

Hug a mug

HUG A MUG has been designed and set up in response to community need and address gaps in local healthcare provision. It aims to help people who are often left behind by the system and those that sometimes ‘fall through the gaps.’

Ewanrigg is in the top 5% of the UK’s most deprived communities and in Feb 2018 was defined by Allerdale Borough Council as the most deprived ward in Allerdale. Ewanrigg and surrounding areas have long been considered deprived and yet despite many well-meaning attempts, investment and anti-poverty plans have made little difference. The Ewanrigg Local Trust take a different approach to traditional regeneration and social development plans. The Ewanrigg Local Trust is a resident led organisation. Local residents decide how they want to improve their community and are helped to put these plans into place. HUG A MUG came out of a four year research process of finding out what local residents want to improve in their community and working with residents and health providers to identify what the priority health and wellbeing challenges and opportunities are for local residents. Through this process it emerged that there was a demand and need for a service like HUG A MUG. We have since spent several years developing the project with local residents and a wide range of partners.

HUG A MUG is a free and friendly guidance café, located upstairs in Maryport Health Services. Open to everyone, whatever their age, situation, background

or postcode, the service is available from 9.30am – 11.30am every weekday morning. HUG A MUG provides a safe and social space where you can get advice on all sorts of things like health and well-being, housing, work, finance or family problems. HUG A MUG is managed by Ann-Marie Steel and operated by the Ewanrigg Local Trust in partnership with Maryport Health Services. It opened in October 2017 on World Mental Health Day. It is staffed by trained volunteers recruited from the community, from local businesses and from educational settings. Free hot drinks are available to drink in or take away and the volunteers are trained to listen to client needs and respond appropriately. HUG A MUG has collated a wealth of resources and information and is working in partnership with a network of service providers and organisations so that volunteers can signpost clients down the right pathway. HUG A MUG provides free phone and internet access and volunteers can assist clients with filling in forms and making calls on their behalf etc. We are not aware of any comparable service run from a GP surgery. We are not aware of anything like HUG A MUG in the UK. We know that some community venues have infrequent advice and guidance clinics. We also know that some larger urban health centres have cafés but we are not aware of any UK signposting and guidance café's established within a small community health centre and open every day. As there is no precedent for a service like HUG A MUG it has enabled us to take a wholly creative and bespoke approach to designing and now adapting this service in response to the needs of the local community.

Many residents need housing, health, employment & finance advice. Despite an, albeit limited range of support groups/services available people often don't have the means to access the help that is available. Barriers can be practical – no phone credit or internet access; or knowledge – people don't know what help is available, or they may be nervous about seeking help. Many see a GP to get the above help because it is a free and trusted service, but they don't have medical needs that require the attention of a GP. HUG A MUG offers people a safe space for a friendly chat and someone to help people work out how to access the support they need for themselves.

- Visit our website to see a general overview of the project. Also, watch our short and accessible explainer animation that appears in the doctor's waiting room and has been used on social media and within school assemblies etc.

Website <https://ewanrigg.com/index.php/projects/hug-a-mug>

- View a short promo video created for social media

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG-_fCfoAto

or search You Tube for Hug a Mug – Visit us at Maryport Health Services

- Read 'A Day in the life of our HUG A MUG Project Manager, Ann-Marie Steel'

<http://www.in-cumbria.com/news/Caring-over-a-cuppa-Ann-Marie-Steel-leads-Hug-A-Mug-project-426451eb-f7d4-4e1a-bbf5-22e0275fad4-ds>

- Read a local GP's view of HUG A MUG and how it is fulfilling a vital role within community health – see

<https://www.ewanrigg.com/index.php/news/223-a-message-from-dr-pauline-gage-about-hug-a-mug>

Going above and beyond

When we set up HUG A MUG we did not anticipate the amount of people in the area that were in need of the service, or the complexity of the problems that some of our residents face. Although the service is supposed to operate from 9.30 – 11.30am every weekday morning, the need for the service has been so great, that our staff and volunteers often have to stay longer. Also, because of the nature of the service and the amount of people who have accessed the service at a crisis time, the sessions can't easily be squeezed into a managed timeslot. A person in crisis can't be hurried, can't be shooed out of the door at 'closing time' and help can't often be accessed at the drop of a hat. Our staff and volunteers (particularly Ann-Marie, our HUG A MUG Co-ordinator) regularly stay with clients after HUG A MUG has closed, waiting for a family member or the Crisis Team to arrive to help keep this person safe. They have reorganised work shifts, holidays, family commitments and personal time to accommodate clients and make sure their needs are met, handling issues as sensitively, confidentially and as efficiently as possible.

