

SERVICE USERS OF THE STOCKPORT MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE – FOCUS GROUP REPORT 1ST AUGUST 2018

A focus group was held on the evening of 1st August at the Stockport Meeting House and was attended by eleven service users. The purpose of the group was to discuss the services provided by The Stockport Mental Health Alliance.

Four participants had only accessed SPARC, two participants had accessed SPARC and the PPS, one participant had accessed SPARC and ARC, one participant had accessed SPARC and Stockport Mind, one participant had only accessed the PPS, one participant had accessed Stockport Mind and the PPS, and one participant had accessed SPARC, the PPS and Stockport Mind.

WHICH ASPECTS OF THESE SERVICES HAVE YOU ACCESSED?

There was a discussion around the group about the variety of support they had accessed within the services in The Stockport Mental Health Alliance. These included snooker club, group chats, women's group, Thai Chi, textiles, card making, outings, advocacy, counselling, group drop-ins, and one-to-one support.

A sheet was passed around the room listing all services offered by SPARC, the PPS and Mind. The group said they were not aware of some of the things that were available, such as volunteering opportunities and CBT.

We then discussed the group's awareness of the three services in The Stockport Mental Health Alliance before being referred. Most of the group said they had little or no awareness of the services on offer before being referred. They were also not aware that they could refer themselves for services offered by SPARC and Mind.

We then went on to discuss ideas for raising awareness of the services in The Stockport Mental Health Alliance. The majority of the group agreed that more information should be available

through their GP. They felt that the GP would be the first place many people would visit when they were suffering from mental illness and therefore more information should be available there.

This led to concern from some members of the group as they felt that these services are already at capacity and would not be able to manage if more people started accessing them. They did not want people to start treating it as a drop in centre that is available for everyone.

One participant felt that if they had been made aware of the services in the GP waiting room, it would have kept them out of hospital on two occasions.

Other ideas for awareness raising included talking to psychiatrists, counsellors, putting leaflets in Stepping Hill and Baker Street, and advertising in the Stockport Review. It was felt that knowledge about these services is low amongst other Health Care professionals and perhaps an open day should be held for them.

Lack of awareness of the services among young people was also discussed and it was suggested that they should advertise in Stockport College. One participant described how their troubles had started when they were young and if they had been aware of the services available back then, they would not be in the situation they are in now.

FOR THOSE THAT HAVE ACCESSED MORE THAN ONE SERVICE, WHY IS THAT?

One member of the group explained that the support from each of the services is different. For example, at SPARC you can attend drop-ins whereas at Mind you can go out on outings and trips. This led to some discussion within the group as others highlighted that SPARC also do trips. Different people within the group were aware of different activities offered.

Another participant has accessed support from SPARC with cooking and meal provision, they had accessed support from Mind to help with benefit applications.

“They both do very good work but they’re different as far as I can see.”

There was a discussion about benefit applications and a few participants described how they had help from Welfare Rights with their applications. They were not aware that Mind offered help with benefit applications.

One member of the group talked about how SPARC and the PPS offer different things because they can visit their CPN at the PPS whereas SPARC offer things such as a type of CBT and an opportunity to take part in activities. The support through the PPS is one to one but very limited.

HOW DID YOU GET REFERRED TO THE SERVICE

Participants were referred to the services in The Stockport Mental Health Alliance in a variety of different ways. These included being referred by the Community Mental Health Team, the Job Centre, Social Services, GPs, and CPN. One participant had been sent to SPARC by Mind as they weren’t offering the service they needed and one participant had self-referred to SPARC after becoming aware of Mind and SPARC through an open day at Alexandra Park.

HOW HAS ACCESSING THESE SERVICES HELPED YOU?

Many members of the group described that accessing these services has helped with boosting their confidence. They have more time to spend with you than the GP does. The CPN can be accessed through the PPS and it was felt that service was invaluable although the time is very limited.

“She hasn’t got a lot of time but compared to a doctor she has more. I can’t say enough about that service, it’s been like a life line. If I ever phone up, she always gets back to me. She never leaves me and I would be devastated if that service wasn’t available.”

It was felt that the support offered by all three services in The Stockport Mental Health Alliance has helped with getting a break and getting out of the house. One member of the group had

described how SPARC has helped them with their depression and even being able to cope enough to think about getting back into work. The practical support is also appreciated in terms of help with benefits, questions about medication and help with housing.

There was a lot of discussion about how the help they have had has been 'life saving'. Many participants described how they wouldn't have known where to start in terms of accessing support and getting the help they need to get back on their feet without these services.

WAITING TIMES FOR REFERRALS

We then went on to discuss waiting times and accessibility of services. There was a consensus around the group that the waiting times had been short. One member had only had to wait a week to access a service from SPARC. Another member had only waited two days to access a service from SPARC. Nobody within the group had experienced having to wait any lengthy period of time for any of the services, although one participant felt that once you are in the PPS there is a long period of time between each one to one support session.

“I used to have a one to one every two weeks and then it went to every four weeks with the PPS service. It’s because there’s so many clients I think.”

ARE THERE ANY IMPROVEMENTS THAT COULD BE MADE?

A lot of this discussion focused on the limited resources available. The group described how there is nothing available in the evenings or at weekends. If you are in crisis, you have to wait until the morning and this is not an ideal situation for people who are feeling desperate. One participant pointed out that SPARC do in fact have two evenings a week. Some participants did not think that these evening sessions went on late enough.

We went on to discuss the fact that many services have been reduced due to a lack of resources. One of the group felt that the only thing that Mind can now offer is advocacy.

“I got sent to SPARC because I went to Mind and they said we can’t cover that anymore.”

There was a suggestion that there could be more resources available online to talk to someone out of hours. Other members of the group felt that this would not work or help them.

Again, the issue of how to raise awareness was discussed.

“There are people at home now suffering because they don’t know where to go or they don’t have the confidence.”

A concern shared by the majority of the group was about the accessibility of the PPS since it has been moved to Disability Stockport. It was described as it having no specific place within that building and that it would help if it had a dedicated space. The space within Disability Stockport is felt to be quite public. When you suffer from anxiety it can be difficult to walk through office space where there are lots of people. A venue with more privacy would be more appropriate. One participant described that at their lowest point they would not have been able to walk through an office and therefore this is felt as a barrier to that service.