



# the star

giving you a voice

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Issue 14 Spring 2011

newsletter for customers of Brighter Futures

### Brighter Futures?

Last October our Board made it clear that whilst we may have less money they were passionate about NOT cutting the services that you receive. They were also clear we must remain sustainable in the long term to guarantee as much security as possible to you. We have had up to 10% cuts in the grant to provide support for people in our housing services, and some cuts in health funding.

At Brighter Futures we have been working very creatively, to reduce even the tiniest bit of waste

from our services. We are working very hard to get the best deals on things like IT support, audit costs, mobile phones, fuel and utilities, Unfortunately in some cases we have decided not to replace some back office staff when they leave in order to save on their wage costs.

As a result it will be business as usual in all our housing, hostel and rough sleepers services, Base 58, Clubhouse, Safe Spaces, ECHO, Catering Network, the Staffordshire Mental

Health Helpline, Smart Moves, Safe and Sound, women's services and Chepstow House.

Our Community Inclusion Team contract has come to an end and all existing customers will be offered alternative services.

I hope that this offers some reassurance that we are working hard to make sure that the services you use remain and will continue well into the future.

*Gill Brown  
Chief Executive*

### Brighter Update

We understand that some of you maybe quite worried about the government cuts and the effect this will have on the services you use. This issue not only contains a clear message from our Chief Executive that on the whole, all is well here at Brighter Futures, but also tells you about two brand new services that Brighter Futures is involved in developing. We've also got some fantastic stories of hope from customers of Chepstow House and 90 Hope Street and more wonderful poetry written by you.

If you want to find out more about our services, what's on, and the latest news visit:

[www.brighter-futures.org.uk](http://www.brighter-futures.org.uk)

*Happy Reading,  
Emma Robertson x*

### Have you visited our new website yet..?

We are delighted to announce that we now have a new website!

Working with our web designers, Cyberzia and with input from lots of our customers we have produced a fresh, clear website packed with information about our services and the organisation.

Just before it was launched we visited 90 Hope Street, Hopwood House and The American Clubhouse to give

customers the opportunity to have a look around the site and tell us what they thought. We had lots of positive comments such as, *'it's great, it's got loads more information on there', 'I like it, it looks much more up to date'*. We also had feedback that some of the services were not so easy to find, so we've made changes to sort that out. Please have a look around and let us know your thoughts.

## 90 Hope Street - stories of hope

90 Hope Street provides accommodation and support to homeless people. For more information about the service call 01782 279234. To contact the Rough Sleeper's Team call FREE on 0800 970 2304

### Stephen's story



My name is Stephen. I moved into 90 Hope Street, Hanley at the time I was not drinking. I moved into a room which was alright then 2 weeks later I moved into a bedsit where I keep everything clean and tidy and do my own cooking.

I am now doing voluntary work at Adsis 3 days a week and that is going really well. I have helped out in the 24/7 clubhouse kitchen on a Saturday and Sunday and also at the 90 Hope Street kitchen which helps out the staff as well.

And I now dress up smart to impress everybody, the staff at 90 Hope Street are really helpful. The next move is to get my own place so that I can get on with my life. I keep myself busy 7 days a week. I enjoy football on a Monday at Northwood Stadium and at Manchester once a month with Jerry and Tim.

*Stephen*

### Chris' story

I was in a relationship for almost 12 years when I decided to leave my girlfriend because she was being disloyal. I moved to my mother's house then started drinking alcohol on a daily basis and a short while

later I became dependent on alcohol.

Becoming dependent on alcohol was when my problems started. My mum had an occasion to drink but not daily. In time my mother became annoyed with my drinking which led to arguments and she told me to leave on numerous occasions. In the end she had to call the police and I ended up homeless. The police pointed me to the Rough Sleeper's Team who then came out to see me.

While I was sleeping rough they would bring me a hot drink and soup and eventually they got me a place at 90 Hope Street. That is where I live now. All the staff here are very helpful.

Because of my drinking they, along with Jane (a nurse who works here 5 days a week) and Joe (from Adsis) recommended I did a home detox. I carried out a detox for nine days without alcohol and succeeded and to this day I am alcohol free.

