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Hear Us

Business Plan

2020-2023

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To promote, educate, communicate and empower, for the benefit and interest of people affected by mental health issues

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Introduction

We promote, educate, communicate and empower for the benefit and interest of people affected by mental health issues across Croydon.

We achieve this by:

- Offering a safe space for people with severe and enduring mental health conditions to engage with service providers to obtain and influence the services they receive.
- Relieving the needs of people living in the London Borough of Croydon and surrounding areas who have mental health problems through advice and practical services
- Educating the wider public about mental health to improve their awareness and reduce the stigma attached to mental health

Croydon's Service User Group for People with Mental Illness

As Croydon's only service user group for people with severe and enduring mental illness, our organisation is 100% service user run. This strength gives us a unique insight into the barriers faced by our service users; particularly those also experiencing drug & alcohol misuse or leaving prison. We provide specialist peer support and personal support for our service users – people with complex mental health issues living or working in the London Borough of Croydon. Our practical, regular activities help users to cope better with daily living and helps to relieve their social, emotional and physical needs.

Our determination to help everyone receive fair access to support (whether practical, emotional and social) without prejudice or discrimination is long-proven – for sixteen years our organisation and our committed staff and volunteers have been an integral part of the mental health support jigsaw picture in the London Borough of Croydon.

As the local co-ordinating body for people with severe and enduring mental illness, we facilitate and ensure service users' voices are included and involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring of mental health services across Croydon.

By effectively representing service users' needs to providers we aim to improve the quality of the services commissioned and delivered across Croydon. Well-established routes such as our Open Forum or regular evidence submissions to the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM) and Croydon's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) lead to positive changes in how service users are treated (please see current achievements listed in more detail under each project section).

We work in close partnership with other organisations across the voluntary sector such as Mind, Imagine, Status Employment, Off the Record, the Croydon BME Forum, and the local Association of Pastoral Care in Mental Health (APCMH) to ensure service users' voices are heard. Strong relationships have also been developed and maintained with statutory services such as the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM) and Croydon's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).



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We campaign for change and fight against Stigma and Discrimination – one of the many ways we do this is by trying to improve the wider public's understanding of mental health.

How Do We Ensure True Involvement?

Who We Empower

Our service users are predominately residents in the London Borough of Croydon but we also support service users who receive services from SLaM who are not resident in this borough. To access our services, our key requirement is that someone has a severe and enduring mental health condition.

Last year – 2018 to 2019 – we reached nearly 3,700 people (3676) with the vast majority in receipt of SLaM services. We know this as we record ethnographic and other data for all service users.

How We Engage

We consult with our service users regularly who are keen to have their say in service design and delivery. Since all our trustees, staff and volunteers have lived experience of mental illness, we strongly support the involvement of service users in the design and delivery of any project. We also include our service users in project development. One example of many, once a year, at one of the regular Open Forums, we run focus groups for all service users to find out what subjects they would like to cover and what guest speakers they would like to invite over the coming year, and feedback on the plan at the next Open Forum (to ensure that we have got the planning right).

We evaluate everything we do for its impact on our service users. We involve everyone whatever their state of mind and refuse to discriminate based on behaviour which is often brought about by their situation. The monitoring and evaluation section details how we actually do this through meaningful involvement in their care, treatment and financial support as well as determining what they want to see in terms of both our services and the services provided by statutory and other voluntary agencies and how they want to receive communications.

How We Developed the Plan

Our trustees set up a service development working party made up of two trustees (Angela Mitchell and Abbi Greene), the CEO, Tim Oldham, and the Service Development Manager, Eleanor Yates.

The group met early April 2019 to develop our strategic approach and assess current work undertaken by Hear Us.



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We wanted full involvement of all staff, volunteers and service users to develop future requirements for Hear Us services over the next 2 years. We also recognised that we have limited resources (especially time) so wanted to make the process as easy as possible.

So we involved staff and volunteers by holding four meetings (one for each potential project / service). We also used one of our Open Forums to gather input from service users on the future direction of the organisation, using appropriate mechanisms to ensure everyone understood what was being asked. We asked them to tell us what key services they'd like in the future, got their views on services provided by statutory and voluntary providers and asked them to feedback on the work Hear Us has done in the past.

This document has been produced as a result of this process. It is ongoing. Staff and trustees are reviewing this plan, adding information as issues change.

How People Find Our Services

A key resource is our 'Guide to Croydon's Mental Health and Wellbeing Services' published for anybody – those experiencing mental health problems, carers and professionals alike – as a comprehensive, up to date, information guide which covers all of the London Borough of Croydon's mental health and wellbeing services. This extensive guide includes statutory and voluntary services, details of our peer support and social groups, and much other useful information; and is also on our website.

We also have a great website - www.hear-us.org – which is regularly updated and full of useful information e.g. Hear Us' Peer Support sessions. We find that many people use it, including carers, professionals and the wider public. We regularly receive feedback from people who have used the website and the impact of the information available on their lives. We regularly post to facebook and other social media to demonstrate the work we do.

How We Work with Others

Hear Us believes strongly in partnership working to provide maximum holistic support but we also acknowledge our specialist skills and experience enable us to support our service users as we are 100% service user led and run. We work closely with the organisations listed, across a range of projects, and in different guises, to support service users.

Frequent/ regular referrals for service users come from **Croydon's Community Mental Health Teams** (psychiatrists), **many Croydon GPs**, **the Probation Service**, specialist organisations such as **Evergreen Lodge Residential Care Home** (users with complex forensic histories), **Turning Point** (clients with drug and alcohol issues) or **Whitworth Road Offenders' Hostel** (ex-prisoners), supported housing schemes such as **Evolve (Palmer House)**, **Lookahead**, **Orbit Housing** and **Hestia Housing Support** and many other organisations sending people seeking to access relevant social or leisure activities as well as peer support.

In 2018-2019, we helped nearly **3500 people**, their families, friends and professionals linked to those with mental illness who wanted to help a service user find social and leisure activities, be able to travel easily (freedom passes & blue badges support), get relevant expert peer support to address welfare surgeries' issues, or simply help them find a safe space where they will be supported, listened to, and engaged into the wider community.



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We achieve this by having strong ongoing two-way relationships with various statutory agencies. One particular one to highlight: **Croydon Jobcentre** refer clients to us whom they identify as having additional emotional health needs and in return they provide additional expertise to ensure service users get the best possible outcome (welfare benefits). We feed into the work of **South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM)**, both operationally and strategically, and have regular meetings with **Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)** to review the work we do and the impact on service users.

Sitting within the voluntary sector, we have regular valuable contact with day centres such as **Imagine Day** and, in return, we refer service users to them for day support, **Mind in Croydon** and **Association of Pastoral Care in Mental Health** (we work side by side to help more complex welfare benefits cases), and **Status Employment** (they help our clients find work experience or employment, and we return the favour through welfare surgeries).

We are also pleased to have good referral partnerships with organisations that enable us to concentrate on our user consultation, engagement and involvement work whilst being reassured that our service users are getting the additional expert support they might need. Organisations such as the **Citizens Advice** covers Housing & Debt, **Food Banks** provide nutrition, **Christians Against Poverty** support those with serious debt, the **South West London Law Centre (Croydon / Sutton)** deal with expert legal matters e.g. tribunals and **Active Minds** take our referrals for sports.

