

MORE THAN A SHOP

Changing the conversation
about mental health

Rachel Summerscales
*Formerly of Hulme Community
Garden Centre*

Stephen Buckley
Mind

Also featuring:
lifeafterhummus, London



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Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Hello and welcome to More Than a Shop, hosted by me Elizabeth Alker. We're welcoming guests with something new and radical to say about the big issues of the day. Well the flavour of the series is a search for new alternative ideas in the spirit of the worldwide co-operative movement, which happens to started in my hometown of Rochdale.

Well, co-ops proudly offer radical alternatives to mainstream ways of getting things done. They are indeed so much more than a shop.

Every year, one in four of us will experience problems with our mental health. And one in six of us reports experiencing a common mental health issues such as anxiety or depression at some points in any given week.

Of course, the reasons for that are numerous and complex. But what is clear is how damaging problems with mental health can be in our lives.

To identify particular challenges and possible solutions – and whether co-operative principles might have a part to play – I'm joined in the studio by Steven Buckley, Head of Information at Mind, the mental health charity, good afternoon; and Rachel Summerscales [formerly] Manager at Hulme Community Garden centre. Welcome to you both.

Rachel just to start with you. Tell us about Hulme Community Garden centre and what it is that you do there?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

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Okay, so I always say it does exactly what it says on the tin. It's a garden centre in Hulme, which is in South Manchester. And it's run by the community for the community on co-operative principles. So we're a charitable organisation, but we're also a co-op. And the front half of the centre is garden centre where you can come and buy plants with a really strong ethical and environmental ethos behind them. And then it's all supported by a huge team of volunteers and service users who access seven day a week services and feel part of our team. So we have a small staff team and a huge volunteer team.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So you mentioned services there. What are the services? What are people coming to you for?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

People come to us for a whole variety of different reasons that they're looking for something to be involved with, and to help them move on with their lives. But what they get when they come to us is to be part of a team, to make new friends, to have a sense of purpose and to build confidence, really, and just to have a reason to get out of bed in the morning and come along.

Nobody signs up for a minimum amount of hours or commitment. You can just come along and we will find you a job and you will be useful, which I think is really key.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And is that why they started? Tell us a little bit about how it came about?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Well, the garden centre started about 22 years ago – we've been open nearly 20 years in 2020, that's a lot of 20s, isn't it? It was part of a big movement in Hulme. So Hulme's a very – *was* a very troubled area. I have to say, it's not trouble *free* now.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And lots of artists in Hulme, aren't there?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Lots of artists, which generally come from times of trouble, really. I think that people try to find that creative solution. And it started – there was a big housing co-op, another co-op see. It was funded by the Guinness [Partnership] called Homes For Change, with about 150 residences. And then we are just across the road from that, and we were just a patch of potential really. So it was about creating a place where people came together to make change.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And I guess 20 years ago... Did this start as something of an experiment, but now we can see the value of it? Is that how it's developed?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, I'd say 20 years. I think the business model was always the same. So we'd have a garden centre that in theory created a profit, that's debatable! Those profits would be ploughed into a volunteering program, a training program, a well-being support program. And that's still the same, really. Our turnover's about £350,000, and we earn about 80% of that – just under 20% is grant funded.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

But in terms of the benefits for service users are the things that you provide, now we recognize that they are good for our well-being – for people who may be experiencing problems with their mental health?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, and I think the voluntary sector is trying to get better at proving what we do works. But it's quite difficult because we don't have a lot of capacity within our organisations to do that. Part of my job, as well as managing the garden centre on three and a half days a week is to prove that impact and to measure those outcomes and show that progress, and it's a lot of work. So I know where I can sit here and tell you about different people and what difference is made to their lives. But yeah, it's difficult to get that down on paper and shout it out to the world really.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Concrete evidence of the value?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

