the City. The consultation also explored the added value and skills these groups and projects bring to the work of the larger mental health service providers. This report is based on the feedback from 60 people, comprising 51 service users and 9 members of Mind in Brighton and Hove staff.

Methodology:

Mind in Brighton and Hove works primarily with people experiencing mental health issues and their carers but also contains a service user involvement project for people with experience of substance misuse and/or dual diagnosis. The LiVE Project organised three focus groups (two for project members and service users and one for staff) and a survey, available online and in paper copy, during the course of the consultation. In addition to this, service user involvement worker Rick Cook conducted round table discussions with service users experiencing drug and alcohol issues and/or dual diagnosis at two separate service user forums.

All areas of the consultation focused primarily on the following two open questions, asked of both service users and staff:

- What do you see as the role of the voluntary sector in supporting people to look after their mental wellbeing and access information and specialist services?
- How can the voluntary and statutory sectors work better together to promote what is available in the voluntary sector and ensure mental health professionals are aware of these and how to access them?

We spent time talking with people about what they understood by the term “voluntary sector” and encouraged people to think about a broad range of local projects and services
they had experience of using which took a role in supporting mental health and wellbeing in the city.

We engaged 35 people via focus groups and round table discussions and 25 people expressed their views via our survey, “The Role of voluntary and Community Projects in Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Brighton and Hove”. (See Appendix 1). The survey was available both online and in paper copy and was promoted widely among our network of service users and through social media, including the Mind Mental Health Advice website, on Face book and on Twitter, during the consultation period.

**Equalities Monitoring Data:**

### Age

- 16-25: 7%
- 26-25: 32%
- 36-45: 14%
- 46-65: 3.50%
- 76-85: 3.50%

### Gender

- Male: 61%
- Female: 28.50%
- Other: 7%
- Prefer not to say: 3.50%
Identification with gender assigned at birth

- Yes: 86%
- No: 7%
- Prefer not to say: 7%

Ethnic/cultural origin

- White: 89%
- Black: 7%
- Mixed: 4%

Religious belief

- Christian: 64%
- No religion: 20%
- Buddhist: 10%
- Other (not specified): 6%
Do you have a disability or long term health problem?

- Yes: 72%
- No: 28%

Are you a carer?

- Yes: 79%
- No: 14%
- Prefer not to say: 7%

Are you from an army or ex-army background?

- Yes: 93%
- No: 3.50%
- Prefer not to say: 3.50%
Summary of Overall Results:

Our consultation produced a large body of qualitative feedback with some strong and clear common themes outlined below. Without exception, participants felt that voluntary sector organisations played a vital role in supporting mental health and wellbeing in the city, often in ways, which were described as distinct and different from those of statutory sector organisations.

“In my experience they offer the most flexible, person centred and empowering aspects of mental health care…the voluntary organisations offer people the chance to define their own needs, get involved, use their own skills, plan their own recovery”.

Our findings also highlighted the importance of voluntary sector organisations in providing a signposting role and helping to refer and link people in to other services and sources of support, both within the statutory sector and the wider community. As outlined further below, the vast majority of participants felt there was a need for mental health professionals within the NHS to know more about voluntary sector projects supporting mental health and wellbeing. However there were also examples of good practice in communication and working together, for example within the Recovery College and/or the Wellbeing Service where clinicians work alongside staff and peer trainers in a community setting.

Interestingly, across the groups the same common themes were identified and expressed by both service users and staff. For this reason, the findings below have been amalgamated. (See Appendix 2 for additional feedback and responses).

What do you see as the role of the voluntary sector in supporting people to look after their mental wellbeing and access information and specialist services?

There were a numbers of key themes that were identified by the participants in response to this question:
Filling the gaps within statutory services

“(Voluntary sector services) are vital in supporting mental health and wellbeing – they bridge the huge gap between primary care and secondary care services for people who are really unwell” (Service user survey participant).

Participants felt that voluntary sector services played an important role in filling the gaps between primary and secondary mental health services and in particular supporting people who find it hard to access services due to complex needs, for example dual diagnosis.

“Without the support that you get from the voluntary sector all too often people would fall between the gaps and not get the essential help and support that they so desperately need” (Round table discussion participant at Dual Diagnosis group)

There was a sense that services could offer something different, with more flexible approaches and provide longer time scales than statutory services. However there was also an acknowledgement of the limited resources available in the NHS, with one participant commenting that voluntary sectors appear to “want” the business where as NHS services don’t.

