

The logo for SPARC (Stockport Progress And Recovery Centre) features the word "SPARC" in a bold, black, hand-drawn style font. A bright yellow starburst with multiple sharp points is positioned behind the letters "A" and "R".

SPARC

Stockport Progress And Recovery Centre

2018

**EVALUATIVE
REPORT**

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Introduction

Most individuals' want their opinions to be heard and feel their decisions matter. This also applies to individuals who have mental health issues. Here at SPARC, their mission is to provide non-judgemental, confidence building support that encourages people to make decisions and stand on their own two feet. A lot of people do not understand mental health issues and can be afraid of unusual behaviour, SPARC helps their members and surrounding community to alter this perspective they may have and introduce a different reality.

Stockport Progress and Recovery Centre (SPARC) is a local voluntary organisation which aims to provide a safe, supportive and thriving environment for adults who are experiencing and/or recovering from mental health problems. They run on a small team of 14 staff members and volunteer workers who play a vital element in assisting on the running of the centre. Activities are offered which strive to promote integration as well as mental, physical and social wellbeing.

SPARC aims to

- Reduce the likelihood of relapse by offering support to individuals with mental health needs living in the community or preparing to discharge from hospital.
- Encourage individuals to feel a valued part of their community based on service and activities, and by supporting individuals to make use of local resources.
- Provide social, leisure and educational opportunities to help overcome the loneliness and isolation often associated with having a mental health problem.
- Promote the active involvement of members in achieving the above through a combination of- regular members meetings and member representation on the Management Committee, and the provision of an environment of support and acceptance aimed at encouraging individuals to express their needs and interests.

What SPARC Offers

A suite of social, leisure, therapeutic and educational opportunities are offered which take place both within the centre and in the local community. These activities aim to target SPARC's five ways to wellbeing: connection, activity, observant, learning and giving. These pathways were generated in order to promote traits which could improve individuals' wellbeing.

Keeping those five ways in mind, services were created to help members engage with other service users and the wider community, helping to increase self-esteem as well as awareness.

Art

Creative Textiles

Day Trippers

Social Group

Relaxation and Wellbeing

IT Course

Crafty Crew

Gym Group

SPARC4Music

Womens Group

Horizons

Social and Therapeutic

Dual Diagnosis Group

Football Group

Sunday Lunch

Snooker Group

Aims of Research

The main aim of my research is centred on the service which SPARC provides and an evaluation of activities which are provided to the members who attend the centre. It is also looking to see if SPARC have good relationships with both inner and outer parties who have contacts with SPARC. The second aim was to undertake the nature of members' relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

Methodology

My report included four specific aims and I used both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore various parts of the services which SPARC provides:

Part 1 seeks to investigate the members' perception of the groups which are provided and how they benefit from being a part of their respective groups.

Part 2 looks at the centre as a whole including all of the members who regularly partake in the activities SPARC provides.

Part 3 involves the insight of different organisations that have collaborated with SPARC and their recognition of SPARC's impact in the mental health community

Part 4 brings in the facilitators who work at SPARC, evaluating their thoughts on SPARC and how it has affected them as individuals.

PART I: Qualitative Analysis of Groups

Overview

In order to research the effectiveness of SPARC services, I generated questionnaires which would encourage the members (service users) to evaluate the services which are provided. These questionnaires created were distributed to a sample out of the different group activities which are offered here at SPARC.

Method

Participants

The sample included 11 participants for the Horizons group, 10 participants for the Women group, 6 participants for the Relaxation & Wellbeing group, 10 participants for the Art group, 9 participants for Creative Textiles, 7 participants for the Music group, 5 participants collected for Social Horticulture, 11 participants for the Sunday Opening and finally 7 participants for the Snooker Group.

Data Collection/Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed at the end of every activity for each group within the centre and were then retrieved when completed.

Data Analysis

Information recorded was then grouped according to common themes that were apparent following the different questions which were posed.

Results

Snooker Group

They meet up every Wednesday from noon till 2pm. The group's aim is for members to enjoy a game of snooker while learning and developing their skills. The members themselves have different levels of ability and everyone is able to participate. The group promotes socialising and peer support within the wider community and there are a variety of other activities available.



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Art Group

"It takes me away from what's going on in my life."

The art group runs every Monday and Friday from 12:30-14:30pm. From my observation, it is a very popular group which is almost always packed to capacity during these sessions. Members attend with the expectation of learning new skills ranging from drawing to acrylics as well as doing something constructive with their time. We discovered that though almost all lessons go smoothly, some members do have disputes with other members within the group. However, this does not prevent them from attending the group; rather they find an amicable way to deal with any problems which arise. This suggests that being a part of a productive group has increased their capability in having civil interactions with other individuals of the community.

Many had nothing but praise for the facilitator, Marc who runs the group.

"Excellent at remembering people and their work projects. Catering to people's needs/whims."

This shows that the facilitator does his best in making them feel relaxed and welcome within the group while catering to any needs they may have. This could make them feel reassured and in turn have confidence in whatever artworks they may produce. Having this atmosphere could make the members feel like they belong to a group which pays attention to them. The members also emphasised the friendly atmosphere as the most important aspect of being a part of the group. This encourages them to make constructive progress with their work and develop skills related to their art.

What would it be like for you if there was no art group?" - This was the last question asked in the questionnaire.

"An empty space"

"The art craft options and focused activity are essential for me and the incentive to attend."

