

An ordinary life

Annual Review 2009/2010



Welcome



I am delighted to have been part of Together during the past year and to have been able to contribute to the organisation's growth and development. Our trustee board has grown in strength and

capacity and I would like to thank all of our trustees for their commitment and their expertise.

These are testing times for our public services, for the voluntary sector, and for the people who rely on them. Concerns about the recession and job losses make it ever more important that we can provide support for people to gain and maintain mental wellbeing.

Together is engaging with more and more people and working with a growing number of partners and allies to reach into communities and support people who are vulnerable.

I am very confident that Together will make an increasingly important contribution to supporting the mental wellbeing of people across the country over the coming years, despite the uncertainties brought about by the current economic circumstances.

Antony Sheehan
Chair



Over the past year at Together we have demonstrated our commitment to support some of the most vulnerable people in the mental health system. Our specialist advocacy work supporting

people in secure hospitals has expanded. The reputation of our court diversion services continues to grow and deservedly so, and we are committed to establishing such services elsewhere so that we can support more people in the criminal justice system.

In contrast we are developing new ways to deliver personalised community based services and offering people the chance to become or be supported by peer supporters.

Our staff, volunteers and service users have shown a tremendous level of dedication to each other, to their work and to Together, and are resourceful and innovative in their efforts to continuously improve the lives of the people we support.

I would like to thank everyone for their hard work, energy and skill.

Liz Felton
Chief Executive

Together is a national charity working alongside people with mental health issues on their journey to leading fulfilling and independent lives.

We **aspire** to a world where each individual can play their part in breaking down the barriers that exist around mental health through ignorance and lack of understanding

We **believe** that people with mental health issues benefit from leading their own lives and shaping the services they receive

We **promote** our conviction that the best mental health services are delivered in partnership with the people we work alongside



An ordinary life

Introduction

Most of us accept without question the components of our lives that make it 'ordinary' – a place to live, friends and family around us, the freedom to go places and an active social life.

For people with mental health issues, however, those basic elements that are the fabric of life can be painfully elusive. Most aspire simply to the dignity and freedom of living independently, and the nourishment that engagement with friends, family and the wider community brings.

And when we asked people who use our services what they most wanted in life, their answers were testament to the isolation and lack of choice many people with mental health problems face:

- To be the same as anyone else in society and have self satisfaction in what we do.
- A job, training and support,
- Money to spend on going out, a short break or a holiday, having a pet or a hobby.
- Someone to share hobbies or pastimes.
- A home that is safe and for as long as we wish, that is warm and comfortable.
- Relationships or a special friend to meet up with and have a social life.
- Someone to speak to and trust about personal issues or when life is tough.

We have recognised that people want more from mental health services than holding them in one place, but to help them on their journey to an ordinary life. From our residences to the various kinds of community support we offer Together exists to help make people's hopes and aspirations a reality.

And every day, our staff see people finding the confidence and belief in themselves to shed the label of 'mental illness' and take their rightful place in society.

In 2009/10 Together provided a safe haven for more than **400** people every month in our **40** residences. **1,200** people came every month to our resource centres to develop new skills and socialise. Together supported **130** people every month to break their cycle of offending. And our advocates helped around **430** people every month to have their voice heard in their dealings with authorities.

Working with offenders



Together's Forensic Mental Health Practitioner (FMHP) service has been working with offenders for 17 years, helping them to break out of the cycle of offending and start a new life.

Our practitioners work in courts across London to identify people with mental health problems and to work with the relevant authorities to ensure there is adequate support to improve their health and wellbeing. We know that it's putting the ordinary things in place – a job, a home, family and community links - that can reduce offending: a better outcome primarily for the individual concerned, but also for the criminal justice system, and society as a whole.

People with mental health problems make up the vast majority of the prison population. It is estimated that around 70% of both male and female prisoners have at least two or more recognised mental health problems. Yet in the groundbreaking 'Bradley Report' which came out in April 2009, author Lord Bradley concluded that too many people pass through the criminal justice system without their mental health needs being addressed. Together supports the recommendations made in the report, and was delighted to be mentioned in it as an example of good practice.

The present Government has recognised that the majority of people who are given short term prison sentences for low-level crimes re-offend after release. This, combined with the extremely high costs of keeping a person in prison, has triggered a debate about the effectiveness of short-term sentences and possible alternatives, including appropriate community sentencing.

Together believes that community support is a more effective means of tackling offending than short term prison sentences for offenders with mental health problems who pose no threat to the public. And in a poll we conducted with You Gov in 2010, around 60% of those questioned agreed with us.

Highlights for the FMHP service include:

- Being cited as an example of good practice in the Bradley Report
- The expansion of our work with offenders, including the launch of a dedicated court liaison and outreach service for women.
- Supporting the London Criminal Justice Partnership at their national mental health conference for frontline criminal justice staff
- Being nominated as a key partner in the setting up of a national Mental Health Court pilot scheme with Her Majesty's Court Service.

