

The St Giles Peer Advisor Network

Impact Evaluation

April 2024

JHCONSULTING

Introduction

The Peer Advisor Network ran from 2019 to 2024. Funded through the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) and delivered by St Giles it had the four key aims of:

- Creating new Peer Advisors to provide local organisations with a pool of potential skilled labour with lived experience backgrounds.
- Improving organisations' connections with their local communities, particularly with people with lived experience, so that they can thrive as volunteers and employees.
- Establishing an evidence base and foundations for system change in the way that services are delivered for the most socially excluded people.
- Engaging and supporting more vulnerable people and creating greater impact within local communities through the use of volunteers with lived experience.

This impact evaluation was commissioned in 2023 to identify and summarise achievements in reaching these aims and in particular to explore the difference that the Peer Advisor Network has made for people, organisations and communities.

This document provides a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates the significant and wide ranging positive impacts that the project has had, and continues to have, presented in the following sections:

The Peer Advisor Network: five things to know	2
The Network in numbers	5
A legacy for lived experience creating systems change	6
Where next?	10
The Power of the Peer Advisor Network: a selection of stories	11

The Peer Advisor Network: five things to know

Between 2019 and 2024, including through the unprecedented Covid 19 pandemic, the St Giles Peer Advisor Network has brought opportunities to overcome adversity and create more positive futures for some of the most disadvantaged people and communities across the UK. The training and support provided for volunteers and organisations has started a chain reaction – enabling people’s lived experience of disadvantage to be the catalyst for change, leaving a lasting impact that communities continue to build on.

1. Turning around lives of disadvantage through the power of the Peer Advisor Network

The training and support given through the Peer Advisor Network helps people in some of the most difficult and challenging circumstances to turn their lives around. Through becoming trained volunteers and paid workers they go on to make a real, sometimes life-saving difference for others, using the power of their lived experience and skill.

“Steven wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for St Giles and Jamie. I’m so grateful for the support.....Having the training that Jamie did at St Giles changes people lives and then they go on to change other people’s lives like Steven’s.....It gives us hope.” Julie, mum of Steven being supported by Jamie, a trained Peer Advisor with a background of addiction and offending now working as a paid outreach worker.

“I went through a lot of stress in UK. I was all alone when I claimed asylum.... and that has taken a lot of toll on me. I cannot appreciate St Giles enough. Each of my clients, I have my own way of working with them. I know how to advise and I have the freedom to advise them. I can translate for the organisation. The clients with similar backgrounds, always ask for me and we can speak the same language. I know what they’re going through and I can help.” Barzan, whose asylum claim took 7 years to approve, then started volunteering as a Peer Advisor at a refugee day centre where he continues alongside studying for a master’s degree in Human Rights

2. Spreading positive impact far and wide for people and communities

Some Peer Advisors have gained the self-confidence to start up services in their own communities, opening up access to skilled support for vulnerable people from someone who’s been there – like Celeste’s service for women experiencing domestic abuse; or Daniel’s support group for parents whose children are affected by gang exploitation; or Carol’s welcoming café where people can come and get advice without the stigma of being seen as someone who needs it. These new services, as well as those in partner organisations are also encouraging others with lived experience to train as Peer Advisors, increasing the reach and depth of help available in communities and providing a lasting legacy.

“Doing the training and setting up the service has given me my voice back, the confidence to go and do this for me. From St Giles it’s not just the NVQ, it’s the care and support they’ve given me. My kids talk openly about what I do and I think they’re proud. My son watched me disappear with the abuse. One of my former clients has now started the Learning to Advise course with St Giles and she’ll do her volunteering with the St Giles Pantry but would like to come and work with me too.” Celeste who survived childhood abuse and domestic violence who has now set up a community based service for women experiencing abuse

"I set up a group with my partner in my community for parents whose children were involved with crime and exploitation – because of what was happening with people I knew. The things I learnt on the IAG helped massively with setting that up and how to help people." **Daniel who was involved in gangs and after becoming a Peer Advisor is now working in a local authority youth engagement team.**

"Six years ago I was homeless, there was nothing good in my life. Now I've got a partner, children and paid job. Everything positive seems to find me now. I manage Jess who's got her qualification now and St Giles has already asked if I can take another volunteer. It gives you so much confidence." **Dave, who was homeless after a history of addiction and offending who now manages a supported housing project and Jess, a new volunteer Peer Advisor**

"From being in debt, scratching around for pennies for drugs, now I get up every morning and give something back, I've got money to buy new clothes and all those things. My kids are proud of me and my whole extended family too. Doing something like this has a ripple effect too – people stop crime, there are less victims, communities are safer." **Jess, Peer Advisor managed by Dave**

3. Changing and developing services so they can reach those most in need across communities

The central ethos of the Peer Advisor Network – harnessing the positive power of lived experience through training and skills development so that vulnerable people can access effective support – has created a movement across partner organisations. From those who had not considered it, to those who had volunteers with lived experience but lacked training and progression opportunities for them, the Peer Advisor Network has made a real difference. The Network's support has enabled organisations to recruit volunteers and staff with lived experience of crime – one of the most challenging areas.

