

Networks of Wellbeing - Update for Asset transfer request, 28 January 2018

In common with the rest of the UK, Huntly has an aging population. However, Huntly's population of over 65's is significantly higher than the average for both Scotland and the rest of Aberdeenshire (Huntly Profile 2015 by Aberdeenshire Council) and this is further evidenced by the presence of three care homes within the town. Huntly also has a significantly higher dementia diagnosis rate of 1.5% of its population compared to an Aberdeenshire average of 0.8%. In addition, current Aberdeenshire Community Mental Health funding criteria excludes over 65s and under 16s from their services which leaves a large vacuum of services for vulnerable age groups. Anecdotally, the local GP practice recent confirmed that there are no council services for older people in Huntly and we are also being told that services in nearby towns are shutting down resulting in even more enquiries about our services.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the mental health and wellbeing of young people is of increasing concern in society and although schools are proactive in their approach to addressing specific concerns, they do not always have the skills or resources to provide this 'in house'. Our local schools have taken a positive step by looking at how we can work together to address the challenges faced by young people today and are looking to our Cycling Connections and Mindfulness coaching to provide support to the young people in their care.

We are aware through the local health centre that there is a lack of NHS Counselling services except for severe cases which itself can have a waiting list of over 1 year. In response to the high demand for counselling services not being met by the NHS (as advised by our local GP practice), a Person-centred Counselling Service using paid, volunteer and student placement counsellors was set-up in Jan 2018. Since then our service has counselled 130 people with a current waiting list of 13 weeks and 2/3 new enquiries being made each week. This service is free at the point of delivery as many who access the service have low income or live on or around the poverty line. Those who access our counselling service are currently aged 18-82 and from all backgrounds in society, including individuals experiencing rural isolation. They bring a range of issues including: depression; anxiety, addiction, relationship issues, work-related stress, the aftermath of childhood trauma, the aftermath of sexual violence and intimate violence, grief, dealing with chronic and long-term illness and pain, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. We hope to extend our counselling service to include young people aged 11-18 years.

At our core, our drop-in centre provides a safe space for one-to-one support work, including initial assessment of referrals, peer support group, mindfulness tuition and our Bike Shack project. In some cases the support 'intervention' may only last a few sessions but will identify a problem in its early stages and can prevent a debilitating mental health crisis well before it impacts. Additionally we can support a person from long-term unemployment into employment, or provide longer term occupational work via our bike project or social activities. For example, working with Community Payback & Community Learning and Development we can offer a volunteering placement linked to a qualification which can enable that individual to gain qualifications while fulfilling their obligations thus improving their chance of subsequent employment.

Numbers supported per month (excluding Bike Shack)

Please note that in January 2017 we supported, through a range of activities and 1:1 support, an average of 300 people per month.

In August 2018 this number had increased to an average of 500 people per month – an increase of over 60% in just over 18 months.

Please also note that these figures relate directly to those who access our services and do not include the families, friends and carers of people struggling with poor mental health and on whom there lies an increased burden of worry and concern. As the mental health of an individual improves, so does the mental health of those around them.

We would propose to use the building not only for counselling services, but to run activities such as Chillin Women, Relaxation, Peer Support and our daily drop in.

Counselling:

Currently we can offer up to 27 hours of counselling a week. Each client is offered up to 10 sessions, although this can be extended at the discretion of the counsellor if necessary. Clients may not require 10 sessions, with some clients finding as few as three sessions helpful. We have helped clients with a wide range of presenting issues, including:

- addiction
- alcoholism
- grief
- passed / childhood trauma
- work related stress
- depression
- loss
- relationship issues
- anxiety
- issues related to being a carer
- life changing health issues
- domestic violence
- the aftermath of sexual assault
- PTSD
- anger management issues
- suicidal thoughts

We also work with people who have severe mental health challenges, which may be life long, and who may be engaged with other NHS mental health services.

Benefits of the Service - The clients who complete the counselling process at networks all report that counselling has helped them meet the challenges they presented with.

Benefits reported include:

- A lift in mood, which can be slight, or a move from suicidal thoughts/plans to feeling they are able to cope with their lives.
- Managing anxiety and depression to enable engagement with everyday life tasks.
- Ability to return to work after being off due to mental health issues.
- An improvement in partner and family relationships.
- An increase in self-esteem and resilience.

The service we provide may reduce pressure on other services, e.g. Doctors at Bydand medical centre have reported a reduction in doctor's appointments by those using the counselling service.

Networks of Wellbeing endeavours to engage with people with mental health issues before they become mental health crises and this can help to reduce the pressure on other local mental health services which treat serious mental illness, such as Cornhill Hospital, by preventing the crisis situation through early intervention.

Client feedback:

Feedback from Oct to Dec 2018 shows that when people were asked how they felt before starting with one of our activities, the response was that 40% felt poor to very poor about the state of their mental wellbeing, and only 13% felt good or very good.

At the end of the block of activities this had changed dramatically and 0% felt poor or very poor with an overwhelming 90% feeling good or very good about the state of their mental wellbeing.

Through increased publicity and signposting from GP surgeries and other partners, more people are aware of our services in particular the counselling service which has been severely lacking in this area. This increased awareness has resulted in an increase in contact being made with our services and, as part of the recovery process, we have seen an increase in supported volunteers wishing to participate in our activities (in a more formal fashion) as part of a recovery journey.

Rather than a single case study we have collated feedback received from various groups and thought that you would like to hear from the people who have benefitted from our services.

Our service users regularly indicate that they “would be lost without the service because it is their lifeline”.

A regular service user and a supported volunteer is quoted as saying “I would be more likely to just stay in the house, not go out much and dwell on my problems”.

The immediate family of another service user has stated “He no longer feels useless but instead feels valued and included in the community. It gives him a sense of purpose & makes him feel like he is contributing something.

By him becoming involved in the project and getting access to social activities out with the times we are together, NoW have also made a huge difference to my own wellbeing.”

Another service user joined a group to “boost my confidence” as she was “looking to go back to work after a long period of unemployment” and she stated “The group has been of significant help to my mental health and wellbeing and confidence. I feel accepted here, loved and appreciated.”

“I learnt new skills and had the opportunity to connect with a group of diverse people. The opportunity to learn breathing and relaxation techniques that I can use in my everyday life has been very helpful”