Suffolk user forum
your voice for emotional and mental health
nothing about us, without us

Impact Story

Stepping Forward Events - Coproduction

Event Topic - Alternatives to Crisis Care

Arriving at the event

When I arrived, the SUF staff made me feel welcome. They greeted me, helped with seating and supported me when I felt anxious about being recognised from my previous occupation. The people at my table were friendly, which helped me settle quickly.

Why I chose to attend

I came to the event because of my lived experience of Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, ADHD and Autism. I deal with days where I feel organised and energetic, and other days where I struggle with focus and motivation. I have spent years managing the inner conflict these conditions create.

Growing up, caregivers often confused my disabilities with mental health problems. This added pressure and made me mask more. I also grew up in a family with outdated views on mental health. I watched my grandmother manage bipolar disorder in ways that were misunderstood by professionals and painful for my mother, who tried to advocate for her.

These experiences shaped how I learned to cope, often by using humour, and led me to undertstand distress as a normal response rather than something that needed support. My experience of domestic abuse also shaped how I understand power, control and trauma, and how deeply they can affect a person's wellbeing.

Feeling listened to

During the event I felt listened to. People showed this through eye contact, open questions and genuine interest. Hearing others speak about their struggles was powerful. I recognised parts of my own story in theirs. Many of us had been fighting for support for a long time without recognising burnout. Staff helped keep discussions focused when conversations drifted back to personal hardship.

How the atmosphere felt

The atmosphere felt warm and reflective. I noticed two groups in the room. One group was made up of people with lived experience who had been worn down by systems that labelled or dismissed them. The other group was staff and managers who understood how the system works and the pressures it faces. As the event went on, both groups began working together. The atmosphere became hopeful and collaborative.

> ***"It was eye opening listening to so many stories of personal struggle and hardship."***

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Confidence in speaking up

At first I was unsure about speaking up. Listening to the speakers reminded me of childhood appointments at my GP and how professionals made decisions about my life before I had the chance to live it.

Feeling heard

The SUF staff were excellent facilitators. I felt valued by the staff, who listened carefully and created space for my experiences.

My interactions with other attendees were more mixed, which highlighted how different backgrounds, levels of understanding and personal histories can shape how people engage in discussions about mental health.

This reinforced for me how important it is for services to create environments where everyone feels able to contribute and be heard. Honesty and transparency are essential for genuine coproduction.

What I learned

The event changed how I see mental health services. My experiences of disability being dismissed or misunderstood showed me how much services need to evolve.

I have previously felt that organisational processes and decisions were shaped by factors I didn't fully understand, which affected my trust in services.

I believe modern mental health support should use behavioural psychology, needs assessment frameworks and validated measures to understand people more accurately. It should also consider social factors like housing, finances, relationships and community support.

Personal impact

The event made me think about times when I raised concerns about my own capability and capacity and how those concerns were dismissed. Trauma and stress can stop people from thriving and I have seen how assumptions from professionals can change the course of a person's life.

I also reflected on wider issues. Many people use coping behaviours to get through the day because they cannot see a better future. This becomes tomorrow's pressure on the NHS, ambulance services and the police. I believe empathy and compassion are personal qualities that cannot be taught.

Most valuable part of the day

The whole day was valuable. Mental health was not part of my education in the 1990s and my family environment mixed work, trauma and religion in ways that shaped my understanding. I have learned more about psychology from television than from professionals. The event helped me update my thinking and see how much change is needed.