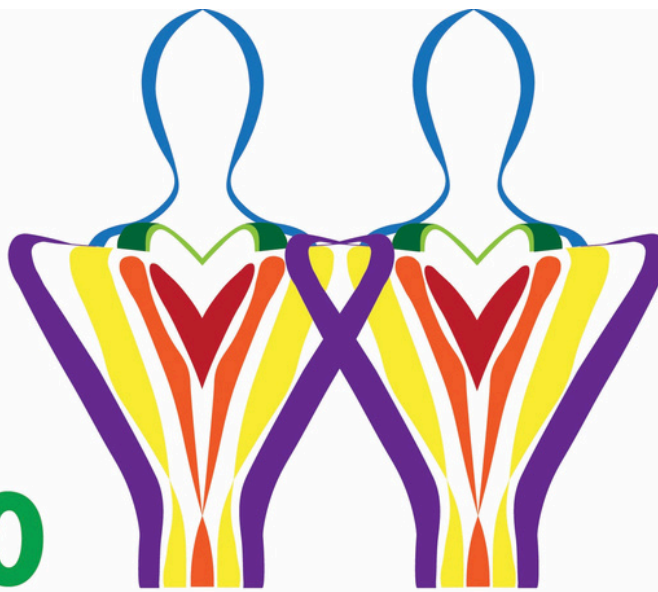


Summer Newsletter 2025

MHELO

MENTAL HEALTH EXPERIENCE LED OPPORTUNITIES



What is MHELO?



MHELO - Mental Health Experience Led Opportunities is a community of people with lived experience who strive to improve the mental health system by sharing a collective voice.

We shout out loud for those who feel they don't have a voice and work together with services to co-produce better outcomes and create a comfortable cradle of mental health support.

INCLUSION

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

BIGGER DREAMS ► BETTER LIVES ► BRIGHTER FUTURES

In this newsletter:

What
MHELO
Means to Us

Rethink
Focus
Groups

Money
Matters

Housing
Matters

New
Coordinator

MHELO
News

HOLDING ON TO HOPE!



In Greek Mythology, Pandora's Box was opened and she released horrendous torments into the world, like plagues, pestilence, hatred, mistrust, anger, sorrow and despair.

However, nestled inside, unreleased, was the Healing Spirit of HOPE.

Amongst darkness, HOPE is our most precious light. Where there is HOPE, there are encouraging expectations and optimism of evolving change.

HOPE keeps us afloat, like a buoy in stormy seas of suffering and strife, to stop us from drowning in sorrows and struggles. It can lift us and propel us forward into new horizons, future fulfilment, opportunities and possibilities.

We all need HOPE, but when you are mentally unwell, HOPE is like a balloon. It deflates, floats away into the distance, or tragically bursts! That is when we need 'Holders of HOPE' to hold onto our 'HOPE balloon'. They can be community lifelines, such as MHELO, peer support, and online organisations that believe in our potential and healing.

Instead of helium, these 'HOPE balloons' are filled with GPA: our Goals, the Pathways or Plans to achieve these goals, and the Agency being the belief we can instigate change! (GPA is referenced from the American psychologist Snyder.) So, we, colleagues of MHELO, are all here with the HOPE that we can create positive change and strive to co-create successful, supportive strategies.

We frequently confer with mental health services, the volunteer community sector, carers and others. We don't claim to be able to fix a broken mental health system, but we can raise our voice about what does and doesn't work!

Moving forward in co-production, we hold HOPE for: Sharing our stories - of suffering alongside successes, what worked for us as well as what didn't, and constructive rather than destructive criticism. Working together with respect, kindness and trust. Mutuality and reciprocity - with common goals and learning from one another. Communicating clearly and actively listening to each other. Feeling heard and valued, and not being ashamed.

An open and honest approach.

Being optimistic about goals as well as realistic. Structure and focus in the group.

Seeking accountability and feedback about changes planned or implemented. Inclusivity and networking - to continue learning from each other's experiences.