Now I feel really good in myself and pleased with myself. The staff have seen a difference in me too and so has my mum and friend. In my eyes I am on the right track. It has not been plain sailing but I feel I have achieved a lot since coming to 90 Hope Street.

I now attend Adsis weekly, which is very helpful. I keep myself busy as much as possible to stop the boredom. I have my ups and downs but I'm happier now than when I first arrived here. It is possible if you put your mind to it. My next aim is to get my own place and then hopefully get back to full time employment.

*Chris*

## Chepstow House

I was referred to Chepstow House in March 2010. I was in a complete mess having lost my job following remand in prison for 5 weeks. The whole benefits system was a minefield, I had no self-esteem whatsoever and believed I was a waste of space. At 56 my life was over.

It took me 5 weeks to pluck up the courage go to Chepstow House for the first time! I was shaking so much I couldn't even sign in properly. Not knowing what to expect I envisaged sitting before a panel of self righteous do-gooders who were helping only out of a sense of public duty. How wrong I was!

The staff were so supportive, non judgemental and friendly. We worked out a star plan and they pointed me to the CAB and housing advice. Best of all this advice was available at Chepstow House so I didn't have to go anywhere else.

They suggested that I join the art group – this was my salvation. From painting by numbers I have progressed using self expression and even have some of my work on my sitting room wall.

Chepstow House also run a life skills course which I found very enjoyable, the other

girls are friendly and we have a lot of fun. Amongst other topics we look at Healthy Eating, Positive Relationships, Budgeting and Personal Safety. I was so proud to receive my certificates for completing the 10 week course.

My GP had referred me to counselling and whilst I was waiting for a vacancy Chepstow House arranged for me to have weekly sessions with a CPN.

I registered with JET as part of the Life Skills course, and in August through them I got a TEP (Transitional Employment Placement) for 16 weeks at Chepstow House providing admin support. This helped my self esteem so much that in December I was able to successfully apply for a permanent position at Brighter Futures' head office at Whittle Court. I have also been involved with the Open Day held at Chepstow House and 'Sale of Work' evening.

My life has really turned around thanks to the team – I had a few blips on the way with my benefits but they made phone calls for me to sort it out!

I can't thank them enough.

*Sue*

We are pleased to announce that Chepstow House has recently received news that funding has been secured to enable the service to continue. This is in no small part due to the fact that the scheme has been so successful in achieving it's aims. For more information and to read a report on the service written by the Centre for Criminological Research at Keele University visit our website or contact our head office (details on page 8)

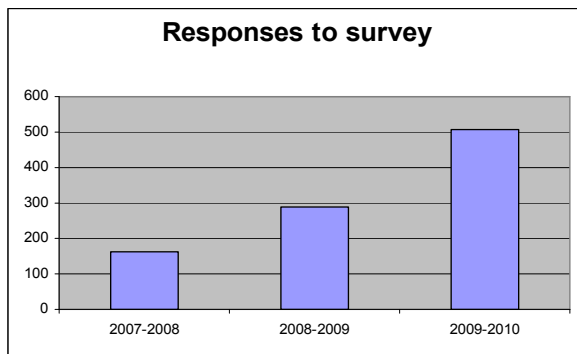
## Brighter Futures - fairness for all

We have recently started asking you to complete a form which asks for information about your employment status, religion, gender, nationality and any disabilities. The form is completely anonymous and you don't have to fill it in. The information you give us is then stored on a database (kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998) and reviewed every three months. We use this information to check that

no one particular group is receiving a poorer service than another. This is a requirement set out by government. One of our key values is 'equality' and we are dedicated to making sure that we understand every type of prejudice and we fight them all.

For more information speak to your support worker or call 01782 406000.

## How satisfied are you?

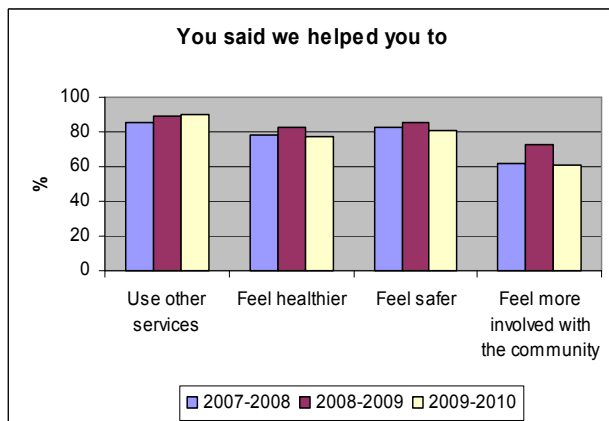


We ask for your ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and whether you are disabled.

