

# Long-term Impact

## Talk for Health

Mental illness is one of the most expensive health problems on the planet (WHO, 2015). One in four in the UK will experience mental health problems every year, yet 75% won't get any help. NHS therapy reaches, at most, 20% of those who would benefit, and half of those who get therapy relapse within a year. This means that therapy is hardly touching the problem and the main solution on offer is drugs. In 2020, one in six UK adults was on anti-depressants, which are harmful over the long-term. So how do we reach large numbers with therapy in an effective and sustainable way?

For decades, scientists have been telling us that equipping lay people with therapeutic

skill is as effective as therapy, can reach larger numbers, and is cost effective. This is what Talk for Health does. With a unique peer-counselling method, we provide an effective talking therapy and at the same time equip participants with the skills to continue peer counselling groups.

The programme was devised in 2008 by a researcher and psychotherapist. It teaches precise, therapy-based methods for talking about feelings, responding empathetically to others, and setting up structured, ongoing, mutual groups that relieve mental distress and are good for wellbeing. These groups are intended not only as a therapy but an ongoing practice - part of your 'psychological 5 a day'. Funded by the NHS in Islington since 2014, and through a partnership with Roehampton University, we have gathered the evidence that T4H is as effective as therapy, and longer lasting. We've proven through research with 1,000+ participants over the past 8 years that participating in T4H leads to a significant improvement in wellbeing and reduction in depressive symptoms. Compared to psychotherapy, Talk for Health (T4H) is also scalable, empowering and builds community.

Talk For Health starts with a psycho-educational programme, normally comprising 24 hours

over 6 weeks. This is both a therapeutic and skills-building experience. Participants reflect on their lives and, as they do so, learn the T4H method for group peer-to-peer counselling. This enables them to set up and/or participate in a network of ongoing groups after the training. The initial programme covers:

- Emotional literacy and truthful talking
- Accurate empathic listening
- Basic counselling skills: responding to others in a therapeutically effective way
- A protocol for setting up and/or participating in ongoing groups

Steve Broome, Former Research Director at The Royal Society of Arts commented: “I commissioned Talk for Health while Director of Research at the RSA as part of the Connected Communities programme on mental wellbeing and social inclusion. The model of change is excellent, distilling key therapeutic processes into a programme that allows local people to support each other's mental wellbeing in a mutually supportive network. Importantly, the model is sustainable: it builds capacity in individuals and communities to support their own and collective needs.”

The transformative impact of Talk for Health and its power to go ‘above and beyond’ is best illustrated through the voices of those who have participated. They highlight:

- The impact of the programme on their personal wellbeing
- The knock-on impact on other elements of their lives (families, careers, physical health)
- The diverse and inclusive community that they become part of
- The sense of empowerment that’s created by teaching them therapeutic skills, rather than having to rely on a public health system that isn’t designed for them

“We live in a society where the idea of community has broken down, become fragmented and we get used to the idea of being alone, coping with life alone until we feel isolated, lonely and possibly depressed. The Talk for Health programme is so much more than teaching peer counselling skills, it's about building a community, breaking down stigma and discrimination. I was part of a group that was diverse in age, gender and ethnicity and yet we were all one sharing and supporting each other. I see this programme and the Talk for Health wider community as a vital part in fixing our broken society. Speaking for myself, I know that being a part of this has improved my mental well-being, which in turn improves my physical well-being.”

“I live with disability and teach social worker students about what it is like to live my life. Today I went back to teach the new cohort and the lecturer who invited me said she can see a HUGE difference in me. I feel a lot stronger in my emotional wellness, better equipped to deal with my life, more confident in making a difference. So not only has T4H made a difference to me but I have been able to pass on something to future carers.”

“For at least a decade, I have been depressed and anxious. Even though I am grateful to the NHS, I began to find that its many providers were unable to support me in a sustained way. Talk for Health welcomed me, and gave me space to be who I am. I always feel better after I’ve engaged in one of their group or training sessions. I cannot sing T4H’s praises highly enough. T4H’s inclusive policy contributes to a more compassionate society and one in which people are enabled to help themselves and others to heal and contribute positively to society.”