Finally we also attend regular meetings with a wide range of agencies and partnerships to ensure the needs of those with severe, enduring mental illness are heard and addressed across Croydon. We sit on the Mental Health Programme Board and Mental Health Transformation community Pathway Delivery Group as a service user representative. We influence the design, commissioning and delivery of mental health services. We have had a big influence on the plan to introduce hubs as part of the CCG's transformation work.



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Current and Future Projects

Over recent years, Hear Us has grown into a dynamic, resourceful 'pack a punch' charity, with aims and objective not just being met but solidly delivered. Over the next three years, we will build on these successes: continuing to deliver high quality services; having a positive impact on the wider community; ensuring more effective commissioning and delivery of Croydon's mental health services; and supporting providers (through systematic monitoring of services and open dialogue) to deliver good quality statutory and voluntary support to our service users. As a well-established and respected mental health charity (respected by service users, carers, the wider voluntary sector and many statutory services), we work hard to deliver support and care for the mental health community.

Some of the ways in which we work hard and deliver

- We represent the views of people that use mental health services in Croydon to service providers and commissioners
- We contribute to the local mental health promotion agenda, and promote positive mental health within the local community
- We promote mutual respect and equality of rights and opportunities, regardless of disability, with particular reference to local mental health service users and service survivors
- We actively campaign with users on issues raised by users themselves and actively oppose discrimination against service users in Croydon for improvements in local mental health services.
- We reach out to all service users to encourage and support participation in the Open Forum and Croydon User Council
- We offer service users a communication platform for the constructive exchange of ideas on issues affecting them e.g. user council in which current concerns are discussed and debated.
- We provide a wide range of information about local and national services and up and coming issues that concern users of mental health services in Croydon.

Our holistic approach (which includes support to access debt advice, social activities, counselling, talking therapies, Motability services, housing support, floating support, direct payments, GP services and more) enables us to ensure service users manage their circumstances / situation well (preventing crisis from triggering negative health and well-being). The next section lists our five project areas: Linkworkers; peer support; Reachout Challenge; Open Forum; and Effective Organisation. We hope that each section will help you find out a bit more about why, how and when we deliver these particular projects.

Linkworking Project

We enable people in crisis to raise issues with service providers so their care and treatment meets their needs; supported by volunteers like them

2019 Activities



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We currently run seventeen Linkworking peer support sessions a week on Croydon's mental health inpatient wards at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and in Croydon's community Mental Health resource centres. After sessions, we run handovers with ward / service managers where we raise over 4,000 issues each year to ensure service user immediate needs' are addressed. The Linkworkers Project also supports service users to understand their treatment; services available to them and brings hope during dark and difficult times. Our outcomes and qualitative data provide insight for the CCG and have a positive impact on local commissioning as it enables providers and commissioners to spend strategically through our work to identify the strategic issues, which exist in mental health services.

We introduced a new service called Linkwork Champions, in October 2018, to work closely alongside SLAM service leads, ward managers and occupational therapists. Meeting monthly, our champions identify areas of concern and make recommendations for change that have direct impact on people's recovery and speed up discharge from inpatient services. This works builds on previous learning from our patient engagement work (helping people with mental illness develop a voice in their care).

From April 2018 to March 2019 we reached 2782 vulnerable service users to discuss their care and treatment (an increase of 9% (228) from the year before). We achieve this through 20 to 25 Linkworkers volunteering at any one time. Their volunteer role is to connect with people with a severe mental illness. We train them to 'Listen', 'Support' and 'Signpost' their peers to aid their recovery, improve their wellbeing and reduce their isolation. Peer navigators provide a new tool for the health services, in that we aid recovery (whilst costing far less than statutory interventions).

Our peer navigators (like the service users they meet) have recently or are currently using the same mental health services provided by South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLAM). Most volunteers join after encountering this project themselves. People are given back their dignity – we give them time to talk about the confusion of thoughts and voices in their heads, anxieties and worries that will not leave them and delusions of paranoia. Linkworkers are not judgemental – they experience these same symptoms too.

What are the problems or issues that this project addresses?

Linkworkers meet with people with a severe mental illness, the most vulnerable people in our communities. Most are sectioned on locked psychiatric wards, isolated away from friends and family. Psychiatric wards can feel clinical and cold environments and are noisy, lonely, scary places, filled with tension. Many service users pace up and down the ward corridors like caged animals, often forced onto a regime of powerful medication, which sinks them into vegetated state.

Our Linkworkers break the monotony of ward life – for many on the ward, Linkworkers are the only visitors they get. Psychiatric wards are merely containment areas where doctors medicate people in severe crisis or psychosis. They are not effective at supporting vulnerable people to move towards recovery (they struggle due to underfunding of mental health services and staff shortages).

Linkworkers are able to connect with service users because of their own lived experiences. People with mental illness die 15 to 20 years earlier than people without an illness. People with a mental illness, particularly men, dis-engage with health services (GPs, hospital and



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even dentists). Most service users also struggle with finances due to additional issues and then use cigarettes, drugs and alcohol to self-medicate.

Patients' preferences matter: stop the silent misdiagnosis - (Mulley et al 2012) highlighted how 'silent misdiagnosis' arises when doctors fail to consult patients about what care they would actually like. Its implications for both better patient care and better use of NHS resources are significant.

These are just two examples of many of how our Linkworkers have helped address key issues:

- People on certain wards were not being given access to fresh air or outdoor space so argued for secure courtyards / garden to be opened several times a day, regularly on all wards
- Lack of staff time with patients e.g. patients left for 45 minutes waiting for communication to take place after discussion. Discussions around potential hiring of admin staff to reduce doctor / nurses' admin load and so increase support. This enables doctors to discuss patients' care plans leading to less AWOL

Acting as a link between staff and users, peer navigators achieve great results:

- Listen: "We are there to listen and not to judge. Having had our own mental health problems, we know how helpful it is to have someone to talk to in confidence and have their own lived experiences of services. As Linkworkers, we offer a safe space to talk about any issues without any fear of repercussions, so that service users can get the help to feel better."
- Support: "If any issues are raised or someone shares something that is worrying them, we are there to support them and try to help get the issues resolved. To do this, we can either support them to raise the issue themselves, or raise the issues on their behalf, anonymously or directly, depending on what is preferred."
- Signpost: "Sometimes what's on someone's mind might be something that we can't help with directly but we can usually point them in the direction to get help. For example, someone might be worried about benefits or need support to find work. In these cases, we can usually let them know about other organisations that are available to help."

Looking Forward to 2020

With the success of our existing project, we are keen to expand our work into neighbouring boroughs covered by SLaM. We hope to start with the LB of Lewisham first, to support service users to improve their mental health and wellbeing and support them on the road to recovery. After a couple of years, we hope to extend Linkworking across all SLaM boroughs, giving service users a greater voice in future development and delivery of services across South London.

By April 2022, we would aim to be in Southwark, Lewisham and Lambeth to cover the local NHS Trust - South and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM) - areas.

We want to address the gap caused when services are developed and designed by people who do not know what it is like mentally to be sectioned, medicated, refused access and



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denied human rights. Now, more than ever, service users need their voices heard, to improve the quality of life of people with an enduring mental illness, relieve dependency, and conserve valuable health and social care resources. It would allow our Linkworkers to help service users find hope when they believe there is none.

