



Summary: A Very Different Conversation

During 2018, a partnership between Suffolk User Forum [SUF], Suffolk Parent Carer Network [SPCN], Suffolk Family Carers [SFC], Healthwatch Suffolk [HWS], ACE Anglia Ipswich & East Suffolk [IESCCG] and NHS West Suffolk [WSCCG] Clinical Commissioning Groups, the Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust [NSFT] and Suffolk County Council carried out engagement about mental health services in Suffolk as part of #averydifferentconversation.

The partnership of voluntary and community sector organisations was commissioned by IESCCG and WSCCG to co-produce with patients, families, carers, professionals and communities how mental health services should be delivered. This type of co-production around mental health services had never been attempted in the East of England before, and aimed to make people's voices heard in future service planning.

Three separate surveys were co-produced by the partnership and distributed online and at engagement events. These surveys, were lengthy, detailed and focussed on qualitative experiences. There were 768 responses to the surveys: 444 were from service users and members of the public, 169 were from carers and 155 were from professionals and staff. Unstructured feedback was also gathered from events conducted by SPCN, SUF and SFC which reached between 4,000 - 5,000 people. Healthwatch Suffolk analysed the data from the surveys and events.

As a result of this engagement and information provided by Public Health Suffolk in the Mental Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), a Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy for East and West Suffolk was developed which set out the vision for transforming mental health services in Suffolk. Before the strategy was finalised, a further survey was commissioned to ask people if the draft strategy reflected their views and to give them the opportunity to suggest amendments. There were 155 responses, and over 50% of the respondents felt that they had influenced the work and that the strategy would make a positive difference. Although the engagement for A Very Different Conversation ended when the strategy was published, the partnership will continue to work together to inform the procurement and contract monitoring of future mental health services in the county.

The Suffolk and North East Essex Sustainability and Transformation Board have considered this co-produced approach of a large-scale transformative commissioning process and intends to try and adopt a similar approach at every opportunity.

Further information about A Very Different Conversation, the reports and strategy are available from:

<http://www.ipswichandeastsuffolkccg.nhs.uk/Haveyoursay/averydifferentconversation/averydifferentconversationdocuments.aspx>



Key themes from the engagement results:

1. Lack of access and wait times - Comments about difficulty accessing services were repeated themes throughout the survey and the group responses. Some service users and carers often stated that they had been unable to access a service or that waiting times were too long. These were acute problems for people trying to access support in a crisis. Funding and staff capacity within services was highlighted as an issue impacting access and waiting times by all three groups in the survey responses.

'I would like to be able to access services. Too ill for well-being service. Don't fit referral criteria for access and assessment. Now been off sick for 5 months which need not have happened if I had been able to access services when I knew I needed more help' (Service user or member of the public)

2. Support in the community - Service users and carers both said that they would like to receive more support from professionals in the community, including from healthcare professionals as well as talking therapies. A number of service users said that that they would like services to be available in their GP surgery or community hub.

'Shorter waiting lists. Long term therapies and Counselling. More CPN support or care co. ongoing mental health support. The service we have in place is insufficient, temporary and not good enough' (Service user or member of the public)

3. Information and signposting - Service users, carers and professionals all said that they would like better information about what services are available and how to access services. All three groups also said that professionals needed to be better informed about available services.

4. Continued support - Service users and carers often said that they would like follow-ups from treatment and more support following a crisis or discharge. Many said that they would like easy access back into services following treatment.

'Follow up appointments to see how they are still doing and perhaps being phased into being discharged to ease them into it' (Professional)

5. Quality of services - Service users and carers commonly stated that they wanted effective mental health treatment and for their care to be tailored to their personal needs. Both groups said that they would like to have treatment options other than medication.

'She feels like whoever she talks to doesn't understand what's going on and they just want to fix her with tablets' (Carer)

6. Integrated care - All three groups, but particularly professionals, mentioned the need for better integration of mental health services, including mental health services working more closely together and having a centralised and accessible system for patient records.



7. Support for carers - There were a number of responses from parents in both the carers and service users survey who said that they did not receive any support as a carer or were not appropriately involved in the cared for person's treatment.

8. Digital support - Service users and carers said that they used or would find apps, websites and social media useful to support them with their mental health and wellbeing. The most common use for digital support was for information and signposting.

9. Schools - Service users and carers mentioned a need for more support for mental health in schools. This included safe spaces and time out of lessons to help students with mental health needs. Service users, carers and professionals also mentioned wanting therapy or counselling in schools and training for teachers about mental health.