



INTUITIVE THINKING SKILLS®

Empowering people through education

Intuitive Thinking Skills' Ambassador Programme is the culmination of 20 years of experience in public sector services and is now a leading light of the LERO agenda. We live and breathe the harnessing of lived experience to create powerful role models of recovery

THE ORIGINAL LERO

FOUNDED IN 2005, Intuitive Thinking Skills provides mentoring and courses designed and delivered by people with lived experience. By empowering through education, we take a unique approach to building people's knowledge, practical skills and thinking tools to support independence.

With 120 staff across England and Wales, Intuitive Thinking Skills works across a range of sectors, including criminal justice, drugs and alcohol, mental health, employment, domestic abuse and homelessness.

PARTNERSHIPS

Everything Intuitive Thinking Skills does is within wider partnerships, reflecting the complexity of our participants' needs – be it

clinical harm reduction, physical and mental health services, or personal resilience. Our partnerships enable the development of local recovery networks that talk to the needs of individuals and their communities.

It was from this perspective that we developed our Ambassador Programme – a local, community-based approach to harnessing the lived experience of people coming through services who want to give back, to develop positive networks for themselves and for others.

AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME

Starting a community-based initiative can be daunting, and the complexities of statutory obligations can make it difficult

to get a good idea off the ground. So, it occurred to us: why not strip community volunteers of red tape obligations? Why not support them to risk assess, help write business plans, check statutory requirements, and perhaps provide them with some localised funding to help them become self-sufficient?

And so the Ambassador Programme was born. We developed our own Level 2 Information and Guidance qualification as a base standard on which to develop the professional skills of people interested in volunteering or starting their own community-based services. Further enhanced with additional training covering boundaries, risk and escalation, and domestic abuse awareness, our ambassadors end the programme with a strong professional grounding on which to build their future careers.

We create the stage on which our ambassadors dance! It is our job to facilitate great ideas that come from people who want to develop their communities for the better, to provide places of refuge and recovery, to inspire their communities to take control and create meaningful services of their own.



Intuitive Thinking Skills was established in 2005, inspired by the personal journey of founder Peter Bentley and his experience of the Manchester drug and alcohol service.

Peter recalls the early days:

Services back in 2005 were much more focused on harm reduction than recovery outcomes. The services I encountered after my detox were all very low in aspiration. Many saw me as a problem rather than as a skilled, resilient individual who had survived the ravages of addiction.

This seemed counterintuitive to me. I met many people in treatment services with truly stunning back stories, and the one thing that struck me was the incredible resilience they had all shown

in coming through tough times. It was this innate toughness I saw, not a broken person.

One of the early contacts I made was my co-founder Zack Haider, who has a wealth of lived experience. Together, we developed our flagship programme Intuitive Recovery. We wanted to offer our own graduates the opportunity to work in this field, not as volunteers but as paid employees. All abstinent, all graduates of this different approach, all being paid and developing meaningful careers due to their deep understanding of the problems our learners face.

Fast forward 20 years and Intuitive Thinking Skills has developed a reputation for delivering practical, educational, attitude change programmes, with lived experience at their heart.

COMMUNITY ACTION

Take a look at some of the wonderful ideas our ambassadors have had, and have gone on to create in their communities

Intuitive Thinking Skills provides a skills-based platform for those wanting to volunteer in Stockport and/or those who want to create community-focused services within the local area.

FOCUS GROUP

Leslie and Andrew were part of a focus group in Brinnington, liaising with public health and local GPs to create two community groups for people struggling with isolation, substance misuse or mental health issues. There are currently ten to 12 regular attendees each week. It is available through local social prescribing professionals.

LANCASHIRE HILL

Kaz and Laura set up a weekly group at Lancashire Hill. They regularly have other services attending to promote their work, such as heart rate checks, continuing education, credit union and sexual health. The group is part of the local social prescribing service and takes referrals from GPs and other service professionals. Currently, ten to 15 people attend each week.

'For over 15 years I used heroin and crack and didn't socialise. I finally stopped using and got off my substitute prescription in 2024. Now living substance-free, I still never socialised and felt unable to communicate with people. A worker at Cirtek House suggested attending Kaz and Laura's Chill and Chat group. The first time I attended I felt uneasy as I wasn't used to people talking to me and taking an interest. It felt strange, but I felt welcomed immediately and like I should be there. Each week I've attended has got easier to the point I no longer fear things. I used to walk with my head down fearing making eye contact with anyone, but the other day I realised I was walking tall with my head held high.' (Group member JF)

SEWING CLASS

Susie delivers a community-based sewing class



at the Olive Branch. She teaches locals how to alter and recycle clothing to create new items, helping them to save money and the environment. Susie's sewing class is attended by more than ten people every week, with participants learning a skill for life.