Around 130 people are supported every month through Together's FMHP service

Amelia*, whose depression caused her to slide into a nightmare of drug addiction and decades in and out of prison.

Before:

"You have such a lack of hope, trust in people and self-esteem that it makes you withdraw from the world. I found myself caught in this emptiness between not wanting to actually die, but not wanting to live the life I have, and not having the confidence to do anything about it. So you blot it out with drugs."

After:

"I've just bought a sofa for my new house; the first place I can call my own in a long, long time. I'm getting help from a doctor, I've got my teeth fixed! Ordinary things for most people, but major for me. I don't make myself any promises, or goals that I don't know I can reach. But I'm going to get there because there is no way I'm going back, and for the first time I feel I have something to aim for."

Housing



Together's residences provide both a safe haven for people emerging from a crisis and a place where they can build the skills and confidence to move towards an independent and fulfilling life.

We believe strongly that the least our residents can expect is the freedom and dignity of having their 'own front door', regardless of the degree of support they need to cope with their circumstances at a particular moment in time.

Our ultimate goal is always to see our residents move on to independent living. Many of them have spent numerous years in and out of hospital and the journey to independence can be challenging. Despite this we are absolutely committed to walking alongside the individual on his/her road to recovery, however long it takes.

And every year we witness many inspiring people who move forward in their lives – often against all the odds

Own front door

This year, we embarked on a visionary and ambitious project to radically transform one of our, currently defunct, properties and at the same time provide a blueprint for our future residential support for people.

Based in Croydon, the plan was drawn up by award-winning architects Brady Mallalieu who are renowned for their work in designing accommodation for people with particular needs. Our service users were a critical part of the design process and highlighted the need for safety, privacy and space for social engagement. The design also incorporates a number of ecologically friendly elements. *At the time of writing, we are waiting to see whether we will be successful in gaining planning permission.*

Together runs more than 40 residences providing various levels of support for people with mental health problems

Sue was helped into independent living after spending most of her life in and out of acute wards.

Before:

"They told me at 18 that I was not safe to be out in the community. I was in and out of hospital for a long time. I tried to commit suicide several times. I had a daughter who I loved very much but I could not look after her. I was very lucky because my sister agreed to take care of her. I did not want to hurt anyone but when I was ill I did do strange things and I suppose people were frightened of me. For a long time no-one told me or my family anything about my illness and where I could cope."

After:

"I was the first person to move into one of Together's residence in 1992. Since that day I have never been back to hospital, which I know is down to Together and the support from my family.

"Today I am in a wonderful flat in town. Having a decent place to live means the world to me. I really was very ill for many years and thinking of living like I am now was just a dream. Simple things like paying bills, keeping the flat looking good, going out shopping with my family and going on holiday with them were things I never believed I would be able to do. I have a wonderful relationship with my daughter. For the first time in my life I feel like I am in control."

Service user involvement

Involving service users in their own recovery, as well as using their knowledge and insight to shape the way Together functions, are principles woven into the fabric of the organisation. Our aim is to be trusted for our expertise in service user involvement.

In 2004 we developed the Service User Involvement Directorate (SUID) – a team of highly qualified staff, all of whom have lived experience of mental health issues - who are tasked to help ensure that service user involvement is embedded at every level of Together.

The team, led by Director Anne Beales MBE, herself a luminary in the mental health service user movement, has gone from strength to strength and continues to provide valuable support and expertise for staff so they can integrate involvement into their work. The team also represents Together at a variety of high-level national and international forums.



Learn from experience

The SUID has championed the increasingly important role of peer support in the road to recovery for people with mental health issues.

In essence, peer support is when people with lived experience of mental health problems use their own knowledge and expertise to help both themselves and others. It is often acknowledged as the most powerful and effective way of supporting recovery.

As part of Together's strategic objective to demonstrate the value of peer support, we commissioned a significant piece of research in 2009. The findings were presented at an event which brought national figures working in peer support together.

Highlights for SUID included:

- Establishing and facilitating a Peer2Peer Group to develop innovative models and share good practice.
- Working with the Priory Group to help improve levels of service user involvement across its mental health services.

- Securing accreditation for our 'Voices Together: Service user involvement and leadership' training with Middlesex University.
- Supporting the development of the 'My Way' transformation pilot in Wandsworth.
- Developing the team development programme in our Castle Resource Centre to promote co-production as a model of delivering mental health services in a resource centre.

Nigel went from 24/7 supported housing to become one of our most precious resources in service user involvement.

Before

"I had been in supported housing for ten years when I saw a poster on the notice board about a meeting SUID was holding in London. I had been fed up spending so much time in bed because of my illness and decided I had to change my lifestyle for the better. The first time I went to London I would never have managed to get there on my own.