In order to continue to provide the Linkworking service to our vulnerable clients in the Borough of Croydon, we estimate we need approximately £53,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £51,135 in year 1, £52,669 in year 2 and £54,249 in year 3. This will ensure we support approximately 2500 people per year across Croydon, through the involvement of 25 volunteers and 3 part time (Linkwork Manager at 28 hours per week, Admin Support and Data Support workers both at 8 hours per week) staff. Some of this is currently funded by the Croydon CCG so we would be looking for an additional £21,635 in year 1, £23,169 in year 2 and £24,749 in year 3.

In 2021, we wish to enable mental health service users in Borough of Lewisham to receive our vital service. We estimate we need approximately £45,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £43,950 in year 1, £45,269 in year 2 and £46,627 in year 3. This will ensure we support 1200 people across Lewisham, through the involvement of 12 volunteers and 3 part time staff (a Linkwork Manager at 20 hours per week, Admin Support and Data Support workers both at 8 hours per week).

In 2022, we wish to enable mental health service users in Borough of Southwark to receive our vital service. We estimate we need approximately £45,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £43,950 in year 1, £45,269 in year 2 and £46,627 in year 3. This will ensure we support 1500 people across Southwark, through the involvement of 15 volunteers and 3 part time staff (a Linkwork Manager at 20 hours per week, Admin Support and Data Support workers both at 8 hours per week).

We also see the need to recruit a regional manager and administrator to support the additional complexity across 3 or 4 boroughs. We estimate we need approximately £54,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £52,721 in year 1, £54,303 in year 2 and £55,932 in year 3. This will involve a Linkwork Regional Manager at 20 hours per week and Admin Support at 8 hours per week.

Also in 2022, we wish to enable mental health service users in Borough of Lambeth to receive our vital service. We estimate we need approximately £45,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £43,950 in year 1, £45,269 in year 2 and £46,627 in year 3. This will ensure we support 1500 people across Lambeth, through the involvement of 15 volunteers and 3 part time staff (a Linkwork Manager at 20 hours per week, Admin Support and Data Support workers both at 8 hours per week).

Key Outcomes

Giving vulnerable service users a greater voice in their quality of care and treatment received on wards / in the community leading to improved decision-making and crucially hope

Volunteer Linkworkers would act as strategic champions for service users to raise global issues with senior SLAM managers, giving a voice to patients and service users e.g. weekly service user contact on identified wards. Results from 2018-2019 show this process works.



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Service providers are now coming to us to ask where they should improve and we are influencing service providers at director level, aided by quarterly reports to SLaM. Some changes are also happening at meetings where we share findings e.g. monthly meetings with senior SLaM staff (PPI leads), quarterly meetings with service managers, and weekly meetings with ward managers to discuss individual patient needs.

Service Users need to be included in their care plan and recovery model (No decision about me without me (2012)) and be helped to navigate into the community e.g. access relevant voluntary sector services which improve their mental health and wellbeing. From simple steps such as access to the garden through to improved waiting times for appointments, all our efforts help build the confidence and trust of service users in their recovery process. Medication plays a large amount in the life of a person suffering with mental illness. When you are first receiving a diagnosis, you are having a label that removes all your self-esteem and confidence in having a future life. It wipes out possibilities of having employment and a family. Medication has severe side-effects and makes you crave unhealthy food, making you gain weight, lose motivation and not care about yourself. Treatments received actually make you feel worse about yourself and your future. Our Linkworkers bring hope when there is no hope.

We build a strong lived experience volunteer network who share our experiences, our recovery, and our lives. We affect people so positively that being a Linkworker “should be bottled and dispensed like medication!”

We want to train up more Linkworkers to be respected volunteers. Our current Linkworkers have a good knowledge of all services across inpatient, community and voluntary sector due to their own lived experiences, helping service users to become more included in communities (rather than continued dependence on services and medication / caught in the revolving door of relapse and hospitalisation).

For a service user, knowing that a Linkworker has actually been an inpatient on that ward is worth its weight in gold. Linkworkers help service users to feel safe to engage with nurses, doctors and consultants, to feel empowered to disclose symptoms, worries and anxiety. Being able to disclose fully your symptoms leads to correct medication and access to treatments leading to recovery and improved wellbeing. For our service to be effective, we need to continue training up volunteers, ensuring that SLaM staff continue to report our volunteers as well-respected, passionate and expert support for users.

Furthermore, this volunteer role also ensures that Linkworkers do not end up in ‘high end’ services since when they volunteer with Hear Us, they develop skills and confidence to ensure that they can manage their mental health conditions, which means that we are enabling people to maintain their health and well-being

We wish to support improvements to SLaM services so it delivers early intervention and preventative services to promote respect and dignity.

Improving service users’ experience and supporting them to recover more speedily will also reduce length of stay which will reduce service provision costs and promote recovery i.e. better support at earliest possible moment.

Our outcomes and qualitative data will provide valuable insight for the CCG and have a positive impact on local commissioning. It is important that service users are given the



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opportunity to be included in the involvement of improving clinical services. This leads to improved mental health service provision across Croydon and in neighbouring boroughs, reduction in annual 'bed' budget, and bigger voice for service users (%). All our data and reports are shared with commissioners and service providers to enable them to improve and deliver quality health and social care services



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Peer Support / Welfare Surgeries

We provide expert advice and guidance to support people with severe and enduring mental health conditions to apply for benefits and other entitlements both directly and with us as representing where necessary. We encourage people to do it for themselves where they can (using peer support in welfare surgeries) so they can grow in self-confidence and soft skills and so maintain their health and well-being (even when faced with periods of chaos).

2019 Activities

Since 2012, Hear Us has run a holistic support project which addresses urgent financial poverty and its underlying causes. Between July 2017- June 2018 we helped 400 people complete their benefits forms, attended 100s of assessments and home visits in a volunteer capacity, supported service users to tackle their housing, council tax and utility debts and helped more than 70 vulnerable people to win their appeal tribunals.

Our approach is based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing: Connect with people, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Giving. Two more examples of what we have helped our service users achieve: support them to open bank accounts which is time consuming but essential as DWP will only accept online applications / payments and preventing over 50 evictions by helping vulnerable clients gain discretionary housing support to enable them to cover their rent costs for a period of months.

We provide peer support to people with severe and enduring mental health conditions in poverty by helping them to access food banks, grants, and benefits. We work closely with organisations that find it difficult to engage with people with a mental illness who need help with benefits. These are Jobcentres, Housing Associations, substance misuse services such as Drug and Alcohol Services, NHS Services (Physical and Mental Health) and Croydon Council. Our clients often have multiple needs including immediate financial needs (eg benefit claims, debt, utilities), housing issues, discretionary payments, foodbanks and health and wellbeing.

Our surgeries have helped 1000s of vulnerable people maintain their income through appropriate, relevant support. From April 2018 to March 2019 we have helped 335 people with 1063 benefits related issues, won 106 ESA and PIP tribunals and more. All this work led to more than £658,691 being secured for service users. We achieve this work in partnership – we work very closely with Mind's Welfare Benefits Service, South West London Law Centre, Citizens Advice, and relate well with DWP and the Council.

