

Enter and View

**Islington Mind Community Support
Service**



Healthwatch Islington

Healthwatch Islington is an independent organisation led by volunteers from the local community. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community.

Healthwatch Islington gathers local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are taken on how services will look in the future, and how they can be improved.

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Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of our findings	4
Why we undertook the visits	5
Feedback from service manager	6
Mind Spa	7
Mind Empower	11
Mind Hub	15
Recommendations	19

Introduction

Healthwatch Islington has the right to 'Enter and View' publicly funded health and adult social care services as they are being delivered. Trained and DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to find out how services are being run, and to make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

In 2015-16 we have been particularly interested in using our Enter and View work to consider how services are personalised to give service members choice and control. We have visited mental health services as well as care homes for older people as part of this work.

This report relates to findings observed on the specific dates and times when the visits took place. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all the service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

Healthwatch Islington would like to thank the service provider (Islington Mind), service users and staff for their contribution to our Enter and View work.

Summary of our findings



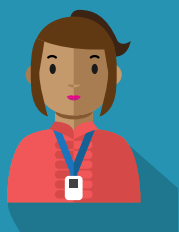
It was very important to service users, managers and staff that a hot meal is provided during a drop in session.



Service users spoke about wanting the service to be open longer and more often (especially in the evenings and at weekends), although there was recognition that this would mean there needed to be increased funding for staff.



There were many different ways for service users to feed back about the service, from weekly meetings, to key worker sessions, questionnaires and direct comments. In the main, people felt they were listened to. At Mind Hub some service users wanted to see the introduction of more formal courses with tutors, or a 'buddy scheme' (for moving on). They also suggested improving the quality of the computers.



There seemed to be slightly different pressures on staff at each centre, but overall staff were seen as supportive and welcoming. Service users also said that staff seemed to have less time to spend with them. It was recognised that this was down to increased paper work and a decrease in funding. Staff seemed to feel well supported. Feedback did suggest that there could be increased access to training.



Some service users we spoke to were anxious that Islington Mind's day service might close or lose funding, so much so that the Enter and View team had service users queuing to speak to them about how good the service is.



The changing landscape of welfare has also led to an increase of anxiety in service users accessing these centres. It has also put more pressure on staff who seem to spend an increasing amount of time supporting service users in their applications for Pip, ESA and supporting them with housing issues.

Why we undertook the visits

Our work plan for this year included Enter and View visits to mental health facilities with particular focus on access and the personalisation of services. We spoke to local voluntary and statutory organisations who suggested we focus on day services as the more 'preventative' community based social services are under threat and appear vulnerable to funding cuts and system re-haul.

The Enter and View team therefore planned visits to the three Islington Mind day services which are jointly funded by Islington Council and Islington Clinical Commissioning Group.

Mind Spa, Mind Empower and Mind Hub receive self-referrals and walk ins to their centres but also receive referrals from community partners including GPs, social workers, the local iAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) service and the police.

The three centres do not have a specific time period for treatment and many of the service users require ongoing support over a long period. The service (including the Counselling and Therapy service) served over 1100 service users in 2015 over the three sites.

There is another mental health day service (The Recovery Centre Isledon Road) that operates in the borough which we have also visited in the past year. You can find the report on our website here http://www.healthwatchislington.co.uk/sites/default/files/isledon_road_enter_and_view.pdf.

If you would like the report in a more accessible format, email info@healthwatchislington.co.uk.

Methodology

The Enter and View team undertook two visits to each Mind day service, the first being an announced visit in April and the second, an unannounced visit in May.

Prior to the visits the team sent the service manager and the centre managers questions we wanted to ask ahead of time. The service manager was able to respond before we undertook our announced visits. At the start of each announced visit the Enter and View team met with the centre manager who answered the set of the questions they had been sent.

Each day service was notified of our announced visit in advance and both staff and service users were expecting the visit. Prior to the visits Healthwatch Islington sent each centre flyers and posters advertising the visit and explaining its purpose.

