

Mental Health
TOGETHER

**Recognising the valuable expertise that
people with lived experience can offer**



*“The heart is very much like the sea, it has its storms, it has its tides.... and in its depths it has its pearls too.” –
Vincent Van Gogh*

These pearls symbolise our Experts by Experience – people whose journeys, often marked by challenge and hardship, have given them unique wisdom and insight. It is through their lived experiences that they gain perspectives which no training or textbook can ever provide, helping us to shape services that truly meet people’s needs.

At Mental Health Together, these voices are not only heard but deeply valued and respected. We provide a safe and supportive space where individuals can recognise the power of their own story and discover how sharing it can inspire change and make a real difference for themselves and others.

“A pearl is a beautiful thing that is produced by an injured living shell.”– Jeffrey J. Fox

Pearls don’t usually come out of pristine oyster shells but from shells that have been battered by tides and currents, often beyond their control. It takes time to appreciate that your story, tough as it may be, is part of your worth.

Currently in 2025 we have **32 Experts by Experience**. People of all ages and backgrounds who have experience of many different mental health services – primary care, secondary care and voluntary sector.

That is a vast amount of knowledge, insight, experience, compassion and skills from many of our different communities across Derby and Derbyshire!

“These are potential partners – people who can meet professionals half-way (and more), puzzle out problems, help professionals explore wider ways to look at things. More than this, they see the NHS in trouble sometimes and really want to help. I’d recommend you use their willing services.” David Gilbert
<https://www.inhealthassociates.co.uk/>

Examples of some projects which have benefitted from our Experts' valuable insights



Co-designing mandatory risk assessment training for mental health clinicians



Training ward staff on 'purposeful admissions' for mental health patients



Co-designing new leaflets to help people get more from their appointments



Advising on a new gatekeeping policy for the crisis team



Reviewing Derbyshire urgent mental healthcare services



Training health professionals to help prevent suicide



Training Approved Mental Health Professionals



Interviewing new staff members for the Living Well service



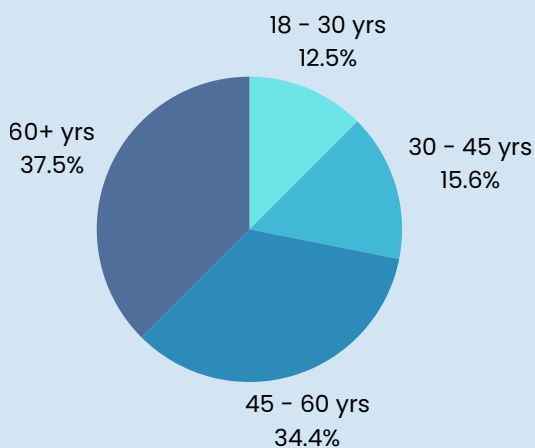
Advising on the development of new 24/7 mental health hubs

An overview of our Demographics

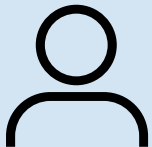
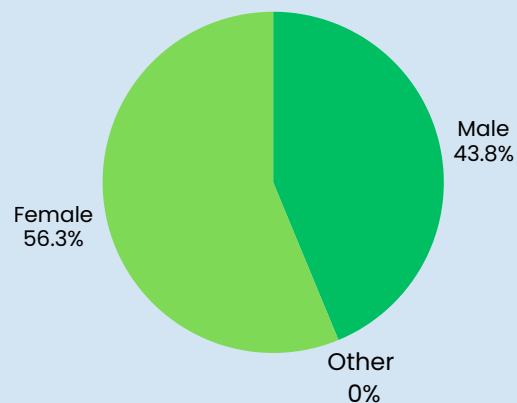


Dales 3
Derby 11
High Peak 5
Chesterfield 5
Amber Valley 4
South Derbyshire 2
North East Derbyshire 2

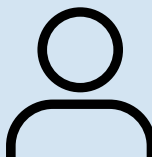
Age Range



Gender breakdown



Mental health carers 7
People with mental health condition(s) 25



Identifying as being neurodivergent 9
Identifying as being from a minority community 7

To help you better understand the insights and wisdom that Experts by Experience can bring, we have invited some of them to introduce themselves. Here they share a glimpse of their story, the experiences and challenges which have shaped them and how they are using them to make a difference.