Offering an alternative experience to using statutory services

Participants also identified and hi-lighted the differences between the sectors;

“I think (voluntary sector services) play a very important role. People are more likely to be treated in a human way and not just as a “patient”. There are likely to be more interesting activities that people can get involved with.” (Service user survey participant)

A significant amount of feedback we received focused on how the ‘culture’ of voluntary sector services differed to that of the statutory sector, how it felt as a client to access these services and the ways in which this supported mental wellbeing.

“the vol orgs offered people the chance to define their own needs, get involved, use their own skills, plan their own recovery” (Service user focus group participant)
Focus group participants talked about how voluntary sector services often provided a welcome balance to the more formal structure and boundaries of statutory sector services, giving a sense of being more “in control” and “listened to”.

“The culture is very different – you are a client or a student rather than a patient” (Service user focus group participant)

Focus group participants further hi-lighted the ways in which voluntary sector projects helped them feel empowered by working within the recovery model and putting clients more in control of the services they used through more open access systems of self referral, for example: “with voluntary sector organisations you feel more in control of the services you use and how you can access them…and this is really helpful with improving self esteem”. (Service user focus group participant)

**Offering a more holistic approach to mental wellbeing**

Voluntary sector services were seen as more “progressive and person centred” and more holistic in their approach to the varying needs and issues of clients.

“People are seen as individuals and services are more open, flexible and adaptable” (Service user focus group participant).

Participants felt that their experience of using services within the voluntary sector was less bound by their diagnosis and that that services “focus more on what you can do rather than what you can’t or what is wrong with you”, which played an important role in promoting recovery and personal growth.

“(Voluntary sector services) don’t diagnose, which often means a more holistic view of someone is taken than ‘what is wrong’” (Service user focus group participant)

People also talked about the important role some voluntary organisations played in having a range of services and activities available under one roof, for example benefits advice alongside wellbeing and creative activities. Acknowledgement was also given to some services having a specialism i.e. women or specific diagnosis to meet individual needs.
Providing opportunities for service user involvement and peer support

Many participants went on to identify examples of this more holistic approach;

“There are so many more opportunities for service user involvement and participation in the third sector and these opportunities are vital for improving mental health, self esteem and wellbeing”. (Participant in round table discussion at dual diagnosis group)

Providing opportunities for peer support and service user involvement were seen as important in supporting mental wellbeing by helping to build self esteem, empowerment and feelings of belonging. Participants identified the voluntary sector as having a key role in facilitating these opportunities. For example, one survey participant saw the role of the voluntary sector in supporting wellbeing as “giving access to vital peer led support that is not available through the statutory services”. Focus group participants also highlighted the importance of opportunities for clients or volunteers to get involved with planning and developing services “effective networking and co-production throughout mental health” and the benefits of this to personal wellbeing as well as to services.

Signposting to other services and sources of support

Voluntary sector services were identified as playing a vital role in supporting wellbeing via signposting and linking clients into other services.

“Voluntary sector organisations play an incredibly important role in helping people to access mental health services and support within the NHS” (Round table discussion participant at dual diagnosis group)
Do you think voluntary sector organisations play an important role in helping people to access mental health services and support within the NHS?

As shown in the above diagram, over 70% of survey respondents thought voluntary sector organisations play an important part in helping people to access services and support within the NHS.

For some participants this included an important element of “hand holding” which enabled them to access services more effectively. This was seen as particularly the case in helping people to access mental health services within the larger providers, such as Brighton and Hove Wellbeing Service.

“They may be the first point of contact for someone perhaps because eg their waiting lists are shorter or referrals process easier. They may then signpost to NHS services and support them if there are difficulties accessing… them” (Service user survey participant)

Participants in both the focus groups and the survey felt that voluntary organisations played an additional role in helping clients to navigate the mental health system, described by one respondent as “incredibly difficult”, particularly for people who were vulnerable or needed extra support to access services:

“In the case of isolated and/or elderly people with mobility problems (voluntary services) are sometimes the only solution to make it possible to access services as many loose all confidence and ‘hide’ from the world” (Service user survey participant).
There was also strong feeling that mental health professionals within the larger providers needed to be better informed about projects and organisations offering support for mental health and wellbeing within the community. Over 90% of survey participants answered yes to the question:

**Do you think there is a need for workers within the NHS, for example GPS, nurses or psychiatrists, to know more about voluntary and community sector projects which support mental health and wellbeing?**

![Bar chart showing that over 90% of survey participants answered yes to the question](image)

There were some very positive examples of statutory sector staff referring patients to the voluntary sector, for example “I was referred to Grow by my psychiatrist. This turned out to be a real turning point in my depression”, however the overall feeling was that many mental health professionals had little awareness of projects offering support for mental wellbeing within the community and that knowledge was rarely shared with patients.

