



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

2020/21
Annual report



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Foreword

During the last two years, COVID-19 has imposed huge demands on the health and social care system in Wales; staff working across all parts of the system have delivered magnificently but many have experienced high workloads, have dealt with large numbers of very sick patients, and have themselves suffered from the direct and indirect burdens of the pandemic.

The expansion of the Health for Health Professionals Wales (HHP Wales) programme, to provide a confidential, national service that complements existing services, has gone some way to address the needs of staff who have experienced these stresses.

The pandemic has provided opportunities to bring workforce wellbeing to the fore and challenge us to develop a more collaborative and equitable model.

I am very grateful to everyone who has been involved in the management and delivery of this service.

I hope that everyone will find time to read this concise annual report and to appreciate the efforts that have been made to help support the physical and mental health of our most prized asset; the health and care staff who work on the frontline day after day to protect and improve the lives of Welsh citizens.



Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer, Wales

What are we trying to do?

Our mission

Health for Health Professionals Wales (HHP Wales) offers free mental health and wellbeing support to all staff, students and volunteers working in the NHS in Wales.

The current HHP Wales service arose from the team's past experience in offering this service to doctors living and working in Wales.

The service has expanded and seen a continued increase in the number of people coming to the service, not just those on the front line but throughout NHS Wales and has now received more funding from Welsh Government to expand the service and help more people.

Now, anyone working for the NHS in Wales that needs help can access it quickly.

Funded by Welsh Government and administered by Cardiff University, our service covers a wide range of professionals and supporting staff working within the NHS in Wales, including but not limited to medical, nursing, allied professionals groups, administrative and management team members.

Aims

- To offer **timely, confidential and free mental health support** to those who are seeking a confidential service
- To help **break down the stigma** around disclosure of mental health challenges that people face in the workplace
- Our ambition is to **extend the services and therapies** available through HHP Wales to make sure we have a service that offers clients a diverse choice of appropriate therapies and services.
- We will **build on and increase our collaborations** with organisations such as Health Education and Improvement Wales, the National Centre for Mental Health, the British Medical Association, NHS England and the Welsh Ambulance Service.

Geraint's story

South Wales pharmacist, Geraint Jones, contracted COVID-19 in April 2020. He has kindly shared an insight to his experiences after he was later diagnosed with Long COVID.

Geraint was living with a multitude of symptoms after his initial COVID infection in April, which became extremely impactful on his day-to-day life, both as a professional and as a person.

Geraint explained: "I was in quite a novel situation at this time as I was diagnosed with Long COVID by a London clinician with experience in treating patients after initial COVID infection.

"There was no guidance on how to support or manage patients presenting with a huge variety of symptoms at this time, so I felt very uncertain on how the illness may impact my life, but also how long it will continue to affect my life.

"I sought support through HHP Wales predominantly out of desperation and not knowing whom to turn to for help.

"My experience with HHP Wales has only been positive. Having used Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in the past, I loosely understood what I was to expect, but also my therapist gave me very useful tips to get the most out of the sessions and then implement this into my day-to-day life.



"The strategies we spoke through were very simple and never used too much mental ability (which I appreciated as some days I was completely lacking in this).

"I naturally felt comfortable when discussing any personal issues with the therapist, which is a skill in itself but also making me feel at ease throughout at a time and date to suit my varying physical symptoms.

"I cannot thank the HHP Wales team enough for guiding me through some very difficult times when nobody else understood my worries and concerns."

**Geraint is now a member of the
HHP Wales Public Advisory Group**

Who's who



Professor Jon Bisson
Director



Dr Jake Hard
Deputy Director



Dr Thomas Kitchen
Deputy Director

Support team

4 Specialist Dr Advisors

36 Therapists

11 Dr Advisors

15 Peer Support Providers

Strategic advisory group

Professor Debbie Cohen, Chair
Dr Majd Al Shamaa, Health Professionals
Dr Sheila Brennan, Psychological Therapies
Peter Hunt, Finance and Administration
Dr Julia Lewis, Addictions and Psychiatry
Dr Adrian Neal, Employee Wellbeing
Lucy Warner, NHS Practitioner Health

Public advisory group

Gareth Bowdler, Chair
Geraint Jones
Natalie Harper
Jade Smitherman

Administration

Naomi Marfell
Peter Hunt
Lizzie Hobbs
Naomi Redford
Catherine Aymar
Catrin Hopkins

HHP Wales team



Summary

The pandemic has been challenging for us all and I feel very proud of the major role HHP Wales has played and continues to play in supporting people working for NHS Wales.

