

## Introduction

Covid-19 highlighted the need for the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to have a more flexible and resilient workforce able to respond to shifts in supply and demand for their service users. Additional staff were needed within in the system across Greater Manchester (GM) to ensure people could get the support they needed quickly.

In response to this, the GM VCSE Leadership Group set up the **GM VCSE Mental Health BANK** - a mechanism to enable organisations that required additional resource to access readily available, trained and experienced practitioners and redirect the resources available to where it was needed to ensure:

- System wide reduction in waiting times and prevention of increases in waiting times.
- Release of the capacity (skills and time) in VCSE workforce.
- Increase in reach and flexibility within local geographical communities and with communities of identity across Greater Manchester.
- Improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes across the region.
- Increased access numbers with a focus on vulnerable, hidden and people from minority communities.

## Supply, demand and surge

The investment in the BANK and this priority project area enabled **42nd Street**, an innovative Greater Manchester young people's mental health charity, to train over 35 practitioners in online support and to second the equivalent of 2 full time members of staff in February 2021 and 0.4 in April 2021.

VCSE therapeutic services across Greater Manchester were forced to move at speed to remote/online working, forcing both practitioners and young people into periods of isolation. As restrictions changed, services

had to work out how to meet the changes in demand and balance the needs and preferences for online/remote support with face-to-face needs.

Following this period, as we came out of lockdown services, they had to consider how to maintain a blended model of support that was high quality and inclusive; that maintained the therapeutic relationships afforded by face-to-face work and was safe, in terms of Information Governance and safeguarding.

*"I provide one to one, mental wellbeing support through an online platform for young people who have self-referred into the service. The work consists of helping young people find ways of managing their mental health and offering a space for young people to be able to talk through what has been going on in their lives. My typical week looked like sessions from 3pm-6pm daily and the mornings full of writing up notes from the previous day's sessions."*

**Mental Health Practitioner.**

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42nd Street were particularly interested in recruiting new practitioners that represented the community of young people they targeted for support including LGBTQ+, BAME, care experienced people, carers and young people with disabilities. Any practitioner that already carried out Mental Health support work with young people (therapists, counsellors, youth workers, social workers) and who had experience of one-to-one support, had a good understanding of safeguarding issues and

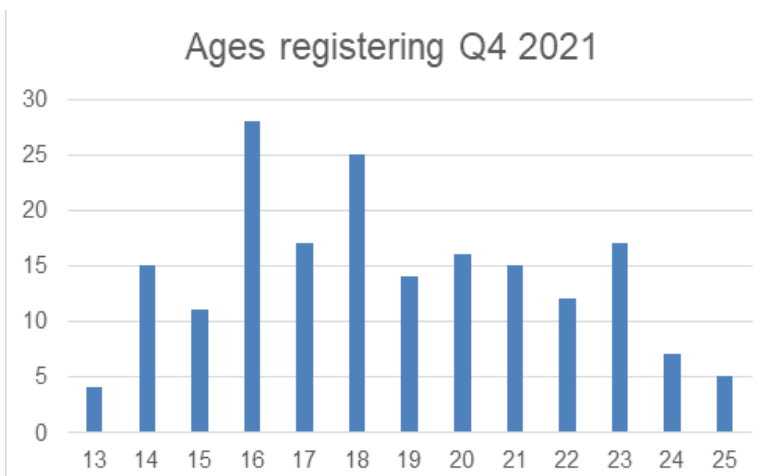
was confident with IT, was eligible to join the workforce for this project.

Each practitioner’s suitability was formally assessed and agreed with the host organisation. 42nd Street ‘buddy’ the secondees up with experienced 42nd Street practitioners, offered ongoing management support, support from the duty team, group supervision sessions and liaised with the host organisation managers.

*“The recurring themes throughout my time at 42nd Street seems to be low mood, social anxiety, managing self-harm, school worries, and family problems. Less common but still present themes where that of suicidal ideation, disordered eating, and sexual/ gender identity exploration.”* Mental Health Practitioner.

## Who was supported

The service supported 13-25 year olds, with the average being 17 years old. The service experienced high trends of identified vulnerable groups and communities accessing the platform.



*“I wanted to have the support and learn some skills of how to manage my emotions better and feel more fulfilled throughout the day, so I thought this sounded just like what I needed and it was great. It was so beneficial and I’m so happy that I was recommended here.”*  
Young Person.

Between January and December 2021, the service reached the following young people:

LGBT+	24.53%
BAME	18.91%
Not in education, training or employment (NEET)	6.3%
Experience of care	4.38%
Young carers	3.93%

Young people supported were based in:

Manchester	48.5%	Wigan	<1%
Salford	20.55%	Stockport	2.53%
Trafford	16.38%	Rochdale	<1%
Tameside	5.58%	Bury	<1%
Oldham	1.6%		

## Impact on waiting times

Prior to the BANK staff being in place, waiting times for mental health support saw peaks during the reopening of schools following the first lockdown, in the summer of 2020, and as Greater Manchester was moved into 'tier 3' during Autumn 2020. Waiting times reached highs of 90 days.

The BANK staff were put in place in late January 2021. By the end of March 2021, waiting times had dropped by approximately 30 days.

By October 2021, further BANK staff were in place and waiting times dropped a further 30 days.

Overall, whilst waiting times remained higher than pre-pandemic figures, the project enabled VCSE organisations to react more quickly to the challenges and needs of individuals.

### Case Study: Aysha, 17

Aysha referred herself for support with 42nd Street in January 2021 because she had feelings of loneliness and a lack of confidence. She was having difficulties at school and struggled regulating her emotions which has caused a rift in her close relationships. Aysha opted for online support via 42nd Street's online platform due to the anonymity offered with text-based support and the ease of attending her sessions remotely.

The sessions comprised of weekly "live chats" of 50 minutes in length where Aysha and the mental health practitioner were present simultaneously. The practitioner used person centred practice and utilised some talking therapy and brief solution focused techniques, where appropriate. Aysha engaged in a total of 12 sessions.

Following support, Aysha was able to identify things which had changed for her since sessions began, including the ability to manage her emotions when upset or angry, being more outgoing and recognising and challenging negative thoughts. She feels her online support has been a big help, just having someone to talk to has helped her to feel less alone and to develop techniques has had profound impact on her life.

### Case Study: Sarah, 17

Sarah became aware of 42nd Street through her GP and decided to register for the service because of her anxiety. She wanted someone to speak to so she didn't feel so alone. Her motivation had been low and she was finding simple tasks impossible.

As part of her support, Sarah and a mental wellbeing practitioner spoke about the 'five ways to wellbeing' and what she could do to look after her wellbeing. She was able to reflect on the different aspects and what she does in her life to be active, connected, learn, give and take notice. They also discussed other things she could do, based on her hobbies and interests that could help Sarah to maintain higher levels of wellbeing.

*"I feel like I can open up more once again because I have someone to talk to who isn't close to me so I don't feel like I can be judged or left for anything I say or any feelings I have."*

Sarah.