

Battle Scars

Newsletter – October 2021

Dear members

With the AGM now behind us – thank you very much to all who joined us and/or voted – the last bit of business linked to the previous financial year, we are refocusing on our projects and services. But we recently had a major spanner in the works: my mental health seriously deteriorated at the end of July (thanks menopause!) I spent all of September under the care of crisis services and I am now with the Community Mental Health Team. I have not stopped working throughout this period but had to reduce my hours right down, some weeks only doing about 15-20 compared to my usual 45-55. In my last newsletter I mentioned that Battle Scars has a peer support model running across all levels. This certainly proved it! I have felt supported by the trustees, the staff and the volunteers throughout this tough time. Especially our staff really stepped up their game, took over every piece of my work they could, filled in as many gaps as possible, ensured that our services kept running, found ways to work with each other to manage problems I would normally have dealt with and took as much pressure off me as they could. I am extremely grateful to them all.

My role has changed quite a lot with some changes being permanent; the main change was stepping down from all group facilitation after 5.5 years, something I did with a very heavy heart. It was something we were aiming towards, we just didn't expect to have to do it so suddenly. Again, staff and volunteers filled in the gaps. In some ways, this and other changes to my role resulted in re-distributing responsibility across our workforce, in many cases increasing staff confidence as they coped with new situations

and teaching me that this is what a team is all about. Not easy for me to relinquish control but it had to be done. I won't lie, I am glad it happened because I had to properly step into the CEO shoes and let go of tasks that did not fit this role, but, again, this isn't the manner I would have picked had I a choice! The board of trustees also backed me up every step of the way, once again, taking off as much pressure as possible. Talking about the board, Debbie Riley stepped down as a trustee shortly before the AGM and Craig Hughes was voted in bringing in different skills and views. We are deeply grateful for all the work Debbie did as a trustee and extremely glad she's still a member of the Battle Scars team as an employee and volunteer.

Thanks to the quick staff and volunteer mobilisation, disruption to services was minimal. And, even though due to lifting of some restrictions and summer, numbers at our groups have dropped, most are nearly fully booked once again.

We even added a social/activities group to replace the Touchstone/Battle Scars Do Something Different group which stopped running a few months ago. With a selection of activities run by various facilitators, we are hoping this group will help our service users have some fun every other Friday evening.

In September, thanks to a bit of funding coming in and using some of our unrestricted funds, we added a member of staff to our team, Christine Guthrie, as our Ambassador and Social Media Coordinator. Christine is also now responsible for our mailouts so we are expecting an increase in demand as she helps Battle Scars become better known around the country.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to put the effort required into restarting our face-to-face groups. We are dealing with different venue availability, restrictions in numbers, the need to take bookings as well as a drop in f2f group facilitators as some have moved on or are not yet comfortable doing f2f work. So, we are facing a few more hurdles than we had expected adding to the delay.

Currently the only f2f group we're running is the new 16-25's group (every Monday evening at the Lovell Park Hub near the Leeds city centre). Numbers have so far been disappointing but we are very optimistic they will pick up. We are using an Eventbrite booking system until restrictions are lifted and we can turn this into a drop-in group.

We are also days away from launching FRESH:

FRESH Follow-up
Review after
Emergency treatment of
Self-Harm

8 volunteers are now trained, equipped and ready to go, we just need to leaflets (coming back from the printers very soon) to go out to the referrers. We expect a slow start which will allow the entire team to slowly build their confidence up.

In the meantime, even though it had been heavily promoted, staff from organisations working with older people have barely responded to the offer to be trained about self-harm (following the successful funding application by the Leeds Older People's Forum to raise awareness of self-harm amongst the over 50's). The myth that self-harm only affects young people, the exact myth we want to break with this training, is what is actually stopping us reaching our target...! LOPF, Battle Scars and other partners are getting the campaign side of things rolling while speaking to more specific

teams of staff from various organisations. We are confident we will get through to them.

Our involvement with strategic planning and service redesign in Leeds is ongoing, the latest being becoming a member of the Trauma Awareness, Prevention and Response steering group. My latest experiences are coming in very handy with the Mental Health Collaborative work on crisis support in Leeds. Considering I got VIP treatment and the perfect crisis response (much to the relief of the crisis services' manager!) our aim will now be to find a way for everybody needing crisis support to get a similarly high standard response. The services avoided a grilling from me but they have also just raised their own standards to my level of expectation! Whether they'll regret that or not, time will tell!

On that note, I will finish this newsletter. As always, thank you for reading it and thank you so much for your support.

Now that our board meetings are back to f2f, we will be holding short virtual "open floor" meetings to which members will be invited to express your views, share feedback and ideas with a small number of trustees.

Please look after yourselves and stay safe.

Jenny - CEO