

# Battle Scars

Newsletter – September 2020

Dear members

We were in lockdown last time I sent you a newsletter... and we're in another lockdown - in Leeds anyway! Definitely not what I was expecting 3 months ago.

It is not like the first though. Some things are clearer and others are even more confusing than before. And by now almost every organisation has had to learn to run and attend virtual meetings and events and we've been one of them. More and more things are happening virtually from ours and other organisations' Zoom AGM's and Microsoft Teams meeting with the Leeds CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) to live broadcasts from the Charity Commission and reporting from the All Political Party Group on Suicide & Self-harm Prevention. My diary is getting awfully packed again and I have had to become pickier about which I attend to make the best use of my time. The aim is for other staff and/or volunteer to become regular members of some of these groups in the future.

Both I and the trustees are very grateful to so many of you who joined us for the virtual AGM in August. Also, every member but one voted, another thing we greatly appreciate. We're hoping for some return to normality next year with a physical, face-to-face AGM with lunch and hopefully the band we had booked for this year. But we will set it up so that members who cannot make it in person can link up via zoom. It has solved the issue of out-of-area members being able to join us on the day and we would hate to leave them out.

One thing that sort of crept up on us by going virtual was that now, in reality, we're operating nationally instead of regionally. We know self-harm is very widespread and in a way,

we wish there was no need for our existence, but we can now start reaching and supporting people out of our local areas.

We are getting daily requests from people wishing to join the invite list for the self-harm peer support groups. We've reached the point where the groups get fully booked, often within a couple of hours of the invite email going out. The lighter-touch group was eventually named the Inbetweeners and was launched on Oct 1<sup>st</sup> with excellent attendance. We had many tech issues with a volunteer new to the virtual services and one brand new facilitator but we're hoping to resolve them by the next group. The family group is not doing great with numbers greatly fluctuating. No matter how disheartening this is for a group that was asked for, we are hoping that with time it'll stabilise. Since we launched the virtual groups in mid-May, we've had a total attendance of 330 made up of 66 individuals. We do get a number of people who book and don't attend but, thanks to our muddled brains, it's usually a matter of getting days and times mixed up, forgetting altogether or anxiety winning. We never penalise non-attendees. We will not make people feel worse when they feel bad enough already.

Three of the 5 groups are being run exclusively by volunteers with one of our volunteer leaders definitely taking the lead and modifying our existing activities to make them suitable for the virtual groups. We're getting interest from existing service users to become virtual group facilitators and since we expect to be setting more groups up, they're at the top of the list. Now we are training them virtually (we're getting our money's worth out of the Zoom

subscription!) we'll also be able to recruit from further afield.

Volunteers are currently putting together a large UK database so we can spread the word and we certainly got more interest following our last mailout to whoever is on the list so far. We haven't been able to take advantage of some of our volunteers' skills and talents to the full extent but hoping to develop better suited opportunities for them in the not-too-distant future.

I am trying to keep in contact with all our volunteers with various success but, at the moment, half of our workforce is on hold. We all know that eventually things will change again though.

The virtual Q&A/training sessions for professionals are slowly taking off. We did two self-harm sessions in August, had to cancel September's but October's is nearly full. I am even working out how to deliver the full training workshop online. We didn't get much interest in the eating disorder training at first but that is changing as word spreads.

41 letters were recently sent out to all schools in Leeds to remind them we're here and what we offer. We will be working together with the Voluntary Action Leeds project Young Lives Leeds to bring other charities working with young people together and discuss best ways to approach both secondary and primary schools and services to think about developing.

Some of you took part in the Crisis Summit that took place in January looking at crisis support in Leeds. Crisis is one of the things the new Leeds Mental Health Collaborative is going to look at and we're now making some more progress. Battle Scars is one of the organisations that are heavily involved in this due to so many of our members having experienced mental health crises. Since we're not commissioned, we have the luxury to be blunt with the truth (blunt not nasty) which has actually worked to our advantage and made our input very sought after.

Financially, we're at a pretty even keel. As explained at the AGM, both income and expenses have dropped. We're hoping the training income will start tipping this scale along with some very small fundraising such as the £72 raised for us by the Eastgate Jobcentre staff for world suicide prevention day and the £70 our two recent raffles raised.

The latest news about our Lottery funding application is that it will remain on hold until at least March which has been a blow. I will be focusing on funding over the next couple of weeks and hoping to put a few applications in. It is a rather complicated process with many funders not willing to pay for rent or salaries which is exactly what we need for our next steps. It has been frustrating that this is taking so long but it would have been worse if we were paying rent for premises during the pandemic and being unable to use it!

12 people very kindly reviewed our self-harm addiction workbook. All the comments have been taken into account and we're now in the final stages of incorporating them and ironing out any creases. Hoping to send it to the printers over the next few weeks. The decision has been made to charge P&P with a small admin charge to cover expenses such as PayPal charges but the workbooks themselves will be free to anybody requesting them. A PDF version will also be available upon request. A follow up and review process has already been agreed upon but we still need to work out some of the practical details.

I won't bore you with all the other things we have in the pipelines, some are in the early stages, some are still whispers and suggestions. I can assure you we don't sit still though!

As always, thank you for reading this and thank you so much for your support. Please look after yourselves and stay safe.

Jenny - CEO