



Mental Health Coaching and Training  
with Social Impact

# **LESSONS from 15 years of working with people and businesses supporting positive mental health In Cambridgeshire**

## **2008 to 2024**



Supported by funding from  
**Cambridgeshire  
Community  
Foundation**





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## 1. Introduction

### The purpose of this document



The purpose of the document is to share what we have learnt as a charity from our 15 years of operating to support and promote positive mental health across Cambridgeshire.

Specifically, we wanted to share the lessons we have learned from delivering coaching to support the positive mental health of vulnerable individuals in our community as the only charity providing this support. In addition, as many small charities struggle to maintain income from traditional forms of funding – grants or donations as well as contracts – we wanted to share what we learnt from successfully diversifying our income by delivering services to business in our last years of operation.

We hope these lessons prove valuable to other charities. Please reach out to Maria – [info@mariavarallo.co.uk](mailto:info@mariavarallo.co.uk) if you would find it helpful to discuss anything that comes out of this document.

There are a huge range of individuals and organisations who have been key to our success over the 15 years. A huge and heartfelt thank you to each of you for your support – from us and from every one of the people we have worked with.

Sam and Maria



## 2 Context

### 2.1 Mental health facts and figures

#### Individual need

Mental health is an issue that affects many people: [estimates state that 1 in 6 adults](#) in the UK experienced a ‘common mental disorder’ such as depression or anxiety in the past week.

Levels of anxiety and depression amongst our beneficiary group rose significantly during the Covid 19 pandemic.

#### Mental health in the workplace

Stress anxiety and depression are thought to be responsible for almost half of all working days lost in Britain due to health issues.<sup>1</sup> Figures before the pandemic showed that [poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion each year](#).

Figures from the [CIPD](#) show that mental health remains a key issue for employees, with for example, around three-quarters of respondents (76%) report some stress-related absence with heavy workloads and management style most commonly to blame.

### 2.2 Our vision, mission and values

#### OUR VISION

Our vision is that anyone experiencing poor mental health has access to the coaching and training support they need to help them lead meaningful lives, in and out of the workplace.

#### OUR MISSION

We provide coaching, training and mentoring to improve mental health and reduce stigma across Cambridgeshire.

We do this in three ways:

1. by supporting unemployed adults to manage their poor mental health and build their confidence towards making positive life changes, including entering the workplace;
2. by supporting employers with training and coaching to create open work cultures and skills that proactively benefit the mental health of their people; and
3. by creating opportunities for the individuals and employers we work with to build meaningful connections, for example through mentoring

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<sup>1</sup> Health and Safety Executive, Annual Statistics (October 2019).



## OUR VALUES

**People First** – the wellbeing of the people we work with is at the heart of everything we do.

**We have integrity** – we act fairly and honestly.

**We are collaborative** – we make a difference by working together to tackle the huge issue of mental health

**We are always learning** – we grow and adapt to make sure we meet the needs of those we are here to support

## 2.3 Our journey

We started out as a community group who saw the benefits and a gap in the use of the life coaching model and positive psychology to create change for adults disadvantaged by poverty.

We initially ran a pilot project with Cambridge Women's Resource Centre. They provided a place of safety for women who had experienced abuse and violence or women struggling with their mental health, resulting from bullying, being a lone parent, at risk of addiction or at risk of imprisonment. We found our course went a long way with all of the women we worked with, having never experienced any personal development previously. The project was a great success and transformational for the women we worked with. This allowed us to secure further project funding. One of those women went on to become a Trustee for the charity and eventually our Community Engagement Coach – Anna.

Initially, our focus was getting people closer to work. However, over time, we saw that there was a common thread running through all our beneficiaries: they were coping with mental ill health. At the time of applying for funding from The National Lottery in 2015, we decided to alter our focus to working with adults experiencing both mental ill health and poverty. There was ample data and research that showed mental ill health was more prevalent for those living below the poverty line. We understand that poverty is one of the most harmful factors and probably the most harmful affecting mental health.

This became the core of our work between 2015 and 2024: delivering Confidence for Change programmes – funded by the National Lottery to individual beneficiaries with a focus on training and coaching to support positive mental health and resilience.

The aim of Illuminate's Confidence for Change and Progression programmes was to bring life coaching techniques to individuals disadvantaged by long term unemployment and mental ill-health. The coaching model is learning and development so forward focussed and timebound and was unique in Cambridgeshire and rare in the wider UK as an approach with this group.