But surely if there are limited resources, there are limited funds for this, we do need to show what the benefit of these services are and account for that money?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah. And I think we should be accounting for it as well. I think it's about having the capacity to do that and recognising it. So for instance, if you did get a £10,000 pound grant, £2000 of that could be just for a manager or an administrator to actually do that reporting, to go and talk to people, to do the number crunching and to tell those stories that funders like to see. So yeah, I don't have a problem with reporting, it's about the capacity and the resource to do that reporting.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And you mentioned being part of a team is there also something about being connected to the earth to seeing things grow?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, one thing there is quite a lot of evidence about is about improving well-being of being out in nature and outside. So if you look at the five ways to well-being and be active, connect, take notice, once you're outside, you notice changes. And I really like the fact that people come to our centre year round, so you see the seasons. When you live in a city, you don't often notice the seasons, you might have one tree outside your window. Again, this is well documented that with our younger generation, including my teenagers, don't get enough access to the outdoors. I notice it when I'm feeling when I'm struggling with my mental health, I'll go out into nature. I'm lucky

to live in a small town so I've got lots of access to the canal and the woods. And it makes a difference, it grounds you.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And also having achieved something tangible, which is, you know, maybe planting something I've seen it grow.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, so something that I notice that people who have a lot of mental health problems really engage with is working in what we call our hot tunnel – it's not very hot, it's like two degrees above what's outside! So we'll take all our vegetables in there, and you know you're starting from the seed and then you're pricking them out and then you're potting them on. And then you've got something like a chili plant that's for sale. And then we'll keep a couple of those chili plants, then we might cook with them on our communal lunch on a Wednesday. And yeah, that thing of seeing that process through and seeing that it takes time, I think is really relevant. Because in nature and in gardening, there's no quick fixes.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Stephen, what does your role of Head of Information at Mind involve?

Steven Buckley, Mind

I'm lucky enough to look after Mind's award winning Information Services, which includes our helpline and our digital peer support platform, which is called Elefriends. Last year, about 14 million people accessed our services in one way or another. So there's clearly a huge demand. And it's a very well used service.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Mental health is an umbrella term, it covers all sorts of different conditions. How hard is it to keep the information that you provide to the public straightforward enough to have an impact?

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah, it's a good question to try and how do we keep our mental health information sort of up to date? How do we keep it relevant and practical? And the key way we do that is involving people who've got experience of mental health problems. The team has their own experience. They do a lot of work in social research; but they also spend a lot of time talking to people, understanding what the issues are that people are facing; road testing phrases, how we talk about certain issues; and making sure it makes sense to the people that we want to use it. But also that it has a practical benefit, you know, we don't want people just to read about mental health and go away, 'Oh that was kind of interesting'.

Actually, what we want to do is people to read about mental health and understand more about how they can perhaps access their rights and entitlements; about the kinds of treatments that they should be asking for, what's available to them; the kind of questions they might want to be asking their doctor; or perhaps even how they can look after themselves or a friend or family member. So it's all about information that gives practical advice rather than just information.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And how do people access the service, you know, depending on where they live as well? How does that work? How does your organisation reach the people that it needs?

Steven Buckley, Mind

We work across England and Wales. Some of our services are national. Clearly our website is one of the key services that we offer and people access that from all over the place.

As a network, we also have around 130 independent Local Minds who work embedded in local communities, who offer more face to face services on occasion, things like counselling, befriending. And some of those also offer lots of gardening style programmes as well. As Rachel's indicated, it's a really popular way of engaging with therapeutic activities for people with mental health problems.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So, Rachel, your organisation is a co-op, isn't it? And Steven Mind is a charity, of course, and I believe that there's a partnership between The Co-op and Mind?

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah, that's right. We just launched our partnership on World Mental Health Day, October 2019, so it's still early stages. But a key thing that we want to be doing with The Co-op is working through our Local Mind network, working with communities to understand what's going to work for them in terms of developing mental health resilience in those communities. So we're going to work with The Co-op to deliver that across England and Wales. We've also developed a partnership with an organisation called SAMH in Scotland, and an organisation called Inspire in Northern Ireland. So there'll be partners with the project as well, which means this gives The Co-op a reach across the whole of UK with this project. So we're really excited by it.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So it's useful to think about co-operative values and how they can be applied to what you do?

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah, sure. Clearly Mind isn't a co-op, but we have lots of things in common and lots of values that we share and overlap with. And I think the ones that stand out for me, it is that question of community focus. The other thing that struck me is, you know, we talked about mental health a lot as a as a health issue, and you know it is. But, also, when you understand that people are more likely to face discrimination at work, or at school or in their life; that perhaps people are more likely to be on income-related benefits; they're much more likely to live in poverty... You know, there is an equality and a social issue here as well. So, it's really interesting to work with a co-op on that question of equality.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And how is the partnership working to resolve some of those problems?