"There was some anxiety about it, particularly because Daniel comes from the area that he would be working in. But we felt we had to take the risk to recruit someone who could genuinely engage with young people... He's changed who we've recruited subsequently and our processes. We're looking for 'right matches' not just professionals." **Local authority youth engagement team manager of Daniel, the first team member with lived experience of gang involvement, who has now been recognised as an Advocate for Social Justice by the local authority**

"Being involved with St Giles and the Peer Advisor training has really strengthened how we take on volunteers. For example, doesn't matter if they have a criminal record, we have the processes and systems in place now to deal with that. The volunteers put together a book that details the recruitment process. It gives the volunteers ownership and at the same time makes sure that everything is done properly. There's also been a big impact on service delivery. Volunteers with the LTA are now doing roles previously only done by paid staff." **Feathers Futures – a community organisation for vulnerable women.**

*"We've never had a ROTL volunteer before. Mark's become a real role model for prisoners and staff, more so than any other prisoner on ROTL. A lot of staff didn't really get the value of ROTL and using lived experience but what Mark's doing is changing that....One staff member said 'I didn't realise we've got a prisoner giving advice to people who need it – that's quite amazing.'" **Prison Officer responsible for Mark who is on day release (ROTL) from prison and has now gained a part-time paid job in a St Giles Pantry***

4. Growing volunteering and professionalism with the power of lived experience

Across the UK, the Peer Advisor Network has helped organisations to develop accredited volunteering pathways that enable more people with lived experience to access opportunities to grow, learn and go on to support more people in need of their specialist help. In North Wales and Scotland where St Giles did not have a presence and there was little accredited volunteer training or support for organisations to involve people with experience, the Peer Advisor Network has made a particularly huge impact, kickstarting movements that have real momentum to continue the transformation of services. The Network has also made a significant contribution to helping to rebuild volunteering after the negative impacts of the pandemic.

“We’re a small organisation and the Peer Advisors mean that we’ve been able to increase the volume of delivery. Some are still with us and others have gone on to get support jobs with other organisations. One Peer who moved to the South of England runs an online group for women at the weekend. She’s still in touch with us. It’s incredible when you think that some of these guys haven’t been in a job for decades....Professionalism has improved across the board. They come to us with new ideas and better practice.” **South Lanarkshire Recovery Project, Scotland where 14 volunteers become Peer Advisors**

“Since getting involved with St Giles we’ve got a proper volunteering pathway and properly trained volunteers. The impact has been huge. Our funders are impressed with this and that’s good for us. We’ve grown because of that – our volunteers can offer more services to more women and demand is rising....where we are on the map means we’re often overlooked, we’re an afterthought, so the St Giles training and support is great.” **Feathers Futures, a women’s organisation in Great Yarmouth**

“What St Giles is attempting to do is incredibly valuable and much needed. The support that people like Dave and Jess give to people is deeply genuine. They haven’t just chosen a profession, they have a real, deep genuine care. It’s far from just a job.” **Manager at Green Pastures – a supported housing organisation that hasn’t previously employed people with lived experience on this project in North Wales**

5. Encouraging understanding that brings people and communities together

The Peer Advisor programme brings together people from hugely diverse backgrounds from those who have experienced abuse, trauma and exploitation, to those who are continuing to recover from addiction and lives of crime, to those who have been subject to racism and other prejudice. In Northern Ireland, people from across communities have trained together, helping to break down historical divisions. Learning together helps people to understand each other, and then Peer Advisors take their skills and lived experience to organisations who are able to see them, and disadvantage, differently.

“A lot of people from different background like addiction or others. I think it was really helpful and supportive to go through the course - there was understanding of diversity and people and their differences and needs.” **Barzan, whose asylum claim took 7 years to approve, then started volunteering as a Peer Advisor at a refugee centre where he continues whilst studying for a master’s degree in Human Rights**

“He can articulate his experience like absent fathers and gang affiliation in such a way that I can understand better. He helps the team see things differently....Recently, a 15 year old was stabbed outside of his school. Daniel was a voice in the community, asking for a meeting across the community to bring about change. That helped to bring the community together. He’s respected at work and in the community.”

Local authority youth engagement team manager of Daniel, the first staff with lived experience of gang involvement

“I knew a lot of the group had experience of the criminal justice system, I hadn’t, but what it did for me was open my eyes to their situation and took away a lot of the prejudices I had previously. I guess I thought going forward if I ever became a manager again or employing staff, I would have a different view of employing people with a criminal record because that isn’t the whole person it is just something that happened in their life in the past. So, it changed my perspective of people who had been involved in the criminal justice system.” **Colin, who experienced many years of alcohol addiction and now works in Adult Social Services**