Hear Us maintains 100% success rate at Tribunal. The introduction of Universal Credit (UC) is proving the greatest challenge to date as the vast majority of people we help do not have the skills, mental capacity or stability to apply or maintain online claims.

After initially meeting with a client we find out about their benefit situation and the issues with which they need support. We help our clients to resolve these issues and also



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maximise their income by helping them to apply for and manage benefits they are entitled to but not already claiming.

Our role is to support and advise on the claims belong to our clients and we give them the information they need to make decisions rather than make decisions for them. Any action we take, we do so with our clients knowledge and consent and we inform them of any knowledge we may gain on their behalf, e.g. from phone calls to the DWP.

The DWP will write to claimants directly rather than going through us and it is generally our clients who inform us of any decisions the DWP have made. We ask our clients to fill out feedback forms, and welcome any comments they have, about the service we provide.

What are the problems or issues that the project will address?

Most can do for themselves but some can't: People lack confidence and some knowledge when dealing with claims for financial entitlement. Some people, with the right support and guidance, are able to claim and maintain their own benefit claims. We are able to provide this large group of people with the right training to do this for themselves. There is a smaller group with complex needs who will always need help.

Mental illness makes you poor: Mental illness is a significant contributory factor to poverty which causes and exacerbates mental health conditions. Studies show 76% of people with mental health problems are dependent on sickness related benefits. Current welfare reform is heavily weighted against people with mental health problems. Stress caused by debt and poverty is hugely damaging and compounds existing illness. It is well documented that the new welfare reforms are discriminating against disabled people and are affecting people with mental health illnesses (who are the most vulnerable in society). Existing services cannot provide intensive support needed to help someone navigate an increasingly complex system. Demand for our service heavily outweighs capacity. A study by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2019 concluded that "claimants with a mental illness were 2.40 times more likely to have their existing DLA entitlement removed following a PIP eligibility assessment than claimants with musculoskeletal conditions, neurological conditions and diabetes" (Pybus et al, 2019, 1).

Hear Us currently supports 49 service users to manage their UC claims. We anticipate that our intervention will ensure that many of the most vulnerable service users in the borough will require an extensive holistic service whilst Universal Credit is being implemented. It is well documented that poverty and debt is a significant contributory factor on mental illness which is hugely damaging & compounds existing conditions. For example, a recent study reported in the guardian of 28th February 2020 there is a link between universal credit and an increase in "psychological stress" putting more pressure on NHS services. With our support, the probably unintended negative impact of such government initiatives as universal credit can be reduced.

Of those undertaking the DLA to PIP transfer, 22% of people being transferred are awarded less which is causing even greater poverty and leading to severe impacts on mental health. 24% of people have lost benefits altogether. But 60-75% of tribunals are successful. With the right support, we believe 80-85% of claims are self-manageable.



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Greater risk of losing life: Two thirds of people on ESA have thought about taking their own life because of the welfare system so there is a need to provide the right kind of support to reduce the risk of self-harm, which is at least partly caused by the welfare system. People whose mental health is further compounded by drug and alcohol issues, as well as elderly service users and those with learning difficulties, do not cope well.

“I have worked with Hear us for a number of years in the support and promotion of better services for people that require assistance due to an underlying mental health condition. Many of those clients accessing Hear Us have either had inadequate advice through the normal service channels or they have been too unwell or overwhelmed to understand the complexities involved with navigating the welfare system. Hear Us has proved time and time again that there is a real need in the Croydon Borough for specialist support and advice to assist this client group with severe and enduring mental health problems to access services and benefits. Hear Us is in a unique position as a peer support group, to offer help in a compassionate and empathetic way. I truly believe that if this support was not available then we would be seeing more clients failing to get the appropriate help they deserve”.

Kevin O'Halloran Disability Employment Adviser, Jobcentre Plus Croydon

Looking Forward to 2020

We want to continue providing a welfare surgeries service to people with complex needs to ensure that they are able to obtain the essential financial support required to tackle poverty and homelessness and support people to recover from mental illness.

We wish to support the mental health community to be more confident in managing their own benefits and more resilient in coping with systems changes by continuing to support those who have complex needs or are unable to cope with the benefits system.

We want to continue our partnership work with other organisations to deliver support for mental health vulnerable people in Croydon to ensure they obtain their fair financial entitlements and help to reduce poverty and homelessness.

Historically we have only offered a ‘hand holding’ service that gave support during an individual’s time of need. However, the project has seen many of these individuals return to us for support when their claims are reviewed and reassessed and we have learnt that helping an individual at their time of need isn’t enough. We realised that in order to create a longer lasting impact, we also need to empower and educate Service Users to take control of large aspects of their claims. These aspects are already within most Service User’s reach (a PIP form asks questions about someone’s health rather than being a ‘benefits exam’), but a lack of confidence and fear leaves them feeling as though any aspect of benefits is too complicated for a non-welfare professional to understand.

Through these workshops, service users will gain the skills and confidence to manage their welfare and gain better awareness of welfare issues and improved ability to self-manage their finances. This will lead to a reduction in anxiety and depression and will allow service users to regain self-respect and stay well.



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Fewer people will end up with rent arrears leading to eviction and homelessness. When vulnerable people lose their homes and have to be placed for months or even years in B & B accommodation, mental health declines and dependence on services increases. Lack of housing or suitable accommodation delays discharge from hospital. This will lead to fewer emergency hospital admissions and GP visits.

In the short term, there will be a reduction in the number of people experiencing immediate financial distress, with an increased awareness of how to access food banks, emergency clothing and utilities. But in the long term, greater financial security will lead to a reduction in the number of people dependant on food banks and forced to take out budgeting and social security loans (or worse, high interest pay day loans).

Fewer service users will suffer relapses (including self-harm and suicide) requiring hospital admission or lengthy input from secondary mental health services and many will go on to lead more fulfilling lives in their local community benefiting both their mental and physical health and face less social isolation – people will feel empowered to play an active role in their communities, through participation in sports, hobbies, voluntary work and paid employment. Our project arms people with an in depth knowledge of opportunities available in the borough, the financial stability to engage in activities and access to transport.

In order to continue to provide the current welfare surgeries service to our vulnerable clients, we estimate we need approximately £60,500 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £60,125 in year 1, £60,279 in year 2 and £61,764 in year 3. This will ensure we support 150 people across Croydon, through the involvement of 5 volunteers and 2 part time (one at 25 hours per week and one at 30 hours per week) staff.

Peer Navigators

While the majority of claimants would be able to learn how to manage some aspects of their claims, aspects the workshops would focus on, there will always be some who will need support, even with those aspects.

As part of the project we hope to be running in the future, we would recruit a team of volunteer “Peer Navigators”; service users who can give those individuals the support they need to manage their claims.

We hope to recruit these volunteers from our past and present clientele, as we would want them to use their own lived experience of mental illness, experience of being on benefits and their knowledge of the ethos and principles at the heart of our organisation, to support the most vulnerable in the mental health community.

We would also want to involve these volunteers in delivering training to organisations so their staff can support their service users to make and maintain claims. We work with many services whose staff are responsible, and who are funded, to help the service users with the benefits but they do not have the training. These workshops would be funded by the organisations to help fund Hear Us.

We would also hope that the experience of volunteering as “Peer Navigators” would help them to grow and we would support them with this growth and help them, as best we can, to work towards any goals they may hope to achieve from volunteering for this role.