During each visit we observed the service and surroundings and spoke to service users and members of staff. The Enter and View team also had prepared questions to ask the service users and staff.

We were offered lunch at the services and some members of the team took this offer up. When we arrived at the centres we found that service users knew about our visit and had come to speak to us.

Before each unannounced visit we gave the day service notice that the team would be coming back to do another visit at some point within a two-week window in May. Again, we sent flyers and posters so that service users were aware that the team would be revisiting the service and why. The aim of this visit was to observe the service when it wasn't prepared for our visit and to spend a little longer at the service, speaking to more staff and service users.

Feedback from the day service manager

The Islington Mind day services were used by over 1100 people in 2015. The service manager explained that Islington Mind have capacity for 35-45 service users at each site during the drop in period each day, as they are unable to provide lunch for more.

Service users can access the day services through self-referral, whether that's through the website or by simply walking into the service. Service users can also be referred by local partners and medical/ social care professionals. The service is open ended and there is no end date or fixed outcome goal that dictates how long service users can remain with the service. The service is funded jointly by Islington Council and Islington Clinical Commissioning Group. Islington Mind delivers the 'Community Support Service' contract, which is up for retender in 2017. The service aims to 'promote better mental health and help people recover from ill-health'.

Service users present with a wide spectrum of mental health issues. Many have received a formal diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, anxiety and depression. Others have had no formal contact with mental health services, but have significant undiagnosed mental illness and access Islington Mind at a time of crisis. Islington Mind also work with those who have been discharged from statutory services who in the past might have had a lot of contact with the Community Mental Health Teams, but due to cuts are now left with little or no community support.

- ▶ **Islington Mind also runs a hospital 'in-reach' team that makes contact with patients before discharge to build relationships that will support them through their discharge transition hoping to avoid readmission through 'the revolving door'.**
- ▶ **Islington Mind also works to support families and carers of people with mental illness.**

All three Islington Mind day centres provide a hot meal at 12 or 1pm on drop-in days for the price of £2.50. Service users can also have desert for 50p extra. The service manager mentioned that service users have said that they rely on this service for food, with a centre manager commenting that service users have said that it is the only meal they get in a day.

The service manager told us about partnerships they have with a number of local organisation/ statutory services: The Rehab and Recovery Team; Foodcycle; Culpeper Gardening Project; ICOPE; the Assessment Service; the Crisis Team; Talk for Health; Highbury Grove Crisis House; Drayton Park Crisis Centre; Islington Mind's in-reach project to Highgate Mental Health Centre inpatient wards; Islington People's Rights; GPs; Asylum Aid; Medical Fund.

The service manager explained that service users are kept up to date with service changes via regular local site meetings and wider service meetings. There was survey that was completed by 112 service users in 2015 which recorded satisfaction levels. Service users are also involved in the activities in the centres – both the choice and running of. Service users run art groups, a Mosaic project, a retro gaming group, a discussion group, a music group, a reading group, a women's group and various LGBT service user run groups. The service manager clarified that staff support service users to run these groups and/or projects and while some groups thrive, others have a limited life span.

Each centre runs a different timetable of services for varying client groups. Each centre has its own personality, and to an extent, its own client group.

The visits to Mind Spa

Details of visits	
Service address	Mind Spa, 35 Ashley Road, London N19 3AG
Service provider	Islington Mind
Announced visit details	19 April 2016, 1pm to 3.30pm
Unannounced visit details	26 May 2016, 1.30pm to 4pm
Authorised representatives	Helen Mukerjee, Vivian Duckett, Jane Plimmer
Contact details	Healthwatch Islington 020 7832 5821

Sex of respondents

Male	Female	Undisclosed	Total
1	10	1	12

Six respondents described themselves as having a disability, three said not, and three preferred not to answer the question.