From my observation, the vital factor which exists within this group is peer support. Individuals flourish when they are being encouraged and appreciated. This group provides a way for members to express themselves through their artistic side, and not only does this improve their creativity it also gives them a way to be in touch with their emotions. Why take away an activity which clearly makes people happy?

Women's Group

"I come here and I feel safe. The people here are friendly. Being here gives me room to breathe."

Every Wednesday without fail the women come together to socialise from 10am to 2:30pm. The women's group provides an atmosphere whereby ladies who attend the centre can come in and relax and just be themselves. From the questionnaires we distributed to this group, we found that the factor that most of the women value was the company. The potential to have discussions with members/volunteers within

the group and feel that their opinions matter. Being in the presence of other people prevented them from feeling isolated and alone in their homes. From observing and interviewing them, we can see that friendships have evolved from the group and the ladies are able to make plans for socialising outside of the centre. Some of the members even make plans to travel without the support of their own family members which has given them an incredible boost of self-confidence.

"I'd be lost"

"Probably stayed at home staring at 4 walls."

When questioned about the most important aspect of being a part of the group, most of the women stressed friendship and prevention of social isolation. The ladies value the peer support they offer each other and also the availability of a familiar female support worker they can talk to if problems arise.

"What would it be like for you if there was no Women's group?"

This was the last question we asked the ladies in the questionnaire.

"Absolutely devastating"

All of the women expressed disapproval at the notion of the women's group no longer existing. That connection and friendship they have created within the group would be severed. From the comments provided by the members, we can infer that the existence of this group has made a positive contribution to their sense of wellbeing. Therefore, the removal of this group would have negating factors on most of the members who take part in this group session.

Social and Therapeutic Horticulture

The Social and Therapeutic Horticulture session takes place on Thursdays from 11:30am- 2pm. Members expressed feeling welcome by the facilitators as well as the members who take part in the session.

"Yes, to a certain extent I have gained some confidence."

When it came to social interaction, all of the members expressed that not only had they felt their level of peer interaction had improved, but also their sense of wellbeing. They stressed that being a part of a group with similar interest alleviated their thoughts on stressful matters and gave them the chance to relax and enjoy the class. This suggests that the members thrive in group conditions as it is beneficial to their wellbeing.

"I would feel I'm missing the enjoyable work, being with the other members. I feel it is therapeutic."

What would it be like for you if we did not hold the horticulture group? - was the last question we asked members.

They expressed disdain at the thought of being unable to partake in an activity they clearly enjoyed. Having this group gives them a chance to be a part of a team and learn new things along the way. Taking this away would have a negative impact on the members.

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Horizons

Being one of the oldest running groups at SPARC, the Horizons' is a well-established group within the centre which caters to all members between 7 to 9:30 pm on a Wednesday evening. Members attend with the expectation of having a good time just socialising with others and taking part in the activities (i.e. quizzes) which have been arranged for them. Majority of people within the group agree that being a part of the group has improved the way they interact with other individuals. This suggests that this sense of fellowship encourages them to step out of their comfort group and make new friendships.

"It takes you away from depression. It makes me feel that I want to come out. It's an achievement to come out."

When asked if being a part of this group has contributed to them having a more positive sense of wellbeing, some members expressed agreement as they have noticed a positive change in their selves. The very fact that they are able to interact with other members indicates a positive impact. However, few members expressed that while they were happy being a part of the group, sometimes they could feel a bit down. This implies that emotions, especially related to one's wellbeing exist across a spectrum and cannot be quantified (i.e. emotions exist on a complex range)

"How do you benefit from attending Horizon?" The main factor which people identified as the reason which they attend was happiness. The ability to socialise amongst their peers and be noticed is the main motivation behind their attendance.

"Feeling I belong"

Having a sense of belonging in any society is very important. Living with a mental health issue, especially one that an individual may have to live with for the rest of their life is a startling revelation. Having this group gives them an opportunity to connect with other individuals who can empathise with their situation.

Music Group

The music group takes place every Tuesday and Friday afternoon and is run by music volunteers Kim and Mark.

"I always feel comfortable with them".

"I have met a set of non-judgemental friends with common interest 'music', who accept you for what you are".

From my direct observation of the Tuesday group, it is attended by a certain majority who have been frequenting for a long period of time. Even though they are comfortable as they are used to seeing such familiar faces, they do not hesitate to welcome new members making them feel relaxed. Each member has a reason for attending be it learning a new instrument or improving their vocals, them coming together to make music enables them to forget about all their worries.

The Musical Director is a talented and gifted musician who everybody loves and respects.

A lot of praise was directed towards the facilitators Kim and Mark, who organise the set list for the band to practice and perfect. They direct the flow of the music and



make sure everybody is on the right track feeling comfortable with what they do. Having such comfort with those who lead them, the members may feel that there are able to confide in them whenever there is any issues within or outside the group.

There is no such thing as a family without disputes, while everybody gets along; this group is not a stranger to controversy. There have been several occasions whereby some members do engage in arguments due to creative differences, however, such disputes are dealt with quickly and order is reinstated once more.

"We all look after each other and support one another."

The main strength which identifies this group is their ability to support each other but still stand strong alone. They function as a unit in such a way that each member is key to a certain production, however, in the absence of said member, the show still goes on. They have generated in such a way that all members feel welcome and relevant to whatever it is that they pursue. This I believe is very important as makes the members feel pertinent.

Having seen first-hand how much members of the centre appreciate this group, I believe it would be a vital loss if this group no longer existed. The ability for one to be happy is something we take for granted because it is an emotion we feel people possess frequently. However, for those who struggle especially when they have a mental health issue, finding something which makes you happy should always be kept as a main priority.