"I'd been at the service a long time and it was really good to meet and share life experiences with a wider range of people. It helped put me on the road to recovery. Two months later I did a course in training skills and got up and gave a presentation. It didn't get boos – it got applause!"

After

"I've participated in all sorts of forums for Together since then. It's good to hear those things like how much better I look. I'm not here to win an award or anything or a battle, I'm here to get better. The most important thing is your health. I want to get better for my son and family.

"The big thing in my life is that after 11 years in 24/7 housing I've achieved my dream to move on to my own sort of flat, and the participation in the things I've done helped me with that. It's also helped me get more involved locally in my community. Without massive Together support I wouldn't be here to help others."

Update on personalisation

The Government has expressed continued commitment to the important process of personalisation – giving people with mental health issues choice and control over their own journey of recovery. Whilst roll-out remains frustratingly patchy across the country, Together is committed to championing and integrating personalisation as well as ensuring that its implementation works in the interests of people with mental health issues.

In November 2009, we hosted a national conference in London at which President Obama's Mental Health Advisor Dr Dan Fisher was the keynote speaker. Entitled 'Should Service Users Lead the Personalisation Agenda?', participants were able to benefit from experience gained in a number of different contexts.

Other highlights included Together staff facilitating a workshop at the biggest international event ever held on personalisation in Liverpool in March 2010. The event was organised by In Control, the charity set up precisely to champion the cause and influence the development of personalisation.



Resource centres



People with mental health problems can find ‘day centres’ a safe haven, and a respite for those who want to escape the isolation of their daily existences.

However, we know there is a danger of them becoming a destination in themselves rather than a stop on the road to people taking their rightful place in the community.

Together has been working to transform our centres into ‘resource centres’ with an emphasis on wellbeing, growth and opportunity. Visitors can access a variety of services – from counselling to IT skills, to practical help in healthy living – all aimed at building the confidence and skills to help people move on to leading an ‘ordinary life’.

Our ‘My Way’ service, developed this year in Wandsworth, takes that concept a step further. The service aims to overcome the challenges of personalisation and find a solution to making community mental health work for the individual.

It is a person-centred service which moves away from ‘one size fits all’ approach to ensuring people have a choice in what support they receive – whether they be conventional services, training, employing a carer or emotional support, and can ‘buy’ the package which best suits their needs. Supporting people through the transition to personal budgets is also an integral part of My Way’s approach.

Together supports more than 1,200 people every month through its 13 resource centres



Anne* has received support from our Reading Resource Centre to give her the confidence to pursue her chosen career path after years of sporadic employment.

Before:

“I have definitely lost out on jobs because of my mental health condition. I could see potential employers almost physically shrink when I would mention it at interviews. I’ve also lost jobs because employers have been unable to cope with it.

“Going to the Job Centre was a pretty futile exercise. The people there were so rushed, and had no concept about how to advise someone like me. They just wanted to get you into any job, and tick the box.”

After:

“What I got at Reading Resource was someone who really believed in my dream to become a youth worker, and instilled the confidence to pursue this, but also lots of practical advice like where to go to look for jobs, what training I would need. I’m also now working as a peer worker at the centre – talking and offering support to people who may be going through a difficult moment.”

Community support

People with complex and recurring mental health issues can have their lives interrupted by sporadic periods of illness. A spell in an acute ward can result in people losing houses, jobs and social support, making it difficult to pick up the pieces when they leave hospital.

Together's network of community support services exists to provide a safety net for people living in the community – providing practical advice for critical issues like tenancies and housing, helping people maintain social contact, as well as offering much-needed support for carers.

With the right kind of support people with mental health problems can flourish in the community, thereby reducing the risk of them entering or returning to hospital

A new service in Rochdale has also shown that by providing practical help – such as support in housing, benefits and so on to people whilst they are still in hospital we can help reduce 'bed blocking' (people staying in hospital longer than is needed because of lack of support in the community) and lessen the risk of relapse once people are discharged.

We are hoping the service – to bridge the gap between hospital and 'real' life - can be developed as we believe it is an important means to preventing the 'revolving door syndrome' that many people with complex mental health problems end up trapped in.

Caring for carers

It's not hard to see why caring for someone with a mental health problem can be stressful and all-consuming.

Together's five Carer projects help to reduce that stress, and make a huge difference to the way people cope

Support can include one-to-one help for a carer struggling to cope at a given moment; respite care; supporting carers during their contact with health and social authorities, or providing recreational and social activities to break the social isolation which is often a characteristic of caring.



New initiatives included a successful horticultural therapy programme for carers who access our Carers Service in Wakefield, and a forum organised by our team in St Helen's, Merseyside to bring carers together with health professionals from a nearby health centre.