Age of respondents

16-24	25-44	45-64	65-79	80+	Undisclosed	Total
1	2	5	1	0	3	12

Ethnicity of respondents

Black or Black British	1
Black or Black British - African	1
Human (respondents self identified)	3
Mixed - Black or Black British and Asian	1
White - British	6

1. Observations

Our Enter and View team visited Mind Spa during the day it hosts 'Outcome', the centre's pan-London LGBT service. Outcome describes itself as 'a sanctuary, somewhere safe where members of the LGBT community can be themselves, free from discrimination and receive counselling and other therapies to improve mental health.' (Islington Mind Outcome literature 2016). This service runs from the centre every Tuesday and is staffed by the usual centre staff. Outcome provides a 'drop in' service between 10.30am and 4pm, with other activities running throughout the day.

'This service offers a safe space for LGBT people who also want mental health support. We want to break isolation in the community and want to offer mental health support as we have found [from service users] that this can be lacking in the community [for people who identify as LGBT]. I feel very safe here and I am glad to be able to contribute to creating a safe space for LGBT people.'

Volunteer staff member

The Enter and View team observed that the space was spacious and newly decorated, with new and bright furniture. The environment felt homely and relaxed. There was an accessible toilet on the ground floor but it wasn't clear to the team whether the whole centre was wheelchair accessible. There was also a room clearly designated for women only.

The team observed that the staff moved around the space with the service users creating a non-hierarchical feel. Staff did not wear a uniform, or identify themselves with name badges. The activity programme was clearly displayed.

The centre was decorated with service user art work, which the team felt showed a sense of ownership of the space. Service users were seen chatting to each other but also able to give each other space. The centre had a welcoming garden that service users were able to use and tend.

2. Centre manager

The manager said that the changes to the benefits system have increased the anxiety of Mind's service users. They have many forms to fill in which are complex and the PIP (Personal Independence Payments, formally Disability Living Allowance) and ESA (Employment and Support Allowance) forms are very 'physical health' focused.

The centre manager added that an increasing number of service users are coming to the centre in crisis, and that extra stress is added by the fear of service closure or reduction.

The service has also been affected by cuts and this has led to staff members taking an elective salary reduction in a bid to keep the centre open more often. Additionally, the manager went on to say that the two paid staff are often stretched beyond capacity, some clients' needs are too complicated to support on a one day a week basis. The manager also said that limited resources were causing the service to be creative and take risks. The manager also spoke about the ways in which service users can influence the service, from weekly centre meetings to informal chats.

3. Staff

The team spoke to one volunteer member who was there to support the centre staff. This volunteer mentioned that they had noticed an increase in service users coming to the project, especially women. They went on to explain that the centre held a woman only open day 'in order to have a forum where we discussed how we could attract more women,' and they felt this initiative had worked well.

The volunteer also mentioned that lots of the clients who use this service come from other boroughs. They also mentioned that the service uses evaluation tools now and again too. The volunteer did comment that although the ground floor is easily accessible, because the centre is based in a terraced house, the 'upstairs could be tricky to access for those with mobility problems.'

4. Service users

The team spoke to eight service users during their visit. These service users were from across London and had come to access this particular service. Service users had heard about this service or been referred by organisations from the LGBT Asylum Seeker's Group, Rainbow Across Borders, St Mungo's Women's Project, their GP, ELOP (East London Out Project), Jules Thorne, and local drop-ins. Others had heard about this service through friends or personal research.

Most of the service users the team spoke to felt that the opening hours suited them, however, six of those we spoke to said that 'longer and more frequent opening hours' would be better. One person said that the current opening times are 'not good for working people', and another mentioned that the service used to be more frequent than just once a week. Service users agreed on the whole that the service is open when it says it will be, except when the centre is short staffed. A couple of respondents mentioned that 'recently there was a notice on the door saying it was shut, so I went to the Hub instead.' One service user said that this happens only rarely and that 'staff text us to let us know'. However, one person did say they sometimes don't receive a text.

