

brigstowe⁺

local HIV services



The Covid-19 pandemic has seen communities coming together and supporting each other like never before and here at Brigstowe it has been no different. Every single one of our volunteers have and continue to wow us with their passion, dedication and ability to adapt and step up when needed.

This mini newsletter is highlighting all of the inspirational activities and is our chance to say a BIG thank you!

Thank You!

Rami - CEO



I'm really pleased that we have put together this newsletter dedicated to saying thank you to our wonderful volunteers. I can't believe that only six years ago, Brigstowe had no regular volunteers (other than it's Board of Trustees). We now have 17 HIV peer mentors, including 4 senior peer mentors, 8 Diabetes peer mentors, a group of campaign volunteers, HIV positive speakers involved in our training and running our recently diagnosed workshop, 2 admin volunteers and a volunteer driver!

All these amazing people give their time, skills, experience and dedication completely free of charge. I feel very privileged to have witnessed how our volunteers have changed the face of Brigstowe completely during this time. As staff, we are continually humbled and bowled over by the commitment and enthusiasm they show with several volunteers fulfilling multiple roles.

From the start, the strength of our Positive Voices services (mentoring, recently diagnosed workshops and HIV awareness training) has been the involvement of people living with HIV in their design and delivery. People with lived experience have got alongside those who are newly diagnosed or still coming to terms with their diagnosis – this has proved a powerful and life changing experience for those receiving support. It's great to see this model now being applied to other conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes. Other volunteers have bravely spoken, as part of our HIV awareness training, in front of professionals and community groups, identifying themselves as HIV positive. Trainees have repeatedly remarked on how their attitudes and understanding have shifted completely as a result.

We make good use of our volunteers in many other ways! Most of the time we have some service development or evaluation under way. We never miss an opportunity to involve volunteers and clients (where appropriate) in these processes. I believe we have built mutual trust and respect between staff and volunteers and it's been exciting to see these individuals feel confident to give us constructive feedback and suggestions for improvements based on their unique experiences. This valuable input allows us to learn and thereby improve our services.

Volunteer commitment has never been more obvious than during the last six months. Our volunteers have risen to new challenges, been totally flexible, and given extra time to ensure that we could meet the needs of our clients. So on behalf of myself, the whole staff team and board of trustees, I want to say a HUGE thank you to every volunteer (past and present) for everything you have and continue to contribute to Brigstowe.

Trustee Tribute

No volunteer newsletter would be complete without a tribute to our amazing trustees. We currently have 11 trustees who play a vital role in the running of Brigstowe. As a relatively small organisation, the Brigstowe staff team can never hope to hold all the expertise or capacity needed. Between them, our trustees have a breadth of professional skills, experience and backgrounds vital for running the organisation. You can find out more about who they are and their background and skills [here](#).

Trustees are legally responsible for the organisation including overseeing it's strategic direction. The trustees ensure that Brigstowe fulfils it's charitable objectives in the best interests of our beneficiaries. In addition to meeting every six weeks, trustees take on many additional roles particularly around service development or where they can offer relevant support for an identified need. I am very grateful for all the support, advice and oversight that they bring to Brigstowe.



WELCOME

G'day, my name is Tamsin and I'm a queer non-binary feminist with a passion for sexual and reproductive health. My background is in music, disability, and sex education. In my spare time I like to sew, write music, and read. Each day is a new opportunity for an iconic fashion moment, and you'll rarely see me looking anything less than fabulous. Most days I work as IT Officer at the domestic violence charity, Women's Aid. I am excited to be volunteering at Brigstowe once a week to give back to my local community, as I believe decreasing HIV related stigma is key to LGBTQ+ rights. I believe everyone has the right to adequate health and social care, to live a life free from judgement, and I greatly value the work that Brigstowe has done for the HIV+ community in Bristol.



Tamsin is our new Admin Volunteer and all round icon. If you're part of our All-In group then Tamsin will be the one to give you a call.

In Conversation With...

Irene - HIV Peer Mentor



Why did you become a Peer Mentor & what do you do as a mentor?