“At the beginning of the programme, I felt I was locked in a dark room and I was scared and didn’t trust others. Over the last year I have loved being in this group. It has enabled me to talk without fear and I have gained confidence in myself. Now I am out of the dark room. Talk for Health has done wonders for my mental and emotional wellbeing. My daughter recently told me she’s so happy to have Mum back.”

“I have complex trauma, as a result of multiple abuse in childhood. If I go into crisis I am overtaken by deep terror. Just after the lockdown, if not for the intervention of a wonderful Talk For Health facilitator I do not think I would have survived. I am 72 and live alone. My terror became so overwhelming that I tried to check into St Pancras mental health facility. They could not admit me because of the virus. I reached out to my facilitator in Talk For Health. She gave me 100% support plus. She listened to me talk on my mobile. She made me feel worthy of love and support. I did not have to hide from her my vulnerability pain and terror. By her kindness and compassion, she enabled me to move through it. I was very lucky to have had this extra support.”

Talk for Health was born at the turn of the Millennium as a peer-to-peer counselling process developed by Founder, Nicky Forsythe, for her own and peers’ wellbeing. From a small pilot group of four people, Talk For Health has now grown into an organization impacting thousands.

During her therapy training from 1998-2006 she had set up a peer counselling group with 3 fellow trainees. The group met for 2 hours every Friday afternoon. Each person had 25 minutes of time: 15 minutes to share and 10 to receive feedback from

the others using counselling skills. Nicky found it to be the most powerful therapeutic experience she had experienced and decided to teach others how to do her 'Friday group' – the blueprint for Talk for Health.

She secured funding from British Telecom's CSR department to pilot the first Talk for Health programme. Much like today, it was a 4-day programme over 6 weeks, where people had space to share about their own lives while at the same time learning to feed back to each other using counselling skills. This pilot was evaluated using scientific wellbeing measures and demonstrated a powerful impact.

Nicky refined the format between 2008 and 2012, delivering Talk for Health at low or no cost to charities, while continuing to gather evidence of its impact. During this time, T4H was delivered to the National Service User Network, to a service-user led charity in Doncaster, and at a GP Practice in Islington as an NHS pilot.

In 2012, Nicky delivered the first Train the Trainer programme, making Talk for Health more scalable. The following year, after a year's programme at the School for Social Entrepreneurs, Nicky incorporated Talk for Health as a Social Enterprise, with the intention of making Talk for Health widely available at no cost.

At the end of 2013, Talk for Health was commissioned by the NHS across the Borough of Islington, based on the successful GP pilot. Since then, we have been commissioned across a growing area of London and beyond. It is now NHS-commissioned or grant-funded in 10 Boroughs, and is implementing plans to roll out far beyond this.

#### **T4H has also been:**

- commissioned by organisations for workplace wellbeing since 2018, when we received NESTA funding to adapt Talk for Health for that purpose
- successfully trialled in universities, at the YMCA and in supported housing for young people (we are looking for funding to equip more 18–25 year olds with Talk for Health skills as 75% of what is called mental illness has made its first appearance by age 24 and early intervention is key)
- commissioned to train NHS Peer Workers, including as part of a national UCL-led trial of Peer Supported Open Dialogue, an intervention for first episode psychosis

Through the pandemic, we adapted our services to provide virtual sessions at a time when many people couldn't access mental health services.

The impact of Talk for Health has been assessed with over 1,000 participants since 2014. Three scientific measures have been used:

- The Outcomes Rating Scale (Miller, 2010), for measuring the impact of talking therapy
- The PHQ9, for assessing depression, the standard measure used in the NHS
- The WHO5 (World Health Organisation 5) which assesses wellbeing.

