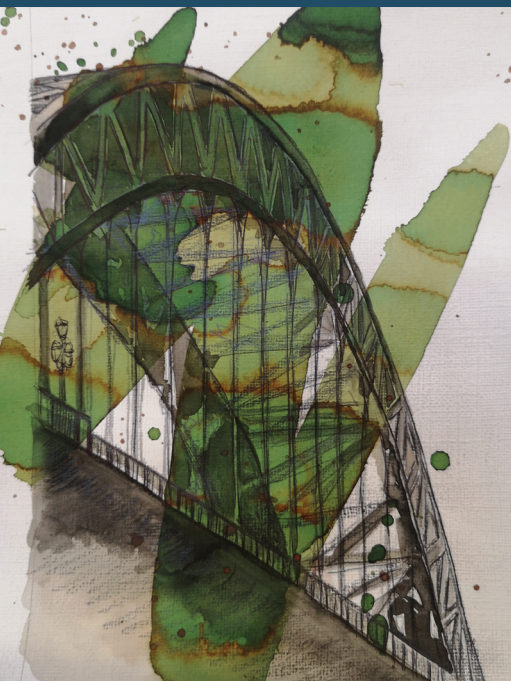




North East together

Together we are stronger



Annual Review 2024

North East together

North East together is a user-led, regional network by and for people with lived experience of mental health difficulties living in North East England. We aim to improve mental health services, challenge stigma and speak out about the issues that affect us.

Since its creation in 2012, North East together has delivered a wide range of activities ranging from the sponsorship of plays written and performed by people with lived experience, to campaigning against welfare reform and working with public health practitioners to bridge the existing gap in life expectancy between mental health service users and the rest of the population.

Due to receiving a grant from National Mind, we have been able to develop our network which has enabled some great pieces of work. We have made some exciting links with new organisations and groups across the region including through our small grants programme.

North East together prides itself on being a grassroots, user led organisation. We have been concerned about the growing impact of the cost of living crisis and use of Oxevision across inpatient wards in the region. We were aware that these issues have been important to members and have therefore been a focus of our work for the year.

In the last year we have strengthened our position as the only regional network by and for people with lived experience. We visited several groups to have conversations about what the current issues are for people with lived experience across the region. We have two spaces on the North East and North Cumbria Lived Experience Board. This has enabled us to have a voice with decision makers, network with peers across the region and learn from and with each other. We strive to be accountable to our membership and the wider user and care population and use our platform responsibly.

Oxevision

North East together is concerned about the implementation of Oxevision, (a vision based patient monitoring system) across mental health wards regionally and nationally. This has been rolled out without meaningful involvement of service users and carers, resulting in a system which raises many concerns.

North East together wanted to hear from people about their views. We developed an anonymous survey and distributed this through our membership, networks and social media. In addition, we held two face to face workshops, one at Starfish in Stockton on Tees and the other in ReCoCo, Newcastle.

We heard from 80 people about their views of Oxevision through the survey, 20% had experience of Oxevision either personally or a loved one and a further 6% were unsure if they had.

Overall, people told us they felt Oxevision was an infringement on their human rights and they were concerned it was open to abuse.

North East together has commissioned a survivor researcher to support in the creation of a report to share what we heard widely across survivor communities and with local NHS.

Suggestions for making wards safer



Cost of living

North East together has been concerned about the impact of the cost of living crisis on people's mental health and wellbeing and their ability to access services. We spoke to groups of service users and carers across the region to hear their views and experiences. We asked what should services be doing to reduce the pressures of the cost of living crisis for people with mental health conditions. People told us, they wanted mental health services to:

- **Accept services should do more:** Services should be acknowledging financial pressure and fighting to support people; Someone who will do everything for you. Say I will hold your hand to get you through this; Free at point of entry support groups; co-ordination across the services supporting needs.
- **Acknowledge finance is a growing issue in poor mental health care:** people need to be supported to understand finance and benefits; help with PIP payments; more money required including childcare; patients should have a welfare person to get to the bottom of a case.
- **Diagnosis and care:** Need to have diagnosis and get it quick so they can get support and recognition they need.

- **Supporting lived experience:** People with lived experience have the most knowledge of the system and share this amongst themselves. People new to the system don't know where to go to connect with their peers.
- **Financial difficulties:** financial insecurity is an additional issue which increases lack of engagement in services; Services -how can they help to fix things if they don't understand them
- **Family left to pick up pieces:** when you have reached your prescribed number of food parcels where else is there to go?
- **Longevity:** when you have been in the system a long time, staff don't ask about changes in financial concerns -its like they are too embarrassed or would have to do something if you told them you had needs.
- **Education:** Make sure everyone knows about local support available but currently it is a postcode lottery for support. Staff should be well informed about the financial challenges many people are facing currently.



North East together small grants

We were able to offer a small grants fund this year for local user led organisations and groups to support them in the work that they do.

It was a heartwarming process, hearing about the great work that is going on across the region. We recognise how challenging it can be for small grassroots groups at a time when everything is so stretched and we were pleased to be able to help in some small way.

While we unfortunately weren't in a position to offer grants to all who applied, we were able to offer a small grant to each of the following:

- Autie Mates
- Contact Morpeth Mental Health Group
- County Durham and Darlington Mental Health Forum
- County Durham Peer Support Network
- Fungi Sea Days: Connect and Flourish Together
- Gateshead Clubhouse
- Holding Hands North East CIC
- Newcastle Bipolar Self Help Group
- Teeside Eritrean Community
- Thrivers
- Tuesday Treckers

Continued...

North East together small grants

Thanks to this programme, we were able to pull together a creative project which links environmental awareness and mental health. The activities enhanced a shared belief amongst our group members that the future is not something that merely happens to us, but something that we can shape actively. Fostering a positive vision for connecting the dots of civic action to tackle social and environmental challenges of today by framing pressing, unsolved challenges with an optimistic attitude. This impact was not only the case for the participants but also all the volunteers involved.

- Fungi Sea Days: Connect and Flourish Together



**If you would like to become a member of North East together,
please contact hello@netogether.co.uk or visit us at
www.northeasttogether.org**

Original artwork designed by Liane Dixon