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Creative approach to mental health

During an eight-week placement at Tyneside Mind, Laura Warwick, a Doctoral Design Research student, applied Service Design principles and practices to redesign the delivery of the charity's existing services and develop a range of new mental health provision.

The new design formed a bid to the 'Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme, which has awarded £426k over three years for Tyneside Mind. BIG's Reaching Communities funding programme aims to help those most in need and builds stronger communities.

Laura's design, entitled Empower your Mind, was aimed at making mental

health and well-being services more progression-focused in order to help users reduce their dependency on the service over time as they develop their own coping strategies.

The design created a Partnership Service whereby people coming to Tyneside Mind would be given material to make plans of the goals they want to achieve over an 18-month timeline; a new Empowerment Worker role, who would be recruited to work with service users on a one-to-one basis throughout their 18-month service plan, helping them to establish what they need in their lives in order to stay well and engage in new opportunities; the recruitment of a Wellbeing & Recovery Worker to facilitate personal development groups and groups that focus on particular issues, such as managing anxiety; and finally the creation of an online resource to enable people who can't engage with Tyneside Mind during opening hours to access course materials and support.

“Prior to my intervention, Tyneside Mind delivered drop-in services and groups to support mental wellbeing, but there were no time-limits,” Laura said. “They tended to have the same users returning to the sessions and there was no clear progression route for the users.

“By redesigning the services with a focus on progression, the users are able to acknowledge their wellbeing goals and aim to achieve them within the timeline allotted to them with one-to-one support from the Empowerment Worker. This progressive support package will also free up spaces for new users to seek help from Tyneside Mind.”

Tyneside Mind is a mental-health charity that works with people living in the Tyneside area who are experiencing mental distress. It delivers responsive services, promoting positive mental health by tackling stigma and promoting inclusion.

Stuart Dexter, Chief Executive of Tyneside Mind, said: “The designer – Laura – was a ‘friendly critic’ challenging attitudes that had become entrenched in the organisation as well as consolidating the more positive aspects of our approach to developing services. The legacy, in terms of its subtle shift in organisational culture, has made us a stronger charity and better equipped to face new challenges.”

The work with Tyneside Mind forms one of three case studies in Laura's

ongoing doctoral study into the value of a design-for-service approach to help voluntary organisations develop public services. While on placement at YMCA North Tyneside she supported their bid to the Big Lottery Fund, helping to secure £190,000; and her work at Seven Stories to improve the rates of customer ticket upgrades – from one-day to annual passes – resulted in a 300% increase in the number of upgrades.

Dean Titterton, Chief Executive of YMCA Tyneside, said: “Laura came into the YMCA to demonstrate and show how service design can develop and establish a company’s profile, service offer and bring financial benefits. A result of this work led to the organisation obtaining a large grant for young people. Laura demonstrated clear and concise design, developing a framework for the organisation going forward to better understand service design.”

Laura added: “The aim of my work with these three organisations was to change their development approach, the way they spend their funding, and also help to improve the services they provide. I’ve been able to make a quantifiable impact on each of my case studies.”

Service Design practice has been used successfully in industry and, more recently, the public sector to boost innovation and sustainability however Laura’s current work with third sector organisations is trailblazing.

Professor Robert Young, Chair in Design Practice and Director for the Centre for Design Research at Northumbria, is supervising Laura’s PhD along with his colleague, Matthew Lievesley, Reader in Human-Centred Problem Solving and Design Manager at the Centre for Design Research.

Professor Young said: “Often the changes that are made through Service Design principles provide longer term benefits to the organisation and service users that may be seen after a period of time. In this case, Laura’s involvement has led to an immediate financial return. The value of her research is beginning to bear fruit already.

“Her work with Tyneside Mind has created financial and social value. The real value is the transformation of the charity’s culture and the way they think about developing the work they undertake.”

Northumbria University hosted a conference last month focused on delivering Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS) in the UK Higher Education Landscape. Laura Warwick presented her charity case studies during the event, the first in the DESIS UK Network series. For more details about Tyneside Mind and their work in the region, visit www.tynesidemind.org.uk or call 0191 477 4545.

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