I became a peer mentor because I realised how beneficial it was when I received mentoring. Meeting my mentor really gave me the confidence to become me again. So when I was in a place where I felt I could give back, I really wanted to as I had already benefitted. I wanted to help another person to feel good. I've been a mentor for almost a year now & usually I meet with my mentees face-to-face.

What happened during Lock down?

Lock down was the most depressing time, it was so stressful and isolating for us all. I started meeting with my mentee over Zoom and WhatsApp video for once a week for about an hour where we would chat about HIV but also well-being, anything that is going on and whatever the mentee wants to talk about. I really enjoyed doing the mentoring during lock down as for me, someone I can lend an idea to of feeling better also helped me in not feeling alone.

How did Brigstowe support you to do the mentoring?

I had never done Zoom before, in fact I had never heard of it! So Brigstowe helped me to feel confident in using it, they even helped me get a laptop because I was a mentor and unable to do my mentoring sessions properly without one. During lockdown we have monthly group supervision with all the other peer mentors on Zoom. Usually we meet face-to-face but instead it was all 14 of us on Zoom! Having the Zoom meetings was really great – I got to see everyone and connect again which was really important in lockdown. Seeing everyone was really helpful for me at that time. I'm glad Brigstowe made it happen. Having this group of mentors has been so great – we check up on each other which really matters. We also get a lot of support from Brigstowe who I'm thankful to, and now I feel really confident on Zoom and have definitely improved my computer skills!

Michael - Telephone Befriender/HIV Peer Mentor



Early on into lockdown, the HIV Peer Mentoring programme was forced to move from weekly in-person sessions with mentees to phone or video chat conversations. Although the shift resulted in some cases where conversations may have been less productive, with clients perhaps less forthcoming without the intimacy of meeting in social situations, it also clearly provided a lifeline for others, without whom that contact might have led to even worse feelings of anxiety and isolation interrupting their mentoring progress.

When the opportunity to do telephone check-ins for the entire client base of Brigstowe arose, it answered the desire to do more to help the community in a time when everyone was being asked to do less - not go out, not socialise, hunker down and stay safe. Clearly for our clients with wide ranging underlying causes for anxiety, this was a vulnerable and potentially scary time, and being able to check in with them, not just once, but regularly if deemed advisable, was an important and satisfying source of support to provide.

Most were simply happy to receive a call, to know that someone was looking out for them, and that they had options should any needs arise, for advice, signposting to other services, or simply obtaining the latest info on safe practices. Perhaps the most common need flagged up was that of obtaining renewed prescriptions, with many people having either neglected their medication supply or citing anxieties over visiting hospitals in order to obtain them - despite that no longer being necessary under the revised Covid conditions.

But in that perhaps most British way, there were also some cases of instant, polite replies to check-in calls of, "Oh, everything's fine." Whereupon, polite, chatty, casual seemingly pointless further conversation revealed that, in fact, things were *not* all that fine. Luckily, in these less common but important examples (people who may not have even realised they were struggling, or in need, or may have issues arise in the near future) we could put people in touch with our advice and support team or external services who were able to provide help and advice. And for the volunteers such as myself, it provided the satisfaction of knowing one less person would fall through the cracks of a national crisis before moving on to make the next call.



But, perhaps more importantly, it served as a strong reminder of the importance of engaging others in conversation. Taking the time to enquire on a social level, not simply run through a predetermined checklist of essential questions. Making those connections is what really served to identify people who needed help, or simply alleviate a little bit of that isolation that so many people have been enduring during this strange, unprecedented time.

As well as our HIV peer mentoring we also have a Type 2 Diabetes peer mentoring programme. In his own words we hear from Mike, one of our fabulous Type 2 Diabetes peer mentors.

I've been a peer mentor 2 years, it's quite a small group but we are really close. Being a peer mentor means meeting up with another person who has Type 2 Diabetes & helping that person achieve their goals around their diabetes.

During lock down our supervision meetings continued on Zoom which was really useful – I felt pretty lonely especially at the beginning so Brigstowe arranging regular supervision was really helpful. Our supervision sessions made me laugh, thinking about it. It was so good connecting with everyone – I'd really look forward to them. The sessions were also a place where we could share our thoughts on diabetes, COVID and talk about any other worries we may have had.

