

positive voices

Final Evaluation



What is the Positive Voices project?

Brigstowe's Positive Voices service started in July 2016, and is in its final stages. It was funded by grants from The National Lottery Community Fund (Reaching Communities) and The Henry Smith Charity. The Positive Voices project is a service for HIV¹ positive people, delivered by and with HIV positive people, and comprises of the following three services:

Peer Support: one to one peer support for people either newly diagnosed or struggling with their HIV diagnosis.

Recently Diagnosed Workshops: a series of interactive information sessions providing information & addressing the needs of people recently diagnosed. Sessions are led by both PLWHIV² & professionals.

HIV Awareness Training: Training sessions delivered to professionals and community groups to increase knowledge around HIV, combat stigma and ignorance & thereby improve the lives of people living with HIV.

This is a summary of the final evaluation³ of the project, undertaken by an independent researcher.

What did the evaluation find?

PLWHIV articulated the absolute importance of having a place they can come to for a range of supports where they can be open about their HIV. The peer support approach, of this project, exceedingly provided this and the need for this to continue was fiercely outlined in the face of streamlined and mainstreamed services.

"I think this is invaluable"

"I think without this, there'd be a lot more suicides, yeah, there'd be more uncomfortable, this is it, this is saving lives..."

"it's the last place I have got to go, where they are cutting more and more services."
(Mentees)

Peer mentoring was seen as special and offering something quite different from other support, such as buddying or NHS services.

"When you are in places that aren't HIV specific, it creates a thing where you don't want to talk about all of you."
(Mentee)

The importance and impact of mentoring was felt strongly because the experience of being listened to, without judgement, is greatly valued.

"If newly diagnosed, meet someone else who isn't clinical and just be able to talk openly...meeting someone who is also positive and they can share their story and support you, particularly newly diagnosed people, helps them to move forwards a lot faster."
(Mentor)

¹ HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

² PLWHIV: People Living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus

³ The final evaluation aimed to explore how the original project funding proposal's outcomes were met, provide future recommendations as well as to evaluate the progress against the mid-term evaluation. The full report is available on Brigstowe's website at www.brigstowe.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Final-evaluation-Positive-Voices.pdf completed by Dr Faith Martin.

NHS HIV clinical staff use the peer mentoring scheme as a referral pathway. They recognize, welcome and encourage the opportunity for patients to talk to a peer mentor. Mentoring provides an additional source of support NHS staff can refer to, and which can potentially take some pressure off them.

"That realisation they are not alone, someone else has been there...and someone you can speak to again in the future, get support from and just to take away that fear and that anxiety of feeling like it is purely on your own shoulders. It is reassuring."
(HIV clinical staff)

The enormous impact on people who have used Positive Voices either as a client or a volunteer, strongly supports the need for follow-on funding to continue to supply this service and develop it further.

"The peer mentoring should definitely continue. It's an escape for many people. If it wasn't there, if I think of the people I have supported, their lives would be awful honestly, they wouldn't have the knowledge, they lived with fear 24/7...I think it would be terrible as many people can't access the knowledge or have a space to think. Their mental health would be, well, I don't know."
(Mentor)

The need for training was described particularly strongly by the interviewed mentees and public health staff. The mentees talked about a lack of knowledge, both in the public and for some HIV positive people who did not know about it until their own diagnosis.

"It's a preventable disease and in this day and age we shouldn't be discriminating and people should be aware...and I think there could be more done on a health promotion point of view in terms of raising the awareness of HIV and U=U campaigns".
(Bristol City Council Public Health)

Service delivery with or by HIV positive people is essential to maintain the uniqueness, credibility, and empowerment of people living with HIV.

"I get out as much, possibly different things, as much as mentees do. It's not a thing where I go there and give something, I maybe give my support and experiences, but I get a lot of things from them. I am more confident now, I am happy with my diagnosis now. I do see sometimes it is hard, but in all honesty, I wouldn't have it any other way."
(Mentor)

Activities & Outcome measures:

36 peer support mentors trained and **54 people** accessed the service as mentees

Four recently diagnosed workshops with **46 people** attending in total

43 different agencies and community groups received HIV Awareness Training

In response to the mid-term evaluation⁴ Brigstowe also trialled a **"Transition Workshop"** which was designed for mentees coming to the end of their peer-mentoring

In self-reported outcome data of participant ratings of change since using services the following was reported:



Increased 'engagement in medical treatment' was the area where fewest participants reported a change at **62%**

Recommendations

The enormous impact on people who have used the services strongly supports the need for follow-on funding to continue to supply this service, therefore:

- Seek funding in order to continue (and develop) this much needed project.
- Pursue specific funding to provide research and activities to engage with people from different communities of colour.
- Continue to increase the presence of peer mentors in the NHS HIV clinic and focus work in increasing referrals by working with clinical staff.
- Explore with mentors how they would like to address non-engagement taking particular notice on the matching process. Ensure supervision facilitates a reflective space with mentors.
- Continue to develop follow up support for mentees who have completed a mentoring relationship.
- Consider offering services not related to time since diagnosis and shorter workshops on different specific issues.
- Evaluate Telephone services devised in response to COVID-19 and potentially incorporate them in future service delivery.

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⁴ The mid-term report is also available on Brigstowe's website at www.brigstowe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Positive-Voices-Mid-Term-Evaluation.pdf completed by Dr Emer Brangan.