

# **Stafford Centre rises to challenge of mental health during pandemic**

**Among the many sad sights in Edinburgh during the pandemic has been the locked doors of the Stafford Centre in Broughton Street, one of the city's busiest mental health resources.**

**Run by charity Support in Mind Scotland (SMIS), the building had to close in mid-March when the Covid-19 crisis unfolded, and the crucial support provided to hundreds of people affected by mental ill health switched almost overnight from face-to-face to a remote model via phone, text and video.**

**It has been a truly herculean effort by staff and the people who access the centre to adapt and stay connected during the initial lockdown and the waves of restrictions that have followed, but they have shown great spirit in adversity and look forward to better times in 2021.**



The Stafford Centre provides compassionate mental health support to 150 people a week

The worry is that demand is going to soar when we emerge from the pandemic, with experts predicting a mental health epidemic as people struggle to cope with issues such as isolation, anxiety, family pressures and financial hardship.

Whereas the accepted statistic before Covid-19 was that 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem in our lifetime, it is anyone's guess how severely that figure will be impacted as a result of the challenges we face now and in the immediate future.

"We want to stay positive, but we are worried that there will be a huge influx of people seeking support," admits Michele Mason, Support in Mind Scotland's Area Manager for Edinburgh. "We know how difficult this past year has been from the people we are directly supporting, and we know there are going to be many more who need help with their mental health."

The positive she is referring to is the welcome news that SiMS has been among the successful organisations awarded contracts as part of the Thrive initiative – the city's new

collaborative approach to mental health services, introduced by the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership.

“The timing is wonderful,” she explains. “We have an initial five-year contract, which will give us the opportunity and security to embed some of the fantastic work we do at the Stafford Centre and in the community, not only in 2021 which we already know will be difficult, but also in the future.



Radio Stafford 103 is run by presenters and DJs who have experienced mental illness

“What we are most proud of during the pandemic is how well people have supported each other. There has been a lot of peer support – people taking the time to look out for each other, either by texting, phoning or meeting each other for a coffee, when that has been allowed.

“It stems from the culture of community that we have fostered at The Stafford Centre, where there is no hierarchy, just a collective sense of togetherness where people support each other with their mental health.”

The dedicated team of staff and volunteers at the Stafford Centre have managed to provide compassionate mental health support to almost 150 people each week throughout the pandemic, including veterans, typically through regular calls, group Zoom calls, and peer support.

Opening the doors again will allow the Centre to fulfil its true potential. Ordinarily, the three-level building is a hive of activity, offering 1-to-1 and group support, benefits advice, a creative space café for healthy eating, a music sanctuary and even its own community mental health radio station – Radio Stafford 103 – which is run entirely by presenters and DJs who have experienced mental illness.

There are plans in May to add a new ‘Urbanpod’ to the back garden area, which has been funded by generous support from the community, including a donation made by S3 pupils at Holyrood High School through the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative. This self-contained unit will offer a quiet space for counselling sessions and the project has aptly been named “Peace in A Pod”.

Support in Mind Scotland and the Stafford Centre are also looking forward to growing their high-profile Charity of Choice relationship with Lothian Buses. The charity was thrilled to be chosen as the city transport giant’s new partner for 2020 and 2021, but the exciting plans they have to work together in the community have so far been badly hampered by the pandemic.

“Without doubt this year has been the toughest ever, for staff and service users, but we are determined to stay strong and we can look back on what we have achieved with a lot of pride,” says Michele.

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“Somehow, we managed to pack up an entire service in three days and move to remote support, working in new, innovative ways, but we can’t wait to be working with people face to face again and seeing the Stafford Centre spring back to life.”

For more information on Support in Mind Scotland and the Stafford Centre visit:  
<https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/> or follow on social media @suppinmindscot

Support in Mind Scotland also offers telephone support during office hours through its National Information Line (0300 323 1545) and specialist Mental Health and Money Advice through a dedicated website:  
<https://www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/scot/>

You can donate to Support in Mind Scotland’s Winter Appeal at:  
<https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/2020winterappeal>