



Final Project report

2023-2025



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How it started



Sisters In Mind started in 2020 as a response to women facing social isolation due to the impact of the pandemic. It aims to support women in a holistic way by offering a safe and welcoming environment. We have been fortunate enough to receive funding from the National Lottery to continue our work. This project has allowed us to train volunteers to be peer mentors, first aiders, and gain AQA certification. We also partnered with Community Aid to support our ladies' advocacy needs. The project has been very successful, and the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

We had been running for nearly 3 years when we received the National Lottery funding. We had identified areas that needed addressing through our continuous discussions with our members. It became evident that our group was growing and our capacity to meet the needs of local women had to be ramped up. So we applied in partnership with Community Aid and Ponders End Community Development Trust to offer advice and advocacy services, trained peer mentors, more hub sessions and a out reach officer to spread the news of Sisters in Mind, enabling us to reach a wider population.





Overview

Year 1

In our first year, Sisters In Mind grew from a new idea into a thriving community hub for local women. We expanded to three weekly sessions, introduced peer mentoring, and launched a successful wellbeing course. Our outreach efforts and partnerships helped us reach more women, address barriers to services, and offer a welcoming, supportive space. Feedback shows our members feel heard, included, and empowered. Despite challenges with space and changing needs, we learned the value of listening and adapting together.

Year 2

The last two years have flown by and has been amazing journey for not only the beneficiaries but the support team and partners alike. The project has been well received and our numbers are growing, proving that we are on the right page. Thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund Sisters In Mind is going from strength to strength.

We have come along way and feel that there is so much more to do.

Training Days



Part of our project was to develop staff and volunteers. With the National Lottery funding we were able to train a team of women that would be to support the project further.

Peer Mentors

We now have a group of peer mentors, who are able to support any of our ladies through out the sessions. Training proved to be invaluable, as we were faced with a situation where three women were triggered emotionally during a talk about domestic violence. Our peer mentors were able to take the individuals aside and support them until they were calm and able to continue with their day.

First Aid

Some of our team spent the day training in emergency first aid. For some it was a refresher and others it was a completely new experience. All candidates passed with flying colours.

Food hygiene

was another area the women wanted to tackle 7 women are now level 2 food hygiene trained.

Safeguarding and Group facilitation awareness

Ponders End Community Development Trust were able to support the project further by running safe guarding and group facilitation sessions. This in turn encouraged the ladies to run sessions and circle time.

AQA - all participants have had their training accredited by The AQA unit award scheme.



Outreach



When we started our application we knew we needed a way of reaching more women, but also a way of getting more for our participants. The funding enabled us to get a new team member.

Our outreach officer has been a great asset to our project and group. Having never worked in the third sector environment. Our outreach officer, a medically retired nurse has travelled her own journey, learning new skills in community engagement, gaining confidence to attend events and organisations to promote our project and its activities. She has managed to increase our user group and make new contacts with other organisations. She managed to secure workshops and also we now have referral partners. We have seen an increase in GP and social prescriber referrals. This indicates the value and further need for our project.

Outcomes:

Increased number of supported women

Improved offer for local community

Increased awareness of Sisters In mind –raising the groups profile



Over the past two years of outreach, I've found the journey both rewarding and transformative. In the beginning, approaching women wasn't something that came naturally to me, but I made the decision to step outside my comfort zone. I reached out to women's groups, libraries, and social prescribers across the borough so I could connect with as many women as possible, share information about our fantastic group, and take part in local events.

As these links expanded, the second year brought a steady flow of women joining us. What has been most inspiring is watching the group evolve—women blossoming, building confidence, and offering genuine support to one another. The atmosphere has become one of encouragement, friendship, and empowerment, where every voice is valued and every achievement celebrated.

Looking back, I see not only how much the group has grown, but also how much I've grown alongside it. What started as unfamiliar outreach has turned into a thriving network of women uplifting each other, creating a ripple effect of positivity across the community.

Outreach officer Kay.

Partnership



Partnerships

The benefits of being supported by our partners has been intrinsic to our success.

The Ponders End Community Development trust (PECDT) has been the foundation needed to ensure that the project was delivered effectively. Their years of experience has supported the development of our staff. Guiding, mentoring and training us to be effective project managers.