This is so that we can tell that no group has a poorer experience of the service due to any discrimination, intentional or otherwise.

Two things you said we could do better were: giving you feedback about what we've changed as a result of your involvement and do more to promote and recognise diversity.

We now have new processes in place to make sure you know what changes we've made.

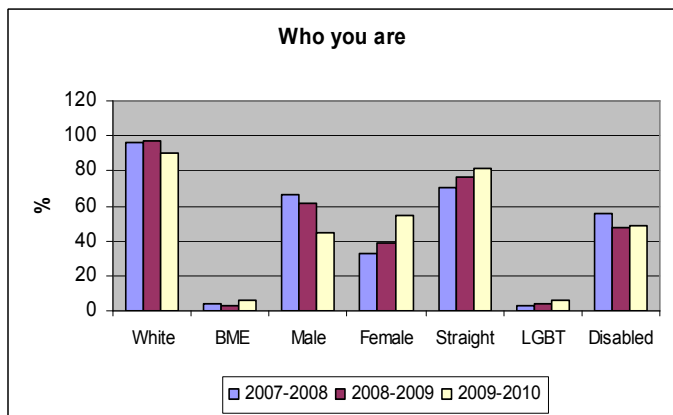


We are delighted to see the high levels of satisfaction you feel about our services. But, work doesn't stop there! We will continue to work at improving the service and support you receive.

Over the next year there will be many more chances for you to comment and help develop our services through the customer involvement opportunities - read more about involvement on page 8. We will also be asking you to help us make changes to this questionnaire to make sure we get information about your whole Brighter Futures' experience.

In February last year we asked you to complete a questionnaire so we could find out more about what you think about our services and how satisfied with the service you are.

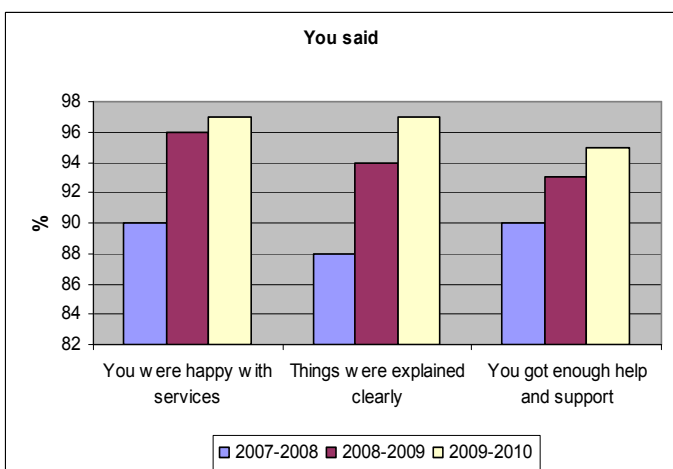
This first graph shows how year on year more of you are filling in the questionnaire. We believe this is because you know that we value your comments and do make changes in response to them.



We're also going to be asking you for your stories about how you've been discriminated against to see what we can learn from your experiences. If you want to tell your story contact us - details on page 8.

We are pleased to see that more of you feel you are being supported to use other services and that on the whole you feel healthier and safer since using our services.

We are putting plans in place to make sure you feel more involved with your community and will be asking you for your input into that through the customer involvement groups over the coming months.



### Give a little love

When you look around, it's sometimes hard to see that life is full of harsh reality.

The world is full of bad things and they won't go away.

And there are so many who need our help today.

Give a little love, fill their lives with hope

And when they need you most let them know you are there

There are some times, when the hand of fate is so cruel

And in the darkest hours a love will show the way

And there are so many who need our love today

You can light the way

And love is the greatest gift you can give

*Kieron  
Safe Spaces customer*

### A DOG BARKS

A dog barks at the rising moon.

Does he think it is another dog,  
and can hear him?

