

positive voices

Project Mid-way
Evaluation



What is the Positive Voices project?

Brigstowe's Positive Voices project was set up in July 2016 with funding for five years from The Big Lottery (Reaching Communities) to provide services for people living with HIV¹, delivered by and with people living with HIV:

One-to-one Peer Support:

A service enabling people who are recently diagnosed or struggling to come to terms with their diagnosis to meet with a trained volunteer mentor who is also living with HIV. The mentor & mentee meet once a week to share experiences, give advice, set goals together, as well as to provide information based around the mentees' diagnosis. The mentoring relationship is time limited to promote independence, lasting up to 6 months.

Recently Diagnosed Workshops:

A series of workshops to provide HIV related information to people recently diagnosed delivered by professionals and people living with HIV. The workshops aim to promote wellbeing, prevent a future crisis, and provide the opportunity for participants to meet & connect with other people experiencing similar situations.

HIV Awareness Training:

Training sessions to empower professionals with the skills and knowledge they need to work confidently with people living with, affected by, or at risk of HIV. Topics covered include HIV transmission, prevention & treatment; testing/support services; and stigma & discrimination as well as a person living with HIV sharing their testimony.

This is a summary of the mid-way evaluation² of the project, undertaken by an independent researcher.



What did the evaluation find?

Social support from a peer is a very powerful form of support, breaking down barriers of stigma, and assisting people living with HIV to manage their diagnosis.

The involvement of people living with HIV has an invaluable impact for the Positive Voices services, and Brigstowe as an organisation.

One-to-one peer support was described as a transformative experience by both mentees and mentors. Mentees reported how mentoring had helped them to resolve a range of issues related to their diagnosis, improve their understanding and knowledge of HIV, and increase their confidence. Challenges for mentees related to the beginning as well as the ending of the mentoring relationship, and mentees' suggestions for improvements to the service were linked to these areas.

Volunteers noted that while being a mentor was a significant commitment, it was also extraordinarily rewarding. The initial training course for peer mentors, developed by Positively UK, was described as a very positive, and therapeutic, experience. Challenges for mentors included acknowledging, and dealing with, times when a mentoring relationship was not working.

¹HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

²The evaluation took place between September 2018 and February 2019. Data included activities completed during the first two years of the project; written feedback and self-reported outcomes from service users; and in-depth interviews with 15 stakeholders. The full report is available at www.brigstowe.org/about/annual-report

What people said

Recently diagnosed workshop

participants gave positive feedback about both the content and delivery of the workshop. However, it was clear that a key element of the service was the opportunity it provided to meet other people living with HIV. Participants valued hearing each other's stories, discussing shared concerns, and realising that they were not alone. Challenges included anxiety before attending for some participants. Knowing someone who would be there, or having input from a peer mentor beforehand, was seen as helpful.

"...we started bringing people living with HIV to the centre of service delivery - which hadn't happened before. Which was amazing...we started to get louder publicly too...It's made us much more dynamic as an organisation"

(Brigstowe staff member)

HIV awareness training was rated highly by participants – on content, delivery and impact. Challenges for participants included finding time to bring staff together for training, but spending 'time out' together in this way was seen as valuable.

"I knew nothing before about HIV, I now feel confident talking about it thank you!"

(HIV awareness training participant)

Working collaboratively with partner organisations had been essential to the success of the project. For example, considerable work was undertaken to establish a peer mentoring service located at Bristol's HIV outpatient service on clinic days. This partnership was valued highly by both Brigstowe and clinical staff, and was reaching people who previously had not accessed support services.

"It's the most satisfying experience I have had since I've been positive. It's absolutely wonderful ... It's enabled me to understand, that what I was feeling, throughout the years, is not unique to me... that there are ways around it, and that I can help people get around it."

(Peer mentor)

Ensuring **sustainability** of the services in a challenging funding environment was a concern for many stakeholders. While volunteers carried out much of the work, substantial input in the form of coordination and support was provided by Brigstowe staff. Participants wanted Brigstowe to develop new sources of income, including from sharing their expertise with other organisations.

"Basically, you need a coordinator, and HIV services left right and centre are losing their funding... [otherwise] you then have these people who are trained up, ready to go, with this amazing training - but there is nothing for them to do."

(Brigstowe staff member)

"[being involved in the project has provided] a better insight into people, particularly when they've been newly diagnosed, what they actually want to know isn't always what I think is important... For a lot of people it's just 'what's going to happen now?' ... So I think it has been really useful for me."

(HIV specialist clinician, on their learning from involvement in the project)

"...after I started meeting her things changed. I became so confident. We talked so many things in life, and she taught me other things that I didn't even know about HIV....Before I couldn't just go in a café and sit down and have a cup of tea or ... But now I can go."

(Mentee)

Activities & Outcome measures:

In self-reported outcome data, participants most consistently reported positive changes in 'self-esteem and confidence', and 'mood', with 89% of participants reporting an improvement. 82% of participants reported an increase in understanding and knowledge of HIV and related issues. 'Confidence to disclose', was the area where fewest participants (47%) reported positive changes.

15 HIV awareness training sessions delivered to student social workers and clinicians, prison staff, mental health care providers, housing associations and other voluntary organisations.

"Someone who, all the way through just gets it....that was what was really important to me"

(Mentee)

Two recently diagnosed **workshops** delivered with **23 people** attending overall

22 peer support mentors were **trained** and **44 people** accessed the service as mentees

93% reported **increased confidence** to challenge HIV-related stigma

86% of training participants reported an **increase in knowledge** and understanding on HIV issues

Recommendations

- Continue to consult on service design and delivery with people living with HIV, and maintain constant dialogue on equitable inclusion.
- Continue to review any barriers to accessing services, and work with people living with HIV to minimise these.
- Take actions to improve engagement with under-represented groups and communities where people living with HIV have identified high levels of stigma.
- Review peer mentor training and support in the areas of maintaining boundaries, and preparation for ending the mentoring relationship. Ensure there is space for mentors and mentees to reflect on challenges of mentoring, any issues which mentoring may not be able to resolve, and how these could be addressed.
- Consider developing follow-up support for mentees who have completed the mentoring relationship.
- Consider how to share learning from this project with other organisations implementing peer support for people living with long term conditions.

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"That was...brilliant. It was very informative. Everything you needed to know or wanted to know. And also it was a chance to meet other people going through the same thing or similar. And after that we created a little friend group and still keep in touch."

(Participant, Recently diagnosed workshop)