The Network in numbers

- ★ **7 hubs across the UK** – East of England, Midlands, West Yorkshire, North Wales, London, Scotland, Northern Ireland serving a diverse range of local communities and neighbourhoods
- ★ **586 Peer Advisors with lived experience of disadvantage trained** in advice, guidance and support, with 98% moving into volunteering positions
- ★ **100% of Peer Advisors reporting greater self-confidence**, resilience and ability to move into work
- ★ **239 trained volunteers moving into paid posts**, with 68% of these in advice, guidance and support roles across the voluntary and statutory sectors
- ★ **Over 11,500 vulnerable people benefitting** from the support of a trained and skilled Peer Advisor with lived experience
- ★ **168 voluntary and statutory partners hosting volunteers** and/or employing Peer Advisor graduates and developing their inclusion of people with lived experience in service design and delivery
- ★ **7 service sectors enhanced** through the work of trained volunteers and paid support workers with lived experience – youth exploitation and criminal justice, addiction recovery, homelessness, domestic violence, food poverty
- ★ **23 Peer Advisors working in 9 St Giles Pantries across England and Wales** with around a quarter going on to work in paid roles. The Pantries have so far provided food help to over 2,000 households, with half of these also accessing additional in depth support
- ★ **Over 30 other projects and initiatives worth over £7m in additional investment** created by and/or benefiting from the Peer Advisor Network

A legacy for lived experience creating systems change

The St Giles Peer Advisor Network has been the launch pad for over £7m worth of new St Giles projects and initiatives across the UK that are continuing the legacy of involving people with lived experience from local communities helping to change the face of services and support for people at disadvantage.

Each of these projects has the Peer Advisor model at their heart, with services shaped by the lived experience of local volunteers and paid staff so that they meet the needs of marginalised people and communities. This rich mix of activity and the positive legacy it brings would not have been possible without the ground breaking work of the Peer Advisor Network, as the following examples illustrate.

Supporting people involved in the criminal justice system (CJS), linking prisons and communities together positively. St Giles has worked with the CJS for many years, but the Peer Advisor Network has kick started innovation, ensuring that people's lived experience of the CJS is valued and used meaningfully to improve probation services. The work is also revitalising the work in prisons, enabling trained and skilled peer support in custody, supporting better mental health, reducing violence and improving the prison environment for offenders and those working in the service:

- ***Engaging People on Probation***, a major national initiative with 50 trained Peer Consultants with lived experience helping to assess and improve how the Probation Service engage their clients – changing mindsets and cultures so that the service can engage offenders much more effectively. **Ministry of Justice**
- ***London Probation Service User Engagement*** – Peer Evaluators trained by St Giles working with Integrated Offender Management so that people with lived experience are involved in service design and commissioning thereby improving how this system works to rehabilitate offenders. **London Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime**
- ***Projects building skills, resilience and positive progression*** across 12 prisons in England and Wales, including a Youth Offending Institution. Delivering the Peer Advisor programme for those in custody, so that offenders can help their peers in prison, on temporary day release in volunteering and paid roles in the community and in paid support roles when they are released. This includes piloting a Youth Work qualification in a women's prison. **HMPPS, Goldsmiths and City & Guilds, St Giles**
- ***Aspiring Champions Cardiff***, in partnership with Youth Cymru – supporting the rehabilitation of young men aged 18-25 through offering the Peer Advisor training to develop skills and establish a model of peer support. **Nationwide Community Fund**
- ***Reset*** – St Giles Peer Evaluators providing lived experience input with City & Guilds to develop their Reset tool designed to help to identify positive attributes that people in custody can use to turn their lives around.

Improving services for women experiencing poverty, marginalisation, mental health issues, domestic abuse and sexual violence – inspired by the possibilities created by the Peer Advisor Network, ensuring the voice of women with lived experience of domestic abuse and sexual violence is heard in the development of statutory services; supporting grassroots organisations in their own deprived communities to empower women to become community champions who can work with more women to fulfil their potential:

- **Women Rising, Enabling Neighbourhoods (WREN)** – a grassroots project for 14 small frontline women-led organisations providing services across four marginalised communities in the East and South East of England. Over 100 local community champions have gone on to support around 1,500 other women and helped to build hope and resilience. Grass roots organisations now have a structure and progression routes for volunteers with lived experience, expanding and developing the services available to women. **Tampon Tax Fund**
- **NHS Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence programme** - influencing, challenging and improving services within the NHS for people who have experienced abuse and sexual violence in the home and/or at work, including in sexual health clinics, to understand and address why some women may not access services. This includes 'experts by experience' involved in developing a 'sexual safety charter'. **NHS**
- **Aspiring Champions Rhyl** working with young mothers and their families on the Rhydwen estate, one of the most deprived communities in Wales, using the peer model to develop community champions who can engage local people so that they can develop their skills and open up work opportunities. **Nationwide Community Fund**

Making a difference for communities and people who have been left behind by disadvantage, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Using peer research and the peer model to provide support that really understands the barriers facing people, developing and delivering truly accessible, respectful and welcoming services to help people move out of poverty and despair:

- **Widening Access to Peer Programme** – working in partnership with Groundwork and Princes Trust, focusing on people most at risk of being left behind post COVID – those from minority ethnic backgrounds, older people and disabled people. Soft engagement to help people gain the confidence to tackling isolation and improve their lives – using public transport, being with others and getting involved in training, including becoming Peer Advisors to support others. **European Social Fund & National Lottery Communities Fund (NLCF)**
- **St Giles Pantry network** – across England and Wales, 9 Pantries that not only provide welcoming 'social supermarkets' for those facing food poverty – equating to 1.4 million meals to date – but an open door for support with debt, benefits, mental health issues, housing problems and more. Using the Peer Advisor model, these vital services are managed, shaped and delivered by local volunteers and staff with lived experience – many who are graduates of the Peer programme. Making support local, easy to access, dignified and effective. **Various funders including one local authority**
- **Research into the long term impact of Covid** – involving Peer Evaluators in interview design and delivery, speaking to people to understand in more detail, from a lived experience perspective, the barriers faced by those already at disadvantage before the pandemic and how to tackle them, and using the resulting research to shape new provision. **NLCF**