*R.A Snell*

It's wonderful to see the thought and emotion that goes into your poems and pictures. Please keep writing and drawing them and if you would like one to be in the next newsletter, give a copy to your support team member or send it directly to Emma Robertson at Whittle Court (see page eight for details)

As some of you may know Mandy Thornton, a team member for Safe Spaces sadly passed away at the end of last year.

Mandy had been working with us for eight years, and will be greatly missed by the team and by the customers she supported. We will remember her as a kind and loyal person, who always gave her time and support to listen to customers in distress.

### A tribute to Mandy Thornton

You worked with kindness  
You had learned patience  
You showed compassion  
You showed an inner strength  
You demonstrated courage and this  
courage strengthened your character.

Each time you chose to help others, your soul grew and flourished – how sad it feels that you should leave us when your soul could have grown so much more.

You made full use of your gifts by the work you did at Safe Spaces.

In your work, you gave of yourself and expected nothing in return and because of this became an inspiration to many.

Life wasn't always easy but throughout it all you found your inner strength and accomplished so much in your all too short life.

If in the evening of our lives we are judged on love then you will be very much resting in peace.

Missed so very much

Thank you for all that you were and for all that we shared together.

*Helen Deeming  
Safe Spaces support worker*

## Opportunities for people living in Newcastle

Brighter Futures is delighted to announce that working together with North Staffs Mind, we are now offering a new service to people living in Newcastle who need help to improve their mental wellbeing.

The service, which is being run by The Clubhouse Network staff and North Staffs Mind staff, offers you the chance to have your own support worker who will help you to achieve your goals.

You can refer yourself to the service or ask someone involved in your care to contact us.

We will arrange to meet you somewhere you feel safe, such as your home, at a Brighter Futures or North Staffs Mind service, or in a range of locations across the Newcastle area.

Together with your support worker you will design a plan which will focus on the things that you want to change or improve about your life.

Your goals could include meeting new people, getting into training and education, learning new skills or getting into

volunteering and work. We can also help you to improve your mental and physical wellbeing and increase your confidence.

The great thing about the support is that it is totally guided by you. Your goals, where you want, how you want, at your pace.

You also have the added benefit of being able to continue, or start to use, any of the Brighter Futures or North Staffs Mind services available to you - two for the price of one!

Over the next few weeks and months we will listen to what you want and develop activity sessions at community venues in and around Newcastle. If you know of a good venue or you've got an idea for an activity session, please let us know!

We also want your ideas to help us produce a leaflet that we will use to promote the service to other people and to review the service to help us to develop it.

If you want to find out more about the service please call us on 01782 835220 (The American) or 01782 262100 (North Staffs Mind)

## Interested in becoming a volunteer.?

Brighter Futures now has a volunteer co-ordinator whose job is to support customers and people outside of the organisation to become volunteers with us.

Some schemes already have volunteers working very effectively and we will be building on that to make sure that every customer who is interested in volunteering is supported throughout the process.

All volunteers will be supported to complete a simple application and interview process

so that we can match people with the vacancies that we have. Positions will be available across the whole of the organisation and will offer various opportunities including catering, administration, cleaning and maintenance.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer for Brighter Futures, please speak to your support worker or contact Jonathan Goodwin on 01782 406000 or at [jonathan.goodwin@brighter-futures.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.goodwin@brighter-futures.org.uk)

## The Clubhouse Network

Hello, the staff at The American have trusted me to write about what new things have been happening here. My name is Amy and I am a second year social work student currently on placement, my time here has been great so far and I'll be sad when I have to leave in a few weeks, although I'm not counting down the days!

There was a member's meeting held on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March and we'd like to thank all of the members who attended. The turn out was brilliant, we've never seen so many people in one room! We discussed some of the positive changes which were happening here and answered questions that members asked.

If you were unable to attend the meeting, the minutes will be displayed throughout all of the Clubhouses so please take a look at them and if you have any comments to make, please let us know! The member meetings are crucial for the development of the Clubhouses as your feedback, suggestions and contributions are what make the service such a good one.

We are very excited here at The American about the new training courses that are being delivered by Stoke-on-Trent College. We've already had lots of interest in the aromatherapies course so it is going ahead at the women's Happy Mondays group at The Observatory.

