



## **Statement – Norwich & Central Norfolk Mind**

**By Amanda Hedley, CEO**

**10<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

Norwich & Central Norfolk Mind (Norwich Mind) would like to thank everyone for the extraordinary support that has been expressed regarding the continuation of the Norwich Mind support line. Archant Media launched their Norfolk-wide mental health campaign in the autumn of last year and as part of that campaign profiled our various services in the New Year. This included the Norwich Mind support line and the very positive impact it has had on people's lives. In the context of this wider campaign it is to be applauded that they have given such a focus to mental health issues generally and more specifically a strong platform for service users and others to express their views about the decision to discontinue funding for the Norwich Mind support line. Service users and their carers have repeatedly expressed their frustration that they have not felt they have had any other vehicle to express their strong feelings regarding their experience of using the wider mental health system and the positive impact the helpline has had on their mental health other than through the media and the petition.

Within the public debate about the need for the support line there have been some misconceptions that Norwich Mind feel need to be clarified. The Norwich Mind support line has been identified as being an important component of a good mental health service for many years within Norfolk – initially planned as part of the Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust's (NSFT) Redesign of Mental Health services over 5 years ago. The NSFT, supported by commissioners, specifically requested that Norwich Mind research good practice models for a telephone helpline as part of the work to look at "Alternatives to Admission of Acute Mental Health Beds." Throughout both these planning processes, the people who use mental health services and their carers, along with a wide group of other stakeholders, were actively involved in designing the model for the helpline and consistently supported the need for an out of hours helpline to be available to fill the gap experienced from within existing service provision. At this time commissioners also added the need for a telephone helpline to the Norfolk Multi- agency Crisis Care Concordat Plan which is a Norfolk wide plan, monitored annually by NHS England, to ensure that crisis care for those with mental health problems is being addressed at local level. In addition the National Mental Health plan recently launched with the promise of an additional £1bn more funding for mental health also highlights the priority for improved Crisis and Home treatment services and the central need to co-produce service provision with the people who use those services.

Shortly after Norwich Mind researched good practice across the country and developed a model that was felt to be appropriate for Norfolk, an opportunity arrived via National Resilience Funding to pilot whether the helpline would indeed deliver the outcomes expected – in particular taking pressures off other health agencies and the clinical teams at the NSFT. The funding was initially for 6 months.

The service was designed therefore with the full support of both the Commissioners and the NSFT as well as other partners eg. Ambulance, A & E and the Police. The service was only available for the most unwell people who were already in receipt of NSFT services or those discharged within the year. It operates in an integrated way with the NSFT teams and that is one of the reasons it works so well - whereas other alternatives mentioned within the debate do not to the same extent (eg Samaritans, A and E ). In particular the Norwich Mind support line staff:

- Have access to care coordinators of clients if necessary and can liaise with the relevant clinical team to ensure information required is passed to the appropriate team for follow up if necessary
- There are clear protocols in place with the Crisis Response and Home Treatment teams (CRHTs) so that if someone who rings the helpline is an emergency and requires the clinical crisis response from the CRHT that is activated immediately through a dedicated telephone line (our hotline)
- Support line staff have access to the care notes of clients on a read only basis so that any support and advice is appropriate and safe depending on client's care plans
- The helpline staff are well trained to listen, as well as to provide advice, emotional support and a focus on working together toward recovery

The model designed and delivered has worked well – it has been a good partnership with the NSFT clinical teams enabling them to focus their more skilled and pressured clinical response on those requiring a more urgent response, whilst our helpline provides the skilled emotional support for those still in emotional need (unless the support line assesses an urgent clinical need and refers to the CRHT on the 'hotline'). Norwich Mind has done its best to evaluate the support line with limited resource and no specialist help to develop the detailed evaluation of the pilot that some commissioners say should have been completed. However we have recorded much data and many service users have shared their own experience. We learned lessons from the initial pilot and when we were refunded by the NSFT in recognition of the contribution the support line made in managing the demand on their clinical services (albeit with reduced hours and initially until the end of March) we introduced further improvements in consultation with the NSFT which improved managing the enormous demand that the support line generated for the helpline service. As a result of this Norwich Mind are confident that we have demonstrated a number of outcomes which show the support line to be effective. In addition we have had many people sharing their stories through the EDP and other media about how the support line has been there when no one else has, and that it has saved people from many trips to A & E, their GP, ambulance services and phoning the overstretched CRHT teams. People have also openly shared how the support line has literally saved their lives. In our view the support line has proven itself to be effective as well as very good value for money.

