



Service user panel minutes
14th March 2021

Staff present:

Alex Feis-Bryce (AF-B) CEO

Katherine Cox (KC) Services Manager and Groupwork Co-ordinator

Number of clients present: 10

- Recruitment to ISVA and counselling teams - current and pending

One of our ISVAs has left. We have recruited a new ISVA who is starting on the 22nd March. There has been COVID-contingency funding available and through this we have been able to recruit into the following posts:

- Waiting list counsellor – dedicated to support clients on the waiting list
- Caseworker who is able to provide practical support and advice to all clients
- Another ISVA post

In addition, the Ministry of Justice has made available extra funding for sexual violence support services including a dedicated male rape support fund. We are confident that through this funding we will gain 2 additional ISVA posts for 2 years

There is also potentially substantial additional funding for counsellors and we should know if we have been successful by the end of this month

Discussion:

AF-B explained that our ISVAs are location specific to London because of the funding. There was feedback about the need for male specific ISVAs across the UK and a call to SurvivorsUK to expand the ISVA service to a national remit. AF-B explained this is difficult as the Ministry of Justice doesn't fund national posts and specific locations require specific ISVAs who are aware of that locality.

One attendee asked about the increased funding and AF-B responded that if all of our bids were successful it would increase our funding by around 30%. We are also placing administrative capacity into the bids. Currently the Groupwork and ISVA services are close to meeting demand but for counselling there remains a concerning long waiting list. The stated ambition of MOPAC (The Mayor's Office for Police and Crime) is to eradicate waiting lists for sexual violence services across London and SurvivorsUK is very involved in those discussions. We have a good relationship with the Mayors office and the MOPAC commissioners.

One attendee asked how much government funding SurvivorsUK receives. AF-B stated that commissioned services are usually more long-term and secure than Trusts and Foundations but in addition we have recruited a fundraiser who is focusing on individual giving and

donations, which are harder to obtain for us than other charities but are hugely helpful as they are unrestricted funds so we have more freedom in how they are used.

One attendee pointed out that the name implies a national remit. AF-B responded that whilst the ISVA and counselling teams are London specific, our helpline and Groupwork programme have a UK wide remit and we have strong links with the national Male Survivors Partnership. We are not attempting to expand the counselling service to be UK wide because of the level of demand we already have on our service.

AF-B said our rebrand will help with communicating what communities we serve with which services.

Another attendee stated that SurvivorsUK IS national and the organisation can take credit for this but we should not be in a position where we are overstretched.

There was some discussion about blended online and face to face group provision following the lifting of lockdown and the demand for more creative groups. KC stated that the plan was to develop both in the months to come.

- Rebrand update

This is underway and involves a web redesign and clearer communications. We are working with an organisation called Shape History. Clients have been involved in all aspects of this process. We are developing a brand which reflects the organisation being warm, friendly and welcoming. We are also aiming for a user's first experience of the website to be straightforward, positive and easy to navigate, and to reduce the number of clicks needed to get where the client wants to be. We are also developing an animated film which we hope will resonate.

- Office update

AF-B explained that we were going to renovate part of the office in Shadwell but, because of the expense involved in the process and the landlord's response, the cost grew to be both unaffordable and unjustifiable. The office rental market has changed, and now we are able to get better value elsewhere, so we ended our contract at Shadwell on the 23rd December. We have engaged a property agent and one of the trustees is working closely with them. We have specified a number of requirements including: appropriate and properly soundproofed counselling rooms (or the ability to install these); friendly and welcoming entrance; located in a safe area; well connected with multiple modes of transport; within a certain number of miles from existing office; accessible. We have also done a mapping exercise using staff postcodes to minimise increased commute times. More details will be available when we have firmer possibilities in place.

We have temporarily redacted a portion of these minutes until we have agreed terms on a new office.

- New trustees update

The Board has been recruiting new trustees and was inundated with fantastic applications. They wanted to fill skills shortages on the existing Board and also stressed the importance of having survivors represented. Last Tuesday five new trustees were co-opted which makes the Board more diverse in every sense. The new trustees bring personal experience and fill the skills shortage we had and all brought a desire specifically to be trustee at SurvivorsUK. The profiles of the new trustees will be shared on the website and a representative will be invited to the next service user panel

Discussion:

There ensued a detailed discussion with AF-B and KC agreed to share with the Board.

One attendee asked the length of the existing trustees' term of office AF-B and KC were not sure but will find out.

Two attendees said they had applied and heard nothing back until they had raised it with KC. Both felt there had been a lack of appreciation from the Board about how brave it is for a survivor to apply. AF-B said he was really sorry to hear that had been people's experience. AF-B said he had spoken to everyone on the shortlist but hadn't been involved any further in the recruitment so wasn't able to comment except to apologise that this had been people's experience. One attendee said he had asked for feedback but none had been forthcoming. Another stated that the process had been too drawn out and that service users applying should be supported – although he said KC had done this informally. One attendee said he had found aspects of the process patronising; that he was asked about whether he was emotionally able to manage the role. Several attendees stated that the procedure should have been better and that there should be better links between the trustees and the service users.

One attendee asked whether there had been an AGM and when AF-B said there had been he questioned why service users had not been invited. There were a number of attendees who had been to the previous AGM and noted that questions had been raised about membership which hadn't been responded to by the Board. AF-B stated that a lot of charities were moving away from a membership model for governance reasons. AF-B and KC stated that recruiting service user reps will be a way of meaningfully involving service users and also improving communication between the Board and service users.

One attendee stated that the operation of the organisation is frankly superb, that it is magnificently run, so Board must be doing something right. There was a discussion about the skill set needed to be a trustee such as Board management and financial literacy; that there will be service users with those skills but being a survivor itself is not sufficient to be a trustee.

An attendee stated that they were impressed with the Board and the level of professionalism which was volunteered

- Thrivers

KC said that we had advertised for service user representatives and received a number of applications. A panel of service users and staff will recruit two reps with a two year term of office. The service user reps will have a clear set of tasks and will be fully managed, trained and supported.

There was some discussion about how this was managed and how the reps and organisation managed expectations that may be placed on service users. KC mentioned the models which we have considered which have been adopted in other organisations and theories of service user involvement which we have drawn on in developing these roles.

KC and AF-B thanked everyone for attending.