Service users felt that Outcome is very welcoming and that there's 'no pressure [and] no judgement'. One commented that 'the drop-in is so important, a non-judgemental space. It is vital for the LGBT community that the service is welcoming and friendly and staff are kind and helpful.'

Service users spoke to the team about a wide range of activities they do at the centre. The feedback from service users seemed to suggest that the service is flexible and caters for the needs of all service users. Those the team spoke to mentioned the weekly meeting which is an opportunity for the service users to choose the menu for the next week and suggest ideas for the service.

Service users said that the centre 'feels very safe. I definitely feel respected and listened to'. One said 'It's a good atmosphere and supportive people. Equality and diversity are very important'. All those we spoke to felt that Outcome is a safe space.

The team heard from service users that the staff are supportive, one said 'staff assisted me to apply for transport and oyster card to assist me with travel.' 'they help me with forms due to my disability'. Another service user felt that such support caused their 'stress to reduce and paranoia to reduce.' It was commented that support with 'housing and help with other issues is available', and that the 'crossover of knowledge is great' amongst the staff. Three service users we spoke to commented on the valued support they had received from staff to complete forms around benefits and disability.

Most of those we spoke to felt that this service was meeting their expectations. One service user commented 'Islington MIND is my community', another remarked 'coming here, I've got confidence'. One 'felt valued' at this service, and stated that there are 'really supportive staff, [who] check if [you're] absent for a few weeks by phone'. Others asked for 'more availability as [it] provides a safe space and someone to talk to', 'longer opening hours [and] an extra day would be good'.

One service user commented that a 'ramp at the front step would be helpful for wheelchair users' and another mentioned that there used to be more day trips and they would welcome more of those.

1. Observations

The team attended the centre during women's day which is a drop in service on Thursdays. It was observed that there was a volunteer on reception who was very welcoming when the team arrived. There were also flowers on the table, which felt homely.

The centre was not very busy. However, the service users present seemed to be engaged in crafts or spending time in the garden. Staff and volunteers were not in uniform and they did not have name badges.

2. Staff

The team managed to speak to a member of staff during the unannounced visit, who had first been involved with the service years ago, but that part of the service was no longer running due to cuts. The staff member highlighted that funding restrictions have had one of the largest impacts on the service over the years.

The staff member explained that service users come to the service, either via self-referral or via referral from local statutory organisations. Barriers that may affect service user engagement are whether they are an Islington resident, and stigma around attending such services. However, because the women's day is an anonymous drop in, stigma is mitigated to an extent.

The staff member said that they try to link up with other organisations where possible, but that this can be time consuming. Staff seem to be increasingly taking on a role of advocate for service users when required, but they don't have the time to do this for every service user – and this is where funding becomes an issue.

Staff receive support in their roles from peers and daily debriefs. They also receive some training, but this depends on funding. Mind Spa currently provides welfare and benefits assistance, form

filling support, emotional support, creative activities, support to find employment and a safe place for service users to belong.

The staff member felt that funding is the service's biggest challenge, saying 'we're trying to do the best to make ends meet – we do try to improvise'. They felt it would be beneficial for the service users to organise more trips, but recognised that this was dependent on funding and staff time. The staff member said that seeing the service users laugh, achieve things, and begin to believe in themselves again made this job worthwhile.

3. Service Users

The team spoke to two service users during the unannounced visit they made to MIND Spa. They heard that these service users had both accessed the service through statutory organisations which had supported them.

Both service users said they only attend this service for women's day on a Thursday, but the opening hours suit them. They both commented on the staff with one saying 'staff are nice and caring, motherly - and other service users are also nice and friendly.' It was also mentioned that 'some people want to be quiet and are able to safely be.' Both service users felt safe, respected and welcomed here.

One spoke about there being regular meetings at the service and that the things that are talked about at the meeting happen. The other spoke about being asked about the type of food she preferred, and felt that she was often consulted.

