



SUFFOLK
for mental wealth
Supporting a positive
mental health experience

Suffolk User Forum - A brief history leading up to the SUF re-launch in October 2012

Suffolk User Forum (SUF) was established in about 2002/2003 as a community organisation. It was well supported by the then Suffolk Mental Health Partnership Trust (SMHPT). SUF members initially met in service users homes and coffee shops but was later given office space by the Chairman of the Hospital Governors.

Initially SUF provided its own furniture and IT equipment but when Suffolk Mental Health Partnership (SMHP) offered IT support they exchanged all the IT equipment with their own. SUF has continued to be funded by the Mental Health Pooled fund, which is a tri- part fund run by the Ipswich & East Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and Suffolk County Council, Adult Care Services.

There were strong Department of Health guidance and policies that supported greater Mental Health (MH) service user involvement, including a culture of payment for user time given to involvement; *'Nothing about us without us'* supported service users wishing to have their voice heard and to receive more individualised, respectful and dignified care.

SUF was originally set up by a Lowestoft service user who continues to be member and Trustee of SUF. The original service user founder members were given support in this venture from Suffolk County Council (SCC) and Julie Bateman, and other of her colleagues plus others working in the mental health field such as Debbie Roberts (then CSIP, now involved with NSUN,) Ian Hartley

and Ian Stewart. They all contributed to getting service user involvement established in Suffolk.

At this time, SUF primarily worked in secondary care services with very active secondary care service users being involved in all management and communication meetings held within the then Mental Health Trust, SMHPT.

Historically SUF had an office in both Bury and Ipswich, but in 2013 SUF became independent from the current mental health trust (Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust) and now has its own offices located at The New Hollies, in Kesgrave, Ipswich.

By the time SUF became a registered charity and registered company in 2009 it had had two service user Chairman and was then on its third. The role for service users managing the service profile and the state of wellness of its Trustees and helpers proved to be very demanding for those people almost exclusively still experiencing secondary mental health care. Directors/Trustees of the Company were then also involved service users, with one at that time taking the lead in terms of running and coordinating SUF. A number of additional service users worked as active SUF members.

However, despite best intentions by early 2012 there were not sufficiently effective governance processes in place within the then SUF, with little formal supervision of individual's work, limited induction and recruitment processes and importantly a need to address governance processes such as obtaining the then CRB checks for staff working with vulnerable adults. Though this was addressed, the impact of different people's levels of wellbeing (a key issue for any disabled persons user led organisation - DPULO) led to some other governance issues being reported to Suffolk Mental Health Partnership staff (SMHPT) as a serious incident and then to Suffolk County Council (SCC) in their commissioning role.

SCC met with SUF representatives and clarified that the then Trustees needed to recruit people with user led expertise, to step in as Trustees to support SUF (this was by SMHPT– Robert Nesbit, Trust Secretary) who strongly believed in promoting the service user voice. This brought SUF three new Trustees Ian Hartley, Derek Jones & Jeannie Wright.

The 2012 annual SUF Stepping Forward Event and SUF AGM was held at University College Suffolk (UCS), on the 15th March 2012. Following discussions at this AGM it was confirmed on 13th April 2012, that the remit for the SUF Trustees was to develop a new structure and operational process within SUF and to widen its operational base.

The presented accounts to the end of June 2011 were approved and 5 SUF Trustees were nominated. They were Ian Hartley¹; Derek Jones¹ and Jeannie Wright who were formally re-elected. Sallyanne Webb and David Whitefield were appointed as new SUF trustees.

The new Trustee board listened to the concerns about SUF and made the brave decision to cease all SUF functions understanding and responding to the concerns that had been raised and took time to renegotiate the SUF contract with SCC and to put more robust governance arrangements in place. By 2012 Commissioners involved with SUF were now Liz Whitby, Jean Cobbold and Gillian Mullins.

This new Trustee board agreed a new SUF structure and the SUF Trustee Board made the decision to employ two SUF staff on a fixed term contract. This led to the appointment of Punna Athwall as SUF Administrator and Jayne Davey as SUF Project Coordinator. The SUF Administrator was appointed and started work in July 2012, taking a lead working with SAVO (now Community Action Suffolk - CAS) to write all SUF policies and procedures and the Project Coordinator started in September 2012.

The SUF re- launch was in October 2012, at which point SUF had no members at all, effectively starting its new role and membership from scratch.

From this time of uncertainty, SUF has grown. We moved into totally independent community based offices initially in both Bury St Edmunds (this office closed in October 2013 due to staffing changes and budget review) and Ipswich.

In 2014 SUF doubled its funding through successful awards from national funders such as Awards for All, The Big Lottery and Time to Change and deliver work place wellbeing seminars and workshops to over 1400 people in Suffolk. SUF has continued to receive its core funding from the Mental Health Pooled Fund, receiving a funding uplift from 1st April 2015.

SUF has undertaken numerous partnership working activities and in this process has attracted new Trustees including Carole Thaine from Mind, Jeff Stern of Healthwatch Suffolk and Kathleen Ben Rabha, from the Church of England Diocese.

As an organisation we have grown from 2 staff in October 2012 to our current staff structure (which is attached). This together with our numerous projects shows the success and expansion of SUF over a less than a two year funding period and the breadth of work we now undertake within the primary care sector and wider communities of Suffolk, including the business community. As our vision increases our role and connections with partners agencies becomes clearer, we are in an ever stronger position to comment in real time on the narrative of mental health experiences in Suffolk.

Jayne Davey

SUF Manager

9th July 2014

(Revised November 2015).