Jane* has been caring for her son Tom who has experienced extreme anxiety to the point where he couldn't bear to be on his own.

Before:

"No matter how hard Tom tried he literally couldn't get out of the door without me for two years. I love him very much, but of course that took its toll on us. We went along to Together's Carer Development Service Project and found out about a garden group. Tom didn't feel threatened on the allotment and he gradually grew in confidence. So much so, that he is now starting to go out with a group of friends on his own, and even ran a stall with me at our recent Open Day."

After

"It has been wonderful to see him blossom and I am finding that I can finally do things on my own. I have been able to, for example, start looking for a job – something I couldn't have imagined a few months ago. Tom has started to really believe he has a future. And that means I can too..."



Advocacy

Government legislation in recent years provided significant safeguards to people with mental health issues and a greater say in the decision making processes that are so pivotal to their lives through providing access to advocacy services.

Together has qualified staff working as both **Independent Mental Health**

Advocates – specialists supporting people who have been detained under the Mental Health Act or who are subject to, for example, Supervised Community Treatment Orders - and as **Independent Mental Capacity Advocates** – specialists created in the Mental Capacity Act 2005 to support someone who is deemed to lack capacity.

Our advocates, who importantly are independent from authorities, work with individuals to ensure their voice is heard, that they are treated fairly, and that they have the information they need to understand what is happening to them and make informed decisions.

Together provides advocacy services in community settings, but also in ten medium and high secure hospital settings. Working in a

sometimes challenging environment, our highly trained team work with patients who are often at their most distressed and vulnerable to help them through the process of hospitalisation, and also provide them with the means to understand and articulate their needs and wishes during their stay.

People with mental health problems often tell us about the powerlessness they feel in the relationship they have with health and social

professionals. We have seen that even those at their most vulnerable are able, with the right support, to have a clear say in decisions being made about their care and support.

Around 780 people are supported every week through our Advocacy Services

Joan* felt intimidated by health authorities before being supported by Together.

Before:

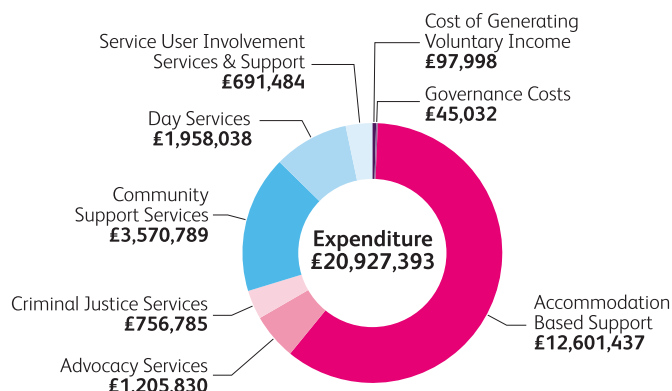
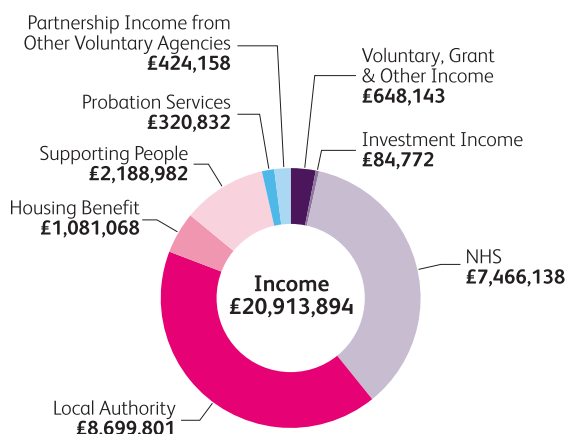
"I was totally unequipped to deal with my Incapacity Benefit being withdrawn, due to an unfair and traumatic medical assessment, during which I felt I had been coerced. I had been advised I could appeal the decision, but felt overwhelmed by the thought of this. When I first met my Advocate, I was very nervous, tearful, confused, depressed and anxious. The Advocate helped me with all the paperwork, talked everything through, and was with me at the Tribunal, which I was so grateful or as I was shaking during it!"

After:

"Without this support and help I certainly would not have got the fabulous outcome of being awarded 10 points and told that I was originally underscored. I would not have had the knowledge or the strength to have delivered the positive outcome we achieved. This has helped me gain some control over my life as I was always worrying having my benefits withdrawn when I felt too ill to go back to work."

**not her real name*

Financial figures



Thank you...

We are extremely grateful to all those local communities, individuals, trust and foundations, as well as corporates that have pledged their support and given generously.

We would especially like to thank the following for their generous support:

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- St Ann's Church
- St Lukes P C C
- The Ammco Trust

- The Guiting Trust
- The Hospital Saturday Fund
- The Lynn Foundation
- The New Temple Lodge
- The Rosca Trust
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