Whilst there were and are many very good support and development approaches that exist both locally and nationally, they did not always work for Illuminate's target



beneficiary group. 80% of Illuminate beneficiaries wanted to consider working, but 60% were too fearful, anxious or struggling with their mental health to pursue work, believing their mental ill-health is stigmatised in the workplace so created a barrier.

Our approach bridged the gap between counselling, therapy and poor mental health. Organisations referring people to us who were not making the most of their services and help they had already been provided, noticing that their self-belief, low confidence and self-esteem was the barrier to moving forward. Working with those beneficiaries enabled them to move on or return to the referring organisation more confident and motivated to take up their opportunities. It also allowed us to signpost or refer beneficiaries to the right existing support where appropriate.

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, our work focused on building self-confidence and enabling those we worked with to become more motivated and resilient by working face to face. Like all services, the pandemic led to our adapting these courses into accessible, shorter online sessions that responded to the need of our beneficiary group's. Most Illuminate beneficiaries were already vulnerable, and the isolation of lockdown and anxiety of the pandemic had a profound ongoing effect on them. To meet their needs, our focus shifted to include and ensure there was a service for connection and support. We brought in associate trainers and included mentoring beneficiaries to deliver sessions for peers (see the stories in the Appendix to this document for examples). We created shorter live on-line sessions, focussing on reducing the negative impacts of isolation brought about by lockdowns.

Having successfully adapted to meet the needs of individuals during the pandemic, as the world emerged from the pandemic, we returned to a Confidence for Change format in both group and one to one formats, moving away from one off sessions, and so returning to our roots as an organisation.

ILLUMINATE CHARITY  
**THE ILLUMINATE JOURNEY**  
 Confidence for Change

**Procedure**

Referrals, self-referrals & inquiries.



Courses, group coaching, meetings our approach.



Next Steps

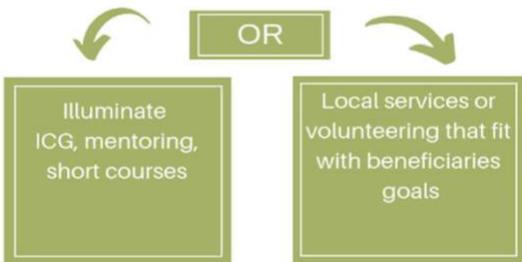


**Approach**

Phone conversation with all regarding expectations, content, motivation and readiness.

Welcoming, deliberately informal, no stigma or labels. No medical history. Respect, independent thinking, reflection, discussion. Beneficiaries are resourceful and whole.

Action plan, goals, future thinking, next steps can include: -  
 Illuminate Community Group (ICG), mentoring scheme, mailing list and/or signposting out of Illuminate.



# Confidence building courses and events

Ready to make some changes in your life, ready to invest in yourself?

We have a choice of one to two hour sessions online to help build your confidence and raise self esteem.



Coaching and Training with Social Impact

- **Boost self-confidence**
- **Build your resilience**
- **Get clear on your boundaries**
- **Identifying your values and strengths**

**Join us.**

[www.illuminatecharity.org.uk](http://www.illuminatecharity.org.uk)

All our online sessions and in-person events are free if you are over 18 and out of work, in between jobs or not working.

[www.illuminatecharity.org.uk](http://www.illuminatecharity.org.uk)



In 2020 we started work to engage with local businesses. The charity was selected as one of 16 charitable organisations to work with the Association of Mental Health Providers through their Enterprise Development Programme in 2021. This enabled us to bring in expert consultancy to develop a business plan and successfully grow our coaching and training services for businesses, as a means to diversifying income.

Lloyds Bank Foundation provided support through its Enhance Programme to undertake market research and create a communications and engagement strategy. Also through The School for Social Entrepreneurs we were offered a place on their course for business development which Maria completed in 2022.

Our objective was to use the expertise and reputation we had gained locally to deliver services to the business community. We were also keen to reduce the stigma around mental health in the workplace. Our focus was on delivering mental health and wellbeing training, coaching to employees as an external provider and Mental Health First Aid courses, all of which:

1. Strengthened the resilience of leaders, managers and staff (including managing uncertainty and managing transition)
2. Overcame the stigma of talking about mental health, ensuring a culture where open conversations allow employees to get the support they need at the right time, preventing greater problems like burnout.
3. Empowered managers and staff with the confidence and skills to spot and monitor the signs of poor mental health and have successful conversations about it so it can be successfully managed.