Supporting young people and their communities facing disadvantage and the particularly negative impacts for them of the pandemic. Young people are included in many of the Peer Advisor Network legacy initiatives. But the projects outlined here have a specific focus on helping them to develop skills that can overcome disadvantage as well as creating a pool of trained peer volunteer and paid roles where their lived experience can help other young people in similar circumstances:

- **Young People's Introduction to Peer Support** – Across England and Wales, dedicated and tailored help for unemployed or economically inactive young people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, including Learning to Advise training as a stepping stone to higher qualifications and paid support roles or other kinds of work. In Wales, young people are also offered training in Youth Work Principles as part of the Youth Hub Pilot. **Communities Aid Foundation**
- **We Move Social Action** – Engaging young peers from the deprived Grangetown Somali community in Cardiff, to involve their narrative in the co-production of services and social action projects for Somali young people in Cardiff. This work is entering its second phase developing Youth Peers and trained youth workers. **Children in Need**
- **Community Champions Tackling Youth Violence** – in partnership with the London Borough of Lambeth, training residents from two estates that suffered from serious criminal exploitation of young people resulting in two young men being victims of knife crime. The Community Champions trained through the Peer Advisor programme and went on to set up surgeries for young people and their families on the estates. **London Borough of Lambeth**

Influencing wider research, design and development across organisations with the power of lived experience. The Peer Advisor programme is about finding a different way to open up opportunity and equality for people with lived experience of disadvantage. This can't rest on training. It's about the much wider potential for people with lived experience to be at the heart of voicing what they need and how they need it to be delivered. These initiatives are just some of the ways that this is continuing to happen:

- **Aberdulais Green Heritage Community Wellbeing Hub National Trust** – a new strategic partnership with the National Trust, training and supporting people with lived experience to become heritage and tourism guides in National Trust properties. This project will be evaluated and used as a model of best practice to be rolled out across other National Trust sites and discussions are ongoing with City and Guilds to develop a new suite of training accredited units to support this work. **Neath Port Talbot Borough Council Heritage, Conservation & Tourism Fund**
- **The St Giles Lived Experience Toolkit** – directly influenced by the success of the Peer Advisor Network, this toolkit is co-produced with and tested by grass roots organisations. Designed to help organisations of all sizes and sectors who want to involve people with lived experience in their work – from trustees to front line roles. It includes self-assessment and resources and is being trialled and refined nationally. **Tampon Tax Fund**
- **Strategic Volunteering Wales** – the development of a peer, lived experience Volunteering Model for Wales in partnership with University Wales Trinity St Davids. This includes a live trial of 15 Lived Experience Volunteer Placements across sectors, co-production of a Lived Experience Volunteer Support Package for Wales and further development of the St Giles Lived Experience Toolkit and

support to meet the needs of Welsh organisations and communities. From this work the Aspire Hub Wales is now being established. **Wales Council for Voluntary Action**

- **Taith Peer Exchange Programme to Norway** – 4 peer learners and 5 staff on an international exchange to Norway to visit a Peer Led Expert College. **Welsh Government Taith International Exchange Programme**

Powering St Giles’ ability to continue delivering on the commitment to lived experience, internally and for communities and partners. Across the regions and nations, the legacy of the Peer Advisor Network is continuing, shaped by the dialogue and partnerships with communities, and supported by strong internal St Giles developments that give the tools to deliver:

- **St Giles Peer Evaluators and Researchers** – harnessing the potential of lived experience to create meaningful research and evaluation that give a new perspective on reviewing services and identifying needs. 34 people have been trained and are delivering assignments across England and Wales, ranging from domestic violence to poverty to the impact of Covid. These skilled Peers work within St Giles and with other organisations including Rocket Science, City & Guilds, Wise, NHS, AVA and JH Consulting. Neighbourly Lab is now working with St Giles to develop a train the trainers package that will continue to develop and grow this innovative service.
- **Becoming a City & Guilds (C&G) Assessment Centre**, enabling St Giles to work with C&G to develop new assured qualifications to meet the needs of wide-ranging client groups, and to deliver more train the trainer provision that places the power to shape and continue the work in the hands of the communities that need it.
- **Kickstarting new local support services in Wales** – the Peer Advisor network has been the catalyst to enable North Wales to establish really significant links with communities through delivering training and support that has led to new services such as the Pantri at Colwyn Bay, in partnership with Adferiad; strong links with Berwyn Prison benefiting the community; and Peer Advisors going on to set up their own community based services.
- **Bringing the lived experience model to Northern Ireland** – establishing a brand new initiative in Northern Ireland was a real challenge – St Giles was completely unknown and the idea of people with lived experience helping to shape and deliver services was not on the radar. Despite this, people from across diverse communities were able to train together, helping to break down barriers. Relationships were developed with organisations from those helping affected by modern slavery, to food poverty, offending and exclusion, starting a dialogue about the potential for harnessing lived experience.
- **Growing recovery communities in Scotland** – the legacy of the Peer programme means that local organisations continue to offer an expanded range of services to many more of the most vulnerable people, helping to tackle the addiction issues that are particularly acute in Scotland. New partnerships have been forged with a range of specialist addiction and other organisations, as well as the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and the Wise group who continue to work with St Giles to secure a legacy for the work.