HUG A MUG distributes Foodbank vouchers to those that need them. In recent months there has been a noticeable 'spike' in demand for Foodbank

vouchers. It is not uncommon for HAM volunteers to dash around to the local community centre to ask if they have spare food that we can give to a client who hasn't eaten for a few days until they can get to the Foodbank.

The service has also exceeded all expectations of how it is valued by clients and service users. Residents that regularly seek out support have found that it can be a lifeline, enabling them to access support in between 'difficult to access' appointments with care system professionals; a vital link to help when they need it most. Some of our service users have made and sold craft items to help raise funds for HUG A MUG – recent examples include a lady who made Xmas decorations, raising over £400 which she donated to HUG A MUG.

Innovation

There are lots of agencies and services operating in the area, but people do not necessarily have the confidence, the facilities or the knowledge to be able to access the right help. Many local services and groups struggle to communicate their offer and struggle to increase the number of people who use their services. Many local people find it hard to find out about what is available to them and there are many barriers to taking those next steps. HUG A MUG aims to bring all this knowledge together in a safe and social space, creating the right atmosphere with the right people who are equipped with the right skills so that they can empower residents to seek out the right support. HUG A MUG aims to create that warm, safe feeling that people get from wrapping their hands around a hot drink and knowing that someone will listen. HUG A

MUG empowers people by helping them to identify what help they need and helping them to take those next steps – the service doesn't aim to do it 'for them' or 'to them.'

Whilst we monitor and evaluate HUG A MUG outcomes and have included some statistics in this application (see the appended infographic) it is difficult to measure the human benefits of HUG A MUG. It is a common occurrence for us to support people in crisis, people who are at risk of harm to themselves and others, people who are 'at the end of their tether' as well as those who are lonely, depressed or who don't know where to turn. HUG A MUG is becoming a place that people come to because they know that someone will be able to help them find a way forwards, and that whilst they are in HUG A MUG they are not alone.

"HUG A MUG is a very welcoming place. The volunteers are helpful and supportive. You don't always have to share your worries, although there is always someone there to listen." Quote from a HUG A MUG service user

We work closely with other organisations who are experts in their field so we can ensure that the services we signpost to are safe, reliable, reputable and regulated.

The collaborative aspect of the project is one of the ways that it is so special. The wave of support that it has enjoyed from all areas of the community, throughout the development phase, the launch phase and the first 2 years of business has been phenomenal.

The HUG A MUG project depends on ‘collaboration’ and has managed to harness the power of various sectors of society including community, voluntary, private and public. It is able to meet the needs of the local population by tapping into a network of resources and expertise. By working together with various agencies and businesses HUG A MUG aims to empower individuals and give them the confidence to seek support and make a change. HUG A MUG continues to grow and develop as new volunteers, partners and clients come on board. You only need take a few steps into HUG A MUG to get a strong sense of community ownership. Regular attenders often offer to make new clients a cup of tea and toast, they see it as a shared space. Regular attenders have become volunteers and volunteers come to HUG A MUG as clients.

The pace at which client numbers has risen shows that it is a much needed service (see below). The collaborative approach to designing and implementing HUG A MUG has been key to its success i.e. we were able to co-design the right service with the involvement of local residents, health providers, local business and community groups.

The service has had enthusiastic and invaluable support from all areas of the local community and key figures, organisations and stakeholders have all been consulted and been able to contribute to its development. Members of the local community have also been central to these consultations – a fact that has been demonstrated by the high number of community volunteers as well as the number of referrals from family members and friends who have read

about the service in the local media or heard about the service through word of mouth. Organisations, services and individuals (such as GPs, counsellors, teachers, clergy and family members) are already directing individuals to HUG A MUG so that they can get the support they need.