We want to get more courses up and running, so please let us know what you're interested in and we can arrange for them to start. There are courses available on lots of things from languages, beginner computer courses and first aid to learning to face paint! If you are interested in any of the courses, please contact Helen at The American on 01782 835220. There is a £6 joining fee to pay but this is a one off payment and it lasts for 12 months. However, if you are on a means tested benefits, there isn't a fee.

## Keeping you safe in your home

If you live in a Brighter Futures property you might recently have been visited by a company that tests if asbestos is present in the walls of a building. Here is more information about why we needed to carry out this work:

### **Why do you test for asbestos?**

As a housing association we have to complete an 'asbestos register' for legal reasons.

This is because asbestos can be very dangerous to the health of maintenance workers who carry out repairs in your home e.g. plumbers, electricians.

### **How do you do the test?**

We come to your home and take a small sample from areas within your home which may contain asbestos. The sample is then sent to a laboratory to see if asbestos is present.

### **What happens next?**

The results are kept on a register. This is to make sure that if work needs to be carried out on your home we can keep you and the maintenance worker safe.

### **If there is asbestos in my home will it harm me?**

No. Asbestos is not dangerous if it is left undisturbed.

### **How can I get more information?**

Contact Sharon Parkes, Health and Safety Officer on 01782 406000

### **Feedback**

Carrying out this work was a big project which involved lots of planning and people. We want to find out if you had any problems and if you did we want to make sure we put them right as soon as possible.

We are sending out a short questionnaire with your support worker (who can help you to fill it in) to give us some feedback. We will let you know what, if any, changes we make in the next newsletter.

*Sharon Parkes  
Health and Safety Officer*

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## Customer involvement

Customer Involvement has been picking up speed since the last newsletter and the 'ball' is now definitely rolling. Well over 400 of you have now expressed an interest in 'getting involved'.

Seven customers completed the first lot of training sessions for the Recruitment group enabling them to sit on an interview panel for potential new employees and one interview has taken place. Wendy said, *'Being part of an interview panel gave me a sense of directly contributing something back to the service, and having a real 'voice' in helping to recruit staff that as a user representative I felt would be empathic, proactive and open to clients needs.'*

Focus groups have now been held for most of our schemes with some excellent feedback coming from them. Lewis, a Reconnect North Staffs customer said, *'It gave me the opportunity to express my views and have input into the service.'*

Chris, a Clubhouse customer said, *"It was a good meeting, very informative. I had the opportunity to speak about my ideas around the day trips and was able to give*

*some suggestions. The meeting also cleared some queries that we had surrounding a few different things. The turn out for the meeting was really good"*.

Three meetings, to discuss some of Brighter Futures' major policies, are being held in April and all customers who said they were interested in the Business Group have been invited.

Customers interested in the Promotion and Publicity group will soon be invited to start contributing to this newsletter. We're also asking for feedback on our new website before and after it's launched which should be happening as this newsletter goes to print!

If you think you should have been contacted for any of the above opportunities but have not received an invite then speak to your support worker, a member of staff or Dave, Customer Involvement Officer, on 01782 406000.

Thanks to everyone who has already been involved, your expert insight to how our organisation is run and your enthusiasm keep making this all worthwhile and important.

*Dave Bailey*

*Customer Involvement Officer*

## Helping people home after hospital

Brighter Futures is offering a new service to people who are getting ready to leave hospital and need support to make sure it goes smoothly. Working in partnership with the **Revival Home Improvements Agency** and the **University Hospital of North Staffordshire** we can offer support to anyone who lives in Stoke-on-Trent and is leaving hospital.

The support is available for up to 30 days after discharge and will help with a wide range of issues including debt, alcohol and drug problems, mental wellbeing, and loneliness.

The service is currently a 3 month pilot but we hope that this will be extended.

For more information about this service please contact Julie Worrall on 01782 202980.

## HELPLINE

worried? isolated? feeling low?

**0808 800 2234**

**FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

**you talk, we listen**



Emotional support for  
people concerned about  
their mental health or that  
of someone they know

Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline  
Supporting and promoting emotional and mental well being  
www.brighter-futures.org.uk

**brighter futures**  
creative support, housing and employment