Where next?

The legacy of the Peer Advisor Network is evident across the UK and Northern Ireland and it's clear that this has created a momentum, with each region tailoring future development to meet the needs and aspirations of local people and their communities and neighbourhoods. To help maximise and sustain this impact, St Giles should consider:

- **Encouraging more community rooted networks and groups to be established by peer Advisor 'graduates'** by developing further training and support for them so that the lived experience of local people can drive services that meet the needs of neighbourhoods. This could include bespoke leadership, mentoring and management training.
- **Enabling community champions to train more volunteers with lived experience** by continuing the work to deliver community based 'train the trainer' provision, putting the power of building capacity in the hands of those who best understand the needs.
- **Driving forward the recognition and recruitment of people with lived experience as volunteers and paid staff in areas and organisations that are new to this idea**, by continuing to trial and further develop the Lived Experience toolkit, including through co-production.
- **Widening the practice of involving the unique perspective of people with lived experience to shape more systems, structures and services** so that those at disadvantage are able to access and benefit from support more easily and effectively. This should include further development of training and opportunities for Peer Consultants, Evaluators and Researchers.
- **Establishing a lived experience community of practice:** St Giles is in a pivotal position to bring together groups and organisations to establish a community of practice that can act as a forum for developing and sharing effective approaches that can create a critical mass and groundswell for change.

The Power of the Peer Advisor Network

There is a wealth of stories that bring to life the positive change that the Peer Advisor Network has brought for individuals, organisations and communities. The three first hand narratives that follow illustrate just a fraction of the range and depth of the impact. A further three stories, brought to life in graphics can be found here:

Mark's story: <https://youtu.be/BSfhRp6Wr-8>

Jackie's story: <https://youtu.be/MEbBMRjXErk>

Daniel's story: <https://youtu.be/1uSS4oR1uuk>

Celeste's story

★ Overcoming domestic violence

★ Establishing a local community service supporting women and girls with similar issues

★ Influencing a women's gym to become a mental health hub

★ Coming full circle by inspiring an ex-client to become a Peer Advisor and volunteer

★ Being a role model for a son and daughter

"I've had a lot of abuse in my life. I was abused as a child and went through domestic violence for five years with the father of my daughter. We'd been separated for about three years but he was still using a lot of controlling behaviour and at the beginning of the first lockdown he assaulted me on my doorstep. The police and a DV organisation got involved at that point and that really opened my eyes to the help that was out there.

He (ex-partner) stopped having contact with my daughter and then it was going through the criminal and family courts to get restraining orders and all that. It was at the contact centre that I met Kate from St Giles. She was there as a volunteer, not part of her paid job. I got on really well with Kate and we talked about St Giles and what they did. I couldn't start anything then because of Kate's role as a volunteer in the contact centre, but as soon as I could I started the NVQ work just on my own ahead of doing the course to get a feel for it.

The course satisfied my soul. It really hit me how important learning about those subjects is – trauma, mental health, diversity. And how important your lived experience and the tools you have used to overcome things is so that you can give peer support. I was nervous about the course. I grew up in a religious household where further education wasn't encouraged. I left school at 16 and I'm also dyslexic and I didn't realise how much until I started the course. But I can't speak highly enough of the training. It was fantastic – not too formal, not intimidating and very easy for anybody. I'm still in contact with another woman I met on the course.

I was working three jobs at that point and one of them was in a women's gym. Once I'd done the Learning to Advise course I asked the gym owner if I could start offering support to some of the

women that came in. I did that as a volunteer and it also meant I could get my full qualification – St Giles came and observed me when I was doing some of the one-to-one work.

Once I'd got the qualification I approached my boss in the gym again to see if I could set up a space there to run the support. I had a room with a sofa and things so it was comfortable and welcoming. And because it's in the gym, women got to know about it. But it was daunting starting things off on my own – doing social media and that kind of thing. My first client came with her 16 year old daughter and then her friend came. And then more kept on coming. The daughters come too because they are so affected. It was a surprise that younger ones would come.

My boss thinks it's brilliant. When I started the training she decided to do some learning and training to set up a more of a mental health gym – not just the physical side. She's done that and has changed the name to a Women's Hub to show that it's for all round wellbeing.

I've just moved out of the gym and I'm in the process of setting up on my own. I've moved house and am keeping on seeing clients – we have coffee, go for walks – whilst I sort out where I'll locate things. I've given up one of my jobs so I can devote more time to it. The St Giles manager is helping me with that. One of my former clients has now started the Learning to Advise course with St Giles and she'll do her volunteering with the St Giles Pantry but would like to come and work with me too.

Doing the training and setting up the service has given me my voice back – the confidence to go and do this for me. From St Giles it's not just the NVQ, it's the care and support they've given me. My kids talk openly about what I do and I think they're proud. My son watched me disappear with the abuse. For him to see me come back is a good example for him."