Both service users felt that the service was supportive and that they had been helped through difficult life situations as well as the benefit changes, budgeting and personal finance. One said 'I feel healthier and mentally supported.' They both agreed that the service was meeting their needs.

The visits to Mind Empower

Details of visits	
Service address	Mind Empower, 11 Southwood Smith Street
Service provider	Islington Mind
Announced visit details	20 April 2016, 1pm to 3.30pm
Unannounced visit details	27 May 2016, 10am to 1pm
Authorised representatives	Mark Austin, Frank Jacobs, Jeni Kent
Contact details	Healthwatch Islington 020 7832 5821

Sex of respondents

Male	Female	Undisclosed	Total
4	3	0	7

Three respondents described themselves as having a disability.

Age of respondents

16-24	25-44	45-64	65-79	80+	Undisclosed	Total
0	1	4	2	0	0	7

Ethnicity of respondents

Black or Black British	3
White - British	4

1. Observations

Our Enter and View team visited Mind Empower during the Wednesday lunch provided by FoodCycle. This meal is open to Mind members and the wider community (London wide). It is a free meal but donations are welcome.

The centre is located in a quiet area. There is no Mind signage but the centre shares its building, and entrance with the Islington Rehab and Re-enablement team. NHS signage is clearly displayed.

The team commented on the spacious front courtyard that had chairs and tables in, primarily being used by smokers. The centre itself was bright and airy, but not particularly spacious. The space was clean and the tables were set up to create a sociable eating space. Although the room was level and wheelchair accessible, tables and chairs were positioned closely together to fit in more chairs which the team felt would make it difficult to manoeuvre a wheelchair around.

The centre had users' artwork displayed on the walls alongside photos of service users doing activities. Service users looked relaxed and comfortable, sat around tables chatting whilst eating or waiting to be served by the FoodCycle volunteers.

There seemed to be no division between the staff and service users. Staff did not wear uniforms or name badges, and although this made it difficult for the team to identify and speak to staff, it gave the service a relaxed atmosphere.

There was a computer room and an art room, both accessed by service users, which made it feel like they had ownership of the space. It was not clear to the team whether there were toilets at the centre or where they were located.

2. Centre manager

The manager voiced concern that the service was feeling increased pressure due to the closure and reduction of other local services. The changes in statutory services has seen more service users being 'discharged' from Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and put under the care of Mind. This means an increasing number of clients have been coming to the service in crisis. Islington Mind has had to reduce staffing and resources whilst facing this increasing need.

It was mentioned that Islington Mind shares a number of clients with the Rehab & Re-enablement team. This helps the services share concerns about clients and put preventative measures in place.

The manager highlighted that the challenge for the staff at this service is 'trying to sustain a good enough service for the clients and keeping our head above water. The clients come first'. FoodCycle provides a weekly meal at Mind Empower (there is food everyday but this is the only day where food is provided for a donation). 'Some people wouldn't eat [well] if they didn't come here' commented the manager, 'it's a critical lifeline'.

Once a month Mind Empower holds centre meetings at which service users are able to comment on the service and raise any suggestions or complaints. It is a space where staff and service users can 'have conversations about our capacity to run things.' The office door is otherwise always open to clients, unless staff are in confidential meetings.

3. Staff

The team spoke to one staff member and one volunteer at the centre. They agreed that the clients using the service 'used to be more able, now they're struggling [and] they're younger too.' They said that there are growing pressures on the service and that clients are concerned that it may be taken away. This concern, alongside the changing benefits landscape is creating a more complex context for the service users. It was mentioned that a significant portion of staff time can be spent supporting service users to fill out forms and supporting clients through the assessment and appeals processes, as it is often much too stressful and complicated for service users to manage alone.