Collectively, our stories provide valuable knowledge, expertise and strength! Through the recognition of the value of collaboration, we hold HOPE of mental health support moving forwards and upwards like the 'balloon of HOPE' filled with GPA; possible GOALS, new PATHWAYS and an AGENCY OF BELIEF THAT WE CAN INDEED INSTIGATE POSITIVE CHANGE!



Above all, we hold HOPE for others suffering with the excruciating pain of mental ill-health. We want to help because we know what it feels like, and we have survived and managed to come out the other side.

That is our story of HOPE!

- Karen B.

MHELO Matters...

1. How did you join MHELO?

I got involved with MHELO through some people I met at a group for people with personality disorders run by Suicide Crisis in Cheltenham.

2. What do you like doing outside?

I love being outside full stop, but my favourite thing is when I have had a chance to go sailing.

3. How would you like to see MHELO developing?

I would like to see younger people joining us.

They are the future, and we need to protect our future!

4. What is an example of the success MHELO has had?

There have been many, but the proposal for Mental Health Quality Checking is still going on now and continues to make an impact.

5. How are the team supportive and fun to work with?

They put up with my sense of humour.

My latest proposal is a soft toy that can go to events. This is my proposal.



6. If you wanted to be a volunteer but were on the fence, what would you say?

If you want to be part of a community where you have a voice and where who you are matters, don't hesitate.

An Interview With Denise Holder,
Chair of MHELO



Your Voice Matters



Rethink Mental Illness is developing spaces called Mental Health Forums. You may have already attended one of the early forum events that they hosted in March this year.

As put perfectly by an Expert by Experience, these spaces are for 'anyone with a vested interest in the provision or use of mental health services in Gloucestershire.

They intend to create a regular meeting point where professionals from the voluntary sector and statutory organisations, people with lived experience and other partners can come together to discuss what it is to be part of the mental health system in Gloucestershire.

We plan to work together to build on what is already going well across the county, identify gaps in the services provided, and develop solutions in collaboration with Experts by Experience. Those who use local services are the individuals who know firsthand what is needed.

The aim is to establish different forums that cover each of the following locations: Gloucester, Stroud, Cheltenham, the Forest of Dean, and the Cotswolds.

We have shared a short survey so that MHELO network members can share their views on what is needed in these forums. We will continue to collaborate with Rethink to ensure that individuals with lived experience are included in these initiatives.

Don't be an Ostrich! Get Help by Steph

There are many changes to the benefit system, but it will be a while before they come into effect for everyone. If you are looking for support in gaining employment or where to get support, these are a few places you could turn to.

There are many other places you can turn to, and we would love to know where you go for advice. The first thing to do is not bury your head in the sand and contact those you owe money to.

There is support in place!



<https://www.forwardsgloucestershire.co.uk/>

This is a helpful website for individuals seeking assistance with finding employment. They will work with you on a 1-1 basis and have a self-referral process. They have people who cover the whole of Gloucestershire and will support people with any disabilities.

<https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en>

Need help with working out if you would be better off in work? How much you are entitled to in benefits? There is a simple to use benefit calculator, which will help you to work out what options are best for you. Free guides and tools on ways to reduce your daily living costs too, we are all struggling with the cost of living and any and all support is welcome for us all.

<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/get-support>

A really useful website which has easy to use benefit calculator and a place to find out if there are any grants that you may be entitled too,

<https://www.stepchange.org/how-we-help.aspx>

Are you struggling with your bills and debts? Do you know that there is support out there for you and you can help to reduce your bills, and gain support on ways to reduce your debts, making contact with those you owe money too, is always a good place to start. Letting them know that you are struggling and working out a payment plan or switching to a different tariff, could save you money.

Benefit Support Services in Gloucestershire by Jackie

With proposed changes to benefits, several organisations in Gloucestershire offer support and advice. These services can help you understand how changes might affect you and what options are available.