Steven Buckley, Mind

It's still very early days yet but what we're going to do is take some of the money we raised and do quite a lot of community based research to understand what an effective and sustainable intervention looks like, across different communities.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay. Rachel, how are the co-operative values applied to what you do?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Obviously, we work in a co-operative way as a team. So when you're out the garden centre, there's no stigma attached to being a paid member of staff or a board member if they popped in who were voluntary, or a volunteer or a service user who might be paying a small amount to come in because you've got say learning disabilities need a bit more support. But I think one of the other things that I really like about the garden centre is about the openness and honesty. We're all very open about our mental health. I have very poor mental health. A couple of our other staff have very poor mental health, which is a bit of an issue but one thing is, is being open with people.

So I started at garden centre six years ago, and I was not a hugger. I'm actually leaving the garden centre next week, and I will be giving out lots of hugs. And so one thing that I've learned is that people want to come in and they'll tell you how they're doing. And sometimes they just want some contact with people. So yesterday I was having a meeting with two women who'd come up from Nottingham to find out about what we do. And then this woman came in who's been with us for a few years. And she just came in and just got me an enormous bear hug for quite some time – I had to try and extricate myself! But she wanted to come in to tell me that she'd got an art exhibition at the Portico Gallery in Manchester. And so she'd started with us doing gardening and things and she'd done some poetry, and then she'd gone on to make some little models. And then she'd got this art exhibition. And she comes in to say thank you and just to check in. She's high functioning Autistic, and with really, really poor mental health.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So on an individual level, you can see really radical changes in people's behaviour. You know, how they are when they come in and how they are after a year or two?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

And not just a year or two, you know, we're there for the long term, which is really important. Generally, our mental health is up and down, isn't it? You know, we can be doing fine for months on end, and then something can happen. And it feels like everything comes crashing down. And I feel like what's really important in the service we offer is that we are always there. And so we'll check in with people and people feel able to say, 'I'm just not up to it this week. I'll be in next week'. And then if it happens for a few weeks, you'll say, 'Come on, you know...'. And then at the end of the day, they sometimes say, 'I'm so glad that I came in. I just feel so much better'. And that's why that's the feedback I want to hear.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So in terms of the challenges that you're both facing... Rachel, with Hulme Community Garden Centre, you're seeing more and more people come to use this facility. How can you support that and is that problematic?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

The main problem that we face at the garden centre, and in general – which is not just in Manchester, but I will speak about Manchester – is that the funding is not sufficient to provide long-term interventions, long-term support for people. As a voluntary sector, we're being squeezed all the time. So we the garden centre after six years of me being there have fewer staff, fewer resources, far less capacity. Yet, we're still delivering the same seven day a week service. And people are still expecting, as they should be, that they can just drop in for a hug or whatever and we're there to provide that and it's very, very difficult to do that.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

When this is all happening, as people are more aware of their problems with mental health more ready to talk about them and perhaps be pointed towards what you do

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Definitely being pointed towards what we do. In Manchester they've just employed a raft of NHS workers whose job is to intervene at GP level and signpost people to the voluntary sector to services that they can get involved in at an early stage, which would improve well-being and build that resilience. This is a huge concern for me. So we have one session a week that's particularly focused on well-being. It's Friday afternoon, it's a quiet gardening session. We have one worker running that one garden. So up to about 10 people, were fine. But over that, we're not going to have much value and quality in what we can deliver.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And there's pressure on your staff as well.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah. Because also, you know, the spectrum of health mental health problems is huge, isn't it? So it's from people who are suffering from depression, loneliness, social isolation, bipolar – all different sorts of conditions that we're not trained to deal with. So it's something that really, really concerns me. One way in our sector that we illustrate it is: If you go to the doctor's, with depression, and you get a prescription – I take Sertraline, that's a prescription I go on and I pay my £9 however much at the pharmacy – and there's money attached to that. But with the so-called social prescribing there's no money attached to it. So someone will be prescribed to go to a community garden or a care farm or an allotment project. But nobody's given the £9.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And is that because, how you described earlier, it's quite difficult to sort of quantify the value, you know, to have kind of hard concrete evidence of what the value is, or to write that down, or the time put into researching it and coming up with figures?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

