

Mind in Gateshead

Introduction

This report details the findings of case study research undertaken by CLES Consulting on the community cafe established and run by Mind in Gateshead. The project is funded under the North East portfolio of the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Well-being Programme, *New Leaf New Life*, and offers volunteering opportunities for local people with mental health issues.

The research was undertaken during October and November 2009, and involved consultation with the MIND Project Manager, the portfolio lead, and five volunteers currently working at the cafe. A desk review of key data and documentation relating to the project was also undertaken. Evidence from the case study research has fed into the wider findings of the national Well-being Programme evaluation.

Background and rationale

The idea for the community cafe came from Mind staff, who when they moved into new premises in Bensham, Gateshead, saw the potential offered by a kitchen in the building to set up a social enterprise cafe. Although advice was sought from voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that had established similar projects, Mind largely developed the project in isolation; little support was solicited from the North East Strategic Health Authority (SHA), the New Leaf New Life portfolio holder, and no other delivery partners were directly involved.

The project is funded from April 2008 to March 2010, one of nine two-year projects within the New Leaf New Life portfolio.

The North East has amongst the worst health and well-being outcomes of any of the English regions, with high levels of multiple deprivation and worklessness. The Stage 1 New Leaf New Life portfolio application to BIG¹ describes the prevalence of mental health issues amongst the region's population, with some 295,000 people experiencing depression and anxiety, and severe mental illness (such as schizophrenia and manic depression) affecting around one per cent of the adult population (21,000 people). Although project documentation does not outline similar local level data for Gateshead, given the challenging socio-economic conditions in much of the city and the association of such conditions with mental health needs, there is a clear rationale for interventions focused on addressing mental health issues in the area.

The rationale for the community cafe project focuses around two groups – the need to help individuals to cope with their mental health issues, and to avoid them becoming socially excluded; and the need to reach out to the local community in order to raise awareness of mental health issues, and reduce the stigma that can be associated with people with mental health issues.

Project design and delivery

Objectives

The project objectives are clearly focused on addressing the underlying rationale and benefiting the two groups identified above. The cafe aims to benefit volunteers with mental health issues who work there by helping them to become less socially excluded, building their confidence, self-esteem and aspirations, and providing them with both formal and 'on-the-job' training in order to increase their skill sets and experience. For some of the volunteers, this will contribute to re-entry into paid employment; for others who are more distant from the labour market, it will help them to meet and communicate with new people, and enhance their overall well-being.

In terms of the wider community, characterised by relatively high levels of deprivation and poverty, the project aims to provide healthy food options for local people. In addition to doing so, the cafe's location within Mind's Wellbeing Centre in Bensham will contribute to the organisation's wider ambitions to combat the stigma of mental ill-health, encouraging people to enter the premises of a mental health organisation who may not have done so otherwise, and to learn more about mental health issues through the literature that is available to cafe users.

¹ *The Well-being programme: application form for stage one*, North East Strategic Health Authority (2006)

One of the principal objectives underpinning the New Leaf New Life portfolio is to foster the role of third sector providers within the field of mental health delivery. The community cafe project clearly fits with this emphasis – although the cafe did not achieve sufficient scale to become a social enterprise, funding under the portfolio provided Mind with the opportunity to pilot a method of service delivery in which it had no prior experience, allowing the organisation to explore new ways of addressing the needs of its client group. The portfolio aims to encourage community-based projects that involve service users in delivering project activity, and that contribute to changing wider perspectives on mental health by tackling stigma, both key objectives behind the cafe project.

The focus of the project also chimes clearly with two of the three objectives of the BIG Well-being Programme: 'people and communities having improved mental well-being'; and 'children, parents and wider community eating more healthily'. There is also strong fit with the wider policy direction of central government on mental health, as expressed in the recent *New Horizons* consultation paper². The paper invites commentary on how best the vision it outlines for 2020 might be achieved, including how to equip people to help their own mental health and ensure that people with mental health problems get high quality support, and how to encourage society to treat people with mental health problems with respect, and not treat them differently simply because of their problems.