Citizens Advice Bureau

<https://gloscab.org.uk/>

Covering Cheltenham, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, and Forest of Dean. Call 0808 189 6280 (Mon-Thu, 10am- 4pm)



Cheltenham Borough Homes

Money Advice Team available for CBH tenants with benefit issues



SCOPE

National helpline for benefits support: 0808 800 3333



Gloucester Law Centre

Call 01452 423492



The Drop Ins

Six locations across Gloucestershire: Cheltenham, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Forest of Dean, Cirencester and Stroud. Call 01452 42542

Government consultation on benefits reform? You can still share your views - our handy article shows how:

<https://www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/research-strategy-and-partnerships/welfare-reform-consultation/>

Mental Health & Housing.

Hi, I'm Melissa. I am 30 years old, and throughout my mental health struggles, I have faced a horrendous number of significant problems. Here, I will highlight some of the issues we face.

Supported living

I had the lucky opportunity to work on behalf of Inclusion in a supported living project, which resulted in a new unit being built in Kingsway. I interviewed many people in supported housing to gather as much information as possible to ensure the unit built was adequate. I had so much fun doing this line of work and being able to explore more information.



Homelessness

Many people with serious mental health conditions don't get any help when they are homeless. Major problems arise due to having nowhere to live. They have no correspondence address, so they cannot receive a letter or be contacted with help. It is a vicious cycle, and it is very hard to see homeless people go through this.

All in all, supported living, homelessness, and homeseekers are causing a long line of wait, while we have contributing factors like the lack of housing provided. A problem many people face is discrimination. For example, one of my friends is reliant on her wheelchair, and it is documented in her notes from every professional supporting her that she has to be on the ground floor. And yet every property she viewed was not accessible. The council decided she was being difficult and refused to help her further. It took many attempts by multiple agencies to change this, despite sending evidence that they already had in her notes.

This is a primary example of the problems people are still facing in today's society. And that's not all, the NHS is overstretched and underfunded, and people's lives are at stake, with services across the board overwhelmed, which means the health service is not reaching enough people in time, causing situations to exacerbate further.

Appointments are hard to come by and waiting lists are unacceptably long, part of the vicious cycle which is causing people's mental health to exacerbate. Although I admit there is no easy way to fix this system, we must find a way. We deserve to be helped and feel safe.

Finally, people with serious mental health find it difficult to make phone calls or attend meetings. Again, there doesn't seem to be enough understanding and support around this. I hope that in the future, councils and housing communicate better and support homeless people with mental health properly.

Meet Kate

Our New Project Coordinator

Kate joins us with a wealth of experience in mental health, volunteer coordination, and a life shaped by a belief in the power of giving back.

From her early days helping at Oxfam sponsored swims as a child to volunteering on archaeological digs in Israel, Kate has reinvented her life more than once, gaining confidence, purpose, and a deep understanding of people along the way.



"It was after the dig that I first felt I had something to say," she recalls. "That experience gave me the confidence to speak up - and now I go to Toastmasters and speak in public for fun!"

In her new role, Kate is excited to combine her passion for social media, lived experience, and volunteer engagement to support the MHELO project.

"At a time when mental health services are under pressure, I believe that by working together and sharing our voices, we can shape services that really serve us."



Her message to new volunteers:

"Confidence grows through action. Whether you're working quietly behind the scenes or sharing your experiences to help shape services, your contribution is equally important. Together, through the power of our collective lived experience, we can work towards improving our lives and making mental health services better for all."

And when she's not speaking, supporting, or coordinating? You'll find her quietly absorbed in drawing mandalas — her favourite form of meditation.

More About MHELO...



If you are interested in joining our friendly team, please contact Kate Keating at Inclusion Gloucestershire on katek@inclusion-glos.org

FREE Self-Care Toolkit

We work together, sharing our voices and experiences to support others in similar situations. Our Self-Care Toolkit was developed in this way by pooling our collective knowledge. Download a copy, complete the prompts, and create a plan that's right for you. Then pick it up every time you need it!

Newsflash...

- One of our recent projects highlighted the lack of information and support for coming off antidepressants safely.
- We're doing a piece of work about safe access to mental health services.
- Last year, we updated and relaunched our Self-Care Toolkit.

Read more, sign up for our next newsletter, or download a free copy of the updated toolkit here...

<https://www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/engagement/mhelo-mental-health-expert-led-opportunities/>