We hope this inspires you to think about how you can benefit from their pearls of wisdom and their willingness to help us shape services that are accessible for all.



Pink Pearl: Strength in authenticity

Belinda's story

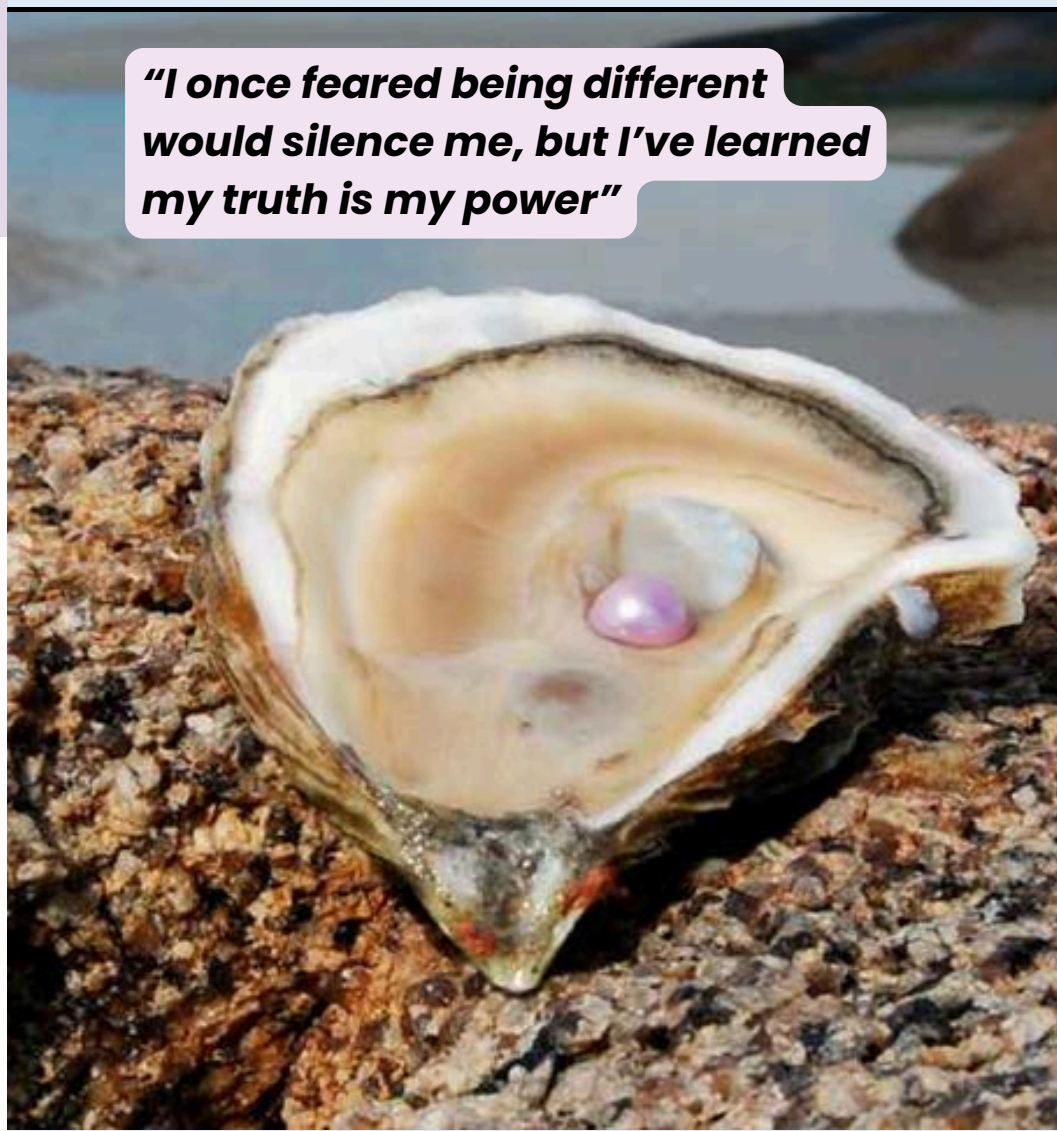
Belinda is a transgender woman whose story highlights the systemic barriers and marginalisation faced by trans people in mental health services.