"One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain."
Bob Marley

Creative Textiles

"This has to be the best group. Very friendly caring staff - nothing is too much trouble."

The creative textiles group is facilitated by two volunteers and takes place every Monday. Attendance within the group can fluctuate and sometimes they have as many as ten members around the table. Members indicated that they were happy

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with the facilitators as they gave them a variety of activities to take part in and they made them feel welcome in the group. They also stressed that the facilitators had a great knowledge when it came to textiles and were very patient explaining things to the different members.

“Being able to socialise in a safe place with people of similar interests, confidence boost when projects are completed. Able to make stuff for family and friends”.

All members conveyed that they felt the sessions had improved their sense of wellbeing. Emphasised that having a focus, that sense of achievement when a project has been completed gives them the sense that they are a part of a group and in turn this alleviates social isolation. New skills have also been achieved due to consistency and this gives them confidence to try out new projects in order to gain more skills.

Bonding, consistency, having friends and being relaxed- this were factors that most of the members stressed were the most important aspect of being a part of the group. Having a sense of belonging is vital in the lives of the members.

Sunday Opening

On Sundays, the centre is open from 11am to 3pm inviting the members to engage in a full Sunday lunch. This enables the members to enjoy a full day of socialisation and relaxation.

The questionnaire I dispensed contained factors which sought to measure the levels of security, interaction and impact a member experiences while in the presence of other individuals. A lot of the members expressed that not only do they feel welcomed by the facilitators when taking part of these sessions, but they also appreciated the efforts made by the other members in making them feel welcome.

“Sometimes I may not eat particularly healthy otherwise and if you feel down at weekends then Sunday is an opportunity to talk to people”.

When asked if their attendance affected their wellbeing positively, most of the members indicated that it was their opportunity to eat a well-balanced meal. It was also an occasion for them to engage in group discussions and move at their own pace.

“I’d be crawling the walls have no interaction with others feel isolated low and depressed. Too much time on my own during the weekends as it’s not open on Saturdays”.

Relaxation & Wellbeing

This group was created in order to fulfil a need in managing the stress levels of different members. The session takes place every Monday from 1:30pm to 2:30pm and is attended by members when they need it.

The questionnaire distributed sought out to explore members’ thoughts on how they manage their stress and if they felt like they had an improved sense of wellbeing. A lot of the members felt that not only do the sessions improve their stress levels, but it also imparts different techniques as to how they can manage their stress. Through

this, they are developing skills that they can use for not only themselves but other people who might be in need of some stress relief.

As the session takes the setting of a group format, a high proportion of the members felt that their communication had improved due to partaking in these classes. The most important aspect they felt they got out of the group was the act of relaxing itself, their ability to leave the outside world behind and achieve inner peace.

“I have been regularly and reliably attending relaxation since been referred to SPARC some 16 years ago. I look forward to it every week and would be very depressed if it were to be dropped”.

PART II: SPARC Member Satisfaction Questionnaire

Overview

I measured member satisfaction in order to identify gaps and develop an effective plan of action for quality improvement. These questionnaires were generated in order to evaluate the response of different individuals according to an emotional and practical aspect. The questionnaire covered the following broad questions: has SPARC services improved their state of emotional wellbeing? Are they able to convey their emotions adequately? The practical aspect seeks to enquire- are the members doing well? Do they benefit from the services which SPARC provides? Are they able to integrate into society and contribute to the community?

Method

Participants

The sample included 48 elderly individuals of various backgrounds and cultures who took part in the questionnaire.

Materials

To answer these questions above, I generated the SPARC Member Satisfaction Questionnaire (SMSQ 12), a variation of the Patient Satisfaction Questionnaire (PSQ) (Marshall and Hays, 1994) which is used in medical care to measure patient satisfaction. The SMSQ 12 is an instrument which contains 12 items which tap into the dimensions of satisfaction related to some components of mental health services: service quality, general satisfaction, financial aspects, communication with staff and other members, accessibility to activities and impact on wellbeing.

General Member Questionnaire

SPARC Member Satisfaction Questionnaire (SMSQ-12)

These questions explore how you feel about the services provided at SPARC.

Please read each of the following questions carefully, keeping in mind the services and activities which are provided to you from SPARC. We are interested in your feelings, both good and bad about the services provided here at SPARC.

How strongly do you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with each of the following statements?

	(Circle One Number on Each Line)				
	Strongly	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
1. I like the services provided at SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
2. I think the workers at SPARC do a good job at making me feel welcome	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel like I am in a safe and supportive environment at SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel that there is an adequate amount of activities which are provided	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have easy access to the activities which I need	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel confident in pursuing activities outside of SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
7. My reliance on medical services has reduced since joining SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am able to participate in more community activities since joining SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have made friends since I joined SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have gained new skills which I am able to use since I joined SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am happy spending time at SPARC	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am able to speak to someone should I need to	1	2	3	4	5

General Satisfaction

I like the services provided at SPARC (1)

I am happy spending time at SPARC (11)

Impact on wellbeing

I feel confident in pursuing activities outside of SPARC (6)

My reliance on medical services has reduced since joining SPARC (7)

I am able to participate in more community activities ever since joining SPARC (8)

I have gained some skills which I am able to use since I joined SPARC (10)

Financial Aspects

My reliance on medical services has reduced since joining SPARC (7)

Accessibility

I have easy access to the activities which I need (5)

I am able to speak to someone should I need to (12)