## 2.4 Key successes over our 15 years

We have worked with over 2000 vulnerable adults, through courses, workshops and coaching schemes, including Confidence for Change and Confidence for Progression programmes and delivered our training, Mental Health First Aid courses and coaching to business community, working with over 900 employees.



Funding *Confidence for Change and Confidence for Progression* programmes 2015–2024

### *2022 launch of our Business Advisory Group*

To provide support and advice to help us work successfully with the Cambridgeshire business community to achieve our mission



Lloyds Bank Foundation funding for Illuminate Community Group and for support in developing our offer to business

We became *members of the Association of Mental Health Providers* in 2022 demonstrating our commitment to quality in the services we provide



### *Our first Speaker Programme launched*

In 2020–21 we supported seven of our individual beneficiaries to be able to tell their stories of living with mental health conditions. The programme has two objectives: enabling each individual to have a voice and build confidence and providing them with opportunities to speak and reduce stigma, including as speakers on the programme we run for businesses



Errington Legal became our *first corporate partner in 2022* – supporting our mission and demonstrating to their staff, clients and suppliers that the agency takes mental health seriously



We worked with England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing, care and support between 2022 and 2023. Our role was to support the transition and organisational change by providing [coaching and training to managers and directors](#). Our independence and impartiality was highly welcomed and key to the success of our work together.



MHFA England

We became well established as [quality providers of MHFA courses](#) online and in person.

Chosen as Charity of the Year 2022 by Pure Resourcing Cambridge



In 2022 we launched our first [Wellbeing Practitioners Network](#) with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. The network is for all internal Mental Health First Aiders and wellbeing leads enabling them to meet regularly forming a peer group providing mutual support in their role, sharing learning and developing expertise.



Health Inequalities Challenge prize 2023 finalists for our coaching scheme

### 3. The lessons we have learnt

#### 3.1 Coaching to support individuals



The life coaching model in the mental health sector was unusual fifteen years ago, this has now changed and many organisations now use coaching as a service or their staff have coaching skills to provide a service. Illuminate developed additional services to respond to a need – a peer support community group facilitated by a former beneficiary. This group offered mentoring using local businesses, so employees mentoring beneficiaries and also offering talks.

Our style and approach was using coaching as our foundation for all services we made the decision to be deliberately informal, warm and welcoming and avoid any professional jargon/speak as our voice to ensure those we worked with could learn in a relaxed setting. This strategy was used from first contact, to the course, coaching or workshop delivery and right through to moving on from us. It also meant beneficiaries kept in contact with us often sharing how they were doing or when they needed a little help.

In addition, beneficiaries told us that they felt over *monitored and assessed*, constantly consulted without any real benefit or change by other organisations. We have worked hard to *gain* the right balance between the need to collect beneficiary data and progression without overloading them. Key to this was our ability to show why we are collecting the data and how it enabled us to deliver support that directly met the needs beneficiaries expressed.

One of Illuminate's key coaching pillars was to collaboratively set small, achievable goals with beneficiaries. The GROW coaching model alone is too restrictive and formulaic for the needs of the individuals Illuminate works with. Much of the support Illuminate beneficiaries accessed before encountering the charity was highly structured

and could miss addressing the beneficiaries needs. The charity's USP is that it has developed expertise and skills in areas including listening and questioning which are not formulaic but tailored to meet individual need.

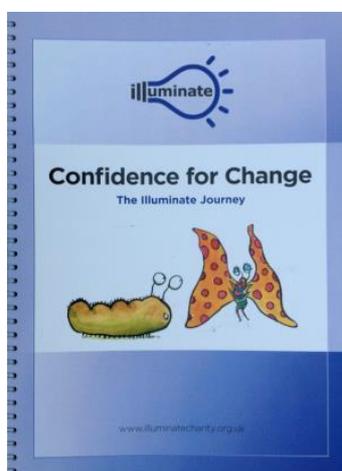
Illuminate coaches used their expertise to be flexible and were able to include the use of Appreciative Inquiry, Positive Psychology, FUEL, Human Givens always seeing the coachee as whole and resourceful. We also set home learning from observation exercises, mindfulness through to using online tools and exercises. Our work was always values driven – the simple principle that if individuals understand what is important to them and why, that they can make more informed life choices and importantly understand when things are NOT right for them.