Within the LGBTQ+ community, around 12% of trans people have attempted to take their own life in the past year, compared with around 2% of LGBTQ+ people who aren't trans.

67% of trans people have experienced depression in the last year.

My journey as a transgender woman navigating mental health challenges has been shaped by a system that often misunderstands and marginalises me. Facing both the impacts of my identity and systemic barriers, I am finding strength in sharing my story and advocating for change. I use my lived experience to raise awareness about the unique struggles faced by trans people and minorities within mental health services. I am passionate about fostering compassion, inclusivity, and practical support to transform the mental health system into a place of safety and respect for all.

"I once feared being different would silence me, but I've learned my truth is my power"



On behalf of our service I want to express my thanks for the detailed feedback you have provided. I am very grateful for the time and trouble you have taken to (help us) provide a fair and inclusive service.





Blue Pearl: Resilience and hope

Hamza's story

Hamza shares how his experience as a Deaf British Muslim man has shaped his mental health journey.

Living in a world that prioritises sound, I have often encountered systemic barriers, cultural assumptions, and a lack of genuine understanding. These experiences have had a lasting impact on my mental health. As someone who stands at the intersection of multiple identities: Deaf, Muslim, and British. I have experienced the weight of exclusion in ways that are both visible and invisible. The silence I live with is not only part of my natural world; it has also been imposed by structures that deny access, representation, and respect. Sharing my story has become a powerful tool for raising awareness and advocating for change.

30 – 60 per cent of deaf people experience mental health issues during their lifetime, more than double the figure for the hearing population.

Derby has one of the largest Deaf communities outside of London, yet research into their specific health needs remains limited.

"I draw upon my experience to highlight the unique struggles faced by Deaf people in mental health services"



I found my conversation with Hamza a really valuable learning experience. He shared information about the deaf community that will really help us with our pathway review.



Golden Pearl: Passion and positivity

Kathryn's story

Kathryn, a neurodivergent woman shares how her personal crisis led to a passion for improving mental health services.