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We would also continue to provide support to clients with complex cases and Tribunals.

With the recognition of this need for a proactive approach to the issue of welfare benefits and a determination to deliver education to service users, we can build a more resilient community as well as directly supporting those in need.

We also expect that we will need a part time Community Relations Project Worker to liaise with statutory and other voluntary sector staff to ensure that services for financial support are improved across the statutory and voluntary sectors in Croydon.

To continue to provide a comprehensive welfare surgeries service for people with complex needs AND support people to take control of their own benefits and financial situation, we estimate we need approximately £93,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £89,758 in year 1, £92,450 in year 2 and £95,224 in year 3. This will ensure we support 255 people across Croydon, through the involvement of 5 volunteers and 2 full time and 1 part time (at 18.5 hours per week) staff.

We would like to deliver the following outputs over the next 12 months:

- Support people with complex needs to better understand and cope
- Developing Expert Skills: Building confidence and hope
- Campaigning for Change: Improving attitudes and support

By enabling people to understand more about the benefits system, we can empower them to interact with the benefits system without it negatively impacting on their health. By running workshops to equip people with the knowledge and confidence to apply for and maintain their own claims, service users will gain skills and confidence to manage their benefits, reduce anxiety and depression, and enable people to stay well.

Within in the wider regional context, we also want to campaign for change to the welfare system. As part of the campaign to reduce the time period from 6 to 5 weeks for receipt of first payment for UC (CPAG as lead campaigner), we know that with the right approach we can help make changes which have a significant positive impact on people's lives e.g. parity for mental and physical health, UC online claim, charges by GPs for supporting information by using our evidence based results.

Achievements

1. The difficulties that our client group experience often throw up barriers that can make it difficult for services to engage with them and for them to engage with services, some examples are; being unable, or find it very difficult, to leave the house due to mental and/or physical health problems, being unable to work with a particular gender due to past trauma and difficulty trusting services, statutory and voluntary. The individuals who face these barriers are no less deserving of help and we are proud to have given them the same help and support as someone without those issues.
2. An exceptional success rate for tribunals and a considerable amount of money recovered from the DWP for service users (more than £658,691 being secured for service users).
3. Saving people from homelessness through applications to discretionary schemes, supporting people to access debt support and maximising income.



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4. Helping people to access travel and Motability schemes, enabling people to become more independent and better able to access opportunities in the community.
5. One of my proudest achievements is having been an inspiration to other service users. A number of our clients have told me that I am an inspiration to them by showing that people with mental health problems are capable of supporting others and making a difference.

Key Outcomes

Overall, our key outcome will be that vulnerable clients will go on to lead more fulfilling lives in their local communities, as they maintain their mental health (even during chaotic circumstances) as they empowered, with the right safety net, to apply for and maintain their own benefit claims. Our intervention will help prevent people from ending up in arrears which can put them at risk of eviction and homelessness. Not having the support to deal with these issues can lead to a decline in a vulnerable person's mental health which could lead to a costly hospital admission or worse; self harm and suicide.

1) Addressing and resolving immediate financial distress:

By providing food tickets, for food banks, and helping clients to make applications to discretionary schemes, such as Croydon's Discretionary Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments, we have helped those in immediate financial distress to put food on the table, turn the lights on and keep their homes warm.

2) Increased Social Inclusion within the mental health community:

Through access to Motability schemes, we have helped clients, who have previously been limited by their mental and physical health problems, to engage with the community and access activities that were previously out of reach for them. We have informed many of the opportunities available to them, in the community, and made referrals to help them to access those opportunities.

3) Improving their financial security by giving them fairer access to welfare benefits:

We helped our clients to become more financially secure, by helping them to maximise their income by supporting them to make applications to benefits that they were previously unaware. We also helped our clients to challenge negative benefit decisions, often caused by a lack of understanding of mental illness on the part of the DWP or by a system that is unfairly weighted against people with mental health difficulties.

4) Tackling Debt:

We have been able to tackle this issue, for our clients, in two ways; Firstly, we have supported our clients to access services dedicated to helping individuals with their debt through referrals and, when necessary, helping clients to make phone calls and access online debt advice.

Of those who come to us in debt, many are in a negative spiral being unable to make repayments and having to take out loans plunging them into further debt. By working to maximise our client's income we have helped those in debt to head in a positive direction,



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in respect of their debt, by enabling them to make repayments and work towards clearing their debt.

We also intend to use our knowledge and experience to campaign for change in service provision, policies and relationships with professionals and the wider public. Our knowledge and experience will help us to influence national and local campaigns for a fairer benefits system and financial support.



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Open Forum

We want to help service users learn to cope with daily challenges by developing skills and self-confidence through a supportive engagement process so it is more likely move on rather than becoming institutionalised.

We want to better influence campaigns at local / regional levels, through this powerful forum, leading to substantive changes in law and support for those with Mental Health conditions.

2019 Activities

Our Open Forums attracted 375 service users in 2018-2019 and attract large numbers of carers and professionals. Since funding was secured from the Maudsley in October 2018, we have boosted numbers attending: 153 in the first 6 months (versus 222 in the following 6 months).

It is designed to give service users a safe environment to come together, meet commissioners and service providers, ask questions, debate current and topical issues / services relevant to their recovery and wellbeing. Each year we hold 10 forums, covering topics as diverse as Croydon's Mental Health Transformation Programme, switching utility suppliers, SLAM Promoting Safe and Therapeutic Services (PSTS) training review, Croydon Council - Hate Crime Awareness and more.

Service users have a dedicated space to have their say but we also encourage anyone with an interest in mental health to attend. Our agendas are set by service users who are encouraged to put forward guest speakers. Our forum is important because it enables service user involvement in the design and delivery of services and provides service providers with invaluable information to tailor services to their needs.

Up to December 2019, we are running open forums on:

- Croydon Gateway (Council Welfare Benefits Service)
- DWP South London Partnership Advisor Support
- OASIS Young people's mental health service in Croydon
- SLAM Service Transformation

We will also hold our AGM in November which will include a celebration of the 10th anniversary of Hear Us as a registered charity.

What are the problems or issues that the project will address?

The Open Forum provides an invaluable space for commissioners, service providers, carers and service users to come together to review the quality of services. There is no other forum of its type in Croydon. By enabling service users to develop and shape services as well as share info and network with each other, it helps to address social isolation.



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There is a gap in what people know and need to find out about the service they receive so as to influence the services provided to best meet their needs. It is also important to ensure that service users can ask commissioners and service providers probing questions about services they receive - to have a say in services receive, combating discrimination in service provision by taking into account specific user experiences.

With a long-established track record (since 2003) of providing open forums in different guises, we run them well and know that people trust us to provide a safe environment in which to share their views with commissioners and service providers. The forum enables service users to better understand their mental health and wellbeing and promote self-management and self-awareness.

Looking Forward to 2020

We want to continue organising and publicising 10 open forums each year inviting guest speakers from the CCG and SLAM as well as other service providers. To run this well, we want to employ a paid part time service user as the project development worker.

Once every 6 months, we will plan to hold focus groups for service users to consult with service users on services they receive from SLAM and other providers, and on what they want Hear Us to do, to enable us to ensure full involvement.