Brigstowe sorted lots of training. People from different organisations even provided sessions during lock down. We had a specialist diabetes nutritionist do a session on Zoom as well as someone from Diabetes UK. It was really helpful as not only was it a chance to get a refresher on the mentoring but we also learnt about what help was available during lock down and understood the situation between COVID & diabetes. Brigstowe also arranged for us to take part in some research with Bristol University and Diabetes UK which was really good and I enjoyed doing it. I haven't done anything like that before. I'm so glad I'm a mentor and part of Brigstowe.

The service is properly starting up again in November which I'm looking forward to. It will all be on Zoom to start with because of the situation with diabetes & COVID, but because of our Zoom supervision sessions I feel confident and ready to do it!



4.7 million
people in the UK
have diabetes.

In response to Covid-19, we have been able to set up an Emergency Hardship Fund. This has allowed us to provide some of our most at need clients with laptops, data packages and financial support.

Sam (a legend btw), joined the Brigstowe team and here he is letting us all know more about what he's been up to.

1. Hi Sam, tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm a student, currently studying at home across the bridge in Chepstow.

2. How did you hear about Brigstowe and why did you want to volunteer for us?

My mother is a doctor working in the field of HIV & Sexual Health, she heard about the volunteer position and mentioned it to me.

I thought it was a nice idea for a few reasons. I was interested in Brigstowe and what they do, I also enjoy driving and saw it as a good opportunity to find out more about the variety/disparity in a big city like Bristol.

3. What have you been doing for us during Covid-19?

Going around Bristol delivering laptops and other aid to those living with HIV. Sometimes relaying questions and info back to Brigstowe.

4. What, if anything have you got out of volunteering for us?

I've learnt a bit about HIV and about those living with HIV. I'm getting to know Bristol too.

5. Anything else you want to say?

Thanks for the opportunity!



Admin Volunteer - Paul

We couldn't write a volunteer newsletter without mentioning Paul who is a wonderful person and has given up a lot of his free time to support Brigstowe over the last year. Before Covid hit Paul would be in our office every Tuesday and Thursday speaking to all of our clients collecting vital feedback on our services and helping to organise our All-In events. Everyone should receive a phone call from Paul, he just has a way on the phone which makes everything seem better. Paul isn't leaving us so don't worry! He will be back soon helping us with some other work.

Here's a piece of advice from one of our volunteers to anyone else thinking of volunteering...

"I would say if you're thinking about volunteering at Brigstowe or any organisation, it's a really good step. It does give you a sense of purpose, it fills your time, it helps educate you, build your skills, you meet new people, and you're helping others. I get so much satisfaction from helping others, and seeing other people develop, blossom and grow. I just think, go for it definitely! Go in and have a chat with whoever it is who is volunteer managing."



"I can talk to my support worker about anything, during this very difficult time with COVID this is what I need. We've talked when I have been depressed and that has really helped me, it has been so good to have my worker and Brigstowe at this time. They have also helped me with money, a laptop so I can continue with college online, food bank deliveries, and keeping connected to my friends, yoga classes and others by providing internet data. It makes me so happy to have my support worker.

Thank you so much for all your time supporting me with all the necessary needs regarding my health, food, and wellbeing. I feel a lot better with your support and you bring me hope that living with HIV is not a death sentence, but a virus like any other."



"The laptop has been a godsend. It means my daughter doesn't have to mess about between 2 phones to do her schoolwork. It has made a huge difference and helped to reduce the stress for both of us.

Thank you Brigstowe."

"Being able to continue the mentoring over Zoom and Whatsapp gave me the opportunity to talk to and understand every thing about my medication, HIV and Covid. My mentor was really empathetic and the best! I can really count on everyone at Brigstowe and am super thankful and grateful!"

Daniel– Mentee

"This (Emergency Hardship Fund) has helped me with food, gas and electric. Without it I would have gone without food which would have resulted in me being ill, I wouldn't have survived without this money.

Thank you & Brigstowe so much for your help at this mad time!"