4. Service Users

The team spoke to nine service users during our visit. Service users spoke about accessing this service via other community and statutory organisations such as PRA (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association), Crisis, Social Workers, local GPs, the Stuart Low Trust, Highbury Grove Crisis Resource Centre and One Support. Three other service users explained that they had heard about this service by word of mouth.

Three of those the team spoke to felt that the service's opening times suited them, while others said that the service could be open more often and later. Three said that the service was always open when it was meant to be, with another saying it usually was. One service user said that on one occasion the service hadn't been open when they'd needed it.

The majority of those the team spoke to commented that the service was welcoming. Six of those the team spoke to felt that it was easy to talk to people at the service, with most of them commenting on interaction with staff. The team spoke to one service user who only regularly uses the service for the FoodCycle lunch on a

Wednesday who felt that 'staff could wear name badges' as it's hard to know who's staff and who's a service user.

On the whole service users fed back that they felt they have a say about what happens at the service. One service user commented that 'they have meetings I try to attend. You can put forward your comments about the services. They listen to us.' Another stated that 'staff are easy to talk to.' One service user explained that 'sometimes we get questionnaires asking us what we think,' another mentioned 'if it was a problem staff would listen.' One service user commented that 'I wanted to run some classes and the staff member was really supportive.' Other feedback showed that 'we have mutual respect'.

One service user commented that 'everything's pretty scheduled or structured... the timetable's pretty fixed' and suggested that they would prefer more flexibility. Another service user added that they have given up on attending meetings because 'Mind aren't bothered about the little people.' However, this had not stopped either of these service users from regularly attending the centre.

All the service users the team spoke to commented on feeling safe at Mind Empower. Service users also commented that the service has 'helped my confidence a lot' and 'people tend to leave you in a better mood if you're down'.

Service users spoke to the team about the community they have at Mind Empower and how it has 'exceeded expectations', One said 'I am over the moon with this service - whatever we need, staff are here to help us, or they'll point us in the right direction to other services and come with me.'

It was mentioned by service users that the women's group, which has stopped, could be re-started. One service user told the team about barbecues and summer trips that used to happen. They would like to see more of these.

Unfortunately, when the team arrived at Mind Empower for the unannounced visit the centre was closed. The team subsequently became aware that the service had decided to shut one Friday a month rather than cut staff time. We did however receive feedback from one service user in-between the visits.

1. Service User

The service user felt that the service was very welcoming and the staff very supportive, personable and easy to talk to. They felt it was a safe environment and mentioned an incident where they felt their safety had been at risk and how well the staff had managed the situation. The service user said that they no longer had a social worker and this meant that they have become increasingly reliant on the staff at Mind.

The service user felt that opening at the weekends and in the evenings would be of huge benefit as those are often the most difficult times. The service user mentioned that more groups would be beneficial, but that these improvements could only be made if there were more staff at the service.

The visits to Mind Hub

Details of visits	
Service address	Mind Hub, 48 Despard Road, London N19 5NW
Service provider	Islington Mind
Announced visit details	21 April 2016, 1pm to 3.30pm
Unannounced visit details	17 May 2016, 1pm to 3.30pm
Authorised representatives	Jenni Chan, Jane Plimmer
Contact details	Healthwatch Islington 020 7832 5821

Sex of respondents

Male	Female	Undisclosed	Total
6	3	0	9

All nine respondents described themselves as having a disability.

Age of respondents

16-24	25-44	45-64	65-79	80+	Undisclosed	Total
0	0	8	1	0	0	9

Ethnicity of respondents

Black or Black British	4
Mixed - White and Asian	1
White - Any other	3
Prefer not to say	1

1. Observations

Our Enter and View team visited this service during the Thursday drop in time (where lunch is served for a fee) but during the team's visit lunch had been put on for free.

The team found the reception staff friendly although it was unattended when they arrived. The reception was staffed by service users. The space was light and relaxed and felt safe because visitors have to use the entry phone to gain access.