The rapid expansion of HHP Wales, whilst maintaining an effective service that is highly valued by those who use it, is a real tribute to its dedicated staff, many of whom have been an integral part of HHP Wales for many years.

I am very grateful to everyone involved with the delivery of HHP Wales and would like to especially thank Professor Debbie Cohen for developing and leading HHP Wales from its inception in 2012, securing additional funding for its expansion at the beginning of the pandemic and her ongoing support of our work.

During the last year, we have strengthened our administrative and governance processes and helped more people in a single year than in the first eight years of HHP Wales' existence.

We have been able to add a range of alternative options for people to receive support through, in addition to face-to-face treatment, with the aim of providing more choice, increasing access and better meeting the full needs of people working within NHS Wales.

We have also launched our fully bilingual website and undertaken a promotional campaign that clearly raised awareness and allowed more people to access support. Please do take the opportunity to find out more about us and what we can offer by visiting our website.

hhpwales.nhs.wales



Professor Jon Bisson
Director, HHP Wales

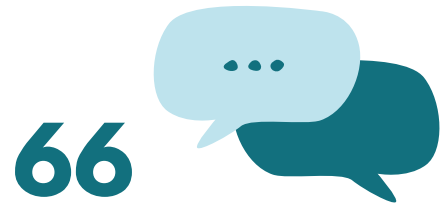
Achievements

This infographic shows some key figures from our activity over the last year.