Inputs

The project originally intended to apply for around £80,000 in funding from New Leaf New Life, but as the overall portfolio resources turned out to be lower than at first anticipated³, Mind applied for £50,000, broken down into £25,000 for each year of the project's lifetime. There is no match funding, although some income is generated in the form of takings from the cafe, and there is a value to the time committed by the volunteer workforce.

The bulk of project expenditure is on staffing costs, with further resources going on food and management. The large majority of the BIG grant is for revenue expenditure; capital expenditure of £1,250 (2.5% of the total grant) funded the purchase of extra kitchen equipment to complement the stock in the existing kitchen. At the time of undertaking the case study research, with some five months delivery remaining, around 80% of the total project budget had been spent, demonstrating that the project is financially on track.

Mind in Gateshead is the sole organisation involved in delivering the project; other than the SHA, which manages the wider portfolio, no other partners have been involved. There are three Mind staff working on the project on a part-time basis: the project manager is funded to spend seven hours per week on the project, a support worker for six hours, and a receptionist/administrator for five hours.

Activities

The cafe provides 'light bite' healthy food options to the local community in Bensham, an area with relatively high levels of deprivation and poverty. Although the original intention was to open the cafe as a full-time social enterprise, with a Mind member of staff acting as a dedicated co-ordinator, this was not possible within the available funding. Instead, the cafe opens to the public twice a week, for Monday lunch and Friday breakfast, and also occasionally provides catering for some of the groups using Mind services in the Wellbeing Centre.

The volunteers are involved in a range of activity, with the particular tasks undertaken by individuals dependent upon personal choice, skills and experience, and the nature of their mental health condition. Some volunteers just work in the kitchen, preparing food or washing dishes, with others undertaking more customer-facing roles such as serving and clearing tables. Over time, the roles undertaken by volunteers often develop – some who had previously only been happy to work in the kitchen gained sufficient experience and confidence to want to liaise directly with cafe customers.



² *New Horizons: Towards a Shared Vision for Mental Health – Consultation* (Department of Health, 2009)

³ The Stage 2 portfolio bid to BIG was significantly scaled back in comparison to the original bid at Stage 1

All of the volunteers have undertaken a Level 1 Food Safety training course. Three volunteers undertook the Level 2 course – although only one of them passed at the first instance, the others are planning to re-sit shortly.

Customers using the cafe are exposed to information about Mind and facts about mental health issues, provided on placemats, menus and wall posters. This information helps to raise awareness, promote good mental health, and reduce stigma.

Target beneficiaries

Reflecting the dual nature of the rationale and project objectives, there are two beneficiary groups: the volunteers working in the cafe; and the cafe's customers, comprising members of the local community.

All of the volunteers have had some involvement with mental health services or support services, and were either already known to Mind, or referred to the organisation by Gateshead Council or other organisations delivering mental health provision.

Performance

Outputs

The principal beneficiary group for the project is the volunteers working at the cafe. The target over the two year time-span for the project was to involve 12 volunteers with mental health issues; at the time of writing (November 2009), 11 volunteers had worked at the cafe (92% of target), with the project on track to meet or exceed this target by the time its BIG funding period finishes in March 2010.

There was some initial confusion between the project/portfolio and BIG over how to count the number of customers using the cafe, the project's secondary beneficiary group. BIG asks its funded interventions only to count beneficiaries once, with its output definition capturing new beneficiaries but excluding repeat beneficiaries. However, in addition to attracting new customers, the cafe's focus was to encourage customers to return on regular occasions – indeed, an important mark of a cafe's success is the extent to which customers, once they have eaten there for the first time, make return visits. For this reason, Mind argued successfully that it should be allowed to count all of its customers, regardless of whether they had previously visited the cafe or not.