I think it's the time. I think there's really good methods, you know, like some of the larger organizations will be using when webs which measures progress on well-being mental health, isn't it Stephen? We worked about three years ago with the University of Gloucestershire. We did a social return on investment exercise, which proves that for every one pound invested in the garden centre we will provide around six pounds of social value to the wider community. And it picked out a whole raft of the outcomes that we can deliver and differences that we make to people's life. And we all developed a tool that measures that. So when someone comes in, they can fill in a little questionnaire – it talks about different aspects. It's quite nice and warm, it doesn't ask probing questions. And then ideally, we check in on that three months, at six months, at six years if we need to. And you would see some progression. But we don't have the staff to do that. So it frustrates me so much that we have this system, but we don't have the capacity to deliver it.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, so financial support the biggest challenge.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, definitely.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Steven, what is your biggest challenge then in what you're doing at the moment and how Mind hopes to expand?

Steven Buckley, Mind

It kind of relates to what Rachel was talking about, really. And it's really interesting, because those kinds of comments are what we hear from Local Minds. You know, the pressure that has been put on them as statutory services are being cut back. Even things like libraries and places to go have been being cut back across communities. More and more people are going to fewer and fewer places. And it's just draining the community and voluntary sector, hugely significantly. You know, I was talking to a Local Mind last week based in one particular city and that they find that getting referrals from across the whole county, saying 'we just can't cope, we're not set up to do it'.

But the challenge that I want to bring, it does relate because while we're, you know, we're in the studio, we're talking pretty comfortably about mental health. The conversation in the world outside about mental health has changed quite a lot over the last 10-15 years. You know, celebrities feel able to talk about it, politicians say they want to fund it. Good question whether or not that eventuates, but people want to talk about mental health, but are services really improving to meet that need.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

There's still this gap in terms of, you know, like you say, people talking about it, but then how much as a society we want to put into dealing with it and providing services

Steven Buckley, Mind

Absolutely. You know, we still know that it's fantastic that we can talk about mental health. It absolutely is. But we still got a situation where people who are, you know, hugely unwell, staying in police cells because there's no A&E facility available. You know, children being sent hundreds of miles away from their parents for care. You know, this is not an acceptable situation.

So I think the challenge is partly that gap between demand, understanding and reality – closing that gap. But also, I think when it comes to mental health, it's complex. You know, people's lives are complex. I'm sure a lot of the people that Rachel deal with have very complicated and difficult lives to lead. And I think we need to acknowledge that in how we approach people's mental health problems. It's probably not good enough to say, you know, we're going to give you some counselling, and then off you go, you'll be sorted. We need to look at people's lives in the context in which they're living them. And if the housing is sub-standard, if they don't have a meaningful job, if they're struggling with debt... It doesn't really matter how much counselling goes around that, their mental health is still going to be, not what it needs to be.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Yeah. And to provide fully for the complexity of the issue is expensive. And I mean, what I'm hearing as well is that the pressure on these services that you're both involved with providing is actually affecting the mental health of the people who are working in them.

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah. It's interesting that we've done quite a lot of work with NHS workers, you know, hugely pressured. We've done some work with emergency services and a similar thing, huge funding pressures over the last five years on

those services. You know, teams really struggling to keep on top of things. Managing the mental health of individuals in pressured jobs is really difficult.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Well, Rachel, we've been hearing about your community garden in Hulme. There are lots of similar projects all over the country. Our producer Geoff Bird has been to North London to drop in on one of the regular sessions run by the community benefit society Lifeafterhummus, where people regularly come together to learn about cooking, with the added benefits of alleviating mental health problems through the simple act of gathering together with a shared goal in mind.

Yoshi, Lifeafterhummus

My name is Yoshi and I work as a volunteer co-ordinator for lifeafterhummus. We teach people how to cook healthy food so that they become healthy in their body and in their mind, and you get to cook and eat with people that you haven't met before.

Geoff Bird, producer

Have you seen people kind of flourish as a result?

Yoshi, Lifeafterhummus

Oh, yeah.

Geoff Bird, producer

What your name's

Volunteers, Lifeafterhummus

[I'm] Julieta. [I'm] Santi.