**April 2020 -
March 2021**



people accessed our services this year



Advisors and therapists supporting our clients



visits to new website



people received Cognitive Behavioural Therapy



440 visits to Welsh pages



members of our Public Advisory Group



people accessed peer support



members of our Strategic Advisory Group



144k +

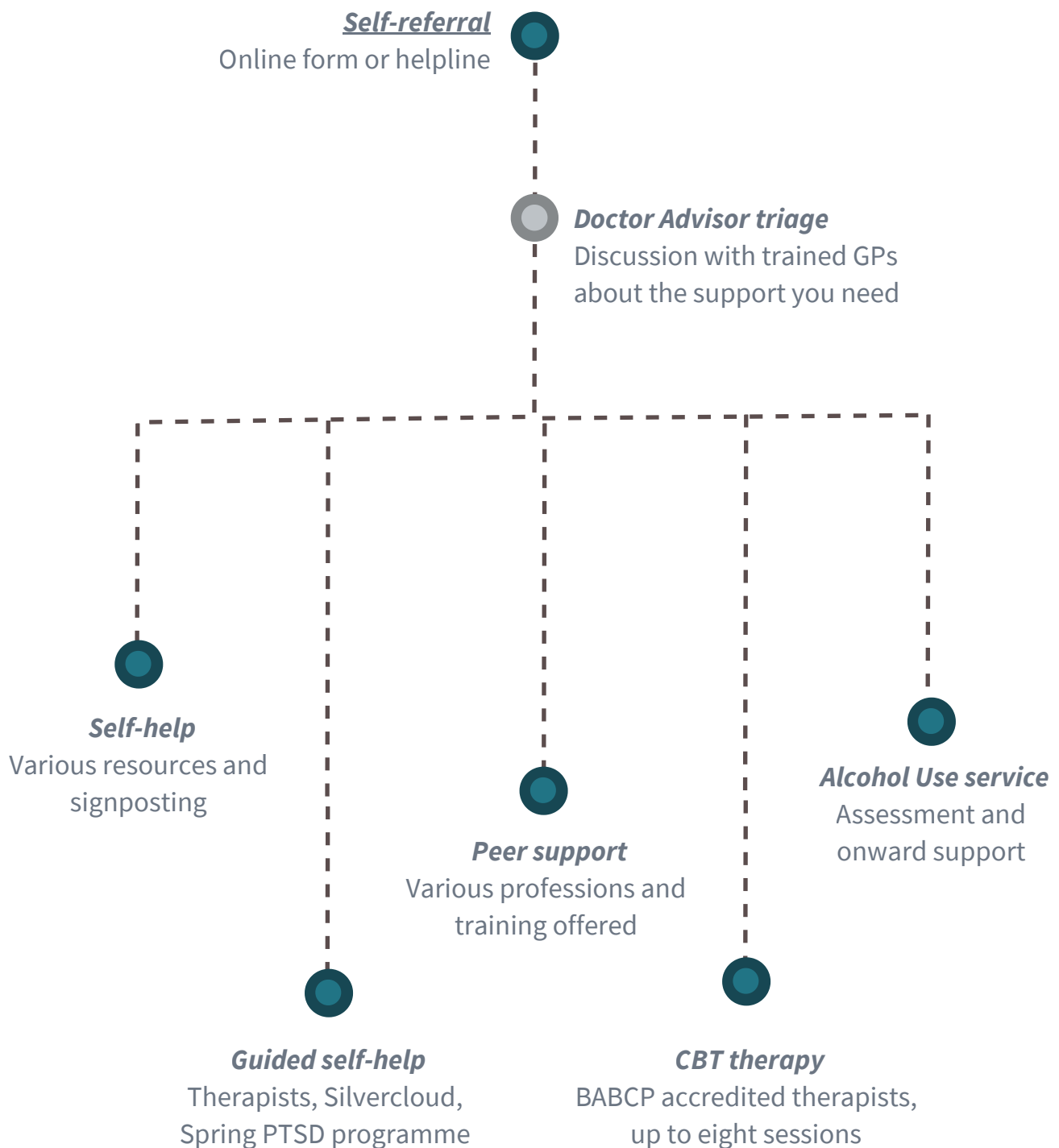
social media impressions



people attended our first symposium

How to access our service

To ensure people are able to refer themselves for support at any time on any day we offer an online form on our website. They are then contacted for an appointment with one of our Dr Advisors. Through this conversation, they are able to discuss an individually tailored approach to the support they need.



Our services

■ Self-help

In collaboration with Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and the NHS England Practitioner Health service, we are able to sign-post to numerous mobile applications, self-help guides, virtual groups and other services.

■ Guided self-help

Following initial consultations with either a SilverCloud or HHP Wales therapist, individuals are directed to specific self-help materials. As appropriate, a follow-up consultation reviews the need for additional support. In conjunction with Traumatic Stress Wales, we also offer access to a new PTSD guided self-help service for mild-moderate PTSD.

■ Peer Support

This gives users access to volunteer peer-support providers.

Doctors and medical students are directed to the services run by the British Medical Association (BMA). Other health professionals are directed to an HHP Wales service.

■ Virtual face-to-face consultations

Individuals can receive up to eight sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) from a British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) accredited therapist.

■ Alcohol service

Individuals are supported through a specialist alcohol use assessment and accessing onward interventions where appropriate.

We recognise that an individual's mental health can be affected by many aspects of their personal and professional lives.

We work with an organisation called [Able-Futures](#) to offer support to those experiencing challenges with relationships, finance, housing, working environments as well as other difficulties.

Who accesses our service?

The number of clients accessing support through our service from non-professional and other specialist areas of NHS staff has continued to grow.