The agreed target for the number of people visiting the cafe over the lifetime of the project is 3,120, based upon 15 people visiting the cafe for each session it is open. In practice, it has been a considerable challenge to attract people into the cafe, with the project achieving a total of 817 customers by October 2009⁴; this is a little over a quarter of the overall target, with less than six months of project delivery to go. Instead of local residents, the customer base has largely comprised Mind staff, people using the services available in the Centre, and staff from neighbouring voluntary organisations. There are a number of reasons why the local community has not visited the cafe in large numbers, with the location of Mind's premises within which the cafe is situated a particular issue:

- ❑ the Well-being centre is on a relatively quiet residential road, with little potential to entice in passing trade due to low levels of footfall;
- ❑ the building is set back from the road, not having an entrance straight off the pavement, and requiring cafe customers to go through the main entrance to the building rather than a specific entrance into the cafe area;
- ❑ the cafe is only open for two sessions a week, limiting awareness amongst the local community, and not providing the opportunity for people to pop in when they feel like it. If more resources had been available, and the cafe had been able to open on a daily basis, greater 'critical mass' might have led to increased demand;
- ❑ in addition, it is possible that the stigma associated with issues around mental health is deterring potential customers from coming through the door – project staff commented that there may be a perception that only people with some form of mental health condition visit the Wellbeing Centre.

⁴ The total of 817 customers includes people making return visits. To date, 136 different individual customers have visited the cafe.

The portfolio holder has a flexible attitude to the project's difficulty in attracting people into the cafe, understanding the explanatory factors behind the failure to meet the set target. Nevertheless, the project shortfall has had an impact on the aggregate number of beneficiaries achieved by the portfolio as a whole, with pressure for this gap to be made up by other projects within the portfolio.

Outcomes

The project has generated significant personal outcomes for the volunteers working in the cafe. Some of the volunteers previously led very solitary existences, and working at the cafe has been important in reducing their social isolation – it provides a safe environment in which they can gradually build relationships and communication skills, both with fellow volunteers and Mind staff, and also with cafe customers. According to Mind staff, one of the volunteers:

'Wouldn't speak to anyone at all when he arrived, but now he chats away to the customers without any difficulty.'

For another of the volunteers, the very fact that they are *'doing something meaningful'* is valuable:

'My confidence has increased massively – I now have a reason to get up in the morning.'

Further evidence of the impact of the project on the confidence and assertiveness of the volunteers is detailed in the narrative reports that are prepared quarterly as part of the reporting process to the portfolio holder. One of the reports presents a case study of a volunteer who when he first came to the cafe needed to attend with his support worker as he did not have the confidence to be there on his own. However, when he had settled in, he was happy to travel to the cafe on his own and did not require any support once there.

Although she does not have significant mental health issues, another volunteer has developed to the extent that she can take lead responsibility for the cafe when the Mind Project Manager is away, a sign of the way in which both confidence and skill sets are developed through the project. In addition to 'soft' skills such as team working, communication and interpersonal skills, the volunteers also develop food preparation and safety skills, gaining relevant qualifications.

Although the project is focused upon individual development and personally defined goals, rather than an end goal of moving volunteers into employment, one of the people who previously volunteered in the cafe is now employed as a Community Nutritionist – it is highly likely that the skills and experience gained at the cafe were significant factors behind his securing this position. For other volunteers, particularly those following Personal Development Plans (PDPs), there is the opportunity to work with Mind staff to develop practical skills with which to increase their employment chances, including help with CV preparation, completing application forms, and undertaking interviews. More broadly, working in the cafe helps volunteers to develop employability skills – these benefits include the ability to follow instructions, take responsibility for particular tasks, and, simply, to turn up on time and demonstrate commitment over a sustained period. Linked to this, involvement with the cafe has an impact on the aspirations of the volunteers – although few may be directly looking to enter employment, for some, their experience of working in the cafe has led to thoughts in that direction:

'The volunteering helps you to get a foot in the door.'

'Working here has made me realise that I have a lot to offer and has definitely given my self-confidence a well-needed boost ... voluntary work within the cafe [has] given me a purpose again.'

Three cafe volunteers have moved on to volunteer for Mind in a different capacity. Two help out with reception and administrative duties, and another is helping to develop a new Mind in Gateshead newsletter.

For two of the volunteers who have been involved with the project since April 2008, the stress involved in working in what can be a demanding cafe environment proved too much, and they decided not to continue volunteering. This decision was related to their particular mental health conditions, and although at first sight it is somewhat disappointing, they have continued to be engaged with other services delivered by Mind in Gateshead – this is a real positive, given that the baseline position for many of the volunteers is one of considerable disengagement, both from service providers and wider society. Importantly, working at the cafe is not intended to provide volunteers with a 'cure' – rather, the project aims to help them to manage their individual mental health needs, and through this to improve their overall well-being.