Maryport Health Services have been incredibly supportive and have donated a room in their building to accommodate HUG A MUG. The Health Services building is used to full capacity and we are therefore very grateful that they value HUG A MUG to the extent that they have freed up a whole room for this purpose. The room has been gutted, renovated and fully equipped thanks to support from businesses such as Sellafield, Atkins, Doosans, Shepleys, Wates Construction, Sealy UK, Eddie Shimmings, LCD Print & Stitch, Kaefers, Ansaldo Nuclear, Morgan Sindall, AMEC, PPM, Cumberland Building Society, Stitch and Print and Sewn by Janie. Support has been shown in many ways including financial, as well as the donation of time, labour, facilities, tools and expertise. Some businesses have allowed some of their staff to volunteer on a regular basis as part of their CSR programmes. The Project Manager will continue to work in partnership with private sector organisations to secure financial assistance so that HUG A MUG does not have to rely on grant aid. HAM is an innovative partnership between Maryport Health Services and the Ewanrigg Local Trust. Maryport Health Services was rated Outstanding, again, by the CQC and HUG A MUG was mentioned positively in the CQC feedback.

All staff and volunteers are fully trained.

HUG A MUG is staffed by volunteers from many different sectors and of all ages. All the volunteers receive training in communications and mental health first aid. These skills can be used in everyday life, in a family setting or taken back to their workplace. The project provides CPD opportunities and the chance to learn new skills. It provides people with an opportunity to help themselves, help each other and contribute to their community in a useful and productive way. Volunteering hours can be logged towards qualifications and awards and it's a great way to gain experience in admin, community support and communications. Traditionally most people find it hard to recruit volunteers but HUG A MUG has proved an exception with a steady flow of new volunteers offering their services. Volunteers say that they are well supported by Ann-Marie, they value the training they get, they have a clear role and purpose within HUG A MUG and they can see the value of their role and the service. Unusually we also get high demand from young people wanting to volunteer. Many of these young people want to pursue careers in health and social care – HUG A MUG provides invaluable experience for these young people.

“I have been able to develop great communication skills since receiving my initial HUG A MUG training. Being able to volunteer in the project has given me the chance to use the training effectively and gain confidence when listening non-judgementally.” Quote from Hug a Mug volunteer

It is run by skilled people who care.

Ann-Marie Steel has managed the project from conception. She has been instrumental in all areas of development – from initial consultation with community sectors, to designing and delivering training for the volunteers; from securing financial support from businesses to managing the renovation of the room; from organising volunteer rotas to co-ordinating the marketing and design of the promotional materials. She has enthusiastically thrown herself into every challenge, carefully managing the project and bringing in external expertise where needed in order to deliver a professional and invaluable service – open to everyone who needs it. Ann-Marie has a background in general and paediatric nursing and has over 20 years’ experience in several voluntary sector charities throughout Cumbria. Her compassionate, common sense approach has guaranteed HUG A MUG’s success to date – and she will continue to drive it forward in the coming months. Ann-Marie thrives on helping other people to fulfil their potential and is a huge asset to the project. She supervises her team of volunteers at HUG A MUG and is constantly seeking out ways to protect, improve, enhance, develop and deliver this innovative and necessary service to local residents.

“It has been amazing to see the volunteers develop the confidence to signpost the clients to the most appropriate support. They have developed lifelong skills through their volunteering in HUG A MUG. The clients have built up trust in the project and for some it is the reason they get out of bed in the morning. Having someone to listen to them and make them a hot drink, means so much. We have new attendees each week and they leave armed with

the confidence and information they need to help make their situation better.”
Ann-Marie Steel, Hug a Mug Co-ordinator

Sustained impact

The success of HUG A MUG has been contributed to many of the factors above. The collaborative model, working in partnership with experts, means that it has been sustainable, and the service has enjoyed month on month growth throughout the first 2 years.

HUG A MUG has been part funded by Ewanrigg Local Trust and does not rely on state funding or grants. It has received £16,000 from businesses and regularly received donations from individuals within the community who want to see the initiative continue and thrive.

It has 19 volunteers from local businesses and the community. Local business volunteers have delivered 880 hours of time, 648 hours have been delivered by community volunteers and 452 hours have been delivered by young people aged 17-25.

The Ewanrigg Local Trust have funded Ann-Marie's post and secured marketing & comms expertise to help shape, develop and promote the service.

The HUG A MUG project has a regular presence in Maryport Matters, a free quarterly community magazine that is delivered to over 7,000 homes in the area.