The numbers below give an idea of the broad spectrum of people we support:



Medical and dental

173 Dr
106 Medical student
8 Dentist
2 Dental nurse
2 Dental student



Nursing and midwifery

140 Nurse
11 Student nurse
15 Midwife
1 Student midwife



Healthcare science and admin

8 Health Visitor
4 HR
3 Clinical Scientist
2 Finance
1 Switchboard



Allied health professionals

31 Administrative
21 Pharmacy
22 Mental Health
16 Occupational Therapist
15 Physiotherapist
8 Radiology
6 Healthcare student
4 Speech and language
3 Opthamology
3 Podiatry
1 Pathology



Welsh Ambulance Service

51 Paramedic
14 EMT
9 Call handler
2 Urgent care assistant
2 Student
2 First responder
1 Driver

Sarah's story

Sarah is a consultant anaesthetist of over twenty years from Cardiff. She kindly shared how her mental health was affected by issues in her family and how HHP Wales and therapy services have helped her access the help she needed to cope.

"Things started for me three years ago in January 2018. I had a normal, busy life: happily married with two teenage daughters and I had never suffered from mental health problems before. Life was good but then things started to unravel."

Sarah's mother passed away in January 2018 and her family situation took another unprecedented turn when her youngest daughter was diagnosed with anorexia in June 2018.

"I thought I understood eating disorders and I was determined we were going to fight to get my daughter back into good health. But unfortunately, it really took its toll on all of us.

"I found I just couldn't work any longer and I went to see my GP at this point. I knew I needed resilience to carry on and I was struggling to sleep, eat and focus. I gave everything to my daughter and our lives were just turned upside down."

As Sarah's daughter's condition worsened so did Sarah's ability to look after herself.

When her daughter became an inpatient following an attempted overdose, Sarah felt she couldn't cope any longer and reached out for help for herself.

"A colleague told me about HHP Wales so I contacted them and managed to see a councillor within a couple of weeks. It was all very efficient and that's how I started on my route with HHP."

Sarah was eventually referred to a psychotherapist, where she was able to focus her sessions on herself and what she needed.

"I returned to work at the start of the COVID-19 crisis in April and even there I noticed how I was so much better at coping than I thought possible.

"Within a few months, I felt more myself than I had done in the past three years. I've reduced my medication and everything is looking more positive because I have learnt to deal with things in a different way.

"The rollercoaster of mental health affects people differently and we are having a dip now. Now I know assistance is there through Occupational Health and HHP Wales should I need it again and that helps me feel supported."

Sarah hopes that sharing her story will encourage others to ask for help when they need it.

Service user feedback

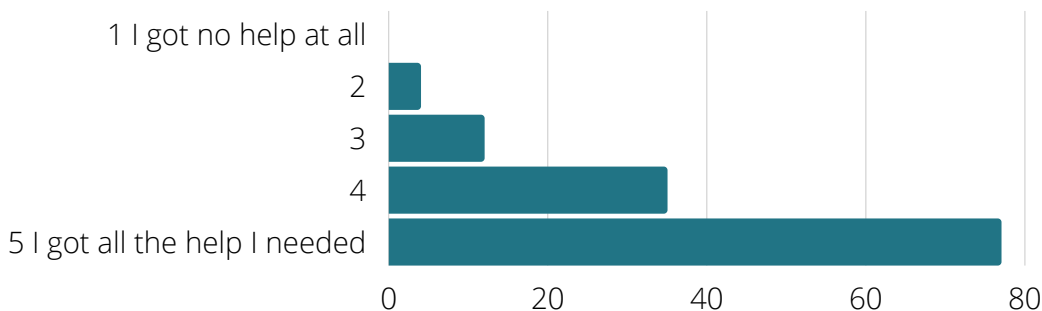
It is important to us that we're always working to improve and streamline the service from the feedback we receive from our clients. We're pleased to share some results of a recent survey which was completed by 146 service users.



91% of clients found their contact with a Dr Advisor helpful or very helpful.

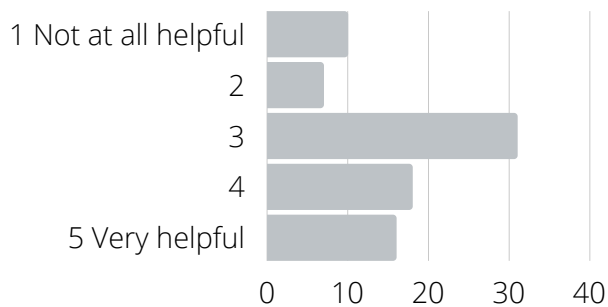
The Dr Advisor was very warm, sounded interested in understanding my problem. Asked open questions that helped me to provide answers in a simple way and feel less anxious. They were empathetic and wanted to help me get the right help.

