



HEAR US CROYDON

Croydon's Mental Health Service Users Group
www.hear-us.org
info@hear-us.org
020 8681 6888

Hear Us

QUALITY MANUAL



SECTION A: Access to Service

A.1 Communications Strategy

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Hear Us
Orchard House
15a Purley Road
South Croydon
CR2 6EZ

Telephone: 020 8681 6888
Email: AQS@hear-us.org
Website: www.hear-us.org
Registered in England No. 6891337
Charity No.1135535



The Hear Us Story 1992-2023

Hear Us is an established mental health service users' charity. Our roots go back to 1992. We became a charity in 2009. We provide peer support to Croydon's mental health community and work to increase awareness of mental illness, combating stigma and discrimination. Each year we support over 3500 people with a severe and enduring mental illness by providing specialised peer support. The majority of our service users receive care packages from South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM).

Our primary purpose is to act as the coordinating body to facilitate and ensure service users involvement in the planning, delivery and monitoring of mental health services, helping to improve the quality of the services commissioned and delivered in Croydon.

We provide peer support to people with severe mental illness in the borough of Croydon and surrounding areas and combat stigma and discrimination through raising awareness amongst public sector workers and the public at large.

We aim to support people through their recovery journey, whether to enable them to receive appropriate care and treatment on the hospital wards or within community mental health centres. We support them to receive their essential financial entitlements, enabling them to live sustainably and visit family and friends through using mobility schemes.

We also want to ensure that people with severe mental illness are given a voice to influence service providers and commissioners to supply appropriate care and treatment to enable them to take a role again in mainstream society. We also aim to influence commissioners and service providers to empower service users to have a say in the way services are provided with both now and in the future.

Our core projects are:

- **Linkworking Project**, since 2007, provides direct support to our service users on in-patient wards at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and in community mental health centres, currently Jeanette Wallace House on Edridge Road & Queens Resource Centre, Queens Road, Croydon.



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- **Open Forum**, since 2003, has provided our local mental health community with a safe place to come together with commissioners and service providers to improve mental health service delivery.
- **Welfare Rights Advice Project**, since 2012, has supported people with disability welfare claims and referred them to organisations that provide access to social inclusion services or access to services that support debt.
- **Reachout Challenge** is an anti-stigma project working with the public sector (including the police) to ensure policies and practice are delivered with an understanding of serious mental illness.
- **Campaigning Project** will build a movement run and led by people with lived experience of mental ill health representing all communities initially in Croydon. This movement will educate, inform and influence for change to improve the lives of some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our communities through awareness raising, and campaigning for change in our public services and in the wider community.

The aim of this Communications Strategy is to outline the approach we will take to ensure our mental health community, staff, stakeholders and the general public understand our vision, values and objectives and what we are doing to achieve them so that we continue to build on our excellent reputation.

It aims to ensure we have different ways to share business critical and operational information with our community and staff, as well as providing the means for them to share their views and other information with us, as communicating works both ways.

Well-timed, clear and tailored communications contribute to the delivery of all areas of the Strategic Business Plan and our success as an organisation.

What we are trying to achieve

We know Hear Us is all about people, so it is incredibly important for us to ensure we connect with all the different groups of people whose lives we affect in ways that suit them.



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Our Communications Strategy links with all other strategies across the organisation, led primarily by the Strategic Business to encourage a positive culture of committed and motivated staff.

All our communications should help to create the kind of image and culture we want to achieve because every contact builds up the picture of Hear Us as a Mental Health Peer Support Group, employer and Charity.

The areas below sum up the aims of our communications work, which will contribute to the delivery of all Hear Us work.

We will:

- Celebrate our success and share how we are achieving our vision, values and objectives so we build a culture and reputation of ambition and excellence.
- Tailor how we communicate to reach and engage people in the most effective ways that achieve understanding and encourage interaction.
- Be clear and open so our staff, customers and partners understand what we are doing, how it affects them and how to contact us.
- Provide and promote opportunities for our mental health community and the wider community, staff and stakeholders to share their views and influence how we work.
- Improve our digital offer and culture so our customers and staff are digital by choice.
- Support business change and our commercial efforts to achieve success and encourage innovation.
- Build on our reputation and brand to increase our local, regional and national recognition and encourage potential business opportunities and partnerships.
- Forge, cultivate and build on valuable connections and partnerships to achieve positive results.