Service Quality

I think the workers at SPARC do a good job at making me feel welcome (2)

I feel like I am in a safe and supportive environment at SPARC (3)

I feel that there are an adequate number of activities which are provided (4)

Communication

I have made some friends since I joined SPARC (9)

I am able to speak to someone should I need to (12)

Results

Figure 1.1:

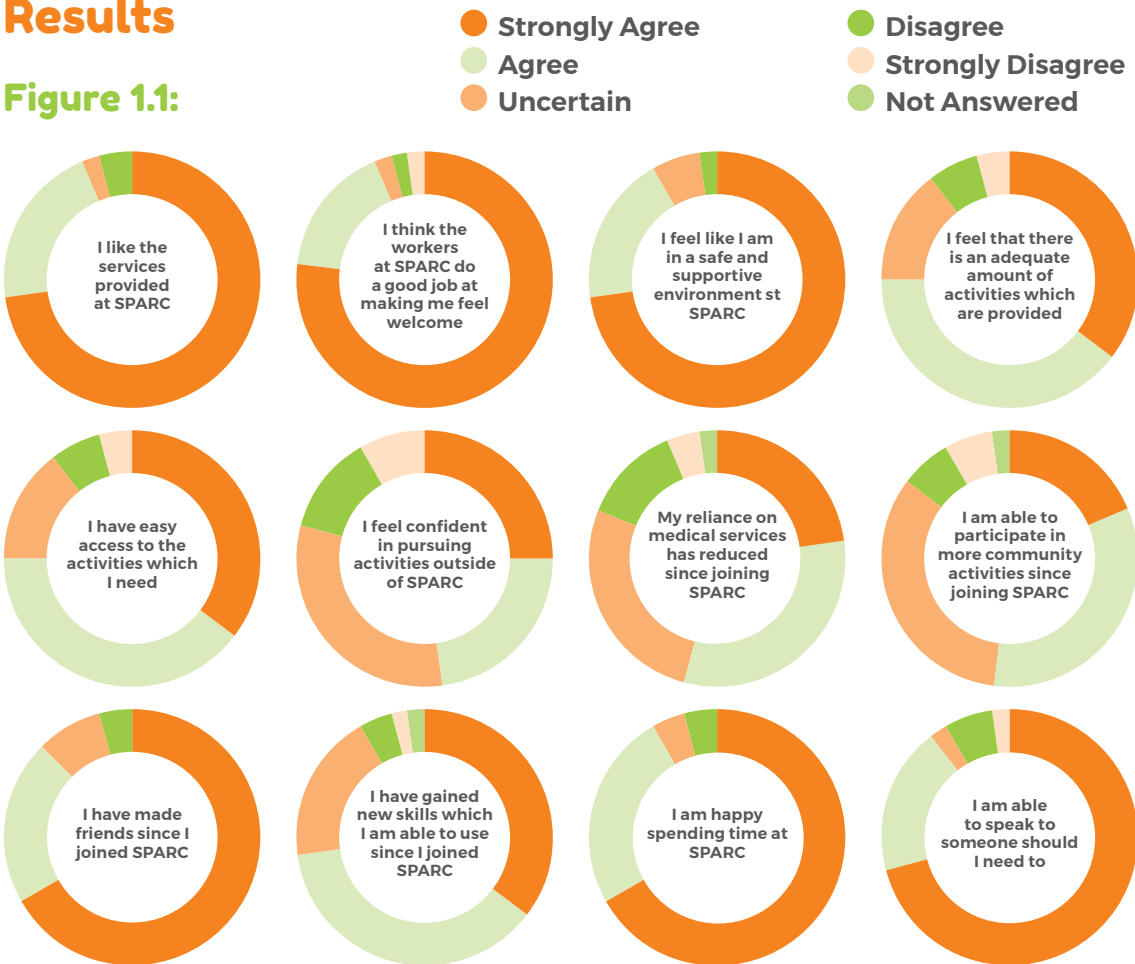
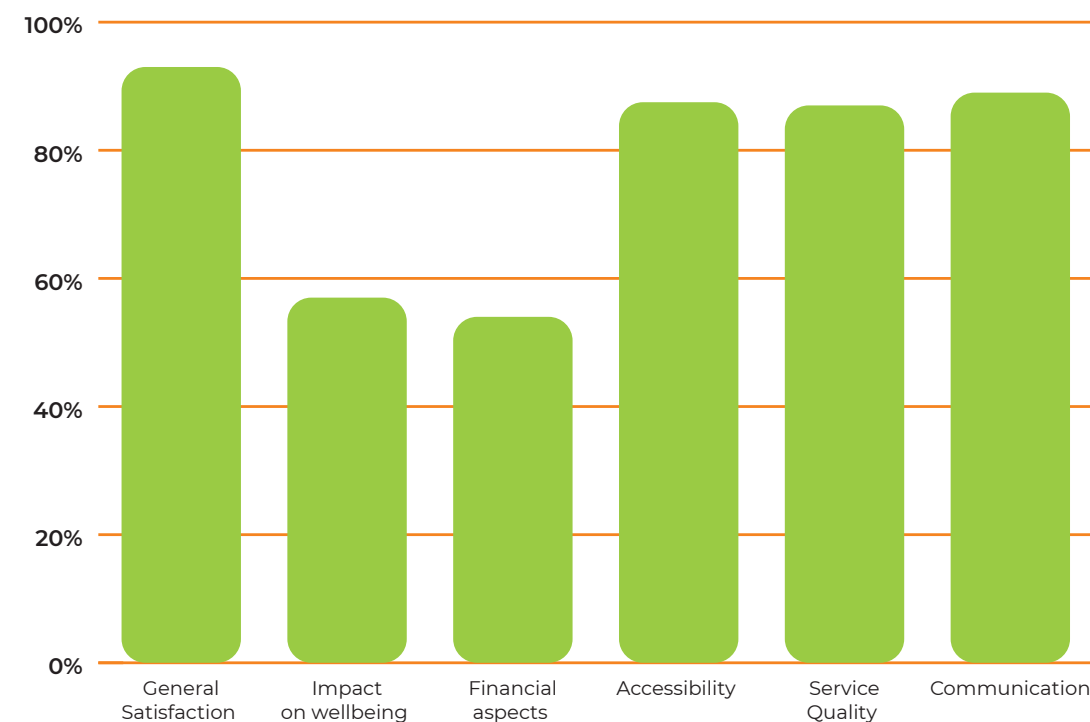