It is also important to clarify that the Wellbeing helpline that has been mentioned as an alternative is a helpline that we too operate. This helpline is part of a contract launched in September for people who have mild to moderate mental health problems and users must be registered with the Wellbeing service and their telephone number must be registered with the helpline otherwise their phone calls do not get through. The vast majority of the people using the Norwich Mind support line are not eligible for the Wellbeing service (and therefore the helpline) as they are too unwell. The reason that the Wellbeing service has a dedicated helpline, and the services for the more unwell mental health patients do not, is that within the Wellbeing service design commissioners listened to the strong view from service users and their carers that they needed access to a helpline outside of normal working hours and at weekends to help them stay well and avoid trips to their GP and A & E.

Norwich Mind had been told that the future funding of the support line would be conducted as part of the contract negotiations between the NSFT and commissioners. Norwich Mind are not involved in those discussions and nor should we be. However, we were not told of any of the rationale for the decision between the NSFT and the commissioners to stop the funding of the Norwich Mind support line until we received formal notification by letter from the NSFT that funding would cease at the end of March. Norwich Mind's understanding is that the decision is based on a lack of funds and not for any other reason.

It is with great regret that Norwich Mind have had to watch from the side lines whilst some of the most vulnerable people within the mental health service have felt they have had no option than to resort to a national petition and to the media in order for them to have their voice heard. Norwich Mind have not encouraged this as we remain very aware of the stress and vulnerability of the people who use our service. Although we cannot engage directly in the media campaign and the petition we welcome that this campaign has enabled a constructive, fair and informative debate in support of our service users and for effective mental health services.

In addition , the campaign and the petition and the very public support from many, including local MPs who have been approached by their constituents, does give an indication of the enormous value placed upon the Norwich Mind support line.

At this stage Norwich Mind are working toward the closure of the support line at the end of this month. Norwich Mind are working hard with the NSFT clinical teams to enable additional support from them for those we are most concerned will be adversely affected by the closure. However these teams are already under immense pressure and they are not available after normal working hours or over the weekend when the people say they need the helpline the most. The urgent and emergency services (CRHT, A & E) do not have the time nor the remit to support people who are not requiring an urgent clinical response. There are no suitable alternatives that provide the response the support line provides and this should be acknowledged.

Norwich Mind does not presume to tell commissioners how they should spend the funding allocated for mental health. Norwich Mind absolutely understand that all organisations, ourselves included, are having to make very difficult decisions about what services can and should be provided. Norwich Mind have considered whether there are other avenues of funding but due to the nature of the people who use the helpline (seriously unwell NHS patients which precludes other grants) and the level of funding required on a recurrent basis, we have not been able to identify any alternative likely funding opportunities – we already subsidise the operational cost of the existing support line in order to provide a free phone number but we would never be able to raise additional funds to the scale required.

The existing funding and therefore the Norwich Mind support line will close at the end of March. As an organisation we are extremely proud of the service that has been delivered and although it has not always been problem free (often the support line was in huge demand and operators had limited capacity to answer calls) we feel immensely proud of the support that we have been able to provide some of the people who are the most unwell. The scale of the response to the petition and to the media campaign confirms that to many people an out of hours support line should be considered as a priority service within the debate about what mental health services should be funded.

Norwich Mind does not know who should fund the helpline – all we ask is that the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) and the NSFT work together to consider any possibility to reverse this decision.

Norwich Mind believes the model has been successful and the service has filled a very important gap in mental health provision – and for this reason – even if we are unable to secure further funding by the end of March we will continue to fight hard to gain funding to provide this important service in the future.

Amanda Hedley

CEO Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind

10/3/16