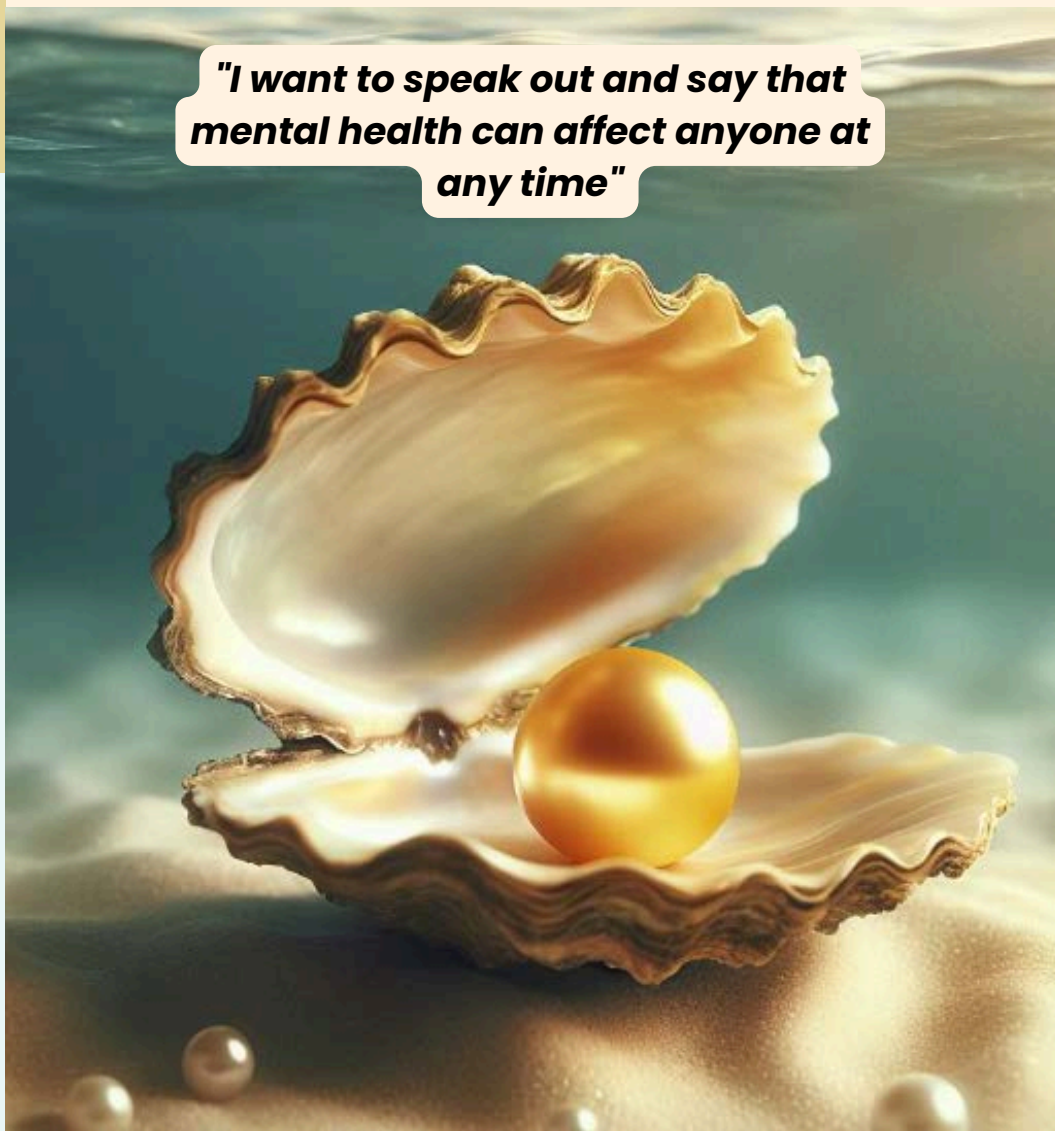
I joined Mental Health Together because I wanted to give back after my own mental health crisis in 2023. To be able to help produce better ways from my own lived experience for Derbyshire NHS to improve their services. Whilst coming together with other Experts by Experience I have found a voice and a passion to really add value and support the challenges that the NHS services are facing. I want the next person who has to use our mental health services to have a positive and rewarding experience, to navigate the services easily and be proud to recommend them. I am keen to offer the perspective of a neurodivergent woman who has been through the trauma of child adoption loss and attempted suicide.

Over a third of adults with a common mental health condition screened positive for ADHD.

Women are slightly more likely than men to screen positive: ~14.9% of women vs ~12.4% of men.

"I want to speak out and say that mental health can affect anyone at any time"

Thank you Kathryn for your thought-provoking and impactful words. We will share them with our staff so they can reflect on them in their daily practice.





Cream Pearl: Truth and wisdom Shelagh's story

Shelagh offers valuable insights a someone who has been sectioned several times and wishes to shape more compassionate mental health practices.

Assessments and a follow on detention to a ward is experienced by many people as very traumatic.

The number of people in contact with secondary mental health services increased by 43% between 2019 and 2024.

My memories are real and offer the valuable perspective of someone who has lived through being sectioned several times but has come out the other side to return to ordinary life, recovered, and able to offer insights into helpful and unhelpful practices. Attending meetings with social workers who carry out Mental Health Act assessments, I have been able to ensure that practitioners really hear what it feels like to be detained and for them to have insight into the trauma that this entails. I have also helped to train ward staff by reflecting on my time spent on wards as a sometimes reluctant patient.