The team observed lots of service user artwork hanging on the walls, and sculptures in the dining area. Service users were observed sitting chatting, or alone, in the communal areas and people were using the garden. The building is laid out over two floors and there is a lift to aid access.

Staff were not wearing a uniform or name badges and they mingled with the service users. This meant that the team found it hard to distinguish between staff and service users.

2. Centre manager

The manager described how changes in benefits and the attendance of assessments had increased anxiety and depression amongst service users. The manager explained that they are concerned about continued and ongoing support for the more vulnerable service users. Changes to statutory services continue and voluntary sector organisations pick up more and more clients. The manager also said it was increasingly unlikely that service users could have access to an allocated social worker for as long as they would like.

The manager explained how Mind has an open access policy and service users can use the service on an ongoing basis with no restrictions on attendance. They also mentioned that service users rely on the centre for food and there are regular meetings and ways of feeding back

through which service users can influence the menu, and also the activities on offer at the centre. The manager also raised the issue of funding restrictions on the service which has meant that they have not been able to replace staff at this centre.

3. Staff

The team were not able to speak to any staff during this visit.

4. Service users

The Enter and View team spoke to nine service users during their visit to Mind Hub. Of these, three had heard about the service through a friend and three had self-referred. Some had heard about this service through local organisations such as Lambo African Caribbean Centre, Isledon Road, their local GP, their social worker and local hospitals.

We asked service users whether the opening times suited them and seven of those we spoke to felt they did. However, service users did comment that 'drop in should be every day in my opinion' and that 'there have been closures on Fridays because of the cuts.'

Service users also felt that the service was usually open when it was meant to be. One member commented that 'very occasionally they can't open because of staff issues, but they always let us know.'

Service users also felt that the service was welcoming 'I feel part of a family here', 'the staff here are great', 'people are friendly'. One felt that there was an imbalance in the quality of the staff across the sites.

Just as they'd done at the other centres, service users at Mind Hub told the team about a large number of ways they spend their time at the centre: eating lunch (7 respondents); going on

outings; music (5); celebrating Black History Month; creative writing group; hearing voices group; alternative therapies; counselling (2); reading papers; art groups (3); playing games; socialising (2).

Four of those the team spoke to commented on the good quality of the food, 'food is good and very good value,' 'meals here are an absolute god-send.'

'Staff are generally good and I get along with most of them very well. These are long-standing relationships and are very helpful to me.' 'Particularly impressed with the staff who can deal with a little bit of emotion without things spiralling out of control.'

Service user, Mind Hub

Some service users mentioned that they would like to have courses with tutors, a 'buddy' scheme (for moving on in the service), better IT facilities and information about healthy eating at the centre.

Six of those the team spoke to felt that the centre is a place that they are listened to, 'everyone is friendly and helpful'. Some service users felt that staff were especially good at this, 'staff are easy to talk to, I can tell them anything. I trust staff 100%.'

Service users spoke to the team about the ways in which they have a say about what happens at the Hub. Six of those we spoke to mentioned that they fed back their ideas and opinions to staff one-to-one. Others mentioned that there are meetings 'from time to time'.

All of those the team spoke to said that they felt safe at this service, 'very safe and respected... not pressured to talk but everyone can if they want', 'I feel very safe and respected too,' 'staff are supportive.'

Six of the service users we spoke to felt that staff were helpful and able to point you in the right direction if you needed support outside the service. 'Staff give advice on other services if they can't help themselves.' Three service users highlighted that staff support them with understanding letters and completing forms. Another service user commented 'staff can also help people get back to work.'

The team asked service users what could make the service better for them. Two of the five who answered said that five day or weekend opening would improve the service for them. Another, commented that more funding to get more staff would be beneficial. One service user commented that they would appreciate 'support to help me move on', with another suggesting 'better computers and reliable internet access.'

Service users also commented that they hope the service keeps its funding or has it increased so the service can keep running and improving as 'it is so valuable... worth its weight in gold.'