The use of writing, journals, drawing and collages also proved to be useful tools where appropriate. In addition, home learning or signposting to tools, articles and videos were helpful to support beneficiaries between sessions.

Beneficiaries were encouraged and skilfully coached to think beyond their comfort zone but within the realm of attainability. The small steps and goals not only increased self-confidence but also helped them move towards reclaiming motivation when often there was a belief there was none. We also had a list of referral agencies local and national that were helpful and supportive, including in-person local services, we could signpost beneficiaries to for additional support.

A key learning over the last five years of operation was to ensure agility and resilience to be able to adapt to meet changing circumstances specifically when unforeseen challenges like a global pandemic arise. Adapting both practically for example editing and re-writing courses and service for online. So meeting the changing need of our traditional beneficiary group (focusing on anxiety) were key.

This agility and professionalism came from having a solid core team with the right skills, right mindset and willingness to adapt to need as well as excellent communication with the beneficiary group to understand their needs. It was important to us that as our pool of associate coaches and trainers grew that they were supported by supervision and team meetings. This paid off in the high evaluation results from our online coaching schemes and online sessions and courses.



The Illuminate workbook, developed and created in-house for participants of our Confidence for Change courses. In recent years this was available for sale from our website.



## 3.2 The business community

Illuminate formally launched a training and coaching service for employers in supporting the mental health of their people in 2020. This grew impressively during our last years of operation and this trading raised £88,718 over the four years.

The money raised we used to support the services we offered to individual beneficiaries; enabling us to work with more beneficiaries as well as enabling businesses to support beneficiaries with skills including mentoring.

Careful planning and expert support up front are key elements to successful income generation from businesses. We recognised we had to approach this process with the same professionalism, confidence and purpose as the businesses we were engaging with. It was important to clearly define and understand the challenge faced by businesses, and the solution we were offering as well as what differentiated the Illuminate approach – our USP.

Lloyds Bank Foundation provided support through its Enhance Programme to undertake market research and create a business communications and engagement strategy. This meant that we had a clear idea of which businesses we were targeting, and how. We created clear messages and ways of engaging businesses that worked for them for example, using LinkedIn and working with business networks across Cambridgeshire where we knew our audience likes to be. Importantly we also adapted our mission, vision and values so they resonated with the business community.

In 2020 we were selected as one of 16 charitable organisations to work with the Association of Mental Health Providers through their Enterprise Development Programme. This enabled us to bring in expert consultancy, as well as a business mentor, to develop a clear and detailed business plan to successfully grow our coaching and training services for businesses to diversify income.

The interest in mental health within the business community started to grow with the publication of the Richard Collier report – Mind Your Head 2019 and Deloitte's Mental Health and Employers Refreshing the case for investment in 2020. These were important tools in clearly making the case for businesses to address mental health.

Drawing on ten years of experience and being well established in the local community with a strong reputation meant we could leverage support to extend our network into the Cambridgeshire business sector.

We made sure we dedicated the right resource to building our relationships with and offer to businesses. Restructuring roles within the charity allowed Maria Varallo to move into the role of business development full time at a time critical for the launch of these services. Maria was supported in developing skills for her new role by taking part in the School for Social Entrepreneurs Changemakers Programme from 2021–22.



The charity now had a strategy and a way forward and it was Maria who moved into the business development role, this came after a rethink of roles and responsibilities and with our mentor looking at what strengths and skills we had within the team. Maria had really enjoyed the initial steps towards working with the business community, so it was a good fit for her to continue when looking at the roles and responsibilities and experience of the team.

It is critical to invest the time and energy needed to build excellent relationships and partnerships in the local business community. This takes time especially given our limited internal resources, so we had to be creative. One important and impactful action was to create a group of individuals from the business sector for the Illuminate Business Advisory Group (IBAG) to act as advisors, a sounding board and as advocates for the charity as it moved to working with businesses was key.

The IBAG group was made up of representatives of the local business community who had been supportive and interested in our work, this included legal and HR professions. The IBAG met four times a year and all members were supportive and helpful in our mission, Maria reported to the meetings and one trustee attended as a link to the board. Relationship building was key and networking in-person (for example with local business groups) and online was also very important.