So this is my first time volunteering but I've been coming here for about three or four times so far. You know, in an area like this that is just really busy and there's lots of transport and lots things like that is quite difficult as a community to connect. And I think, you know, isolation is quite a big issue here. Having a place where people can come, especially like local people, neighbours, meeting new people is a great thing, you know, and it's something that's really needed, I think.

Geoff Bird, producer

Okay, I'm with Farrah. Farrah, what's your full name.

Farrah Rainfly, Lifeafterhummus

Farrah Rainfly.

Geoff Bird, producer

And you... what's your role? I mean right now you're fix the sink with a bit of tape...!

Farrah Rainfly, Lifeafterhummus

Plumber's tape, please.

So, I'm one of the founding directors of Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society. So we chose to become a Community Benefit Society because we wanted to belong to the community – wanted to be of *benefit* to the community and to *belong* to the community.

Geoff Bird, producer

So you're actively trying to engage them? And take account of their opinions and feelings?

Farrah Rainfly, Lifeafterhummus

Yes. But they don't necessarily have to take up membership.

Geoff Bird, producer

The, perhaps, surprise benefit is the degree to which, I understand, this has benefited people in terms of their mental health. When did you notice that happening?

Farrah Rainfly, Lifeafterhummus

Well, we always do our feedback forms and we started to notice what people were saying about their mental health. Which is, we'd suspected it, but we started to get that feedback. Somebody who's been coming repetitively, has said these classes are helping me with my anxiety. It's, you know, that is that person's lived experience. They're saying to you, 'Yeah, it's a cooking class, but it's also helping my well-being'.

May I please get you at a table and we're going to start at 7.30 – we're running 15 minutes late.

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

So I used to live in a commune, it got shut down. And when I lived there, I felt like being around people of different ages was really good for my mental health. Then I got rehoused and it's like I live alone and not by choice. But yeah, I guess I was looking for a way to connect with my community, which I find quite difficult as a, like, foreigner and, also, if you're in your 20s, it's kind of hard to, like, just start talking to some random old person. I can't come every week, but I try and come as often as I can. We're tribal people, and we're not supposed to really alone every night of the week.

Geoff Bird, producer

And is it as straightforward as that? You come here and you instantly kind of connect to people through the act of kind of breaking bread or chopping carrots or whatever it is.

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

Yeah, to be honest, like, you know, sometimes I don't feel so good like it myself and don't really want to come but I force myself to come and I've never gone home not feeling much better than I had felt when I got here.

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

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So I'm originally from Bournemouth. I've been London for three months. To me, it's kind of, I suppose more positive because, if I didn't come to any sort of events, I'd be in isolation not knowing anybody. It's, again, great to meet different people's, different experiences. And I don't know what I'd do without it, I'll be honest.

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

Well, I've been coming here for a little while. And for me, it's just a great Monday evening social. There's 50 people here, it's a good opportunity to, you know, be feel a part of something, to feel part of a group in a community.

Geoff Bird, producer

What benefits does that bring to you in terms of your well-being?

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

So I kind of struggle with a little bit of social anxiety sometimes. So some evenings it's a good evening just to practice being around people and then other evenings or it's more relaxed, it's, I come away feeling that really worthwhile and nice.

Participant, Lifeafterhummus

You don't always have the energy, if you're not feeling good to like go and meet a friend and actually do an entire catch up or something, this is a lot more casual, like. I could come here and be very, very quiet and that would be okay, and just be around people. And that's something that I find really amazing here.

I think it's modern society, we're kind of sold the dream that the kind of best thing we could do is to buy our own flat and not have to live with housemates anymore and not have to live with family anymore. And that's meant to be the thing that makes us happiest. And it's never been the thing that made us happy. We're not supposed to live that way. I love my own space, I'm sure lots of people do. But we're supposed to live around the corner from a grandmother and tell each other's kids to stop being d**ks. And I really don't think it's a London thing – I think there are people all over the world but particularly in Western culture, who are becoming increasingly isolated. I think you have to take care of that yourself and find places like this that can help you to feel more connected to your community.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Does that chime with you guys? So we're hearing similar experiences – there are some really powerful stories in that piece.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

It definitely chimed with me. I really enjoyed listening to that. What you said Stephen about people's lives and how the lives that we lead impact on our well-being and our mental health. So recently, I've taken a decision to start my own social enterprise, doing it the way that I want to do it. But I've also taken some steps in my life, and I really liked what she was saying about being part of a community. I live a really busy life. I've got a pony. Everyone says, 'Why are you taking on a horse? It makes you more busy!', and I've got a horse because it makes me step out of that. And it means that I have to go and do something. I have to go up. I have to put her in the field, muck

her out. But yeah, having the pony helps me and my youngest with our anxiety, with feeling low and just keeps us going.