“As a long term service user who volunteers and teaches health professionals locally… I find it a little absurd that they often know so little about what is out there that could help their clients” (Service user survey participant).

Service users we spoke to with a dual diagnosis of mental health and substance misuse issues felt particularly strongly that professionals within the NHS had very little idea of support available for complex needs within the community, for example: “I was accessing
services for over a decade before one of my peers told me that there was a service tailor made for someone with my dual problems which could help me.” (Round table discussion participant at dual diagnosis group)

Conclusion:

To summarise findings, participants felt that the voluntary sector plays an essential role in filling the gaps within the statutory sector and plays a particular role in supporting people who may find it hard to access services due to complex needs. As one service user expressed, “without the services provided by the voluntary sector my mental health would still be in the gutter, like I often was when I was using – I cannot stress enough the important role they play in supporting vulnerable people like I was”.

Many participants referred to the ways in which voluntary sector projects and services adopted a flexible and person centred model in working with clients, enabling “the person to explore, explain and find out for themselves”, which in itself gave a sense of empowerment and helped aid recovery and wellbeing.

There was recognition among participants that statutory and voluntary sector mental health services fulfilled different roles in terms of treatment and support for people experiencing mental health issues and of the different pressures and restrictions on services within hospital and GP settings.

“There is a place and a role for the formal guidance, structure and boundaries of the statutory sector but it helps to have the voluntary sector balance this” (Focus group participant)

There was also recognition that the rapid pace of change and development within the voluntary sector, for example due to short term funding, could make it challenging for workers within the statutory sector to keep track of what was available within the community. However, the consensus view was that “the more these organisations work together or aware of and support each others’ practices the better” for both staff and service users.
Recommendations:

“We need joined up thinking and proper, effective networking and co-production throughout mental health so that there are less overlaps (and) everyone knows the best services for people who need them” (Service user survey participant).

Participants were also asked to give their ideas and recommendations on the following question:

**How can the voluntary and statutory sectors work better together to promote what is available in the voluntary sector and ensure mental health professionals are aware of these and how to access them?**

Whilst it was seen as important that this question was also given to staff within the statutory sector, a number of key recommendations were identified, by service users and staff within our consultation. These included:

- Developing a system of active referrals to voluntary and community sector projects pre-discharge, so people are offered a choice and routinely linked in with support before leaving primary and secondary care services where needed.

- Providing funded opportunities for voluntary sector groups and projects to visit hospitals and work with GP practices, for example holding regular information and market place events for staff and patients at Mill View such as the recent ‘Recovery through Activity’ event.

- Releasing clinicians to work within community settings to gain a different perspective and develop awareness of voluntary sector services. As an example of this, one focus group participant cited his psychiatrist who was involved with running a course on bi-polar within the Recovery College.

- Developing a pool of trained and supported volunteers with lived experience of mental health issues to share their experience and knowledge of voluntary sector services, and the support they offer, with workers within the statutory sector.

- Supporting the development and maintenance of a single “go to” database or “information hub” of all voluntary and community sector services, which could be
accessed by both staff and service users. However there was feeling from some participants that this information was already available, for example on the Mind Advice and Information website, so cautioned against “re-inventing the wheel”.

- Developing more liaison and networking opportunities for staff within the voluntary and statutory sector, for example joint training events.
- Dedicating time and funding for staff within the NHS to be released from clinical work, particularly during induction periods, to develop their knowledge and understanding of projects supporting mental health within the voluntary sector. A further suggestion proposed having a funded information and resources post within statutory services to update staff and provide newsletters.
- Participants also came up with some straightforward solutions including using social media to connect groups with bigger providers, having posters in the right place such as waiting rooms, libraries and other public places.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Copy of Survey
Appendix 2: Additional feedback from survey and focus groups