

Social Café & Buddy Scheme: community-based support for men from BAME communities

SCFT pilot site: South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw

Core component: Addressing Inequalities & Peer Based Approaches

Working in partnership with local third sector organisations, the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw SCFT have developed a multifaceted approach to supporting men from Black African and Caribbean backgrounds as they transition from inpatient secure care services into the community:

- ✓ The Social Café (also known as the Wellbeing Hub)
- ✓ Wellbeing Zones
- ✓ Buddy Scheme

For the purposes of the pilot, the SCFT focused these initiatives in Sheffield, where people from BAME backgrounds are overrepresented in the secure inpatient population (46%) compared to the local general population (19.2%).

The Social Café (Wellbeing Hub)

The Social Café is held at the Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association's (SADACCA) community care centre in Sheffield's town centre, once a week from 11 am to 3pm. The Café is open to those who have leave from inpatient services, as well as those who have been discharged and now living in the community - at the time of writing, approximately 10 people attend on a regular basis.

"It was slow to start, and we have to really encourage colleagues to refer, but there was a shift and everyone is now really onboard"
Care Coordinator, South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw SCFT

"One person accessing the social café has enjoyed the gardening and the social aspect of this. Another positive thing has been identifying it as a community support that will continue when they leave hospital as part of their weekly routine" **Occupational Therapist, South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw SCFT**

The Social Café is a place for BAME service users to socialise with others from a similar background to their own, who they can identify with and relate to. It can provide some consistency for those transitioning from inpatient settings to the community; a place they are familiar with and can attend on a regular basis once discharged. It is somewhere that people can go and take part in games, gardening, music, learn about self-care and access online resources such as My Toolkit (see box 2).

During the pandemic and lockdowns, the Social Café was able to continue online for people in hospital, with the support of staff, as well as in the community.

BOX 2: [My Toolkit](https://www.sheffieldmentalhealth.co.uk/how-to-use-my-toolkit), created by Sheffield Flourish in collaboration with the community, is an online confidential space to support mental health and wellbeing, using resources from the Sheffield Mental Health Guide. For more info visit <https://www.sheffieldmentalhealth.co.uk/how-to-use-my-toolkit>

Wellbeing Zones

As part of the Social Café, service users can attend 40-minute sessions to learn useful tools to build stronger mental health and improve their wellbeing. These sessions are accessed via referral and 1:1 assessment and run by 'Space to Breathe', a third sector organisation that is based at SADACCA's premises and specialise in wellbeing. The sessions include:

- Learning Mindfulness
- Lifting Stress

- Relieving Anxiety
- Finding Strength in Nature
- Building Resilience.

BOX 3: Space to Breathe is an organisation which uses the arts, positive psychology and simple non-religious spirituality to improve wellbeing and mental health. They have a wealth of experience and have created free wellbeing tools available to download from their website:

<https://spacetobreatheuk.com/>

Buddy Scheme

The Buddy Scheme has only recently started and is designed to provide those transitioning from inpatient services to the community with a friend who has lived experience of mental health services and can support them on their journey. The project aims to recruit up to 50 volunteers who will be trained in Mental Health First Aid, to act as peer support and build a supportive friendship (not clinical or medical), to help those who may feel socially isolated after being away from a community for long periods of time.

All buddies have lived experience of using mental health services, but many will not have the unique experience of secure inpatient services. This gap in knowledge and experience has been recognised and these buddies are supported by their peer colleagues who do have this experience to help them to prepare and support people in secure inpatient services.

The process of matching people in services and buddies will develop as the scheme develops. Currently, matches are made based on shared interests, but where this isn't possible, two buddies will meet a service user together and see whether the service-user naturally gets on with one or the other.

The scheme is in its infancy and, at the time of writing, has undergone its first wave of recruitment and received 52 applications, 25 of which have been interviewed and accepted as volunteers.

Space to Breathe worked with Philip*, an inpatient in a low secure unit. Philip had challenges with anxiety and intrusive thoughts that often presented in anger and relational problems with other service-users. He was also quite shy and lacked social confidence.

Philip was supported by an OT to join the Wellbeing Zones sessions via Zoom during the pandemic. Philip had a good relationship with the OT and asked them to stay with him during each session. Philip felt able to share freely in the sessions and was able to learn new skills, particularly around mindfulness, and was able to find ways to manage his anxiety a little better.