I started my sessions with my therapist back in the middle of the pandemic, when an accumulation of life events led me to feeling very anxious, psychically exhausted and mentally drained... It might sound cliché but through CBT she helped me question and address negative thinking patterns I've had my whole life. I urge anyone who is struggling to seek therapy, as I believe everyone has the right to feel their best.



Did you leave therapy with insight and strategies that may help you in the future?

Service user feedback

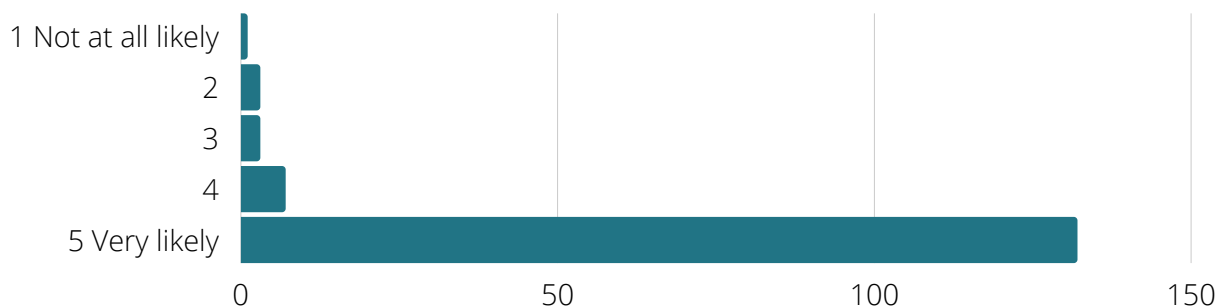


After speaking to a Dr Advisor, how helpful did you find the self-help resources you accessed?

“ I felt empowered to access resources that I chose for myself, ones that work for me as an individual. Feel equipped by these even in the event of having a problem again. ”



73% of clients who accessed peer support got all the support they needed through their provider.



How likely would you be to recommend this service to others?

“ It has been the best thing I have done for myself in a long time. It has left me feeling positive about the future and my coping mechanisms. I also know now where to contact support again if needed. ”

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

In the first eight years of the service we received more than **600 calls** and an average of **two referrals a week** were referred on for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

In reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, from April 2020 we endeavoured to support all frontline healthcare staff and provide an individually tailored approach to support. This expanded further in June 2020 to include all staff employed by the NHS in Wales.

Following the expansion

From mid-April 2020, when we initially expanded the service to frontline staff, we received 13 referrals a week. This increased to **18 a week** in July 2020 when we opened the service to all staff employed by the NHS in Wales.

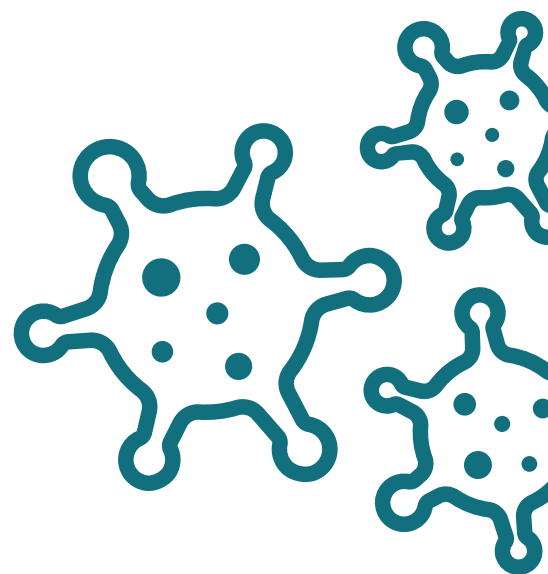
It became clear that healthcare staff across the whole of the NHS in Wales benefitted from this support through the pandemic.