Figure 1.1 shows the results from the SMSQ-12. Options included were: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree with a sixth option- uncertain-made when evaluating the data. The data shows that a high proportion of members either strongly agreed or agreed with the respective question posed with the exception of questions 6: (I feel confident in pursuing activities outside of SPARC), 7: (my reliance on medical services has reduced since joining SPARC) and 8: (I am able to participate in more community activities since joining SPARC) were members leaned more towards the uncertain and negative options.

Figure 1.2:



The figure above indicates that a high number of members are generally satisfied with the services which are provided at SPARC. It also shows positive results for how accessible the services are, the quality of SPARC's service and the communication they experience within the centre. However, it displays mediocre results related to the criteria – impact on wellbeing and financial aspects.

Discussion

From the results retrieved from Figure 1.1, we can infer that members' seem to have problems related to interaction that is not within SPARC as they displayed a lack of confidence when it came to them pursuing activities outside of SPARC. However, the results from questions 8 show that the skills might not transfer- this suggests that some support in using those skills in the community could be developed. This also suggests that skills gained from partaking in SPARC activities might not be

put into practical effect as members still find themselves somewhat isolated from the outside community. This creates a greater effect as it has an impact on their wellbeing as seen in Figure 1.2 as they are unable to integrate their community.

Some of the members who use SPARC services also rely on other medical services in order to maintain a certain level of function. The results indicated that only 54% of the participants agreed to have less of reliance when it came to medical services. This suggests that even with socialisation in group settings, the members still rely on other services to achieve their desired level of function. Or it could also be that some of the members have no other option to rely on other services except SPARC as mental health exists across a spectrum and may require more than one solution. This, in turn, will have an effect in their financial life as they still need to spare finances in order to take care of themselves.

In conclusion, most members are highly satisfied with the centre with heavy emphasis placed on the services provided at SPARC, time spent, as well as the workers who make them feel welcomed.

Relationships With Other Mental Health Services

In addition to the Mental Health Alliance formed with Mind, SPARC also has a variety of collaborations with other organisations in order to provide the best service possible to their service users and other individuals who may need the necessary support.

Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT)

The CMHT roles are very important as they are individuals' first point of contact after a referral from a primary care service or discharge from a mental health unit. They assist with individuals who have complex mental health issues and offer support which targets to alleviate their conditions. They exist within that individuals' community and offer services such as basic counselling or other mental health treatments such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). CMHT are secondary health care services who provide treatments to individuals with mild to moderate mental health issues. They can also be addressed as the Community Recovery Team or the Assessment and Brief Treatment team. Within SPARC, we have relationships with three main CMHT which are Councillor Lane, York House and Torkington Lodge as well as recovery inclusive teams.

Wellbeing and Independence Network (WIN)

WIN exists within the Stockport community to provide access to local mental health services. They support individuals with in-home drop in's in order to prevent social isolation. They also assist individuals through accompanying them to assessments as well as first-time sessional activities. They work with SPARC through a two-way referral system. They collaborate in order to provide support for clients.

Comments from WIN regarding SPARC's service:

SPARC is an invaluable service/space for some of Stockport's extremely vulnerable individuals. It provides a variety of services/projects and is effective in the sense that it is very user-led. SPARC is a long-standing, well known service site which is maintained in part by the clients themselves. It gives clients purposeful activity, independence and skills in a social space in addition to support for mental health specifically.

SPARC is invaluable both to service users and carers. It provides projects, groups and space to some extremely vulnerable individuals. The staff's' commit tirelessly to the alliance, supporting the service and the service users. The space and staff give a safe welcoming environment for activities and skills.

Comments regarding the impact of their services if no longer in collaboration with SPARC:

There is a massive gap in services for MH clients in Stockport which SPARC goes a long way in helping this particular section of society. Without SPARC our client referrals would take longer to be accepted into different services, and the impact of this on clients wellbeing would be huge. Our ability to provide options of support for the clients would be fewer if SPARC was not available.

The Alliance

Stockport Progress and Recovery Centre (SPARC), Pennine Care Trust and Stockport and District Mind come together to form what is known as **The Stockport Mental Health Alliance**. Due to this union, resource, knowledge and ideas are shared across the three organisations enabling them to provide an effective service to their respective members who require support. From this collaboration, we are able to offer an array of activities and services as separate organisations and also within the alliance. Due to this, members in turn have the best possible services which are accessible to them improving service user satisfaction and meeting unfulfilled needs.

Pennine Care

Provide care and treatment for people with mild to serious mental health illnesses – work with Norbury Ward, Arden Ward, RIT, EIS, and CMHT Torkington.