Commissioners and service providers will gain from greater exposure to service user needs and can tailor their services as a result of discussions with service users. Long term, we would use the knowledge gained to develop campaigns to address stigma and discrimination in services provided and in the wider community. During the lifetime of the project, we will discuss with commissioners, service providers and other funders how to mainstream open forums into core activities either in our charity, elsewhere in the voluntary sector or in statutory services.

In order to continue to provide open forum to enable mental health service users and others to be involved in engaging with mental health and other services, we estimate we need approximately £27,500 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £26,826 in year 1, £27,630 in year 2 and £28,460 in year 3. This will ensure we enable 500 people across Croydon to be involved in open forums, through the involvement of 10 volunteers and 1 part time (at 28 hours per week) staff.

Key Outcome

We believe that through empowering people to have a voice, service users can not only influence the commissioning and delivery of services but also develop self-confidence, aiding recovery, supporting greater independence and reducing social isolation. This will enable them to take a more active part in society which combats stigma and discrimination towards this vulnerable group in society. It is a good place for service users to understand what the services do.



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Reachout Challenge

We want to help reduce the stigma associated with mental illness by training, supporting and informing the wider community.

2019 Activities

The Reachout Challenge is an anti-stigma campaign to raise awareness of mental health issues amongst public sector employees and the wider public. We do this through information sharing and talking about our lived experience of mental health so the wider community has better understanding of the realities of living with mental health conditions. We have a number of formats we use including information stalls, formal training and dialogues to communicate our message. We provide a myth busting sheet which educates and informs people.

We have worked with over 25 groups that people with mental health problems often come into contact with e.g. regularly deliver user-led training at the internationally recognised crisis and hostage negotiator training at Hendon Police College. We also train emergency services and faith groups. Further local activity this year includes volunteers attending Co-Op stores to raise public awareness as well as donations for our worthy cause. This project benefits all people with mental health conditions, public sector workers and their clients, volunteers and staff of Hear Us, and more.

What are the problems or issues that the project will address?

There is still considerable stigma associated with mental health as well as ignorance and naivety. Through empowering people with mental health challenges to speak out and have a purpose, we enable us (both our volunteers and members) to become an active member of the community and help with the recovery journey.

We have found from the feedback that we have received that the interactions have changed attitudes to aid understanding and improve the experiences of services being provided. By increasing coverage and reaching more services and the wider public we can make a real difference to the experiences of people within our community. In the long term we would consider franchising the product to make it financially self-sufficient.

Looking Forward to 2020

Our aim is to expand our Reachout Challenge to make more of a difference based on a proven format. The contribution of service users and volunteers ensures that we are empowering them to have a voice and enable changes to be made to services to improve the experience of both service provider and service user. By improving people's awareness of mental health, we can break down barriers and change the personal experience to combat stigma and discrimination within services and the wider community.



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We will hold regular information stalls and dialogues with more public sector organisations and the public to break down barriers for people with mental health conditions. This could include a pledge as a result of our dialogue with people and expansion of local coverage. We currently are limited by volunteer availability so we would like to expand our volunteer base to cover more organisations and events. In the medium term we wish to expand our project so that we reach more people in public sector organisations and the wider public.

In order to expand our Reachout Challenge, we estimate we need approximately £31,500 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £30,392 in year 1, £31,304 in year 2 and £32,243 in year 3. This will ensure we enable Organisations across Croydon, London and South East, to be reached to educate and inform on mental health and wellbeing, through the involvement of 20 volunteers and 2 part time (1 at 20 hours per week and 1 at 8 hours per week) staff. We receive some donations from public sector organisations we work with so this would put the Reachout Challenge on a sustainable financial and professional footing.

Key Outcomes

Our work combats negative views of mental health - that we are not able to contribute, not employable or useless - which in turn improves community cohesion and addresses low self-esteem and confidence amongst those dealing with public sector organisations, making the experience of both the service provider and service recipient a more positive one.

By combating stigma and discrimination, we can educate and inform the public and as the realities of mental health are more widely understood, we improve the life chances of people with mental health conditions as we help improve community cohesion



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Effective Organisation

We want to ensure more effective professional support to all projects and service users by building better systems, successfully delivering projects and working in partnership to meet our community's needs whilst ensuring our staff and volunteers' well-being.

2019 Activities

We currently have a number of part time staff and volunteers who provide vital support for our front facing projects funded partially by core funding from the CCG and through reserves.

We provide high quality professional support to all projects and service users to enable enhanced services for service users, good wellbeing of staff and volunteers and work in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies which ensures we are well respected and have greater access to resources and a bigger reach. As a result, we are a stronger organisation and more connected in the community. Our trustees give timely and appropriate direction and is strong and stable team. We are resourceful and enterprising with highly developed skills in our area of expertise.

What are the problems or issues that the project will address and how do you know?

Our staff and volunteers provide a number of functions which enable our projects to support our service users. Our part time website and social media manager provides expertise in supporting our website and social media which enables service users, professionals and the public to obtain information about available services provided by both statutory and voluntary services. Our part time service development manager is responsible for ensuring support for the long term development of our services, supporting the CEO and other staff and trustees to ensure we can deliver services which support the needs of service users and carers. The service development manager is also responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient funds available to ensure Hear Us can continue with its essential work and expand our reach to more people with mental health needs and address stigma and discrimination within services and wider society. The service development manager has successfully obtained funding for open forums, welfare surgeries and Linkworking which has enabled these projects to continue their work supporting vulnerable people with severe and enduring mental health needs. The Chief Executive Officer is critical to ensuring the effective delivery of services, providing leadership to Hear Us staff and volunteers, liaising and involving funders, trustees and other stakeholders.

We also need to cover office costs which include rent for our offices in Purley Road and Fairfield Halls, office equipment, IT and insurance. In addition, as part of our requirements as a charity and responsible employer, we employ an accountant, HR and payroll services. We also have to cover trustee and user participation expenses and marketing, dues and subscriptions and travel expenses.



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Volunteers help to ensure the office is managed effectively and sends out publicity to service users and professionals for, for example, the open forum. We really value volunteers since they not only contribute to the successful and effective running of the charity and its projects, but also provide opportunities to some of our service users to enable them to participate in society and combat social exclusion and social isolation.

Looking Forward to 2020

As part of our future plans to expand our reach and impact on service users and the wider community, we have identified a need to expand the work of the service development manager to support our future plans. Support for the development of our projects require expertise in project management, fundraising and strategic development of Hear Us. Our work in 2019 to develop this business plan through involving our service users, volunteers and staff at all levels in responding to the needs of people with severe and enduring mental health needs has led to recognition that there exists an essential need to expand the work of the service development manager. This is vital to ensure that we can meet the challenges of our service users and other stakeholders to combat stigma and discrimination and ensure the development of services which better meet the needs of mental health service users.

We also need to ensure that we can continue to provide support for our website and social media presence. Our website is used by numerous service users, professionals and other volunteer groups including regular use of the Hear Us guide to services and the provision of information concerning Hear Us services and projects and statutory and other voluntary sector organisations. To support the future development of our projects and services, we have identified a need to expand the hours of website and social media manager to redesign and manage the website and make greater more timely use of social media.

We also wish to employ a part time administrator (8 hours per week) to provide office and administrative support to the CEO and other staff and volunteers. This will ensure that our CEO is freed up from administrative support and will enable us to focus on strategic and operational decision making.