Impact on wider conditions

The project aims to generate wider impacts in terms of the difference it makes to the broader well-being of both volunteers and cafe customers. With regard to the former, a number of volunteers have taken the opportunity to get involved in other groups run by Mind at the Wellbeing Centre, including its Healthy Living Group. Some of the volunteers consulted for the study commented that, as a general result of working in the cafe, they tended to eat more healthily, and had become more interested in their diet and physical well-being – they had learnt more about food, and how to cook new recipes. The difficulties in attracting customers into the cafe, and the restricted opening hours, have limited the extent to which the project has been successful in influencing wider well-being amongst the local community, through the provision of a healthy eating alternative to other food outlets in the area.

Equality and diversity

Bensham, and the wider Gateshead area, is a predominantly white area, and the backgrounds of the cafe volunteers reflect this. With the exception of one of the volunteers, all have some form of mental health disability, and are claiming Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, or similar benefits. There is a relatively even balance between male and female volunteers.

Additionality and sustainability

There are only limited volunteering opportunities available for mental health service users in the local area, and if the project had not gone ahead it is likely that the majority of the cafe volunteers would not have found it easy to source alternative provision. Although there was another cafe in Gateshead that offered work-related training for people with mental health needs, it lost its funding earlier this year.

The project is funded under the New Leaf New Life portfolio until March 2010; at the time of writing, Mind staff were actively exploring alternative sources of funding under which the cafe might continue to be resourced. Mind worked alongside Gateshead Citizens Advice Bureau in the development of a bid to the Ecominds fund to secure support for the development of a new building – this was to include a rooftop cafe, to be run by the Mind team and volunteers. Unfortunately, this bid was not successful, although there are other possible sources of funding that are currently being investigated.

As evidenced by the difficulty in bringing in customers, the cafe does not constitute a sustainable enterprise in its current location. It will remain reliant on ongoing revenue funding, unless it can source sufficient investment to secure a city centre location, and to support full-time opening. In the right place, with a sufficient number of volunteers, it could attract much more custom, providing a steady income stream to cover costs. However, this would require significant financial support, at a time when funding streams are coming under ever greater pressure.

If funding is sourced for the cafe to continue in operation, its sustainability will be enhanced if a number of volunteers develop sufficient experience, skills and confidence to take responsibility for running the cafe without the need for supervision by Mind staff, thereby reducing the need for significant ongoing revenue support. One volunteer has already reached this position, although she does not have significant mental health needs. There may be a case for encouraging volunteers with less severe needs to come forward, as they may be more likely to be in a position to undertake a cafe management role in the short to medium term.

It is important to consider the extent to which the outcomes experienced by individual volunteers are sustainable over the longer-term. Even if the cafe closes in 2010 when the current BIG funding comes to an end, there will be an enduring legacy for many of the volunteers involved – the benefits they have derived from the cafe in terms of enhanced self-esteem and confidence, and the ability to communicate, build relationships and bear responsibility, will make a significant contribution to their longer-term well-being.

The project will also leave an important legacy for Mind in Gateshead, both for individual staff members and the organisation as a whole. Although the original ambition to establish the cafe as a social enterprise has not materialised, the experience of setting it up has given those involved the confidence to do something similar in the future, perhaps with a different focus that might better suit the building and location in which Mind is based.

Processes

Partnership working and the delivery approach

Mind in Gateshead developed and implemented the project without significant input from partner organisations, although the Project Manager met with other organisations that were running similar projects, or had experience in setting up a social enterprise, in order to find out more about what was involved and to identify best practice.

The relationship between Mind and the portfolio holder, the SHA, has been a good one, although the extent of interaction has been limited, focused around the application process and ongoing monitoring and progress reporting. There has perhaps been something of a missed opportunity in terms of the inability of the Mind Project Manager to take up all of the networking and training opportunities on offer under the portfolio, simply because she only has very limited weekly hours to devote to the project and is therefore under considerable pressure of time. The SHA stages a number of regular events, of value to the project in terms of sharing learning and best practice, and potentially for exploring the ideas of partners over how the cafe might be put on a more sustainable footing for the medium to longer-term.