Pure Innovations

They are a charity whose aim is to support people to have a fulfilled life, with a sense of purpose and belonging. They strive to provide a wide and varied offer, ranging from employment, volunteering and independent life skills to pursuing a variety of hobbies and interests.

Stockport Mind

They are an independent adult mental health charity that offers friendly, accessible support and information to promote wellbeing in the community. They provide support services such as:

Group and activities to support social inclusion/reduce isolation

Stockport mental health alliance – link workers for service users who are recovering and being “stepped down” from secondary care services.

- Stockport mental health carers service
- Mental health awareness training
- Volunteering
- Emotional resilience courses
- Confidence building courses

Heathfield House

Heathfield house is step down rehabilitation unit for males aged between 18 and 65 based in Stockport that provides 24 hour nursing inpatient care. The Service Users' mental health statuses range from informal (MCA) or detained. The pathway is geared towards individual need and consists of 3 stages; Assessment, Engagement and Recovery which can span between 18 to 36 months, though there are Service Users who have been on the unit longer who still continue to benefit from intensive support.

Beacon Counselling

Their aim is to build resilience in communities by supporting adults, young people and children experiencing mental and emotional distress. They do this by providing one to one counselling, group programmes and community projects.

PART III: Thematic Analysis Derived From Interviews

Overview

In exploring the relationship between SPARC and other organisations, I generated a guideline questionnaire in order to get feedback on their thoughts of how SPARC contributes to the mental health service and how they perceive SPARC as an organisation

Section A (Background Information)

How long have you worked at your organisation? (Try to get some preliminary questions beforehand i.e. via email)

What would you say “works” within your field when supporting people with mental health issues?

How do your service users (members) learn about your services?

How was a relationship between you and SPARC established?

Section B (Qualitative information- open-ended questions)

Could you describe how your service and SPARC work together? - Can you think of ways in which the collaboration can be improved?

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing organisations that support those living with mental health issues?

“What activities do you know about which SPARC offers?” – “what impact do you think that/those activities have from your experience of SPARC?”

Can you describe any ways in which their services contribute to the sector?”

From what you know of SPARC and bearing in mind realistic resources – can you think of one thing you might change about what they offer or how they operate?

If SPARC didn’t exist, what do you think the impact on their members might be?

Method

Participants

The sample included 7 participants who took part in individual interviews. The individuals who were interviewed came from the following organisations: Pennine Care, Pure Innovations, Stockport Mind, Heathfield Hospital, Beacon Counselling, Councillor Lane and Stepping Hill Hospital.

Data collection/Procedure

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews based on the questions outlined above. The interview questions above were provided as guidelines with room for flexibility and follow up questions if relevant to the interview. Participants were asked to give as much detail as they could and point out if they did not understand a question. The interview ranged from 8 minutes to 30 minutes with an average length of 14 minutes. Responses to questions provided were recorded and orthographically transcribed.

Data Analysis

Responses were analysed using the theoretical thematic analyses procedure. First, the information provided was read to identify any texts which were relevant to the research aim. Then, texts which dealt with the same issue were grouped together into categories and given names. Thirdly, the data was analysed to ensure that each dataset had a name and definition to support each category. The thematic analyses resulted in 16 categories, which were grouped into 5 main themes.

Results

The analyses of the responses in the transcript resulted in five main themes: Recovery and enablement promote positive outcomes in mental health; the impact of funding in the mental health system; holistic support is paramount for wellbeing; taking pressure off statutory resources and what if SPARC didn’t exist?

Recovery and enablement promote positive outcomes in mental health

When working with individuals who have mental health issues, you are always learning because each individual is different. But one of the common factors people focused on was having a non-judgemental approach. Taking in the information you are being given with open ears. Really listening to a service user's problems could encourage different ways of thinking up a solution and this in turn provides different techniques in the way staff interacts with service users. From my conversations with the different organisations, the main goal is to improve chances of recovery and enablement in the mental health lives of the service users. Coming in with an understanding approach and looking at facts through the members (service users) eyes instead of your perception of reality. Helping people recognise their own strengths and needs and develop some of their life skills despite their challenges, helping them understand their condition and level of function. SPARC focuses on enablement and recovery through group activities which target social isolation and promote integration. They create an opportunity for individuals to gain and maintain skills which is paramount to their mental health and wellbeing. With SPARC, they are creating a relationship with each of its members, gaining their trust before putting any demands on them. Having this sense of belonging through group activities members partake in, creates a reality whereby members come to understand that they are not alone and therefore recovery is not fiction but attainable.

The impact of funding in the mental health system

When asked about the biggest challenges that mental health organisations face, the most frequent answer was funding. Within the mental health system, there is a severe lack of funding as services depend on government grants- which is not in abundant supply. Most secondary healthcare services based in Stockport are commonly given one or two year contracts which stipulate the amount of money given and the use of said money for every service provided by the respective organisation. This system of cyclical funding results in planning ahead to account for each activity and in turn, this creates a vulnerability in the service making it fragile as knowledge is prevented from being discovered by the members. This system of funding also makes it difficult for organisations to plan ahead for different development schemes and pathways. The greater effect of this could mean that there could be restructuring to certain organisations, services could be cut affecting the local community teams around it.

Holistic support is paramount for wellbeing

From my communication with different members, they like to be looked at as individuals rather than the results of their mental health problems.

“A lot of people have shared experiences so they feel like they're not being looked at in a certain way, they feel accepted.”