In order to meet the needs of our projects and service users, we estimate we need approximately £130,000 per year for the next three years. This would be made up of £127,593 in year 1, £131,421 in year 2 and £135,363 in year 3. This will ensure we provide support to 3300 people across Croydon to educate and inform on mental health and wellbeing, through the involvement of 5 volunteers and 1 full time and 3 part time (2 at 28 hours per week and 1 at 8 hours per week) staff. Some of this currently funded by the Croydon Council and Croydon CCG, so we would be looking for an additional £53,093 in year 1, £56,921 in year 2 and £60,863 in year 3.

Key Outcomes

1. To support the expansion of Hear Us' projects and services to reach more people and address issues of stigma and discrimination within services and the wider community.



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2. To effectively and professionally develop our projects to address the needs of vulnerable members of our community with severe and enduring mental health needs.
3. To ensure we have sufficient funds to support the needs of vulnerable people with severe and enduring mental health conditions.



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Current funding situation

As of 2019/20, we currently receive £134,500 from the funders below. The Linkworkers are also receiving £32,640 for their time and involvement from SLaM involvement register.

Funder	Project	Amount
Croydon CCG/Council	Operation Costs	£74,000
Croydon CCG	Linkworking Project	£29,500
Maudsley Charity	Open Forum	£16,000
Relief in Need	Welfare Surgeries	£15,000
		£134,500
Other Funding*		
South London & Maudsley NHS Trust	Linkworkers	£32,640



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Governance

Hear Us has been running since 4th October 2001 as a not for profit organisation in Croydon and on 15th April 2010 the Management Committee registered Hear Us with the Charity Commission for charity status (No. 1135535) to give Hear Us a more independent and stronger voice in the community.

The constitution in the original form was adopted by resolution at the AGM held on the 27th May 2004. Amendments to the constitution were adopted by resolution at the EGM held on 1st July 2008.

The Board of Directors (Trustees) are listed below. They include a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and the Co-ordinator Tim Oldham. The Committee has the power to co-opt members as and when they deem it necessary. The Board of Directors are responsible for the day to day running of Hear Us and have a responsibility to report to funders, the charity commission and other stakeholders whenever the need arises.

The trustees have responsibility for the overall governance and direction of Hear Us, and have a duty of care for volunteers and staff. If you have paid staff it's important to be clear about separate roles, responsibilities, and legal liabilities.

Governance	Management
Overview of organisation as a whole	Day to day operation of projects
Long-term direction	Short to medium-term implementation of plans
Processes and frameworks for effective working	Detailed planning and supervision
Accountable for actions and decisions	Responsible for delivery

Principal office Orchard House, 15a Purley Road, South Croydon, CR2 6EZ

Telephone 020 8681 6888

Email info@hear-us.org

Website 1 www.hear-us.org

Website 2 www.guide-hear-us.org

Directors/Trustees Angela Mitchell (Chair)

Cassandra Austin (Vice Chair)

Abeline Greene (Company Secretary)



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Karen Grayson (Treasurer)

David Ashton

Jonathan Weller

Ruth Govan



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Finances

Current Finances: Systems and Situation

Hear Us endeavours to maintain reserves equivalent to a minimum of three months costs at all times. For the financial year 2018/19 this will be approximately £34,000. These are held in bank accounts with easy withdrawal facilities.

Our annual accounts are held on the Charity Commission's and Companies House websites

With the need of service users necessitating an expansion to our front facing projects, an increase in core funding is required to provide the necessary support to make these projects even more successful.

It is envisaged that the core funding required to place the charity on a sustainable footing will entail assignment of 15-35% of the costs to each project though we intend to do our best to find core funding to cover all back office functions.

Future Approach

We will be guided by our beneficiaries focusing on delivering services that meet people's needs and becoming more self-reliant and less dependent on commissioners for funding.

We will further develop our skills in fundraising so we can fund the services that local commissioners are unable, or unwilling, to fund. We will work more closely with service users and carers and find out, directly from them, the issues that are having an impact on their lives. We will conduct more research and use questionnaires and surveys to inform our thinking and help us campaign locally and nationally.

We will develop our links with the community in order to harness community action and recruit more volunteers to enable us to expand our services.

We will make more use of our premises to further develop our "two way" relationship with the community. This relationship will help people to become involved in our services and will help us to engage with the public, particularly through our Reachout Challenge, to challenge stereotypes and overcome the stigma of mental illness. Our Reachout Challenge will also generate funds through events, as the opportunities present themselves, which we can use to further support the work of our organisation.

In order to make the changes necessary to meet our objectives we will review our structure, use of resources and skills. This will include ensuring that we are able to undertake more marketing and fundraising, and, make more use of monitoring and record keeping so we are better able to campaign and lobby and better able to engage with the community.

In the medium to long term, we anticipate finding additional grant funding to support our core services to enable us to continue to support our service users. Where appropriate, we will consider contracts to provide additional services with local and national service providers.



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We will become more business-like through development of our skills in marketing and competing for services when they are put out to tender. By costing our services we will ensure we are ready to market them to a range of audiences.

We will seek a grant for Hear Us core costs to provide a stable office environment for 3 years to support our effective organisation project. This will enable our staff to continue to provide peer support, act as the voice of the vulnerable and facilitate and provide service user involvement. We will secondly (or as a whole project grant) secure grants for the following projects: Linkworking Project; Welfare Surgeries; Open Forum; and the Reachout Challenge.



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Staffing

Core Staff

Chief Executive Officer	Tim Oldham
Benefits Project Worker	David Ashton
Benefits Project Worker	Cheryalin Wilfred
Linkworking Project Manager	Barbra Davison
Linkworking Project Worker	Carmen Gray
Linkworking Support Worker/Open forum chair	Claire Hawkes
Reachout Challenge Project Manager	Barbra Davison
Service Development Manager	Eleanor Yates
Website and social media manager	Al Carparelli

Volunteers

- 25 Linkworkers who are paid for the involvement time by SLAM's Involvement Register
- 20 Reachout Volunteers
- 8 Office volunteers
- 9 Open Forum Volunteers
- 2 Welfare Surgeries Volunteers



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Monitoring & Evaluation

We evaluate everything we do for its impact on our service users.

We monitor our welfare surgeries service through evaluating service takeup and reach and monitoring financial, budgeting and planning results against targets. This includes monthly internal reports which gathers numbers of service users supported, issues raised, demographics etc, the amount of money raised in previously unclaimed benefits, number of tribunals attended, forms completed, leisure opportunities taken up etc. Budget spend will be reviewed monthly and overseen by the Trustees. We have built a comprehensive database and use this to monitor outcomes and write reports and adapt planning.

Open forums are service user run enabling as many service users as possible to participate. Information from the open forums can be used as case studies for our other services and projects. This can act as an input to campaigns to combat stigma and discrimination in the local community and wider society towards people with mental health conditions as well as enabling staff and volunteers to learn from our service users' experiences. Our service users are some of the most vulnerable and isolated people in society and we provide a conduit to enable our service users to have a voice and work to improve services and society as a whole.

Our focus is recording the key lessons learned from the discussions in open forums to influence campaigns to address stigma and discrimination in policy, service delivery or in the wider community. This will ensure that not only will services be influenced by service users but also on a wider front, ensure that changes may be made to, for example, the benefits system to make sure that claimants are not disadvantaged as a result of the mental health conditions. In addition, we will regularly review the reach of the forums to ensure that as many service users as possible are involved.