Working with our mentor, Peta to support, challenge and suggest ideas provided invaluable support in terms of developing a strategy and delivering services that really met the needs of businesses across our community. It was also an important part of the team's development to talk through the learning, what worked and what didn't, keeping the website current and talking to business not only to the beneficiaries and voluntary sector etc.

With our messaging and communications in place Sam connected with Anchor Housing and this relationship developed into a major piece of work for the charity. The team delivered training, talks, presentations and coaching to managers over 2020 and 2021. Anchor was going through organisation change and had the foresight to understand the impact COVID had and now the structural change on their people.

"The coaching made such a difference by allowing time to reflect on my management and leadership skills and style so I can anticipate what aspects I need to draw on. It's extremely useful to explore these issues safely, without judgement and with an objective experienced person. Coaching is also extremely important to help people see where they have potential to develop themselves as leaders."

"It was really helpful to have someone from outside of Anchor, as there was no agenda involved and I felt able to be open and honest. It gave me a fresh perspective, sometimes you do not see certain things when you're so close to a situation. It was very easy to talk and it made me see things a lot differently, so thank you for your input which has helped me more than you realise. "

## Charity of the Year

In 2022 we were named Charity of the Year for Pure Resourcing Cambridge (PRS). PRS were supportive and helpful in our work since 2015 when Caroline Batchelor (Director) delivered a talk on finding work to one of the Confidence for Change courses. We invited speakers to talk on the course at certain points for example – goals, motivation and ‘what next for you?’ sections.

In 2023 and 24 Mark Wishart from PRS kindly volunteered his time to offer group mentoring and coaching workshops in-person in Cambridge. These were very popular, and Mark shared his expertise and knowledge to help people move closer to the workplace through discussing CV’s, online searches and contacting businesses.

### The Pure Resourcing Solutions Cambridge Team



“It was a pleasure to share my experience and knowledge in the workshop this morning, not only professionally but also my personal experience which many of the group could relate too. The organisation by Maria and Sam for the event was excellent as was all the correspondence and conversations prior, it was a pleasure to be able to volunteer again for the charity.” Mark Wishart, Senior Manager, Pure Resourcing Solutions Cambridge

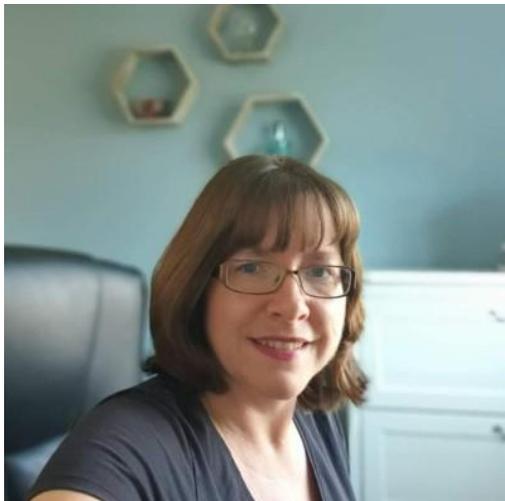


## Admin support – Virtual Assistant

As Covid hit we gained emergency funding to support the transition from face to face to online and offering us capacity in office administration and data management. We did not have enough funding to appoint a part time employed role so we decided to work with a virtual assistant and Jane Jackson came highly recommended. Jane quickly became an established and vital part of the team.

“I recall my first meeting with Jane, our trial Virtual Assistant. We had the funding to offer her 20 hours of work a month and after an hour of me downloading everything I knew that I thought would be useful, Jane understood. I thought it would take ages to get her trained to be effective, how wrong I was. Jane picked up everything from that first meeting and made an impact straight away. I now realise that as a VA, that is her background and she works this way without a thought. I can honestly say I was quite reluctant to use a VA, but it very quickly became the more efficient thing we did regarding staffing. It is such a cost-effective way to bring in high calibre staffing into your organization. I wish I done this a lot sooner!” Sam Greenley

Jane's website and number – 07703 827824



## 4. Stories and case studies

### 4.1 How Illuminate has impacted on individual lives

It's almost impossible to choose from the number of stories we have collected over the years that show the power of coaching and training in improving individual lives. We have shared many of these stories over the years, including in our annual reports and on social media.

We are particularly proud when individuals we have worked with are, with support then able to take on a role at Illuminate, as in R's case. There are other beneficiaries who have gone on to deliver workshops or other forms of support for beneficiaries, like Linda and A.