Staff from different organisations expressed that through attending SPARC and taking part in the group activities, members find a space where they start to feel comfortable. It starts to evolve in such a way that regardless of the activities that are being offered, it's a place where they feel a sense of belonging, the support they create amongst their peers. SPARC creates a supportive environment where members thrive discovering and developing aspects of themselves they did not know existed. Members break that social isolation building up their confidence, self-worth and esteem, developing skills which help them integrate into society. Some of the activities SPARC offers could have a therapeutic effect as it helps them relax and it creates coping strategies. It helps with reflection because it helps people build some insight into their selves. Through consistent attendance to certain groups, members develop and maintain skills which could be an advantage when engaging with the local community. This builds up their confidence as they are given tools in order to have meaningful interactions with other people around them. All of these factors combine creating a pathway leading sense of improved wellbeing as their needs as individuals are met.

Taking pressure off statutory resources

SPARC has a number of relationships with different organisations within the mental health community. Not only do their services provide relief for their members but it also does the same for respective organisations.

“I use it as an early warning system. In other words, if someone is becoming unwell uh from conversations had with staff I would be able to step in and wag my finger.”

SPARC aims to reduce the likelihood of relapse in individuals through the services which are provided. It is a place whereby members come to seek advice and navigation through the different mental health services. Not only do the activities combat isolation, but it helps people protect themselves against being vulnerable to other organisations or individuals. Through these group interactions, it helps them develop routine and in turn could reduce the likelihood of relapsing. A greater effect of this would be saving money on hospital beds, relying less on medication and more on that sense of improved wellbeing from being a part of SPARC.

What if SPARC didn't exist?

Apart from finding acceptance within the greater community, acceptance with whom you are and what you as an individual has to offer the world is very important. Members come to SPARC because they struggle to differentiate how society sees them versus how they perceive themselves. Being a part of SPARC gives them that insight, a moment of reflection in which they can really evaluate who they are as an individual. Taking SPARC away would impart added stress and isolation, factors which members tried hard to erase. Apart from the emotional strain on the members, there will also be a massive strain on the community mental health teams both financially and timewise as they struggle to make sure that each individual is receiving the amount of care appropriate to their level of function. Failure of this would lead to individuals being admitted to hospital as their lack of care in both their mental and physical life has deteriorated. Life would then become a desperate situation and could even be life threatening as a vital routine of their life (service users) has been severed.

PART IV: Feedback from Facilitators at SPARC

Overview

Questionnaires were generated in order to gauge their opinions on the services that are offered in SPARC and their impact on the members as well as their experience of SPARC.

Method

Participants

13 facilitators participated in taking part in this questionnaire. About half of the participants who took part are volunteers who occupied roles such as café assistants and counsellors. Other roles include finance managers, support workers and CBT counsellors. .

Data Analysis

The questions that were asked sought to explore their thoughts of working at SPARC and its effect on themselves as well as the members who attend the centre. It is also exploring the impact of SPARC on the local community as well as other organisations that have relationships with SPARC. Information collected was then grouped according to common themes that were apparent following the different questions which were posed.

Results

“The most essential piece of knowledge that I have gained from SPARC is the understanding that people with mental health issues are PEOPLE with mental health issues. They are people first and foremost; a diagnosis is not a person”

Being a part of SPARC has greatly influenced the lives of people who work there as their views on individuals who have mental health issues has changed drastically. They expressed having a renewed appreciation for the complexity of the human mind and behaviour. Their understanding has been enriched as they respect the complex and diverse issues that come with certain people. This leads them to practice life with a non-judgemental approach as they are yet to fully understand the hidden potential of the members.

It is because of the ethical foundation of the organisation that I have been taught how to understand the human side of mental health issues.

As the facilitators are surrounded with other workers who think like-wise, this



strengthens their team work as they hold mutual philosophies when tackling related issues. They are able to have an input in improving the day to day function, mental and emotional wellbeing of the members. As they are encountering members with various issues, they hold a flexible approach in assisting people in order to overcome their issues in a compassionate manner. This does not only improve the members wellbeing but also instils a sense of self-worth which beneficial to the workers.

A factor which most workers agreed was affecting mental health organisations was the allocation of finances. Due to this, there have been instances of smaller charities closing down as they are unable to deliver services which would be beneficial to people with mental health issues. This makes it difficult for smaller charities to plan ahead as they are limited by their options. Another daunting factor which is persistent is the presence of stigma, the vilification of people with mental health issues. This affects the wellbeing of the members as they are always on their guard against individuals they are not familiar with.

One of the hardest experiences some worker faced was being able to retain their composure even in the face of confrontation. Their ability to stem down their negative emotions and have a listening ear in place.

“The activities help create social networks, enable people to learn new skills, provide people with motivation to leave the house and do something they enjoy, improve confidence and overall wellbeing”

The facilitators recognised the positive aspects related to the participation of the activities offered at SPARC. It helps generate a feeling of self-worth as they are engaging activities which enrich their quality of life. They are able to socialise amongst their peers and create friendships and make bonds. The activities also provide a safe haven as it gives off a therapeutic effect. Generally, SPARC takes off pressure from other services as it reduces the likelihood of relapse in individuals and in turn saves money on hospital beds.

Facilitators expressed that the removal of SPARC would be a catastrophic event as it would have an impact on both the members and other organisations as there would be a vacuum in services. Members' interaction in the community would diminish affecting their confidence and their ability to socialise. Financial pressures on other services would increase which could lead to an overburdened NHS.