Jamie's story

★ Overcoming trauma, addiction and criminality

★ Getting a qualification after little previous engagement with education

★ Going above and beyond to support the most vulnerable out on the streets of the local community

★ Helping clients and their families in crisis who have nowhere else to turn

★ Being part of a professional team involving criminal justice

"I was a painter and decorator by trade but I had big addictions to drugs and alcohol. I started at 11 and by 14 I was nightclubbing. When I was 18 my grandad died. He was very important to me and I started drinking even more. At 21 I had a bad car crash and my best friend died in it. I was there with him dead beside me. So by my twenties I was drinking, thieving and being arrested. The last time I was arrested I had a knife on me. I was given a suspended sentence on condition I went into rehab. It was there I found out about St Giles.

I realised I wanted to help other people with similar problems to me. I did the Peer Advisor training and it was hard but I knew I needed to do it and I kept pushing. I'd never really been to school properly and I've always put myself down, saying I'm thick. I volunteered on two St Giles projects for prison leavers. A lot of them had problems similar to mine and we could relate to each other. Then I got a paid support worker job with Touchstone (organisation offering a range of mental health and other wellbeing services). Then I got a job back with St Giles and now I'm working as part of a Liaison and Diversion team with people who get arrested.

I've been in paid work for about 18 months now and I'm two years clean. You can want to help people but you need people to support you and give you the training so you can actually do that. I really enjoy my job. I do detached work at night as well – going to spots where young people are to engage with them and try to help them avoid getting into what I did. We do cell interventions where we go into a police cell and talk to the person who's been arrested. I like to share a bit of my background so they know that I'm not speaking from a text book. It helps to build that trust. I've got a client who went into detox a couple of weeks ago and they've told me that he's doing really well. That makes me feel so good, and it helps my continuing recovery too.

I do talks on the LTA course and I go to rehab to tell people about it. I think 'well it's really helped me' and it might just help someone else. I did a speech for St Giles 60th birthday celebration. It was a huge room of people. I'm quite a shy person and it really built up my confidence.

One of the clients I'm helping at the moment got sent to prison on remand for an offence that he committed before we were working with him. He's back in court next month and I'll see him then so that if he gets a custodial sentence we can carry on keeping in touch and support him when he's released. In the meantime I work with his mam and stepdad – I'm helping them with things like his property and just keeping in touch with them.

I've never looked back since I started with St Giles. It's the best thing that's ever happened to me. If it wasn't for St Giles and the Peer Advisor programme I'd be dead now or in prison. My family had given up on me. I'd lost everything. Now I'm back with my partner and I've got a lovely house to live in. St Giles have been one thousand percent supportive – they really value people with lived experience. It's not well known enough what St Giles does and there's such a need for it."

Julie – the mum of Steven, a client that Jamie is helping

"My son Steven has a lot of mental health problems. He's got ADHD and learning difficulties and he suffers with depression. He attempted suicide five times in the space of six months. He takes drugs. He started with weed because it helps with his ADHD – the doctor wouldn't prescribe any drugs for him. Then he got into Class As and that's when everything changed.

He's 34 and no-one has ever really helped him. When he ends up in hospital they just say there's nothing they can do for him. He has literally begged for help so many times. Last summer he was attacked taking drugs and when he ended up in A&E again the police gave him a leaflet about the Liaison and Diversion. When we contacted them and spoke to Jamie it was like a breath of fresh air. Steven could identify with him straight away because he had a similar background with the drug taking and police stuff. He said, 'He gets it Mam'. If he'd been a pen pusher he wouldn't have

spoken to him. He's got a way with Steven. When Jamie says what would be best to do, Steven wants to do it because he has that connection.

Having Jamie makes you feel that you have someone on your side to help you in a system that you don't understand. Steven wanted to get off the merry-go-round of drugs and trouble but he had no-one to help him do that. When Jamie came along he had someone.

Jamie took Steven under his wing and helped with everything. He set up appointments with doctors, found Steven somewhere to live. Went to appointments with him. Went to court with him. And he talked to Steven. He helped to keep him safe. Steven was tagged to begin with and he wanted to go and stay with his new girlfriend and that would have meant breaking his curfew. Jamie went with Steven to court to explain and they got things changed so that he didn't breach it.

At the moment, Steven's in prison for something that happened before Jamie met him. His girlfriend back then accused him of attacking her but she was having a psychotic episode and so she also says she can't really remember anything. Steven was out getting drugs at the time. He's been in trouble a lot over the years, but nothing that serious and this is the first time he's been in prison. The girlfriend committed suicide earlier this year and sent him off into another spiral. When he finally had his court appearance the judge decided to send him into prison – I think he'd just made up his mind without the case even being heard – he called him a massive danger.

He's in court again in April and we hope he'll be able to get out. He's on a red regime so he's locked up 23 hours a day. It took a month to get his anti-depressants for him. And he wasn't getting my letters so he thought I'd deserted him. Jamie has kept in touch with me all the way through and he's even been trying to help keep Steven's housing for him for when he gets out, but I think we might lose that even with his efforts. I know Jamie's hoping to talk to Steven whilst he's inside and help him too when he gets out. It gives us hope.

