Health Together Peer Support Team

Suffolk User Forum

Healthy Together Team, and the co-produced Healthy Together initiative take proactive and targeted action to address the physical healthcare inequalities faced by the 3,785 individuals living with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) - including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and psychosis - across Suffolk. People with SMI face significant health disparities, being over twice as likely to develop conditions like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes compared to the general population, and a life expectancy 15 to 20 years shorter.

Working in partnership with the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT) and NHS commissioners, their work promotes equitable access to physical healthcare for people with SMI, and their approach is enriched by providing tailored, peer-led support focused on improving physical health and overall well-being. They offer a unique peer support service focused on personalised care and building trusted, non-clinical relationships with people. Individuals are referred to Healthy Together after their annual physical health check to receive support in achieving their physical health goals, including improving nutrition, increasing activity, quitting smoking, or accessing dental care. The team have lived experience of mental health challenges, providing relatable support and guidance fostering understanding, empowerment, and building trust whilst ensuring they receive practical support and respect in managing their health.

Since 2021, the Healthy Together team has helped boost participation in annual physical health checks for SMI. Annually, the team of 4 (2 FTE roles) works with around 270 referrals, with 64% of these individuals come from the 50% most deprived areas in Suffolk. This reveals a strong need for support in the most challenged communities. The team responds to referrals within 5 days, keeping them open for up to 6 months. 92% of people supported by the team achieve their physical health goals across 70+ healthcare pathways within 6 months.