“Over 300 people in Stockport would lose an important part of their life - friends, structure and a happy place where they can be themselves and evolve into happier people.”

Facts And Figures

A total of 397 individuals engaged with SPARC and its related activities during 2017/2018, a 9.97% increase from last year.

There were 2705 occurrences of support activity (a 21.35% increase from last year) including:

**189 Alliance
Counselling
Service sessions
providing therapy
for 51 members-
121.74% increase
from last year**



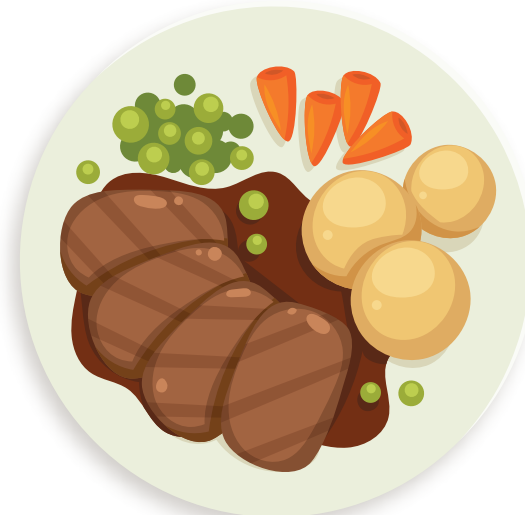
**148 in reach
sessions at
Stepping Hill
Hospital's Mental
Health Unit**



97 SPARC4me support sessions



The café was open 136 times during the year and supported by 13 volunteers



There were a total of 267 members who visited to take part in general activities offered by SPARC including the alliance counselling service, a 9.88% increase from last year



Future Plans For SPARC

Suicide Prevention Project working in collaboration with others, SPARC aims to create a suicide prevention project that is responsive to the needs of those people who are experiencing distress. They want to build a project that is multi-faceted meeting a variety of needs such as psychological therapies, support activities and advocacy.

Promotion aims to promote their services via social media as well as with various partnerships. SPARC will be represented by SPARC staff, volunteers and service users at networking events across the borough and at multidisciplinary meetings. Aim to utilise traditional methods such as posters and fliers and also engage with external stakeholders to promote aspects of the service such as the SPARC4me service.

Volunteer Coordinator SPARC recognises the value of their volunteers and so would like to employ a Volunteer Coordinator who can improve on the recruitment and support of their volunteer team.

Funding in the following 2-5 years, SPARC aims to acquire funding in order to sustain their current contract through continuing the partnership that currently exists within the Alliance Contract. Their hope is to maintain their relationship with local statutory services and use this as a springboard to improve their communications and relationship with local stakeholders. This will secure the future of SPARC and that of their partners and will improve the service for local people who receive support from this contract. SPARC also seeks to acquire a fundraiser that can manage the funding requirements of their organisation.

Expand In-reach service increasing SPARC's service user involvement and representation within the governance and planning of the service will enable them to develop the organisation and its related projects to truly meet the needs of our customers and ensure that they remain in line with current wants and needs. They aim to do this through the continuation of their members meetings and to also deliver service user training to build up a team of buddy's and mentors who can then in turn support the introduction of new members to the organisation.

What If SPARC Did Not Exist?

1 in 4 people experienced a mental health problem in the past week alone. When you come across people in your day to day life, there is nothing that indicates the way that person has lived their life or what they are going through. Guilt, confusion, depression are just a few of the emotions that come attached with certain mental illnesses. Individuals who have mental health issues have to deal with not only these emotions but the way people see them and also how they see themselves. We should be able to exist in a society where people are not afraid of being judged

for things that are out of their control, a community that takes the time to try and understand.

I have had the opportunity to work in SPARC for the past nine months and it has been incredibly eventful for me. Many organisations promise many things but do not deliver, but SPARC is not one of them. I have witnessed the way both staff and volunteers come together several times in order to support the members, encourage them and help them believe that what they want matters. This provides the members with hope for the future and gives them such an increase in self-confidence and belief in their abilities. It is imperative that SPARC continues to do this in order to keep on providing these services. I always had this belief that mental health services represent a safe haven to their members in order for them to recover from their perception of themselves and how they impact the world around them. SPARC does not only provide this but also alters their internalisation in order to provide a positive light on their mental illness. They are creating a world where people do not have to apologise for their state of mind.

I want to thank the supervisors at SPARC, Lynn and David for giving me this opportunity for being a part of this journey where I could experience positive change in the frontline. My experience here has taught me several things but mostly it has imparted a renewed appreciation for the complexity of the human mind and behaviour. My understanding of mental health issues has been enriched as I've come to respect the complex and diverse issues that come with certain people influencing me to practice life with a non-judgemental approach.

Recommendations

SPARC can engage in more promotions regarding their service and the activities they provide within the centre in order to get the members more involved and take part in new things.

Certain courses can also be created in order to target the growth of new skills in the members that are keen to learn.

Included in my report, members did not seem comfortable in taking part in community actions. It would be beneficial if more activities were centred within the outside community in order for members to gain more confidence away from their immediate friend group. Through this they would feel more confident in pursuing activities outside of SPARC. There are certain groups within SPARC which helps members develop certain skills such as knitting, drawing or even singing. It would be helpful towards those members if they were introduced to other services which provide such activities in order for them to improve on their skills.

Within the centre I noticed a certain gap in age groups with the under 30s not being catered for. Hopefully, through the securing of funds, resources can be generated in order to provide activities for young adults living with mental health issues.

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