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Role: PDM (Programme Delivery Manager) Engagement

Project involved in:
Community Advisory Group

District: West Yorkshire
(Wakefield based)



"I hope my case study helps professionals understand and hopefully if anyone out there is struggling please reach out. It's OK not to be OK"

Dawn Bland

Adults background:

Dawn is an active member of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) who was recruited via Spectrum People (a mental health support charity) in the Wakefield District.

The aim of the CAG is to provide a consultation platform with a regular group of volunteers and allow them to use their local knowledge of West Yorkshire communities to comment on and influence new violence reduction unit (VRU) interventions and ensure any proposals best suit what our communities want and need to reduce serious violence. Most importantly, the group is owned and chaired by members – providing a voice for the community.

Dawn has lived experience of childhood trauma and domestic abuse and has a passion for making a positive change for others. Dawn has previously been homeless and has been through the care system. Her first suicide attempt was at 12 years of age.

She submits several pieces of art and poetry to the VRU which will be shared on our website as part of the group biographies. She is a campaigning poet and artist and has released some publications via Spectrum People.

"I write my poetry through my life experiences. All I want to do is help others as to me it's never been about money as you can't put a price tag on anyone. This is why all money from my poetry books goes straight to charity to raise awareness and reach out to others."



Situation at the beginning of the intervention/project:

- Dawn has experienced childhood trauma and domestic abuse as an adult. She suffers with mental health conditions because of this and struggles to find mental health support services such as counselling which can cater for her needs which are often described as 'too complex'.
- She feels let down by a lack of services and frustrated at the 'false hope' when services are advertised but then she is turned away.

"I have tried to get counselling for my childhood trauma and constantly hit a brick wall. I have found with emotional unstable personality disorder we just get told by most services 'sorry we can't help as your needs are too complex'. This is another issue we need to deal with as too many people are falling through the gaps."

- She feels strongly about making sure her voice is heard and she has thanked us for believing in her.
- Her book sales raise money for Spectrum People, a mental health charity in Wakefield.

Milestones achieved:



Publishing several books of her poetry which she produced in lockdown.



Being part of art displays and being asked to host her art at several train stations in Wakefield.



A growing social media presence where she shares her artwork and poetry and supports other people with trauma. She also shares information about support helplines and services.



Being an active influential member of our Community Advisory Group and seizing opportunities to attend other groups such as the Trauma Informed Community Collaborative and raised key areas of concern around mental health support with West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin.



Met with the West Yorkshire Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Alison Lowe, to discuss her challenges to access mental health services and the aim of setting up a survivor support group in Wakefield.



Challenges faced:



Accessing mental health support in particular counselling services to allow her to deal with her childhood trauma.



When she first secured a place on the group, there were some barriers to digital access which the VRU and Spectrum People worked in partnership to solve; the VRU purchased Spectrum People a tablet which Dawn has access to use for each meeting (as the meetings started during covid restriction periods).

Current situation:

- Dawn took part in some Group Dynamics Training as part of the Community Advisory Group.

The aim of the training was to upskill volunteers and to ensure that the group works effectively together when consulting on proposed VRU interventions.

The training aims included working through group conflict, facilitating problem solving and shared group outcomes and how to be a resilient group facilitator. This will benefit her with her aim of setting up a survivor support group in Wakefield district.

- Through her lived experience, brought a real-life perspective and challenge to the task we completed around connecting people to our services and ensuring our services work together effectively.



“When I was homeless I was lucky the police picked me up and took me to a hostel. Please help me make the much needed changes in our services as we can’t keep sticking a plaster on these issues.”

- She feels empowered that she is getting her voice heard to campaign for change within services and using her voice to speak on behalf of other people who are ‘too complex’ to access mental health services.
- During her meeting with Alison Lowe, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, she spoke also positively about engagement she had with police officers who had supported her when dealing with her abusive ex-partner including criminal damage and a restraining order.
- She is working with Touchstone colleagues to apply for a Safer Communities Fund grant to set up a survivor’s support group in Wakefield as she has identified a gap in service provision.
- Alison advised she also empowers this group to keep attending partnership meetings and campaigning for change to mental health support and accessibility to services for those with complex needs.

“If my case study makes the much needed changes and reaches out to others that are struggling with any issues I have faced, then we are making a difference. Thank you for supporting me and thank you for having me on the violence reduction board.”

“Being on the board has benefited my mental health and gives me a focus to help others.”