I'd resigned myself that I'd lose Steven to suicide and then Jamie came along. Now I know there's someone else out there who wants him to live, besides me. Steven wouldn't be here if it wasn't for St Giles and Jamie. I'm so grateful for the support. He's there for me too and it's invaluable. Having the training that Jamie did at St Giles changes people's lives and then they go on to change other people's lives like Steven's. He goes above and beyond for us, it's way beyond anything I expected."

Jamie's Manager at the Liaison and Diversion Service

"I've worked in Liaison and Diversion since 2017 and since 2021 I've managed the service across two areas that are very different and with very different issues. The first person from St Giles that joined our team was Rahim, as an assertive outreach worker for people who weren't engaging with addiction services, turning up for their probation appointments and other services. So the hard to engage ones. The role really got some wings during that period. It set the scene and when we got the ADDER accelerator funding it meant we could build on it. Rahim went on a sabbatical and that's when St Giles offered us Jamie. We talked about the training and experience he'd had at St Giles. He had a month shadowing with Rahim and then he was off doing it himself. He's really settled in.

People with lived experience that's similar to the ones they work with have a real knack and way with them. We all have lived experience and something to share, but to have people who have been through similar things working with us is paramount to the success. I don't like to pigeon hole people

as 'lived experience'. They have a lot of skill sets – doing assessments, communication with the team and a wide range of other agencies, partnership working – it's about everything that they bring.

Jamie and Rahim have brought different angles and we've got another member of the team, John, who's got experience of the drug addiction side. Jamie and John work really well together – they bounce off each other and draw on each other's knowledge.

We're part of a range of strategic and operational partnerships. I've talked with other providers about St Giles and the model that we have together and there's interest in what we do because people see it working. It's very valuable and we have a good relationship with St Giles. There's been a lot of support for what we do from other professionals because they see this approach working. A substance misuse project that we work with is particularly interested in how it operates with St Giles. I talk about it being part of a whole system approach. It's not just about employing people with lived experience, it's about how that works with the whole team. We've rolled out the approach to L&D across the region now and it's really successful.

Jamie is a great part of the team. He's calming, sensitive and gentle. He's very soft in the way that he speaks, but clear about what he says. He doesn't mince his words but he does it in such a way that it works. He's a steady pair of hands. Our engagement with young people is only for 12 weeks and it's all about empowering people to stand on their own two feet. He'll help them by arranging appointments and taking them at first but the aim is to get them to a point where they can do it on their own.

He's very motivated. He's got involved in helping homeless people and one day each week he goes out at 5am to find them and speak to them about things like housing, recovery and those sorts of things. He took part in the national count – that started at 4am. Because he works outreach I check in with him when he starts and finishes to make sure he's safe. 4am was early, even for me!

Our team isn't based in a police station, we're in the council offices and we share with some police officers – licencing and dog wardens. It can be a bit hard for people with lived experience (of the criminal justice system) and I'd say that's a work in progress.

We buy in expertise – mental health, substance misuse – and lived experience is another type of expertise. It's not tokenistic. Jamie's voice is just as important as everyone else's. I absolutely believe that the team should be welcoming to people from all backgrounds. To begin with there were some staff who weren't so open to the idea. They've moved on through normal processes and everyone now values all members of the team.

We second people to other services and there are progression opportunities for Jamie. He's treated just like any other member of staff including doing the training we have. He has good ambition but he's not unrealistic either. It's great what he's achieved in two years of being in recovery but he's not trying to run before he can walk. He's keen to go through his police vetting so that he can have access to other roles. Maybe he can then go on to being able to be in a police station and see people in custody. He's prompted that and we'll start that process in the New Year. He wants to learn and progress and that's a real testament to him. Of course there may be glitches along the way, but we all have those."

Cathy's story

- ★ Creating volunteering that makes the most of the positive power of lived experience
- ★ Developing a progression pathway for volunteers through the Lived Experience Toolkit
 - ★ Volunteers and clients leading the development of high quality services
 - ★ Expanding a vital resource in a community that has been left behind

"I first came here (women's organisation) in 2022. A friend of mine wanted some support to go there – she was going through depression, agoraphobia and social anxiety and her doctor had socially prescribed going there.

I was already volunteering at Citizens Advice but after a couple of months coming here I gave that up and started volunteering here instead. I got on with the staff really well and I very rarely get on with a group of women – generally I find them cliquey and bitchy – but it's really different here.

I was in the first group to do the course at St Giles. The training was useful but it all felt a bit last minute dot com in the organisation side. The trainer was brilliant but we were all learning together a bit – feeling our way. Since then it has got better. I did learn new things. The big thing was about the approach. At Citizens Advice they dictate what you can advise on – there are specific websites and information that you have to use – and you have to take it to the higher ups for approval before you give the information to a client.

The Peer Advisor approach is completely different. You need to make sure that information that you give is accurate – I'm very careful about that. But you draw on your own experience - your lived experience is really important. I can use my lived experience much more in my current volunteering role. I don't give personal details – we learn about boundaries on the course and it's something I wouldn't do anyway – but I do talk about things that will help put someone at their ease – so they know I get it.