All scales have a 'clinical threshold', beneath which it is considered that participants are clinically distressed. On average, participants who start Talk for Health in clinical distress, with low wellbeing and/or moderate to severe depressive symptoms, achieve significant clinical and wellbeing improvements with a large effect size. This was the case for each of these scientific measures.

Those who are depressed, on average, achieve recovery after the 24-hour initial programme, and this recovery is well maintained at 6 months. This is critical, since with standard NHS talking therapy, just over 50% achieve recovery from depression but more than half of those who recover relapse within a year. See Appendix 1 for more detail on efficacy measures.

95% of Talk for Health participants complete the programme compared to 38% who start treatment on an NHS talking therapy programme (IAPT, NHS Digital, July 2020).

Talk For Health has also proven itself effective in providing access to historically marginalized communities. 41% of Talk for Health participants are people of colour, compared to 17% on NHS talking therapy programmes.

### **Train the Trainer and Social Franchising**

A focus at Talk For Health has been to scale our impact while maintaining quality. This has involved early development (in 2012) of a Train the Trainer programme for selecting, training, licensing and supervising new trainers. Since 2012, seven cohorts and more than 70 people have completed our Train the Trainer programme. Currently there are more than 20 active sessional trainers who work in pairs under contract to, and supervised by, us.

This year, we started to train new people to train trainers (Train the Trainee Trainer programme!), which will take us to the next level of sustainability.

Our programme's sustainability is also enabled through high quality, manualised processes and manuals for the 4-day programme, the ongoing groups, and Train the Trainer programme. These enable fidelity to model and are updated every few

years to reflect new learnings – whether of our own, within the field of mental health, or within our culture.

In 2019 Talk for Health was assessed as ‘scale ready’ by Spring Impact – an organisation that supports social innovations to grow. That year, we received funding and support to develop a detailed business plan to scale Talk for Health via social franchise (i.e. licensing partner organisations to deliver Talk for Health under clear quality assurance protocols. Although these plans were set back by the pandemic, they are currently being implemented).

### **Train the Chair**

Alongside the studies detailed above which speak to the efficacy of the Talk for Health programme over many years, the ongoing impact of the program is also supported by an innovative ‘Train the Chair’ programme where participants in the program are trained to set up and run their own network of groups in the local community as volunteers. More than 300 people have been trained as volunteer group chairs since 2014, and there are currently more than 50 active group chairs and more than 30 active ongoing groups (which anybody who has done the Talk for Health programme can attend as often or as infrequently as they like). The registry of ongoing groups is held on our website and sign-up links for the next week are sent to more than 1,000 people each week.

### **What others say about the sustained impact of T4H**

The quotes below are from people who actively refer others to the T4H programme, or who have been trained to chair groups:

“This is not a temporary ‘remedy’. T4H offers the tools and infrastructure – through ongoing peer to peer groups – to continue to manage well and feel better in life. Importantly, as the network of T4H participants and peer trainers grows with more and more ongoing support groups that spin off from the programme, these benefits are likely to grow exponentially across the community. As a small organization, I found that T4H really manages its resources carefully and effectively. Staff are keenly aware of keeping things cost-effective and delivering value for money. In short, T4H is a beacon in the world of community services.” (Referrer)

“The Chair and Share Groups are where the on-going support happens. As well as benefiting myself, chairing on-going Group meetings has been a very rewarding experience. Getting feedback from others on how attending a Group helps them and boosts their mood and confidence convinces me of the value of the process.”  
(Participant and Chair of Ongoing T4H Group)

“It is a tremendously amazing idea that keeps on giving, empowering people not only to improve their mental wellbeing but also to run their own support groups in their communities and be an active part in improving other people’s mental health.”  
(GP, Referrer)

“There are very few opportunities that marginalized (lonely) individuals have to come together to share, learn, grown and develop resilience, supportive relationships and sustainable skills. T4H facilitates and allows diverse people to create and develop a life changing democratic space, where often for the first time they hear their voice, their story and the voices of their peers. Sharing difficult traumatic life stories without being shut up, stigmatized or shamed. It is reparative.” (Referrer)