Publicity, promotion and engagement

The project budget includes a small pot for marketing and publicity, used to promote demand both from people interested in volunteering in the cafe and from customers. In terms of the former, the project has sought to encourage people to volunteer by distributing publicity flyers to GP surgeries and mainstream and voluntary sector providers of mental health services. Amongst the current volunteers, a number were already coming to the Mind premises to attend groups or receive services, and heard about the cafe from staff. For others, they were referred to the project by their support worker or by mainstream service providers.

Mind has put considerable effort into publicising the cafe within the local community, in order to increase the number of customers. Local houses, businesses and schools have been leafleted, and offers put on in the summer holidays such as 'buy one get one free' and a free piece of fruit and soft drink with every meal. One of the volunteers who has good IT skills has been centrally involved in developing marketing initiatives for the cafe, including the production of an A-board and banner that are put up outside the Mind building when the cafe is open. The project was also publicised to a number of voluntary groups in Gateshead, to persuade staff and service users to visit, or for providers to consider using it as a venue for meeting their clients. However, despite these initiatives, there has been little impact on customer demand, with the factors previously discussed proving to be significant barriers that the project could do little about.



Monitoring and evaluation

The project submits monthly monitoring returns to the portfolio team at the SHA. Project outputs for both its beneficiary groups are reported, in terms of the number of volunteers and the number of cafe customers. Headline expenditure against budget is also detailed, as is planned expenditure for the forthcoming month. The Project Manager also produces quarterly narrative reports that provide a more qualitative reflection on the outcomes flowing out of the project. A final evaluation is planned for late 2009/early 2010, towards the end of the BIG funding period.

The outcomes enjoyed by volunteers working in the cafe are captured through both self-assessment progress trackers that are completed by the volunteers themselves, and an observational assessment progress tracker completed by Mind staff. These are focused around five broad areas:

- ❑ **communication and interpersonal skills** – with colleagues, customers and other MIND colleagues;
- ❑ **self-confidence** – the ability of volunteers to work independently and use their own initiative in the cafe; their willingness to take on more responsibilities, and their nervousness with certain tasks;
- ❑ **assertiveness** – the ability of volunteers to assert themselves with others; their ability to make their own choices, and their ability to ask for help;

- ❑ **personal** – the extent to which volunteers take care of their appearance and are reliable, attending regularly and turning up on time, or telephoning if they are going to be late;
- ❑ **practical** – the degree to which volunteers carry out tasks that are set by others; their ability to find information for themselves, and the extent to which they are well-organised.

In addition, one of the Mind Support Workers encourages volunteers to discuss their progress on a one-to-one basis, completing and following PDPs if they are keen to do so. PDPs are used to help individuals identify their short, medium and long-term goals, breaking the developmental path down into small, manageable steps, and attaching milestones to them so that progress can be assessed. The focus is on three central questions: where am I now? where do I want to be? how can I get there? Volunteers working in the cafe who had decided to follow a PDP evidently saw it as a valuable tool:

'It's useful – I like to know what I'm doing, what I'm aiming at, what I'm trying to achieve.'

Conclusions

Key lessons

The outcomes experienced by volunteers at the community cafe are significant; indeed, in terms of the 'distance travelled' by many of them, the experience has the potential to be life-changing over the medium to longer-term. The project has therefore clearly met its primary objective to enhance the overall well-being of its volunteers, helping to reduce their isolation from the wider community, and increasing their confidence, self-esteem and aspirations. Due to the difficulties in building demand for cafe services amongst the local community, there has been less success in achieving the secondary project objective, to improve the eating habits of local people, and to disseminate information about mental health, helping to reduce the stigma associated with the issue.