#### R's Story – Confidence for Change beneficiary and Illuminate Trainer

R has lived experience of poor mental health. He struggled with his mental health throughout his university years, receiving a formal diagnosis of depression and borderline personality disorder. He graduated with a Human Biology degree, achieving a PhD in Child Health and went directly into work.

“It wasn't long before I became aware that there was little support or understanding of mental health issues in the workplace, the ‘stigma’ was significant for me as I became more and more isolated in my experience and with my diagnosis's. It's all a bit of a blur to be honest, my Depression and BPD took over. I relocated our family, from London to Manchester and then to Cambridgeshire, my wife has a good job and although I had been in work, change after change, life was becoming more and more overwhelming for me.”

R was referred to Illuminate in 2015 by the Richmond Fellowship following a GP referral to their service. He attended the ‘Confidence for Change’ course and secured a job at that time; however, the mental health support was not in place within the organisation and he was not able to continue in the role.

“I felt disempowered, disillusioned, isolated and without a salary for the first time in 30 years, it felt horrible. My mental health fragile, with more of a goal in place I returned to Illuminate and completed ‘Confidence for Change’ again in 2016. The courses were great and I was in a group of people which made me realise I am not alone in my experience, that helps. The courses have taught me a lot about myself and specifically my limiting beliefs, the second time on the course I had a different perspective and was more receptive. I was able to follow through with opportunities the mentoring I received from local solicitor's firm Taylor Vinters was empowering and helped hugely.



“Illuminate has helped me to restore faith in myself, given me the focus, confidence, helped me become more outward looking and afforded the time to access the support I need.”

R went on to create and deliver his talk ‘Mental Health in the Workplace’ a presentation for businesses as he became an Illuminate Trainer with lived experience. He also completed an accredited Mental Health First Aid course.

“The benefits for me are huge, I am in a completely different place, there are down days, but the down days are occasions now not every day. I think Illuminate gives people their lives back. It gave me a future when I couldn’t see one. I now feel I am doing something not just for my family but for me and as an Illuminate beneficiary, I feel valued, I value myself.”

## Linda’s Story – Confidence for Change beneficiary and workshop presenter

Linda and her young son had relocated to the local area supported by the Refuge. Once settled, she began to focus on re-establishing herself and her career. Working with a Coach with Reed Partnership. The coach also happened to have been a beneficiary of our ‘Confidence for Change’ course in 2011.

Linda was keen to draw on her own personal journey. Overcoming the challenge of the Family Court processes which had a significantly impact on her mental health.

“As a single mum, who had overcome some turbulent and challenging events in my life, I was referred to Illuminate via Reed Partnership Executive Coach. Through Illuminate I was hoping to boost my confidence, and to test myself for the capability of delivering my acting courses to a wider audience. The Illuminate courses were great and gave me an understanding of using and working on Zoom. I received mentoring from Sam and Anna to put my own course together.

The amount of support, caring and understanding I received really boosted my confidence and self-esteem. I was able to create and deliver four sessions, sharing the acting techniques I had learned to bring the mind and body together for calm and relaxation, and confident communication. I feel I am where I wanted to be, in terms of aims, perspectives and plans, and achieving my dream of launching my own business. I am really grateful for the opportunity and experience; it really has given me the confidence to move forward in my life.”

The course was successfully delivered and well received by the attendees of the sessions. Immediately after delivering her course with us Linda developed her own website and established a community focused drama group. Linda is now a language tutor and has developed a community drama club.

## A's Story – Confidence for Change beneficiary and workshop presenter

“Getting a place on and going to the Illuminate ‘Confidence for Change’ course was really important for me, I have struggled with change and had so many changes since August 2018. However, being on the course I started to realise that there are so many clever and sensitive people struggling with mental health like me, so I’m not alone! That makes a big difference and I’ve learned positive strategies to cope on a day to day basis. The best experience for me was the talks from people that had struggled with the severe conditions of mental health issues throughout their lives, they are here giving me the biggest example of how to be imperfect, but brave and they encourage me find the way to be useful to others too. This is the most inspiring thing: if they can do this I can, I don’t need to be perfect to be able to help the others.”