Community Aid has been in the local area for over 30 years and their services and knowledge have been a great asset to our project. The women were able to get advice, guidance and advocacy on several topics covering benefits, housing, gp and hospital appointments. Many of these women were reluctant to seek help elsewhere due to a lack of confidence in the system. Our advocacy officer has become a vital part of our sessions, but she has also become part of the group herself seeing the benefits for her own wellbeing. The feedback from the women who use her services, has been fantastic and they see her as one of them, not just a support staff. This has created a sense of confidence and trust.



One of the most important parts of my work has been supporting the sisters in navigating the benefits system. For many, the process was confusing and intimidating. Through clear guidance, step-by-step explanations, and practical help, I've supported many sisters with:

- Checking which benefits they may be eligible for
- Understanding application processes
- Completing forms with confidence
- Gathering required documents
- Challenging incorrect decisions or requesting reviews
- Accessing local services, grants, and additional financial help

Seeing a sister's relief when she realises she can get the support she needs has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of these sessions. Advocacy Officer, Rahana



Ponders End
Community
Development Trust



Outcomes:

Increased understanding and knowledge of navigating the benefit and health systems.

Increase in uptake of benefits

Increase confidence in seeking advice .

Our Activities



Our hub sessions are very popular, and we have a good core group of attendees who turn up each week to be part of the offerings.

Our sessions start with circle time and here the women can check in with each other and score themselves out of 10 on how they are feeling that day. This activity has proved to be extremely popular and beneficial as it gives us an insight into how the individual is feeling and with our trained peer mentors we can quickly pick up on any difficulties a woman could be experiencing. Wellbeing is the underlying focus of this group and we have seen over the last few years that by supporting individuals and giving them the tools to help themselves, they evolve into happier healthy people. Our sessions include a spot of light lunch and then we have a variety of options. These include talks, workshops, creative activities, films and music.

Our project officers also use this time to discuss what's next for Sisters In Mind ensuring that the women themselves continue to direct the project.

"I have really enjoyed being part of the Sisters In Mind team. It is testament to our ever developing team. It is amazing to see how many women, staff and volunteers alike feel empowered and confident to take control of their lives. Thanks to National Lottery for giving us the opportunity to support women in our community." Elizabeth Session lead

Our Activities



Our wellbeing courses have been extremely successful. With the National lottery funding we were able to offer wellbeing courses to our members. These were developed based on feedback from our ladies. It became evident that many women struggle with self-care. In these 6 week courses women were introduced to various method of self-care. These included journaling, mindfulness, breath work, arts and craft, communication and yoga. Each woman was given a journal to record their experiences and create a tool kit that they could draw on to support their wellbeing. Many women were reluctant at first, but when they realised what they wrote was private to them, they relaxed into the program. Sharing their experiences, thoughts and feeling became part of the sessions.

“I have learnt a lot; I now know that I must work with what I have now and not look at my past abilities and to pace myself” Ms PE

It has been good to see some of the women putting in to practice what they have learnt. Not all students have continued with the recommended activities, but their raised awareness of self-care is evident when they are talking to other members of the group or engaging with talks from the NHS Enfield and Barnet mental health team. Who have kindly provided support to our members over last couple of years.



Our Activities



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Many of the women have gained confidence to go out with others in the group whom they would not have otherwise mixed with, due to cultural, race and religious differences. This we feel has been a result of our openness to discuss and learn from each other, through the multicultural activities we run. This in turn has helped them to form friendships in and out of the group and has reduced feelings of isolation amongst many of the women.

Black history month has been adapted to our Cultural month a unanimous decision to cover all walks of life representing the diversity of Sisters In Mind. This user lead initiative is growing in popularity and has created a greater understanding and tolerance of differences but ultimately the highlights the similarities and common experiences of women. We feel that this will have a greater impact on the wider community as the women share the experiences of being a part of this amazing group.



Trips



Trips and days out have become a part of the buzz for sisters in mind. The social connections have formed this bond that has the women wanting to spend more time together. It has been decided at least once a year there will be an outing, preferably to the coast for some fresh air and the obligatory fish and chips.

This year the ladies managed trips to Southend, Spitalfields market, V&A museum, gardens and a show.