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Principles

To ensure we achieve a consistent approach, our communications work will be guided by the following principles. These are in line with the values set out in our Strategic Business Plan.

All Hear Us communications will:

- Be driven by our community's needs, the Strategic Business Plan and our brand
- Be ethical and respectful, in-keeping with our values
- Be as accessible as possible to meet our audiences' needs
- Be honest and straight-forward
- Be personable
- Communicate in Plain English
- Be branded and look professional
- Be responsive and timely
- Have a clear purpose – what we want people to understand, feel or do
- Be tailored to suit our target audience

How we will make it happen

To help achieve our strategic vision, values and objectives and our communication aims, the areas of work we will focus on are detailed below:

Understand our audience

One of the most important aspects of communicating well is that we know who we are communicating with. Only when we understand our audiences better can we target messages and be confident they will reach those intended.

We know there are five main audience groups we want to reach and our aim is to understand them better so we can contribute to the Strategic Business Plan objective to provide great customer services.



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Mental
Health
Community

Staff,
Volunteers
& Trustees

Partners and
Stakeholders

General
Public

Local and
National
Media

Tell the Hear Us story

To ensure our communications contribute to achieving the organisation's vision, it is important to create a clear set of messages that are consistently applied. This is known as 'The Hear Us story'. These are the messages that do not change for the organisation.

They help to build our identity, creating a picture of what 'great' looks like and building a culture of success and excellence. They inform our audiences why we are here and what we're aiming to achieve in all the individual actions taking place in our daily business. They create the 'golden thread' that ties everything to Hear Us's vision, values and objectives.

A clear and recognisable brand

A brand can be best summed up as a company's personality. All the different elements of our organisation together make Hear Us's image and reputation. That means it is much more than just our logo. It is about the images we use, the clothes we wear, the vehicles we drive, the videos we post, the company we keep and how staff present themselves. Only by maintaining our strong brand presence in Croydon, and expanding our brand recognition beyond the boroughs boundaries, can we continue to build our reputation. This is key to our growth and continued success in line with the Strategic Business Plan.

Develop the ways we communicate

To be able to communicate effectively we know it is important to have a range of different methods to reach our audiences. The ultimate aim is to reach people through their preferred way of receiving information and to provide simple, convenient ways for people to contact us.



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Website

Our website is where we would like our community to come to when they want news or have a query for Hear Us. Continuing to develop new online services is crucial to meeting our community's expectations and needs, as well as achieving better value for money and developing greener ways of working.

Hear Us Website, about our services: www.hear-us.org

Hear Us Guide, about other services around Croydon: www.guide-hear-us.org

Social Media

Social media is an excellent way to reach ever-mobile audiences. Continuing to grow our social media community is an important part of how we will better target our communications, providing information to people we know are interested or involved with Hear Us.

Hear Us social media sites:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hearuscroydon

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/hearuscroydon>

Instagram: www.instagram.com/hearuscroydon

Instagram: www.instagram.com/hearuslinkworking

Printed Materials

Many of our community are not digitally savvy or prefer to be communicated with in print. It is the cornerstone of Hear Us communications and we will continue to develop it as an important way of reaching our community. Other printed materials including posters, leaflets, postcards and flyers complement it.

Media Management

How we respond to questions from the media and work with reporters is an important part of managing our reputation and building on the Hear Us brand so we are easily recognised. We will develop a media approach that takes into account different scenarios with appropriate spokespeople.

Networking

Forming effective, valuable partnerships continues to be an important strand of our communications work as an organisation. Planning and organising how Hear Us connects with other important, influential people and businesses



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across the borough of Croydon, regionally and nationally is vital to Hear Us 's reputation and success.

Memberships

Hear Us needs members to support our work, represent the charity in the community and champion equal access to support for people with severe and enduring mental illness.