A went on to create and deliver a Qigong workshop to the Illuminate Community Group, which contributed to an improvement in confidence and focus, moving to London and securing a part-time role as a Youth Worker. A reconnected with Illuminate during the COVID19 lockdown period as part of his personal mental health plan, "It was helpful to reach out and reconnect with Anna at a challenging time for us all. I’ve contributed a blog to MIND about my journey and I am actually leading a group of Qigong sessions on Wednesday mornings with a NHS community group and this is thanks to that day of mini workshops with Illuminate."

“It was great to be amongst a group of like-minded people, it gave me the confidence to ask the group co-ordinator if I could receive guidance to put a workshop together for the community group, focusing on my passion and knowledge of, body and mind acupuncture therapy. It was a fantastic experience; she was able to offer me mentoring and encouragement, which really helped when I felt anxious or worried. The workshop was great, it was the first time I had given a talk to a group of people, I felt I had achieved something special. I had a great response from the group. Now I’m more aware that I’ve a choice to make each single day, each single moment, I can be out there and go towards ‘difficulties’, learn and grow or I can choose to let myself lead from my old beliefs and stay stuck in my comfort zone. It’s a much better place for me to be. I choose to move forward positively. Illuminate was a magical experience for me.”

A continues to deliver his Shiatsu & Jin Shin Do holistic wellbeing sessions in London, and volunteers within the LGBTQT community locally.



## T's Story – Confidence for Progression beneficiary and participant on the speaker programme

Lockdown brought huge challenges for T, a personal trainer and an active member of the Illuminate beneficiary community, however weekly connection to the weekly community sessions supported his wellbeing and mental health.

“It was huge for me the lockdowns, as someone who lives alone and was used to going to the gym every day to then being contained and isolated was tough. Illuminate really did support their community, it was a lifeline for many of us. Having the opportunity to get involved in the speaker programme with Susie was excellent, and eye opening. We all have our personal stories, and it was really humbling to be part of the speaker group. We all inspired one another on a level, and we were able to offer encouragement to one another at a challenging time for the whole world. I really admire the courage I saw, and the confidence that the group gained as a whole. Personally, it was helpful to have something positive to focus on, and a way of giving back to Illuminate on some level.

In my younger days I achieved a Social Work degree and worked across social care and probation sector services, in 1989 I made the decision to change my career direction and invest in a business opportunity within the hospitality industry. Things went well for the first 5 years, business was thriving, I was running a business, worked unsociable hours – I just kept going. Then it came to a point where everything spiralled out of control, things weren't as great as I thought – I had become dependent on alcohol, although I was in complete denial and in the midst of the chaos that accompanies addiction, depression, anxiety, stress, major financial worries, relationship breakdown, homeless and the worry of my ageing parents.

My confidence was zero and I had some proper dark days, it was only my daughter that really kept me going. And then there was the ‘biggie’ I had to acknowledge that I was an alcoholic. I committed to years of recovery work and have achieved 14 years of sobriety. In 2019 confidence in myself and my abilities was really low, depression was knocking at my door again and deep down still carrying the weight of the last 10 years.

I heard about Illuminate which really did come at the right time. Illuminate helped me gain confidence in myself, I got my focus back, felt involved in life again. I think it's great that Illuminate fully support the conversations we need to be having about men and mental health, it's so important. Now I'm feeling really good about life, we all have down days, but finding focus moves you forward, Illuminate has definitely given me confidence in my focus and direction.”

## 4.2 How Illuminate has impacted on employees – a case study

England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing, care and support.

Illuminate provided a specialised wellbeing coaching and resilience training package for managers and their teams whilst the organisation was going through significant changes.



We worked with 77 managers over three months and monitored the impact of our work. At the end we produced an evaluation report with the results, feedback, and impact.

Our independence, being an external provider, was highly welcomed and key to success. Importantly, feedback stated that working with an external coach meant managers could have more honest and in-depth conversations more than they could with their own managers. This led to a more honest and professional relationship with positive outcomes.

### The Training

77 operational managers across the organisation participated in the 5 Resilience for Teams training days.

Outcomes agreed: –

1. An understanding of how the brain and body reacts to stress
2. Introduction and insight into techniques for managing stress, anxiety and build resilience
3. An understanding of practical application in cascading to their teams

Evaluation results: –

76% scored it as excellent

23% very good

1% OK

100% would recommend the training

96% said they now have a better understanding of resilience

4% said they would follow up through their coaching how to put some of the tools and strategies into practice

### The Coaching

The focus was on supporting managers to develop their leadership role and style whilst being mindful of their own wellbeing and personal development.



