



Press Release

Essential Norfolk & Waveney mental health support line will not continue

5th June 2015

“We are very shocked and extremely disappointed with the decision of the five CCG’s not to continue funding the support line here at Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind. The support line has proven to be a very successful pilot since January taking in excess of 5000 calls from services users who have described the connection they have with the project as “a lifeline.”

The number of calls we receive continues to grow monthly and the support line not continuing past July is our worst fear, primarily for our service users who we are very concerned about losing this lifeline and support that they have become reliant on since January. The money for this pilot was given to the five CCG’s by central government as an addition to their overall health budget (which exceeds over £1.2 billion for Norfolk). We were asked to run this pilot to test out how effective this support line would be in reducing the considerable pressures experienced by the Norfolk Suffolk Foundation Trust (NSFT), GP’s, A & E and the Police and Ambulance services. The pilot has proven hugely successful in both reducing pressure and improving the mental health of the most vulnerable and at-risk people in Norfolk. We were therefore expecting that as the pilot has been so successful each CCG would agree to find the approximately £30k each from within the budget they have at their disposal to continue to fund this essential service until at least the end of this financial year.

The support line is freely available to those people in contact with the NSFT 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and offers an efficient, cost effective response to services users as well as caring and specialist help. We know from what our service users tell us that the helpline has prevented them feeling the need to access other services like A & E, GPs and the NSFT services which contributes significant resource saving within the system. If funding had been continued we were planning to expand the helpline through the use of volunteers so that we could respond to even more people and we feel very saddened that this will not become a reality. The CCG’s describe existing services such as the NSFT Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team and calling 111 as being available to service users when the helpline closes. In fact both these services regularly refer their clients to the support line. The pilot was established because the pressure on these other services meant they could not respond appropriately as evidenced by the recent Healthwatch report which described ‘out of hours’ mental health services as ‘extremely poor’ and

by the fact that the NSFT has been placed in special measures. We believe that this decision by the five CCG's is symptomatic of the low priority that is given to mental health and those in crisis.

Kevin James, service user governor for Norfolk/NSFT has commented hearing the news;

'Other service users, cares and NSFT staff have consistently fed back to me that the support line has provided a lifeline in times of crisis and mental distress, and many people will be devastated and shocked to hear this news. The support line has met the needs of service users where other services have failed and I personally feel beyond concerned for the welfare of those who have a genuine need for the service. This decision continues to fuel the debate in Norfolk regarding the parity of esteem between mental health and physical health.'

We are very unsure of finding a way forward for this pilot. Accessing another source of funding seems unlikely especially at such short notice but we will not give up hope yet. We are incredibly passionate about keeping this essential service available to service users and would welcome any support from the general public or local organisations."

ENDS

For more information contact Amanda Hedley – CEO Norwich & Central Norfolk Mind

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