

Stockport FLAG

<http://www.stockportflag.org.uk/>

Strategic Context

Stockport council and its partners are developing an integrated health and social care hub model, including information and advice. Four integrated hubs will be created, including the creation of multi-disciplinary professional teams for people with significant health and/or social care needs.

Their vision is that information, advice and services which support well-being and independence will be an integral part of their offer to people at all stages in the customer journey.

Aims of the FLAG service

FLAG provides an independent, free and confidential “assisted signposting” service for people with health and social care needs.

It particularly targets people with low to moderate need, and people who are not eligible for state funding. Its focus is on helping people to find non-traditional solutions, with the ultimate aim of reducing take-up of expensive and statutory services. Its new service specification requires the service to:

“..demonstrate a positive impact on demand for formal or crisis health and social care services in the short, medium and long term”.

Features of the service

FLAG is currently overseen by a consortium of 15 voluntary sector organisations called Synergy. It also has a formal partnership with Healthwatch, and delivers the information and advice aspects of that organisation’s work.

The service was launched to the public in January 2010, following 6 months development, including recruitment of staff.

People can access the service by phone, website or face-to-face at the town centre office. The service also provides extensive outreach; its advisors visit visible locations (such as supermarkets) but also go to venues that are used by priority target groups, such as health centres; the magistrates court; community centres in socially deprived areas; women's groups; ethnic minority groups; stroke support groups, etc. It operated in a total of 15 locations during 2013; the aim, increasingly, is to ensure the service is reaching the most at risk groups.

The service is characterised by its holistic approach; it can deal with a very wide range of issues and typically, people have several of their queries addressed at the same time. Initial contact with a FLAG worker involves "triaging" to identify the full range of needs and to find out if any advocacy support is needed. Referrals are then made to a wide range of specialist organisations (with only 4% of all customers being referred to the council). There is a strong emphasis on linking people to informal (including peer support) networks, rather than to traditional services.



Unusually, all referrals receive a follow up call to make sure that people have not got lost in the system, that they have secured the right support, and that their need/s have been met. One of FLAG's roles is to identify recurring problems and gather feedback from service users to help shape existing and future services in Stockport.

Access to information and Databases

All staff use Stockport's "My Care My Choice" website to ensure a standard quality and pathway of information and advice provision. Since 2012, FLAG has had responsibility for registering services on the "market place" – a web-based resource for people using personal budgets and direct payments.

FLAG is developing its own database of unusual local resources that may not feature on other websites, and they share this with the council's support planning staff. When FLAG workers pick up new information in communities, or find interesting resources on the internet, these are logged in the database. The aim is to make this more accessible and searchable over time.

Special projects

FLAG has been involved in some special projects including:

- **Health and Well-Being check**

There is a "case finding" project, now called the 'Health and Well-Being Check' that started at one GP practice in 2010 and has expanded to four other practices. A questionnaire is sent to every patient annually in the month of their birthday by their GP to establish whether they have emerging health or social needs. Where there appear to be issues of concern, the person is contacted by an Age UK worker or by Stockport FLAG, who are able to have more in-depth discussions about a range of issues. There are plans to build on this work to develop community navigator services in each of 4 integrated hubs.

- **Support after Reablement**

The partners involved in this project are FLAG, Age UK Stockport, and Adult Social Care. People being discharged from the Adult Social Care Reablement service and not going on to receive a longer term package of care are offered a referral to FLAG/Age UK Stockport to access information or advice about their future support options, including opportunities to get more involved in the community.

- **People-powered health for people with mental health needs**

People Powered Health is a personalised targeted prevention service. It operates from a number of locations including GP surgeries, with Stockport FLAG providing advice and signposting, and Stockport Mind providing personalised support planning where required. A key aim is the linking of people to peer mentors and other motivating approaches.

- **Self-serve kiosks**

An interesting development for the future is a new service that is starting in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau, with funding from the Big Lottery. People will be able to access information at self-serve kiosks, and be signposted to FLAG or the CAB if they need assisted signposting. This may be a way of managing increased pressures on both services, as it is recognised that some people only need information and can manage the rest for themselves.

Promoting the service

Staff work hard at promoting the service. They deliver training and briefing sessions to team meetings of social workers/rehabilitation workers/voluntary sector partners. A network of volunteer “FLAG champions” (who are former customers) has been recruited to help promote the service.

Quality

The FLAG service has a strong commitment to customer service and has achieved the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) standard (at “Compliance Plus” level). The advisors achieve (or are working towards) NVQ level 3 in information and advice.

Surveys suggest that customer satisfaction levels are very high.

Resources

The annual funding for FLAG in 2012-13 was around £180,000 from the council.

The service has 3.5 fte staff employing 9 part-time people: Project manager, Senior Advisor, 6 Advisors and an Administrative Officer.

The advisors come from a range of backgrounds; all are educated to degree level, and they have a variety of specialist knowledge (ranging from legal issues, nursing, domestic violence work, learning disability, etc). They are skilled at dealing with people who have emotional problems, are under stress or undergoing a crisis.

Monitoring

FLAG has rigorous monitoring systems, resulting in the production of a good quarterly monitoring report which includes both quantitative and qualitative information. Some of the relevant data are reported below.