After completing the sessions, Philip attended the Social Cafe but didn't feel confident to continue. He didn't want to disengage completely though, and so the Space to Breathe team introduced Philip to the idea of the Buddy Scheme while they were out for a walk together. Philip had gotten to know Andy (the Founder & Director of Space to Breathe) and asked if he might be his Buddy/supporter for the short term and then, when he felt comfortable, he could meet someone new.

Andy discussed this with Philip's OT and the SCFT and all agreed this was a good solution. *"I am now meeting W once a month, continuing to share self-care tools and building his confidence. I am hopeful that in time he'll start to meet a Buddy volunteer regularly as he gains confidence."* **Andy Freeman, Founder & Director, Space to Breathe**

**Name has been changed*

Positive impact

Despite being in their infancy, the initiatives have had a significantly positive impact, including:

- ✓ **Digital skills** - where the Wellbeing Zones were being delivered online, many service users started using new technology for the first time or became more confident in using it.
- ✓ **Self-care** - service users felt better equipped to use self-care tools and techniques as a result of the Wellbeing Zone sessions like breathing exercises, 'stress container' and mindfulness meditations. Others learned to regulate their emotions and articulate their feelings when faced with challenging situations such as tribunals, or transitions such as discharge.
- ✓ **Reduced stigma** - the active involvement of volunteers helps to reduce the stigma around mental health in the community by increasing their awareness and understanding of the issues and struggles that people with mental ill-health can face.
- ✓ **Increased support** – service users felt more supported in the community. Being at SADACCA has proved an invaluable link to the community for Black men attending the service. Two service users being considered for discharge are already known at SADACCA and have been able to reconnect with the African-Caribbean community there.
- ✓ **Reduction in social isolation** – people transitioning to the community from inpatient services have the opportunity to build relationships before discharge that can continue and have a place to go that is orientated around recovery and provides a supportive environment. SADACCA gives individuals the chance of longer-term friendships and community.

Key learning

The SCFT has learned a lot during these early stages and highlighted to the following key learning points to support others keen to develop something similar

- ✓ **Digital technology and infrastructure (i.e. internet connections) in hospitals** is vital to support people in hospitals to access initiatives such as this.
- ✓ **Ward support and understanding of the initiatives** is vital to:
 - support the promotion of them and encourage referrals.
 - Help with arranging escorts to enable the service users on leave to be accompanied to the social café.
- ✓ **Commitment to the process:** Where an individual and their OT/carer are both committed to the process, the Wellbeing Zone Sessions tended to run much better.
- ✓ **Patients' initial anxiety:** the first visit to the Social Café proved challenging for some service users, causing significant anxiety. To counter this, materials with photos of the venue and staff were created and services users had the opportunity to talk through their anxieties so that they could be supported or enabled to attend.
- ✓ **Building social confidence:** the opportunity to learn or relearn social skills and grow in confidence gives service users the tools they need to live well in the community.
- ✓ **Supporting transition:** the self-care tools appear to be particularly useful at transition points e.g. a tribunal, discharge or leave request. It was reported that "these skills enabled individuals to be calmer, to see the future clearer and to articulate their thoughts and emotions in a calmer manner. They also enabled them to be grounded and see positives, even when things didn't go their way." **Project Impact Report May 2021**

"That improved social confidence can't be underestimated."
**Project Impact Report
May 2021**

- ✓ **Collaboration with Community and/or Third Sector Organisations:** the importance of working collaboratively with community / third sector organisations cannot be underestimated, particularly when seeking to identify and address the inequalities that people using secure services might have faced or continue to face. Their expertise and/or lived experience of specific cultures, beliefs, and values, and their existing connections to community groups and networks are vital to supporting people to live well in communities following discharge.

“We have learnt through the project the power of community connections... Where we have needed to reach out to an Ethnic Minority community, we’ve reached out first to local organisations - built relationships - and tried to work in partnership with them. This helps us navigate cultural boundaries, means service-users are more comfortable and means there is a long-term support network for people we work with.” **Andy Freeman, Founder & Director, Space to Breathe**