"The collective, supportive voice of Mental Health Together has helped me find my own voice"



Shelagh's focus on therapeutic activity, personalisation, and simply treating people as equals who have goals, is exactly what we needed for our Model of Care training.





Green Pearl: Courage and creativity

Tim's story

Tim's story includes childhood trauma, complex PTSD, and physical health conditions, challenges that inspired him to create a community organisation.

I have battled with my own mental health as a result of childhood trauma, complex PTSD, anxiety and depression. I also have some long term physical health conditions to cope with. Because of my own challenges I am a strong believer that, with the right support, we can still achieve great things. It all starts with a coproduction strategy that enables us to help design really good support services. I set up a not-for-profit organisation, Mindscapes, to support the community with their mental health. We use our lived experience, training, creativity and photography to support ourselves to thrive. We see what works on the ground every day and want to share our insights to improve provision for local people.

30% of the UK population live with one or more long-term conditions, and more than 4 million of these people will also have mental health problems.

Research shows a lack of understanding about the role of creativity for people with a serious mental illness.

"Despite our struggles we can achieve great things"



“**Tim, you have built a fantastic resource for the community in Mindscapes. It was a real privilege to see your work in action.**



White Pearls: Humanity and inclusion Carers' stories

Jean and Rose share their experience of caring for loved ones with mental health conditions, and the struggle to be heard.

Between us we have 40 years experience of caring for family members with a long term mental health condition. We have experienced so much and have valuable insights and ideas to share. It's been very hard to have a voice and we really want to help change that, which is why we joined Mental Health Together. We are keen to improve the relationship between mental health professionals and carers. Often the issue of confidentiality prevents this relationship from developing. It's all about humanity and solving how we can listen to all voices despite some legal constraints around sharing. We need to be able to trust mental health professionals and be given hope of recovery for those we care for.

"For the first time in many years we have been given a voice and a chance to be involved"



Derbyshire has a higher than average percentage of unpaid carers (Derbyshire 10.2% - England 8.7%).

Just under 30% of unpaid carers across Derbyshire spend more than 50 hours a week caring for someone.



It was so helpful to hear Rose and Jean's stories - the experiences they have had and the challenges of being a carer. A good reminder for me that things which are day-to-day for us as professionals may be very scary for clients and carers.





Black Pearl: Compassion and empathy

Matt's story

Matt, who lives with bipolar disorder and has survived attempted suicide, shares how it now empowers him.

I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder a number of years ago and although it was a tough time, it was also a huge relief. I have suffered with suicidal thoughts and even survived suicide. Being an Expert by Experience has given me the chance to share my story with others. I've been told that I have saved at least 3 lives in recent years, just by talking to others. Carrying the Baton of Hope in Derbyshire was a great honour. I've also helped to change letters sent out to mental health patients creating better, clearer and more compassionate communication. I am passionate about using my experiences to support change in mental health services. Poetry is one way in which I share this passion and advocate for better conversations about mental health.

Prevalence of self-harm in the population has increased from 6.4% in 2014 to 10.3% in 2024.

1 in 13 adults report having made a suicide attempt.

"Getting a diagnosis was hard but it was also the beginning of understanding myself"

Thank you, Matt. We are using your insights on a weekly basis to enhance the training we deliver to professionals in Derbyshire, and they are having a powerful impact on audiences.



So, how can you, and your team, benefit from all this fabulous resource?

You are very welcome to contact us for a chat about how you can connect with these voices of lived experience. You may have a project or service that could benefit from their insights. This might be directly related to mental health services or you may need a 'mental health lens' on a different service.

We're very happy to talk it through and find the best way of connecting you.

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Mental Health Together



This publication is dedicated to the memory of Thomas Comer (1992 – 2025) who shared his wisdom so generously.