

## CASE STUDY #4

# WY-FI's flexible psychological therapy service

## Improving access to mental health support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage

**Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives:**  
Supporting people with multiple needs

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CFE Research and  
The University of Sheffield,  
with the Systems Change  
Action Network



**West Yorkshire Finding Independence, or WY-FI,  
is the Fulfilling Lives partnership for West Yorkshire.**

## What was the problem?

Statutory mental health services are often inappropriate, inflexible and difficult to navigate for people with experience of multiple disadvantage.

Most Fulfilling Lives beneficiaries experience both mental ill-health and substance misuse. They are often required by local mental health services to complete six consecutive months of sobriety before they can receive a mental health assessment. However, poor mental health and substance misuse are often bound-up together, with people using substances to self-medicate mental distress. As a result, few people have assessed needs.

**“ We don't have a dual diagnosis worker in Calderdale [at this time]. So, it is disappointing when you've made a referral and you get somebody to assess them and then they're told, 'No, there's nothing they can do'. Although the beneficiary may say, 'I'm drinking because I'm experiencing these mental health problems'.**

Due to high demand, local mental health services have high thresholds for eligibility for services. Beneficiaries often do not meet these thresholds. But the negative impacts of their mental health problems are often compounded by the other disadvantages they face, such as trauma, homelessness, poverty and offending.

The local mental health services available tend to operate in a non-person-centred and inflexible way. The experience of beneficiaries and WY-FI navigators<sup>1</sup> is that the available support is often imposed – services know what's best. Furthermore, local mental health services operate in a way that is often too rigid for beneficiaries to engage with. Non-attendance, almost regardless of personal circumstances, can result in being discharged.

**“ If you don't turn up then they may give you another appointment, but you really are skating on thin ice because you won't get another one after the second appointment. It is very difficult.**

It was clear to WY-FI that something had to be done to support beneficiaries who experience both poor mental health and substance misuse, and who were unable to access statutory mental health services. Beneficiaries needed help to stabilise their conditions to enable them to engage with treatment and other services. WY-FI also wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to work with this group of people if the support package is designed in the right way.

## How did the partnership address it?

WY-FI commissioned not-for-profit mental health service providers Insight Healthcare to deliver a specialist service for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. This included providing mental health assessments and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to provide beneficiaries with coping strategies to increase their ability to engage with other treatment and support.

**“ It’s teaching them strategies to be able to deal with their everyday life because that’s what CBT does and having those strategies when you’ve nothing before, that’s fabulous.**

An Insight cognitive behavioural therapist was based at the WY-FI office in central Halifax, and they could also draw on other treatment and expertise offered by Insight. This allowed the therapist to work closely with navigators and selected beneficiaries to develop understanding and trust. When the beneficiary was ready, the therapist would deliver CBT sessions. The psychotherapist worked in a similar way to the navigators, being flexible and responsive to beneficiaries’ needs. They accompanied navigators to visit beneficiaries in their homes to help build familiarity, trust and rapport.

**“ We wanted Insight to be able to work directly with people like our navigators do, that meant person-centred, at point of need, to work flexibly with them. To go out to where they were, not just as people came in, to not worry about people not turning up.**

The scheme was run as a one-off pilot between July 2017 and August 2018.

## What difference did it make?

The provision of CBT made a positive differences to beneficiaries' mental health and their recovery. Furthermore, the co-location of a psychotherapist with navigators made positive differences to the WY-FI team in Halifax.

### Improved understanding of beneficiaries' mental health needs

In total 35 beneficiaries completed a full assessment of their mental health needs with an Insight psychotherapist. Of those, fourteen went on to engage with CBT, with just under half completing the treatment.<sup>2</sup>

Without access to local mental health services, beneficiaries and navigators did not have an accurate understanding of a person's mental health needs. This meant that they were uncertain about the type of support needed. The provision of a full mental health assessment by Insight psychotherapists helped both beneficiaries and navigators to better understand and address needs.

### Provided stability and coping strategies

The combination of CBT sessions and continued support from navigators helped beneficiaries who engaged with treatment to make improvements in self-reliance and stability. One beneficiary spoke about how he managed to complete six months of sobriety and was due to receive an assessment from the local mental health team. Before getting help from WY-FI he would get frustrated and abusive towards public service staff. With the combined support from CBT sessions and his navigator, he managed to acquire coping strategies that helped him control his emotions and behaviour around people in public services. Furthermore, while he now feels more confident and in control of his daily life, he knows that if any problems start to emerge with his mental health he can rely on WY-FI to support him.

**“** I'm doing a lot of stuff on my own now. I'm doing a lot of this stuff on my own, but I know that they're here. That's the thing. Sometimes I'll need to talk stuff over.

The flexible CBT service can also help beneficiaries overcome relapses and set-backs. For example, another beneficiary experienced a relapse to substance misuse while training to become a peer mentor with WY-FI. This set him back considerably. He completed a mental health assessment and several CBT sessions with the psychotherapist. This helped him to recover from substance misuse more quickly than he expected.

## **Better understanding and connections with local mental health services**

Before Insight got involved, WY-FI staff experienced difficulties engaging with local mental health services. They either did not fully understand the referral processes or did not know the right professionals to contact. The psychotherapist worked alongside navigators when they advocated for beneficiaries in mental health services. This allowed navigators to learn correct terminologies, the right processes to follow and added health care professionals to their contacts. As a result, navigators were taken more seriously during their communications with professionals in mental health.

## **Learned cognitive behavioural therapy techniques**

WY-FI navigators also learnt some CBT techniques that they can use when they work with beneficiaries. This has helped them to better handle situations when a beneficiary experiences problems. Moreover, Insight provided some CBT sessions for WY-FI staff and this helped them learn coping strategies with their case load.