We ask all attendees to complete a monitoring form after each forum which helps us to improve the service. We look at these forms and change the way we run forums and contact guest speakers who have been suggested by attendees. We also follow up with guest speakers and use information received from open forums to encourage learning on both sides. Each August we undertake an open forum success and issues day which includes assessing the impact of developing services on attendees.

We will use the learning from this project to support development of campaigns to address stigma and discrimination both within the services and wider community. We will also use it to guide our work with SLaM to influence the design and delivery of services both for inpatients and patients in the community. We will capture in minutes the presentation and questions and answers and make them available on our website and at subsequent forums.

We find that many people use our guide to services including carers, professionals and the wider public. We regularly receive feedback on how the guide has helped service users and carers to identify projects which help to combat social exclusion and isolation and to support recovery from mental illness. Staff in SLaM regularly tell us about the impact of having this information available which is not available from any other source.



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Our outcomes and qualitative data provide insight for the CCG and have a positive impact on local commissioning as it enables providers and commissioners to spend strategically through our work to identify the strategic issues which exist in mental health services. It is important that service users are given the opportunity to be included in the involvement of improving clinical services. This leads to improved mental health service provision across Croydon and in neighbouring boroughs, reduction in annual 'bed' budget and a bigger and stronger voice for service users (%). All our data and reports are shared with commissioners and service providers to enable them to improve and deliver quality health and social care services.

We obtain explicit consent from our service users to store and use the information they provide to monitor and evaluate our services, the services we receive from statutory agencies and use this information to help to improve the services we receive.



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Quality

We have a number of policies and procedures which support the work we do and ensure the services we provide are of the highest quality.

Section C. Management - Part 12 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy

Section C. Management - Part 14 Whistle Blowing Policy

Section C. Management - Part 15 Prevent Policy

Section C. Management - Part 17 Staff Training and Development Policy

Section C. Management - Part 18 Safeguarding Children Policy

Section C. Management - Part 19 Incident reporting Policy

Section C. Management - Part 20 Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures

Section C. Management - Part 21 Data Protection and Information Governance Policy and Procedures

Section C. Management - Part 22 Business Continuity Plan

Section C. Management - Part 23 Risk Management Policy

Section E. Staff and Volunteers - Part 25 Employee Handbook

All our policies and procedures are published on our website: <https://www.hear-us.org>

We undertake peer review and mentoring of our staff and volunteers to ensure they are constantly learning and improving the work they do. This continual improvement is vital to ensure we keep pace of the demands of service users and that our service users receive the highest quality service to support their recovery and combat poverty, social exclusion and stigma and discrimination.

Through monitoring and evaluation, we ensure that we learn and continually improve on our services. But we go further. We regularly undertake focus groups and ask our service users and carers what they think needs to change to improve their mental health and wellbeing. We also obtain feedback from staff and professionals in the CCG and SLaM to understand how our services are supporting them in their work to ensure a speedy recovery and improved mental health and change our services to improve the quality of our services as it is needed.



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Risks

Evaluation of risks and analysis of mitigation is undertaken by both our trustees and our staff. We regularly review the most critical risks to ensure we can put in place mitigation before the risk becomes an issue.

Our most significant risk is financial in that we require sustainable funding to meet the needs of our projects. The risk is that we have insufficient funds to support some or all of our projects and our future plans has been partly mitigated by the employment of a service development manager to focus on future plans and fundraising to support those plans. We are also looking to diversify our funding streams through developing funding relationships that support both our core requirements and projects.

The risk of loss of staff through illness or resignation is partly mitigated by the commitment demonstrated by our staff to Hear Us. In addition, we ensure that there is sufficient personnel to cover our core functions through more than one person being assigned to each project. We also ensure that our staff and volunteers are effectively supported and encouraged to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing through mentoring and management support.

Another high impact risk is the relationship we have with partner organisations including SLAM, CCG and Mind in Croydon. We endeavour to maintain good working relationships with staff at all levels and open communications to ensure a trusting and positive partnership.



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Case studies

Welfare surgeries

- 1) I had a client who was without benefits for two years. He was referred to us by a friend of his. I invited him to come to our office and I started by getting him with my help to apply for Personal Independence Payment. I helped him fill out the form and went with him to his assessment and got a lot of evidence to go with his form. He ended up getting Enhanced rate and then I got him to apply with my help for Universal Credit. He has a better quality of life. He doesn't have to borrow from Paul to pay Pete. He is financially stable. He can go places like visiting his dad. He has become socially independent and he has more confidence in himself.
- 2) I helped another client who was in debt with her heating bill over 1000 pounds. This was really getting to her - it was making her Mental Health deteriorate. She got our number through Croydon library. She was talking to one of the librarians who gave her our number. She sounded so stressed out and was crying down the phone. I calmed her down and gave her an appointment to come in and see me. I went online and filled out a form with her services provider and sent them evidence and wrote something on her behalf. In a few weeks' time her heating bill was wiped off. She was debt free and I got her to apply for Personal Independence Payment. She also got Enhanced rate and I helped her get a freedom pass. This client in her own words said that I literally saved her life. She has become less isolated. She can visit her family because of her freedom pass. She is more emotionally stable and is financially better off. No more sleepless nights and she says she is stress free.
- 3) I helped another client who moved in to his new flat and had nothing. He was referred to us by his probation officer. He came in to see me at the offices and I helped him apply for Croydon Discretionary scheme. I explained his situation and how he suffers with physical health problem and Mental Health Illness. I sent them proof of his benefits. He was awarded household goods. He is living a better quality of life. He said he is very grateful that there is a charity like Hear Us that help vulnerable people who suffer with Mental Health Illness.
- 4) When we started working with one individual he had lost his sickness related benefit (ESA) followed by his housing benefit and Council Tax Support, he had received some support from another organisation (The Council!!!!) to claim Universal Credit but they had done a very underwhelming job and he was yet to receive any housing or living costs after having made the claim almost two months prior. This gentleman had also lost financial support to pay fuel and maintenance costs for his car as a result of the transfer from DLA to PIP. He and his disabled son were facing eviction from their council property while also not being able to afford to eat or have the heating on (we began working with this individual in November so it was a tad on the cold side), this gentleman was struggling to the extent that he had made plans to take his life the following weekend.

In the first week of working with him we had helped him to access local grants that enabled him to put money on his gas and electric as well as supporting him to access food banks so he and his son were able to eat. Additionally, we resolved the



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issues with his Housing benefit and Council Tax Support having the housing arrears written off, restarting his CTS claim and getting his Universal Credit Housing and living costs in place. We began the process of challenging the decisions made on his ESA and PIP claims and at Christmas referred him to a scheme that delivered everything needed to have a decent Christmas dinner. Over the months of working with him we successfully challenged the claims on his benefits leading to him receiving arrears from money lost from previous decisions as well as giving him ongoing financial stability and support to meet his vehicle costs so he was less isolated. Throughout those months we also helped him to access psychological therapies as well as social and community opportunities. In addition to this we also helped him to claim child DLA for his son boosting his disposable income and gave him the confidence to maintain his Universal Credit claim but with an open door should he be faced with anything too complex for him to be able to manage.