FEEDBACK

Increased awareness has been a major factor in this project and the ability to ask for help has been another. Members are now more confident to ask for more information about issues that concern them. For example, over the months we have invited guest speakers in to cover topics such as Wills, Power of attorney, AI, Benefits , domestic violence, diabetes, cancer, mental health to name but a few. This has increased their understanding and the ability to pass on their newfound knowledge to others outside of the group.

Increased self-confidence is also evident when we see otherwise quiet members take part in discussions and lead circle time. It is often mentioned that this is an unusual group. One lady who also attends WI sessions expressed the following:

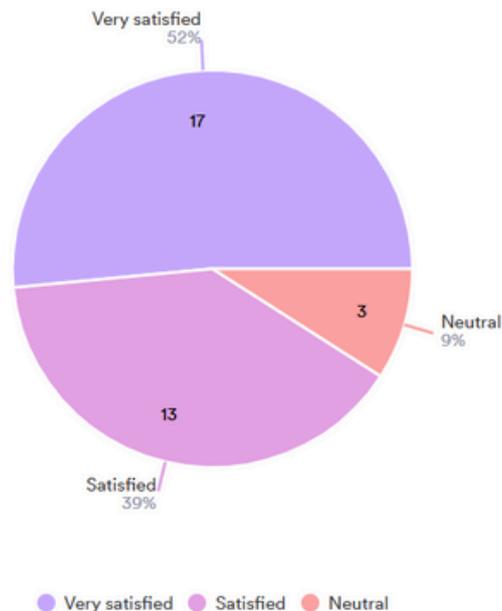
“I go to my other group, but it is more structured and you are given and told what to do. You do have conversations, you know one to one, but not like here. Here we can talk about anything and it is different more like family” Mrs A

Another member who has suffered with her mental health for several years told the group in circle time.

“I’ve been away for a few weeks and have missed everyone. This is my safe space, “ KH

6b. How satisfied are you with the support and resources offered by Sisters in Mind?

33 Responses



OUTPUTS

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

4 COURSES
3 ACREDITED



215 HUB
SESSIONS

35 OUTREACH
SESSIONS



31 TALKS

97 ADVOCACY
SESSIONS



98 DIRECT
BENEFICIARIES
50 NEW RECRUITS

15 Women sign
posted to other
services



1 New website
www.sisters-in-mind.org.uk

Impact

User led activities

Our success has been greatly enhanced by our ability to listen to our members. They are the ones that drive the project forward. We are not in the business of telling people what they want but facilitating and empowering them to have a voice and express their needs. This strategy has ensured that the sessions were varied and relevant. Everyone had an input and were encouraged to feedback their thoughts good or bad.

The overall impact of our project has brought changes in attitudes amongst our women. Many start with us with low expectations, lack of confidence and feelings of isolation. We have seen many of our women grow in confidence and are keen to share their experiences with their families and friends. Our project has also had impact on local health services as we are now have referrals from GPs, Social prescribers, and other health organisations such as Mind and NHS mental health services.

Outcomes

- Increased interaction
- Decreased isolation
- Increased empowerment
- Increased awareness

What's Next?

We have learnt a lot over the last two years and have made changes in the way we have delivered our activities. The safety and wellbeing of our beneficiaries is paramount. Due to the number of referral's we have received, we realised that we needed to create a disclaimer. This covers who we can support and those we cant i.e. those with clinical mental health issues. We found that some health services were sending women to us that we currently do not have the capacity for. This is in turn led us to think about what else was needed, as a number of our own group were referred to Talking Therapies and Mind. We have decided that it would be good to have access to our own councillor, for women to discuss minor issues of anxiety and or depression.

The success of the training for staff and volunteers has made us consider how we can take this further. We have decided that we need a bigger team to be able to deal with the various areas we want to cover. We are now developing the next phase for Sisters In Mind. This will involve creating separate specialist areas for which we need to build a team. The areas we will cover is Community outreach and advocacy, health and wellbeing , Group activities and steering , training and development. Our long term goal is to have our own premises to put Sisters In Mind well and truly on the map. A stable place where local women can come socialise, be empowered and have a voice in their own future. We are looking at our options in terms of how to make ourselves more self sufficient and sustainable.