Word of mouth remained a key sign of the service's positive impact. With this in mind, we began to share stories from users of our service who were willing to share their experiences in the hope of encouraging their colleagues to reach out.

In the first year of our expanded service, **770 people** contacted HHP Wales, as such we required a larger team to oversee the development of additional resources within the tiers of support that were put in place.

We increased our administration and senior management teams, as well as building our teams of doctor advisors, peer support volunteers and therapists to help meet increased demand.

To raise interest in both the service and the help we needed to staff it, we created a new website and ran a social media campaign, which also helped us reach new clients.





Natalie's story

South Wales GP Natalie got in touch with HHP Wales following an anxiety flare up, exacerbated by issues in her personal life, cancelled wedding plans and working as a junior doctor in the middle of a global pandemic.

"Over the past 10 years of living with anxiety, I have come to recognise the triggers in my behaviour that highlight for me that I may start to struggle with my mental wellbeing.

"Over-thinking, worrying, catastrophising and compulsive behaviour like checking plug switches and shutting doors have become red flags for me.

"I noticed I was starting to develop unhelpful thinking styles and behaviours again which told me it was time to reach out for support.

"I approached my GP. She told me about the HHP Wales service, and I have been doing much better since they helped me get set up with a therapist.

"I was offered a set of eight sessions with a therapist based in Cardiff which was great because I could have the sessions from the comfort of my own home.

"The flexibility helped alleviate worry as I was mindful that I was about to start working within psychiatry teams in the local area.

"I was very aware I was starting as a healthcare professional at the same time as starting as a patient and I really wanted to keep my personal/professional identity separate.

"The confidentiality reassurances offered by the therapy through HHP Wales meant I never had to worry about anonymity.

"I didn't feel the sessions being online put me at any disadvantage and I feel lucky to have accessed such high-quality face to face therapy, despite living so far away from anyone!"

**Natalie is now a member of the
HHP Wales Public Advisory Group**

Working together

Collaboration with our partner and stakeholder organisations is essential to ensure the HHP Wales service is reaching everyone within NHS Wales.

We continue to regularly liaise and collaborate with a range of partner and stakeholder organisations both within and outside Wales.

We've been particularly keen to build relationships and develop network links with occupational health departments and wellbeing teams across Wales.

Our work with HEIW, NHS Practitioner Health and the Scottish Workforce Specialist Service has provided many opportunities to collaborate and share information as the situation and environment we have been working in has been rapidly evolving.

Other stakeholder groups include all NHS Wales Health Boards and Trusts, The European Physician Health Group, the Samaritans, Welsh and UK Government officials and the British Medical Association (BMA).

HHP Wales has undertaken to present to a wide number of organisations to support increased collaboration and we are grateful for all the work done to promote the service.

These include the BMA Welsh Council, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in Wales, Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing, Unison and other Trade Unions, The Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.

We were grateful to Baroness Eluned Morgan, during her time as the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Welsh Language, for the opportunity to meet with her and share the work done and the vision ahead for HHP Wales.

HHP Wales has a growing team of volunteers providing peer support. If this is something you might be interested in being part of then please get in touch.

Future developments

After such a successful year, we are now ambitious to build on this and further improve the range, quality and accessibility of the services we offer.

We plan to continue with our efforts to raise awareness amongst people working within NHS Wales and to see an increase in the number of staff using HHP Wales as a result.

We aim to reduce variation in the backgrounds of people seeking support from us, the organisations they work for and the areas of Wales they are from.

The creation of our Strategic Advisory and Public Advisory Groups will allow us to benefit from the advice of experts, including those with lived experience of using HHP Wales, and collectively develop and enhance what we provide.

We will continue to focus on training and supporting the staff who provide the HHP Wales services, to enhance their skills and ability to help HHP Wales realise its aims.

I am confident that HHP Wales will continue to grow, go from strength to strength and effectively support people working within NHS Wales.



Professor Jon Bisson
Director, HHP Wales



Enquiries

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