With understanding my lived experience, I didn't realise what I'd been through until I was volunteering here with a domestic violence group. Listening to other women I recognised that what they were describing had happened to me. It was mental and emotional abuse. I had depression, anxiety and agoraphobia. At one point I couldn't even face opening the front door.

Now I run a group too – it's all about self-esteem and confidence building. It's the strangest thing for me to do. Before, I was the 'no, no don't put me in the front' kind of person – I like to keep in the background. Even on the course I was like that but the training helped me to acknowledge what I needed to do – to step out of my comfort zone. And now look at me – leading a group! The first group that I ran, two ladies decided to become volunteers and I think they've started the LTA now as well.

I'm currently doing the NVQ – my workbooks and the observations. I'm looking forward to getting my Level 3 because I can say 'yes, I've finished it' but I'm also a bit nervous because it means that you're sort of ready for more responsibility – I need to take baby steps on that.

It's really good to have three of us doing the training together. It's opened up another layer to our advice giving. We can look at things differently. We've all had different lived experience, different backgrounds and we can talk together and think 'we've been through this – now how do we use it'.

The training was learning in a different way. It helped me to retain things because it was more interactive.

We don't normally get things for free that would benefit us, especially with the lived experience angle. Normally, you'd need to have GCSEs to do a course like that. The LTA was easy enough to access and if you don't understand anything you can just ask. If you haven't done much in the way of qualifications, it gives you confidence to do something.

I'm happy as a volunteer at the moment. Healthwise, if I'm having a bad day I can phone up and someone else can cover me, but if I was paid I'd feel obligated to come in. Winter is worse for me. I have fibromyalgia, osteo arthritis and sciatica and I'm unable to take prescribed pain killers because of my heart. My mental health wouldn't stop me from going in now, just if I'm struggling with those. But now that I've got confidence running a group maybe paid work is something I could think about."

Manager of Cathy at women's organisation

"We started working with St Giles in March 2022. We were really interested in the free, accredited training for our volunteers. We're a small organisation – a safe space for women – and heavily reliant on volunteers. So far, 11 out of our 15 volunteers have done the Learning to Advise (LTA) course. It was hard at the beginning because it took them so far out of their comfort zone – they needed a lot of support. But then there's been a real ripple effect with the first cohort succeeding and being able to encourage and support the others as they went through.

The impact has been huge. It's reinforced their abilities and given them so much more confidence. We were quite nervous about one of the volunteers but she went on the LTA and came back a different person – she's got an ability to handle situations that she didn't have before. The fact that they know they can get a Level 3 qualification is really important. Many don't have formal qualifications or didn't do well at school and it's a huge confidence boost and puts them in a better position to get paid jobs.

None of the volunteers have moved into jobs yet, not because they aren't ready but because where we are there just aren't the right jobs with flexibility for women who have child and other family caring responsibilities. We've got one person who's caring for her mum, dad and aunt who are all in their nineties and live at home. She completed her LTA and still volunteers with us. If we had more funding as an organisation we would happily take them on but where we are on the map means we're often overlooked, we're an afterthought, so the St Giles training and support is great.

Being involved with St Giles and the Peer Advisor training has really strengthened how we take on volunteers. For example, doesn't matter if they have a criminal record, we have the processes and systems in place now to deal with that. The volunteers put together a book that details the recruitment process. It gives the volunteers ownership and at the same time makes sure that everything is done properly.

There's also been a big impact on service delivery. Volunteers with the LTA are now doing roles previously only done by paid staff. Things like need assessments and action planning. Before they did their training they would have informal chats with clients but now they keep the informal approach but are able to complete all the formal things that we need to do to help clients. Some are also running their own groups now such as craft, book club and confidence building – all of these designed to support women. They are very busy groups and are well supported by paid staff but

having the Peers running them creates a much more relaxed atmosphere – it's very often where women will disclose things that open up the can of worms that they need help with. When the book club was run by staff it eventually folded but our volunteer revived it and planned it out and now it's full. They've also set up a sewing group with a bit of funding we got.

The volunteers feel they have a real identity. They insisted that they wanted t-shirts and fleeces that identifies them in the organisation as trained volunteers – we offered lanyards but they weren't enough! So now they have the t-shirts and fleeces. There is a real momentum. The groups the volunteers are running have begun organising other things – the crafternoon ladies signed themselves up for a table at a local Christmas Fair to raise funds. So the enthusiasm is having a knock effect on our clients' confidence too.

We would never have been able to source funding for training like the LTA, and even if we had I would have been concerned about getting the right type and quality of training. It's so important that people of all abilities can access it and the material is relevant. I now see the benefits of ring fencing budget for training when we're able to do that, but would still be wanting to make sure the quality was as good as St Giles. It fits so well with our values.

Since getting involved with St Giles we've got a proper volunteering pathway and properly trained volunteers. Our funders are impressed with this and that's good for us. We've grown because of that – our volunteers can offer more services to more women and demand is rising. We've just moved into new premises that has a kitchen and a café. We've also got group rooms and we're renting them out to other organisations which is bringing in income.

We used the Lived Experience Toolkit from St Giles to do our entire Lived Experience Framework. We feel really confident about having volunteers because of it and the training. I'm going to the Domestic Abuse commissioners' conference next week and I want to share all this with them because it's so important and it's made such a difference for us."