Hear Us members vote for new trustees and help to shape the direction of the charity as a fully service-user-run organisation. Members also play a role in improving mental health support services and tackling stigma in Croydon, south London and beyond.

Crisis Communications

Be prepared should something bad happen is an important part of managing the risks to the organisation and its reputation. Hear Us has a strong crisis communications plan, but this must be maintained and tested regularly to continue to ensure it is effective.

Internal Communications

It is incredibly important to equip staff with the knowledge, skills and information needed to provide excellent customer services. Internal communications are an important part of this and we will develop a plan to improve how we connect with staff and encourage a culture of success.

Marketing

Coming up with ways to promote our products and services to different groups of people is an important part of becoming more commercial and generating income for the business. We will review how we currently market the different areas of Hear Us that sell products and services to improve how we create demand and generate leads.

Campaigns

When there is a specific need, with a specific objective in mind, Hear Us may need to create a campaign to ensure effective delivery of the messages needed. Campaigns should be used sparingly, for big issues, and Hear Us will place a limit of three campaigns in any one calendar year.



Communication deliverables

Understand our audiences

Carry out an audience analysis, including preferred communication preferences and document the findings as part of a comprehensive client insight exercise to help us tailor our communications to suit our audiences.

Tell the story of Hear Us

Create a suite of guidance documents that establish straplines, key messages, language, tone of voice and other tools based on our vision, values and objectives, which help to build Hear Us's culture of success, making our Strategic Business Plan and brand values clear to all.

A clear and recognisable brand

Develop the Hear Us brand and update our brand guide to take into account business changes and ambitions including our various commercial subsidiaries/ efforts and create easy to use quick guides for different audiences including staff, partners and contractors to develop the ways we communicate.

Develop the ways we communicate

- Develop an evidence-based communications action plan that captures the actions needed to contribute to the aims within the Strategic Business Plan, Communications Strategy and other strategies across the business.
- Create and implement a new website and self-service portal to enable our service users to communicate with us online and continue to develop both to encourage maximum use, creating a digital by choice culture.
- Create a social media approach to increase use of all Hear Us accounts by our audiences and to better tailor messages to the relevant follower groups so we reach more people digitally and grow our online community.
- Understand our staff communication needs better and develop a set of actions to address the findings, leading to a specific Internal Communications Plan to ensure staff have the information they need to



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provide great customer service and create a culture of excellence to attract and keep the best people at Hear Us.

- Create a media approach outlining designated spokespeople for different scenarios to promote and protect Hear Us and its reputation and to increase recognition and opportunities.
- Create specific marketing plans for initiatives and schemes for Hear Us and its subsidiaries to generate leads with the ultimate aim of increasing our income to achieve our growth ambitions.
- Develop a strategic partners and membership programme to organise and plan the valuable connections established and needed for Hear Us to make the commercial links necessary to achieve growth and development ambitions, and to encourage learning and best practice in the industry and across working disciplines.
- Create a maximum of three campaigns per year as identified by the Senior Management Team to promote priority areas key to the ongoing success of the business.
- Review the Crisis Communications Plan on an annual basis.

How we will keep track

To ensure we are focussed in working towards the aims set out in this strategy, we will monitor and measure our progress by:

- Reporting progress against the Communications Strategy to the Board of Trustee annually, with reviews of aims as needed.
- Quarterly reporting to the Board of Trustees as part of the performance monitoring against the Strategic Business Plan.
- Quarterly monitoring of the Communications Strategy at Customer Focus Committee with a focus on the current areas of work being carried out.
- Service User satisfaction survey results carried out every two years.
- Staff survey results completed at least every two years in partnership with HR.
- Develop a set of performance



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Please read this document in conjunction:

[SECTION A.1.1 Business Strategy](#)

[SECTION A.1 Marketing Strategy & Marketing Plan](#)



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Version #	Author	Date	Version Notes
HU-V3	Tim Oldham	29/10/2021	FINAL
HU-V5	Tim Oldham	14/04/2023	New Revision – annual review
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		Click or tap to enter a date.	