Steven Buckley, Mind

Well, it was interesting at the end there because she was saying you have to seek these things out. You have to find your community. Is some of the responsibility on the individual? I mean, I found that quite interesting. And, like you say, we're all so busy now – it's often the excuse that we're just too busy to do this and we carry on. But, meanwhile, we're getting worse and worse.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

I think one thing that in the tape that people that Geoff interviewed, had that sense of being able to get out and that confidence to get out and engage in the Lifeafterhumus. I think that a lot of people that I see in society and in our community don't have that initial impetus to get out. And I think that's where we need to support them into doing that, really. And once you get into a place, like they said, you'd get into a place and you keep coming back. But that first step... So yeah, there is an onus on an individual to go out and find that, but that's in an ideal world, everybody would do that. And I think there's lots of barriers to doing that lots.

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah, I'd agree with that. I mean, there are things that we can all do to sort of help improve or maintain our mental well-being. And it was really interesting Rachel to hear about you carving some space in your life for doing something that that you value and want to do. And I think that's one thing that people can do is finding things that they enjoy purely for them making time to do that.

You know, another thing that comes up is fitness a lot of the time, look after your fitness. It's not always easy if you've got a mental health problem. You know, there are barriers of access, there are barriers of money, barriers of motivation, barriers of different physical abilities. And so one of the projects that Mind has been running recently is a project called 'Get Set To Go' which is about helping people with mental health problems take part in community based physical activity. And a lot of that does involve peer work, encouraging them to take that step and doing it together. So they can build some confidence and feel more able to do it in the long term.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

And things like Park Run are really great. But again, it's that you don't want to go to a Park Run on your own. But if you can find someone to buddy up with once you go you meet people there, things like that you think of just as going running, they hugely more than just going running.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So you both come with a solution. What can we do to make sure that the services flourish, continue, deal with the pressure that are under. Rachel, what is your solution?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

So my solution is that Local Authorities and health services fund social enterprises, co-ops, charities, community groups to deliver the support that is needed. But fund it properly without loads of rules attached. So my new

social enterprise, which is called Phantasmagoria, which is really hard to say. But it's key that it's called Phantasmagoria, because it's all about imagination and creativity and where it can take you. It's based in Ashton-Under-Lyne, which is in the borough of Tameside. And in Tameside, I'm really impressed with how they've tackled social prescribing. Because they've created a social prescribing team, who are a team of around 10 people and they work with vulnerable people in society and they actually take them to explore options of volunteering of all sorts of different things that they might engage in.

But what they also do, which is the big difference is that they fund those organisations to deliver that.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So when you say social prescribing, what exactly do we mean by that?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

My understanding of social prescribing is, firstly, it's a buzzword, and it's hard to define. But what I think it means is that if you go and see your GP, instead of giving you a prescription for a drug intervention, they give you a prescription for physical intervention – a place to go and improve your well-being. For our organization, through the community well-being pot we've been funded £25,000 pounds – which for a new organization is pretty amazing – and it means that we are now creating a magical travel emporium. It's very exciting. I've got a key team of volunteers already, we've only been going a month who absolutely love it. But knowing that that's funded and supported is a huge difference to what I feel like at the Community Garden Centre. Is that it always feels underfunded and under resourced.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Steven, what is your solution as well? Because it ties in a little bit, doesn't it?

Steven Buckley, Mind

Yeah, it does. And, you know, our partnership with The Co-op is about actually exploring what some of those solutions might look like in concrete terms, and then provided for funding, for delivery and for funding. So you know, we want to work with The Co-op to make sure the voice of people is heard in the design of services. We want to make sure the services are evidence-based and effective. And we want to make sure they're rooted in the needs of community and that they're sustainable wherever possible. So you know, in terms of our partnership with The Co-op, that's one of the things that we want to deal with that.