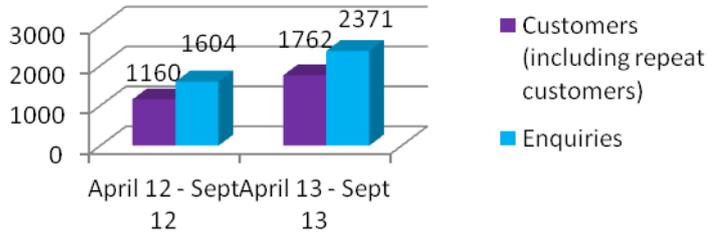
Referrals to FLAG have been rising sharply – to over 1700 from April to September 2013 (i.e. potentially, 3,500 per annum). This increase in referrals has led to a reduction in the unit cost of the service - which is possibly £5 per enquiry rising to £15 for more complex cases.

The website has around 1500 unique visitors (and more than 2000 hits) per quarter.

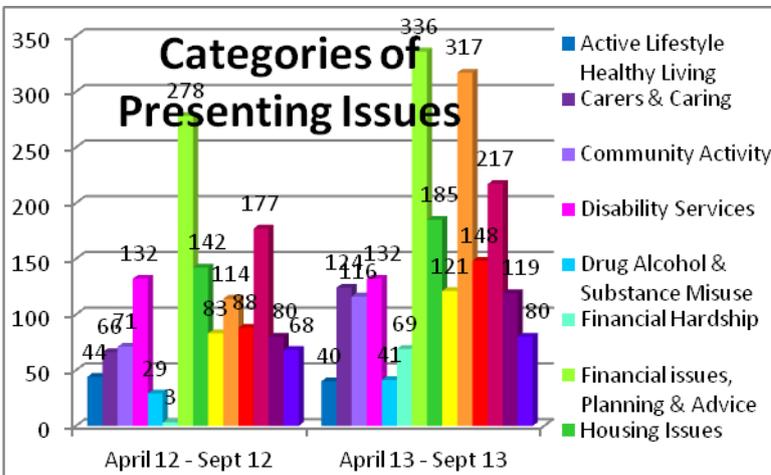
FLAG monitors customers' presenting issues using standard categories, and has registered a big increase in enquiries relating to financial problems, and to mental health/wellbeing (see below).

Whilst most people self-refer, FLAG is building referrals from the council's contact centre (for people who are not eligible for formal support). Also, an increasing number of GPs ring FLAG whilst the patient is with them, in order to "socially prescribe" directly into FLAG. The wide range of responses to the question, "where did you hear about FLAG?" illustrates the importance of wide marketing and proactive outreach.

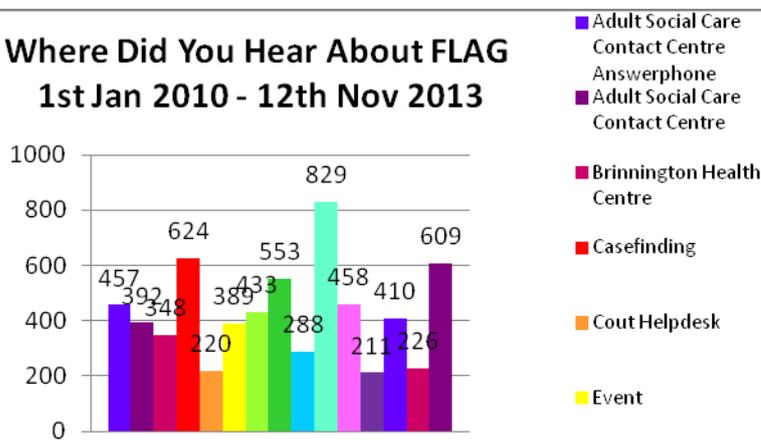
Numbers of Customers and Enquiries Comparison



Categories of Presenting Issues



Where Did You Hear About FLAG 1st Jan 2010 - 12th Nov 2013



A new specification for the project is being developed, through collaboration between the council and FLAG. This envisages the collection of more informative outcomes, including health outcomes, data. The commissioners believe that in time, it should be possible to drill down into specific issues (such as the incidence of falls, mental wellbeing etc) which have particular strategic relevance. The council also wants FLAG to work on “quantifying its contribution to the wider health and social care economy in terms of **cost benefit**”.

Learning from this project

- For the provider, a key issue for the future is how this service can be scaled up without losing quality. This may need to entail a slightly more differentiated approach, that depends on a judgement about people’s own capacity: perhaps, more people should be helped to self-serve rather than receive a full advice service.
- Local commissioning agencies have an ambition to retain a “universal” service but believe that this needs to be balanced with targeting priority areas and groups.
- The commissioners are currently looking at how the current information and advice service model fits with the vision for integrated locality-based “hubs”. The hubs include services and support designed to prevent those ‘at risk’ of deterioration and loss of independence; stability services which can quickly respond to an emerging crisis or support people to return to independent living in their own homes; right through to the creation of multi-disciplinary teams to support the cohort of more vulnerable people with more complex needs.
- A key issue is how good information and advice can be made available throughout customers’ journeys, preventing further deterioration, including for people with critical and substantial levels of need.