## Learning from experience

There were a number of factors that helped to ensure the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural therapy sessions for beneficiaries. These include co-location of the psychotherapist and WY-FI navigators, flexibility in the work pattern of the psychotherapist, and the importance of beneficiaries seeing the same therapist.

### Co-locate therapists with outreach teams

Basing the psychotherapist at the WY-FI office made a big difference. This allowed navigators and the therapist to work closely together, to share information and understanding of beneficiaries. The WY-FI office is familiar to beneficiaries and provides a comfortable setting to introduce them to the therapist.

Co-location provided the opportunity for WY-FI navigators to learn about the therapist's practice and develop their own techniques. Navigators also learnt more about mental health services and started to make contact with key professionals.

### Provide flexible appointments

Flexible appointments for CBT were important in ensuring beneficiary engagement. Beneficiaries were allotted two hours for CBT sessions rather than the usual one hour, to allow for late arrival, give time for beneficiaries to settle in and to take breaks.

**“ Sessions weren't ever an hour, they were two-hour sessions, purely to accommodate diverse factors like concentration, memory, some, like [name], one of the ladies was in chronic pain, so we had to have lots of breaks due to drug use.**

Beneficiaries did not always attend when expected and visited the office at other times in need of help. The therapist responded flexibly, recognising

the importance of being prepared for when a beneficiary is ready to talk. Unlike statutory services, beneficiaries were not discharged for missing appointments. This flexibility helped to build trust and was found to pay off over time with improved engagement.

**“** We started the pilot with really high DNA [did not attend rates] for all the assessments [...] once they were engaged in a relationship with that person and they knew they could rely on them, then the DNA rate significantly improved.

## Go where beneficiaries are

Being prepared to go out and visit beneficiaries was an important element of the therapist's working practice. This would involve meeting beneficiaries at their home or at a venue where they felt comfortable, such as a coffee shop. This was particularly important in the early stages of building a relationship between therapist and beneficiary. Therapy sessions could be done either by telephone or face-to-face meeting, depending on the beneficiary's preference. Navigators played a key role in brokering meetings and helping to develop trust and rapport between all involved.

**“** We'd got a new referral and she was speaking to me [the navigator] about some things in her past. I mentioned to her about the CBT and asked if I could bring [the therapist] out [to her home] with me. She said, 'Yes.' And that just brought down quite a lot of barriers, because we went out into her home. She talked a little bit with the therapist whilst I was there. They took it from there and arranged their appointments.

## Combine mental health treatment with navigator support

For people affected by multiple disadvantage, it's important that issues, including mental ill-health, are addressed holistically. The therapeutic treatment was combined with ongoing support from navigators. Navigators

worked to ensure other aspects of beneficiaries' needs were being addressed, such as organising suitable housing, ensuring correct benefit entitlements and helping people to engage with meaningful activities such as hobbies.

## Getting a therapist with the right skills and attitude is key

Mental health specialists working with people experiencing multiple disadvantage need to be prepared to work flexibly and this may be different to how they have been trained or used to working. Several different Insight psychotherapists were engaged during the scheme and not all were prepared for the demands of working in a more flexible and responsive way. Recruiting people with not just the right skills and expertise but the right attitude was a challenge and meant there were sometimes gaps in service provision.

The key learning from this experience is to ensure that prospective candidates fully understand what the role entails and that they are willing to be proactive and work as part of the navigator team. More experienced therapists rather than newly qualified professionals appeared to be better suited to taking on the additional challenge of working in a less structured way.

**“** The attitude that you need, it's the attitude the navigators have, it's the attitude of, 'Right, anything could happen today and I'm going to be persistent, proactive, positive, optimistic.' You know? And not all CBT practitioners have that, not all therapists have that.

## Try to ensure beneficiaries see the same therapist

Beneficiaries spoke about the importance of ongoing sessions with therapists who know them and their back story. Seeing different professionals and having to re-tell their story can be frustrating, time-consuming and traumatic. If a therapist already knows their story, they can make more progress during the sessions.

**“** I really got on with her [the CBT practitioner]. They offered me someone else and I said, 'Look, I'd prefer to work with her, because she knows my background.' I didn't want to explain it all again. And that's what they do for you.

## Taking it further

Working closely with Insight, WY-FI navigators have a direct link to psychotherapists who have a standing in local health services. This has continued beyond the life of the scheme, where navigators have been able to call upon the guidance and assistance of Insight when they encountered difficulties in accessing and engaging with mental health services. Insight have advised and assisted navigators to reach the appropriate professionals to ensure a beneficiary gets the support they need.

**“** Although the scheme's finished, they've just been really, really welcoming and they've said, you know, 'We'll try and push it through as best as we can', or, 'We'll give it priority', or, 'We'll have a look at it'. And yes, they've been really good, yes.

## Find out more

Read WY-FI's latest briefing on the impact of mental health services: [https://www.mcnevaluation.co.uk/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file\\_download&wpfd\\_category\\_id=338&wpfd\\_file\\_id=6532&token=acdf0009c1814ceac9f027b0973d4a9a&preview=1](https://www.mcnevaluation.co.uk/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file_download&wpfd_category_id=338&wpfd_file_id=6532&token=acdf0009c1814ceac9f027b0973d4a9a&preview=1)

Find out more about West Yorkshire Finding Independence: <https://wy-fi.org.uk/>

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## Endnotes

1. Navigators are service neutral staff members who build trusting relationships with beneficiaries and support them to re-engage with services and get person-centred help
2. Crowe, M. (2019) *Mental Health Assessment and Support Needs for People Experiencing Multiple Needs: A Report to the Calderdale WY-FI Locality Group WY-FI*

Evaluated by



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Of  
Sheffield.