I think another solution that we would sort of think about is... Everyone knows there isn't a huge amount of money sloshing around. You know, government departments have had budget cuts, the NHS has been to an extent protected from that. So, you know, a question might be: Does the NHS feel bold enough to fund outside of the health system? You know, are there projects that they could identify and fund as a health intervention? Despite the fact there might not be a randomized control trial that really provides the kind of 'so called' gold standard evidence base that commissioners tend to look for.

When he heard from Local Minds, they express frustration that they're expected to meet that evaluation and evidence base, which they just don't have the time or the expertise to do because they're frontline workers. You know, mental health is about people, they want to work with people, they don't want to spend their time filling in forms. You know, they know what they do is effective. And this comes back to the point on the tape, because people's experience tells them that it's making a difference. Yeah, I'm not quite sure how much evidence you really need to gather beyond someone saying, 'Two weeks ago, I felt dreadful. Now I feel a lot better. Yeah, I feel more capable in these areas.' That, to me, feels like quite a solid outcome.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

It's getting that balance, which is what I'm trying to do in my new social enterprise from the very start is having some time to actually record that. So my aim is that we keep one day a week where we don't open the shop. We don't open the workshops. We actually look at monitoring and evaluation and also some future planning. Because the other problem is that when you're just delivering and firefighting all the time, you never get to plan ahead.

Steven Buckley, Mind

I'm wondering whether or not we can spin it around a little bit and I wonder whether it should be less the responsibility of community services to evidence, their impact, and more the responsibility of the state or system for one of the better phrase to understand the impact those services are delivering.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And so how would you create that kind of awareness at that level?

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Well, one thing that we look at the Tameside model – that could work and should work. It's quite a new model. But the social prescribing team should be doing the reporting. So if they bring a volunteer down who joins us, they should check in and then say, 'How are they doing?' And we could just verbally say, 'Oh, it's brilliant. They've been three weeks on the run. They've really engaged.' They can do that sort of more formal monitoring and report back to public health or Tameside Council whoever their funding's coming from,

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So is it lobbying? Is it working together? Is it both those things?

Steven Buckley, Mind

I mean, there's always place for lobbying, you know, getting people around the table. And I think it's really important that politicians at a more senior level, that are perhaps a bit more distant from the frontline, to hear the stories as well as see the numbers, because I think it's the stories that really kind of explain what's going on in people's lives.

But equally, you know, lobbying by itself is not sufficient. There needs to be action. And I do think there's a place for organisations and communities to take charge of that themselves, where possible and finding what works and delivering that where possible.

I was talking with some young men from African Caribbean heritage about mental health a few months back and they were talking about their experiences collectively, having gone to see their GP talking about depression or anxiety, and their experience of trying to access counselling through their GP, and they didn't have a good experience. They felt the GP didn't take them particularly seriously, wanted to give him some pills. Possibly, he just didn't think that maybe a young black man would be interested in counselling. So that group of those blokes got together, they found a volunteer counsellor who was prepared to come and give an hour or so of time every fortnight. They found a church hall that would, you know, host them, and they did some sort of community group counselling once a fortnight. You know, they felt it is very effective, you felt it was perhaps a bit more culturally appropriate, understood some of the issues, you know. I'm not sure how sustainable they think it is in

the long term, but I think it's an example of how, with the right kind of will and the right kind of understanding and the right people working together, you can achieve something without the permission of anyone else.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

The opportunity is there.

Rachel Summerscales, [formerly] Hulme Community Garden

Yeah, working together it sums it up really. So working together as a community but working together, as a government, as a health service, as a local council, as a voluntary sector. We need to work together more co-operatively, don't we?

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Well, best of luck to you both. Rachel in your new endeavour, Phantasmagoria. And thank you both for coming and sharing your ideas and experiences.

If you would like more information about support services that are available, please do visit mind.org.uk.

Even in banking. Okay – and seedy sourdough, as we heard. And well, thank you both. That was a really inspiring conversation.

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More Than a Shop is a collaboration between Co-operatives UK, The Co-op, Co-op News, The Co-operative College and The Co-operative Heritage Trust. The series is presented by me, Elizabeth Alker, and it's produced by Geoff Bird on behalf of Sparklab Productions.