Common themes were personal and professional development as managers evolve and learn to become leaders. Identifying and tackling outdated or unhelpful beliefs and ideas about themselves and their potential. Developing skills and confidence.

Mental wellbeing was at the heart of these conversations and by raising their awareness of their own wellbeing and mental health they, in turn, could manage more effectively the wellbeing of their teams.

Outcomes agreed:-

1. Managers will be enabled, motivated, and more resilient
2. Increase in feeling valued and in control
3. Identify their personal strengths and skills
4. Increased confidence in their leadership role

Evaluation results: -

87% scored excellent

13% very good

100% would recommend the coaching

75% gained practical strategies for their role

83% had greater confidence in their role

92% gained new coping strategies for stress and overwhelm

100% stated the coaching sessions were beneficial and helpful. The attendance rates for training and coaching sessions was 100%

It was clear that capitalising on our independence and impartiality whilst utilising our expertise in coaching and training brings significant benefits for organisations big and small. This was evidenced in the evaluations as well as in the qualitative feedback.

Our work is innovative and professional offering powerful support and learning in uncertain times. Working together demonstrates the value an organisation has for its greatest asset.

**"The coaching made such a difference by having time to reflect on my management and leadership skills so I can anticipate what I need to draw on and develop. It's extremely useful to explore this, without judgment and with an objective experienced person."**

“I have known Illuminate from their early days and have watched as the charity has grown and developed into the outstanding organisation it is today. The Illuminate team are passionate about what they do and actively live and work by their core values. The courses they provide are person centred and they deliver real results for those that attend. As an organisation Illuminate are active members of the local voluntary sector and work with others to provide the best outcomes for their clients. I have always been impressed by the professionalism, integrity and knowledge of the whole Illuminate team, this has never been stronger than over the last 18 months where they have adapted their delivery to ensure that they are still there to support their clients through what has been an increasingly difficult period.”

**Mark Freeman – CEO - Cambridgeshire Community Volunteer Services (CCVS)**



Lockdown Christmas team meeting  
2021



Staff and trustees  
2023



### 3. Thank You

To all the individuals who have made such a difference, including the following:

*Our team of staff and associates*

Anna Gilchrist  
Eleanor Morrison  
Fay Durrant  
Jane Jackson  
Jeremy Gulvin  
Richard Stephens  
Susie Peter  
Vikki Pratley  
Kylie Holmes

*Our mentor*

Peta Sweet

*Our Trustees*

Alan Soer  
Christine Montgomery  
John Clark  
Keith Bullock  
Pam Scott (Chair)  
Special mention to Katrina Copping our first Chair who believed in Illuminate right from the start.

*Illuminate Business Advisory Group members*

Christine Shaw  
Caroline Batchelor  
Eleanor Sidgwick  
Jan Holmes  
Keith Bullock

*The foundations and organisations generously providing grant funding*

Association of Mental Health Providers, Comic Relief  
Enterprising Development Programme  
Living Sport  
Cambridge Community Foundation  
National Lottery  
Lloyds Bank Foundation

*The generous people who volunteered their time and skills*

Suzanne Favell – John Lewis  
Lyn Hudson – John Lewis  
Sarah Barker–Hircock – John Lewis  
Judith Pugh – Pure Resourcing Solutions  
Millie Fuller – Cambridge Consultants

## Looking forward

The expertise, knowledge and skills remain with the team members: –

Maria will remain working in the local area developing and delivering courses, coaching for groups and individuals, taking the learning and expertise from Illuminate into her next role. You can contact her – [info@mariavarallo.co.uk](mailto:info@mariavarallo.co.uk)

Jeremy will continue delivering the Mental Health First Aid courses for businesses and coaching for individuals and groups, you can contact him – [coach@syncsynergy.co.uk](mailto:coach@syncsynergy.co.uk)

Sam is focusing on welfare and safeguarding at festivals and supporting mental wellbeing at events throughout the UK. Sam is also available for mentoring, consultancy and business support – [sam.greenley@outlook.com](mailto:sam.greenley@outlook.com)

Anna continues to work in the sector and the local area offering mentoring and community engagement services. You can contact Anna through her LinkedIn profile.

Jane our virtual assistant continues to be self-employed and specialising in non-profits and small businesses – [jane.jackson@jsiadminolutions.co.uk](mailto:jane.jackson@jsiadminolutions.co.uk)

