

CARERS OF SERVICE USERS OF THE STOCKPORT MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE – FOCUS GROUP REPORT 13TH AUGUST 2018

A focus group was held on the afternoon of 13th August at the Stockport Town Hall and was attended by six carers. The purpose of the group was to discuss the services provided by The Stockport Mental Health Alliance that their loved ones use.

The attendees explained that their loved ones were currently accessing services from the PPS and from SPARC.

HOW HAVE THE SERVICES IN THE MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE HELPED THE PEOPLE YOU CARE FOR

The group described how the help they have received has been a lifeline. It has helped their loved ones feel less isolated and has, in some cases, given a sense of purpose that they didn't have before. When the service users are isolated it can make them very ill and therefore attending these services helps with that. People with mental health issues can suffer with low self-esteem and attending these services helps with boosting their confidence.

“When you're giving service users their life, you're giving the family... It's affecting the whole lot. If they're feeling better the whole family is.”

One participant relayed how for their loved one, SPARC is a place they can go and feel safe and not feel judged but also can empathise with other people who are around them.

Another participant explained that their loved one had not benefited from the services provided by SPARC as they felt that everyone else who was attending was also ill. They also felt that the service was for older people and had not been suitable.

There was an under 30s group that had been helpful for one participant's loved one but it had stopped very suddenly. This was raised as an issue because stopping things suddenly is not good for individuals with serious mental health issues.

The practical support that loved ones have received through the PPS has been very helpful in terms of helping with their mental health issues in their everyday life, for example, the staff at the PPS arranged for one individual to have the help of a cleaner who understands mental health issues. The PPS will tailor the support to that individual through the one-to-one support so they know what might work for them, might not work for someone else.

Another benefit of the PPS is the fact that they never discharge you so if you need their services in the future, there is no problem with accessing your records.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE SERVICE?

The group described a number of ways they had found out about the service. These included referrals from the Community Psychiatric Team, Consultant Psychiatrist and the Early Intervention Team.

The group also talked about a group that does not exist anymore called the Carers Local Implementation Team. They said this was a valuable source of information for finding out about services that are available. They feel they are not really kept up to date now and communication about services is primarily done through word of mouth.

COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS OF THE SERVICES

The group regularly mentioned how the services on offer change so rapidly, it is difficult to keep up to date with what is available.

“We need more information because it changes. At one stage they were going to change it so you didn't have to be under secondary services so different people could go in. And then that was stopped but we didn't know and then it went back to you need to be under secondary services.”

There are often rumours about what is available and who it is available to. There was a perception from some group participants that SPARC did not have many young people using the service but then someone else had heard that more young people had started attending.

In terms of communication with the services about their loved one's care, it was felt to be poor by the majority of the group. The triangle of care has made some difference but not enough. If you are new to these services it can be extremely difficult trying to negotiate what's going on and who's who.

One participant felt that any form of feedback given to the services can be seen as critical and not received well.

The group agreed that staff from the PPS service will always return your call if you need to speak with them however, if you leave a message at SPARC there is no confidence it will get passed on and you often don't get a call back from anyone. It was also felt that the information would be different depending on whom you spoke to at SPARC.

Some of the group felt that there was a problem with volunteers at Mind answering the phone and not having the experience or capacity to pass messages on.

The sheet was then passed round the room with the list of services on. Not all participants were aware of the services provided and some were confused as they had been told specifically that they don't provide these things.

“For example, practical support such as meal planning and cooking. Well I'm pretty aware that is not on offer. If someone call tell me that's on offer I'll be really surprised.”

Other things that they felt were not available were advocacy and help with filling in forms. The help from the PPS with applying for benefits has also been useful for the carers themselves as this can be a difficult task to do on behalf of their loved ones but in their experience, staff from

the PPS will help with filling in forms if you are absolutely desperate, it is not a service that they offer. The group also felt that counselling and CBT was not something that was being offered.

One participant highlighted that signposting had been listed as a service but they felt that this could not be described as a service as everybody does that and you just end up going round and round.

One of the services that is provided but was not listed was that the PPS will recognise when someone is becoming ill and fast track them back to help with safeguarding.

Nobody in the group felt that any of the services were overlapping or duplicating each other and actually there were quite big gaps in that there was a lot that nobody was providing.

HOW COULD THE SERVICES BE IMPROVED?

There was a lot of concern throughout the group about how the services have reduced over time and that there is not enough provision for those with long-lasting mental health conditions. One participant explained their concern that the numbers of people being discharged from CMHT is getting higher each year and that the PPS is not able to cope with the number of people; the group were concerned that the entire service is based on only two people. They used to be able to do home visits but now they can only provide appointments at the Disability Stockport venue. It is felt that this venue is entirely unsuitable and challenging for people who suffer with mental health problems due to having to walk through a big building with lots of office workers. There is no privacy or dedicated area within the building.

“The drop-in is only two days a week it’s not enough. You can’t say to someone you’ve got to be ill on Tuesday and Thursday.”

There was strong feelings that the one-to-one support offered at the PPS is invaluable but there are concerns with the amount it has been reduced. Many of the services are now volunteer led, which is inappropriate when you are working with vulnerable people, as they do not have the

knowledge and experience to deal with them. They need a service exactly like the PPS but with more resources in it.

“It’s an obligation of duty, a duty of care to these people. This isn’t a lifestyle choice, they are ill. They need qualified help and support to the best of their ability that Stockport can give.”

There is also a feeling that many of the services now focus on wellbeing which isn’t necessarily helpful if you have a serious mental illness.

There was a discussion that as participants of the group are part of a carers group, they had been contacted by other members to express their concern and worry of their assumption that this service is going to be cut and that they wouldn’t be able to manage without it.