

## Example of a good Public Recognition Award nomination

Nominator: Vicki Hirst

Job title: Community Involvement Officer

Nominee's name: Hear Us - charity and mental health service user group - Jane White is the main contact

Nominee's job title: Projects Manager

I would like to nominate 'Hear Us' for the public recognition award for their fantastic support and staff training over the last year two years.

Hear Us is a Croydon-based mental health service user group, which offers support and guidance to those who have mental illnesses. Everyone associated with the charity has lived experience of mental health, and all strive to advance education about their condition and reduce discrimination.

In Croydon, the LAS became involved in a unique project run by Hear Us, which looked at trying to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. The project is based on the idea that a 15 minute conversation with someone who has experience of mental health can help break down barriers and misconceptions about the illness. Through a number of training sessions our staff were able to chat face-to-face to volunteers and ask questions they would not normally get to ask in a patient care setting. In a confidential and informal environment these volunteers, who all have experience of mental illness, talked openly about their experiences and the challenges they face.

Staff really enjoyed the sessions and the feedback was hugely positive, illustrating just how important and beneficial these sessions were:

- The relaxed atmosphere made it easy to talk. I learnt more about mental illness in two hours than five years in the service!
- I liked the clear information and the openness of the volunteers. We should have more training days like this.
- I liked the fact that this was real people talking honestly about their experiences. There should be more regular sessions. An excellent workshop.
- Great to be able to learn from people with personal experience of mental illness, rather than reading up on the subject in a book.

Why should Hear Us win the award?

Hear Us has given a great deal of its volunteers' time and resource to LAS, all for free. I feel that this dedication and support deserves to be formally recognised.

They are a fantastic group of people who demonstrate such humility and honesty. The Hear Us volunteers are extremely brave, and talk openly to our staff about some of their most personal experiences in order to help raise awareness of what it is like to live with mental

illness. The group has enhanced the knowledge of the staff they have spoken to and become good friends of the Service.

In particular Jane White, who ran the project, is an inspiration. She will shows great tenacity in ensuring that her volunteer's' voices are heard, and that organisations tackle the stigma surrounding mental health. Mental Health was highlighted as a priority for the service in 2014, and Jane has always worked with us to help promote better understanding of the challenges patients face. She has always helped us out when we have needed, and provided a number of speakers to present at various events.

As a result of Jane's persistence and dedication Hear Us has also become involved in many other areas of work in the LAS.

- Informal drop-in sessions with over 200 EOC call takers, where staff could pop by in their break and have a chat with a volunteer.
- Presentation about their personal experiences by Nicole Nash and Jane White to the LAS Trust Board in January 2014
- Presentation by several members of Hear us at the Evening with Us 'Mind Matters' event in February 2014.
- Jane White and David Ashton have been appointed patient representatives at the LAS Mental Health Committee.

Their dedication to the charity and its work is clearly demonstrated. While they were travelling by minibus to Bow to carry out a session with EOC call takers, the bus was unfortunately involved in a road accident. One of the volunteers was seriously injured and several of the volunteers were taken to hospital. The crash was distressing for all involved. Yet they did not let it stop them. Through their dedication and passion for their project they still came back to carry out a number of sessions the following week.

For such a small charity, I feel they have had a huge impact of the staff of Croydon, and the Service. Recognition at the VIP awards would be a small gesture to show our immense gratitude to our friends at Hear Us for all their support, and to give them a little of the limelight that they deserve. <http://www.hear-us.org/>

I have also submitted some photos via the awards inbox to support the nomination.