It was highlighted by service users that Mind runs all three mental health day services in Islington to which people can self-refer. (the fourth centre at Isledon Road only accepts new referrals from secondary mental healthcare services) and that if you have a problem with Mind where else can you go for similar support? It was also pointed out that Mind handles their own complaints system and unlike Camden, Islington has fewer advocacy services.

One person stated 'I'd like there to be someone independent who could listen to both sides of the argument.'

1. Observations

The team highlighted that the front door, confusingly, has an ordinary doorbell and entry phone, but on the team's arrival the door turned out to be unlocked anyway.

The team commented that the lunch was good, even though the team weren't expected on that particular day.

2. Staff

The team spoke to three members of staff during their unannounced visit. One staff member commented that over the past few years, service users have had less access to social services causing Mind to do more advocacy and liaison with statutory services on their behalf. Another staff member mentioned that the service has become much busier over recent years, with 'A lot of people requiring help with housing/ benefits/ freedom passes etc.'

Staff told the team that service users can either self-refer or be referred by local organisations and/ or statutory services.

MIND has a good relationship with other service and organisations in the area which enables them to signpost/ refer service users when suitable. However, one staff member pointed out that 'all the services are struggling, so they have less capacity.'

If service users have suggestions about the service, they are considered seriously by staff. There are monthly centre meetings for service users, suggestion boxes and complaints forms that service users can use to input their ideas and opinions. Service users can also go directly to the service manager if they wish.

The service also has a key worker system and all service users have regular reviews, the frequency of which depends on their individual needs and circumstances. There are also regular 'brainstorming sessions' to identify new ideas with service users and staff.

Staff spoke about having suitable support in their role, from weekly staff meetings, to daily debriefings and a monthly one-to-one de-brief with the service manager. Training was also mentioned, but financial restrictions seem to limit availability. One staff member suggested that there could be reflective group practice for staff members, which could create a space for staff to think about what they do and how they feel about the work.

Some service users come to use specific facilities, such as the music room and art room, and many enjoy a hot lunch.

One staff member commented that 'we focus on what we can do for people - this can be emotional support and space and time to listen and be with people and practical help with benefits and housing, so we try to tailor this service'. One staff member highlighted that reductions in funding has led to reductions in staffing levels in the service. Service users have been greatly affected by the changes to benefits.

As in the other centres, staff members were positive about the worth of their roles. The service being too busy, time being limited and there being less staff due to funding restrictions, appeared to have caused some challenges for the staff we spoke to.

Recommendations

1	Service user feedback suggested that there is no clear way of communicating experiences of the Mind service in the borough to an independent body. The new service should address this shortcoming, and ensure that these channels are made known to the service users.
2	The new service would need at least the same, if not higher staffing levels. If not there would be a risk of the rehabilitative aspect of the service being diluted.
3	Service users seemed very anxious that this service is going to be taken away. It is very important that conversations around the re-tendering process be very carefully and clearly communicated with service users.
4	Ensure that service users are involved at every step of the re-tendering process to reduce the inevitable anxiety service users will experience.

Two points of clarification from the service manager, with whom we shared the draft copy of this report:

- ▶ Page 9, last paragraph 'One service user commented that 'a ramp at the front steps would be helpful for wheelchair users.'
Just to clarify there is a permanent accessible ramp at the side of the building. However we are currently having repair work done to the floor, so this ramp is not in use. We do have a portable ramp which is used when clients need it.
- ▶ Page 14, first paragraph states 'Unfortunately, when the team arrived at Mind Empower for the unannounced visit the centre was closed. The team subsequently became aware that the service had decided to shut one Friday a month rather than cut staff time'.
This was in response to a funding cut in 2011. Following consultation with Islington Mind Board of Trustees, staff and service users it was decided to introduce monthly closure days across our sites.

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Please get in touch to find out more about volunteering for Healthwatch Islington.

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