If greater funding had been available to the project, this would have enabled the cafe to operate more regular hours, contributing to efforts to draw customers in. However, the location of the Wellbeing Centre is a considerable drawback in terms of attracting passing trade, and unless there had been sufficient funding to support opening a cafe in an appropriate city centre venue, it is unlikely that enough demand would have been generated for the cafe to become more sustainable. There are, however, benefits in having the cafe within the main Mind building – volunteers are more likely to be encouraged to participate in the various mental health services on offer, and conversely, participants in some of the groups that are run are more likely to volunteer to work in the cafe. Furthermore, those customers that do come to the cafe are able to access information on mental health issues, and gain an insight into Mind's wider activities and client base. This is important in terms of the objective of the project and wider portfolio to increase mental health awareness and address stigmatisation.

The limited funding available also impacted upon the extent to which the Mind Project Manager could take advantage of the opportunities available under the portfolio such as training and networking events. This was disadvantageous to the project in terms of reducing the chance to share learning and best practice, but also of detriment to the wider programme – considerable added value results if individual projects contribute upwards to the programme level, making the programme more than the sum of its constituent parts. For the future, if ways can be found to surmount capacity issues that prevent project personnel from attending portfolio events, they should be considered – this might involve providing additional resources to fund the attendance of project representatives at appropriate events. The dividends that might flow from closer interaction between projects could include the increased effectiveness of current project and programme delivery, and enhanced future sustainability and legacy.

There are some 15-20 mental health projects under the New Leaf New Life portfolio, generally of a relatively small scale, similar to the community cafe. There is considerable value in supporting projects of this sort, not least in order to pilot new and potentially innovative methods of delivery. However, and not withstanding the significant outcomes that have been achieved by the cafe project, the allocation of greater resources to a smaller number of projects can help to maximise the outcomes that result, and consequently the effectiveness with which overall programme objectives are achieved.

Opportunities for the future

The key question with regard to the future for the project is how to sustain it after completion of the New Leaf New Life funding period in March 2010. Mind is actively seeking further funding, although to date has not been successful in doing so.

However, unless significant funding is sourced, to support moving the cafe to a more viable location, it will always be challenging to attract in sufficient numbers of customers to generate a steady income stream and provide the venture with a more sustainable footing for the future. Sustainability might be enhanced if more volunteers with the aptitude to take on a management role can be found and trained so that they have the necessary skills and experience. It is probably unrealistic for volunteers with significant mental health needs to be able to do so, so there is a rationale for widening the scope of the project to encourage volunteers without mental health needs to consider working in the cafe. Although the focus should remain on Mind's core client group, attracting in a broader range of volunteers would also contribute to the project and portfolio ambitions to encourage interaction between mental health service users and the wider community, and to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

Setting up a project like the community cafe is not a simple undertaking, and Mind in Gateshead has taken the right approach in starting relatively small in order to test out the approach and identify learning along the way. Capacity has been developed, and the building blocks are now in place for future initiatives, either around expanding the cafe project itself, or perhaps developing a social enterprise with a different focus but a similar method of delivery. There are considerable risks involved in undertaking such ventures, so the decision to do so would need to be based upon a careful analysis of the demand for the goods and services on offer, and confidence that its focus was something that volunteers with mental health issues would be both interested and capable of getting involved in. Given the experience of establishing and running the cafe, if Mind can hit upon a suitable concept for development, they could stand a good chance of securing the necessary support and resources to make it a reality.

In the event that the cafe is scaled up in the future, there might be potential to generate additional custom by offering catering for office lunches and other functions. There is clear demand for such services, particularly from more socially responsible businesses that are keen to support social enterprises and similar types of organisation, and this could provide an additional source of income to support wider project activities.

It is important that volunteers are encouraged to move on to other opportunities when both they and Mind staff feel they are ready to do so. It may not be in an individual's best interest to remain working at the cafe if they could enjoy the opportunity to develop further in a different environment – this might be formal employment, but could equally be volunteering in a different setting.

The Department of Health is committed to moving social care towards an individual budgets model in which people can exercise independence and choice over the care and support they receive. Individuals are given more control over the finance available to them, enabling them to exercise greater control over their care options, with the intention that their needs are met more effectively. The onset of individual budgets represents a potential opportunity to Mind, and to projects such as the community cafe, as service users may well prefer to assess such provision in preference to more mainstream alternatives.