'I was in treatment and I thought I would like to give something back to the community by starting a sewing class. People can buy charity clothes very cheaply and I can show them how to make them into something else, mend them or alter them, whilst spending time with a group of like-minded people who want to be in a warm and lovely environment.' (Susie)

'Some of us have gone through recovery, some of us haven't, but it's nice because we're all



Above: Community-based sewing class at the Olive Branch.

bringing different things and talking about different things. Everyone's got different projects so we can learn from each other whilst working on our individual projects. I have learnt a lot so far, it's just brilliant and Susie's lovely, she's amazing.' (Group member Kirsty)

COFFEE MORNINGS

Nina delivers monthly Orange Umbrella coffee mornings in Bramhall as well as confidence-building classes for the Women's Centre, and has been doing an incredible job at raising awareness of domestic abuse across Stockport.

HOMELESSNESS

David has worked with The Wellspring and local council to address issues around homelessness and how to tackle the problem locally.

The groups have brought together Stockport residents and created a sense of community where previously there was none. Those attending have gained confidence, self-esteem and motivation with fantastic outcomes.

One gentleman hadn't left his house for 12 years; he is now attending further education and is volunteering. Another has become abstinent and is now in full-time paid employment, simply as a result of attending these groups.

Intuitive Thinking Skills take pride in delivering strong, credible outcomes through the partnerships we are involved in as part of our Ambition Portsmouth service.

WOMEN WARRIORS

Tiffany created and hosts a group called Women Warriors, a safe space for women to receive support and explore their feelings through art and connection with peers.

HEALTH SUPPORT

Lorraine is following her passion for supporting those in hospital facing health challenges relating to addiction. She now works closely with the alcohol specialist nurse service at Portsmouth QA hospital, providing peer support to patients and enhancing the vital work carried out by this



team by contributing her lived experience to teaching sessions.

B.MORE

John regularly conducts needle exchange in local hostels and has recently become the chair of B.More, a community group focused on reducing stigma and raising awareness of recovery success in the wider community, with aspirations to become a charity soon.

Benji is a founding member and chair of B.More, dedicated to transforming lives and fostering an Inclusive Recovery City in Portsmouth. Benji's commitment and consistent dedication to Ambition Portsmouth will see him leading our Saturday Recovery Group.

Following B.More's Coffee in the Square event, the group received 28 evaluation feedback forms, with most saying that just by stopping and having a coffee and conversation they learnt more about recovery – it was evident that the discussions helped reduce stigma in the local area.

PROJECT W

Makayla was a founding member of our women's service Project W and helped it grow into the success it is today, supporting vulnerable women with complex needs in Portsmouth and creating a community for them to be a part of. Currently, 21-24

Left: Greater Manchester ambassadors at the Ayres Road Festival in Hulme providing a refuge station and games alongside information, advice and guidance on local services.



Top left: B.More coffee event. Above: Creative workshops at Project W.

women access the service weekly. A Project W feedback survey found 100 per cent of attendees had felt safe accessing the service and 100 per cent reported having made positive changes in their lives.

'It's a place where all women can meet and feel safe to catch up and have discussions with like-minded people.'

'It's confidential and has really helped me. It's made me feel more confident. I would recommend to a friend because hopefully it would help them in the same way.'
(Project W attendee feedback)

AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME

After completing our Ambassador Programme, Kirsty and Dal gained employment with the local drug and alcohol service and share the lead on co-producing their LGBTQ+ peer support programme.

The Ambassador Programme gives people the opportunity to use their lived experience and skills to improve their own life, as well as the lives of the local community.

AMBASSADOR SERVICES



meaningfully give back, and share their varied experiences.

By spreading out the offer, the cross-fertilisation of ideas gets bolder, louder and more dynamic.

AMBASSADOR ASPIRATIONS

Key to the success of the Ambassador Programme is the belief that it is not a central service's job to define what a volunteer should do, or what community services it needs; these ideas and aspirations should always come from the individuals who live in those communities.

Many of our ambassadors go on to paid employment, whether directly after graduating having realised the skills they have to offer, or after a period of volunteering. More than 40 per cent of our ambassadors are now in full-time employment, while the rest are doing genuinely creative things in their communities.

Pictured: Dorset's lived experience recovery organisation Clarity was formed recently and is already having a positive impact on services and service user engagement in the area.

AMBASSADOR SERVICE LOCATIONS

Our most developed services are Stockport and Portsmouth, with more recent additions growing in Redcar, Salford, Bolton, Coventry, Warwickshire, Gloucester, Dorset and Denbighshire. We have also started ambassador services in prisons, where we train trusted prisoners to engage with the prison population.

FUNDING

Ambassador services are funded through drug and alcohol core and supplementary grants, but in each area we are keen to offer the core training package to as wide a partnership as possible, creating powerful networks of volunteers and dynamic hubs where local people can develop their ideas,

OUR SERVICES

INTUITIVE RECOVERY®

Re-education for addictions

Our abstinence-based skills programme to teach people how to say no, wherever they are or whoever they are with. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Addictive Desire Recognition.

SKILLS-TU EMPLOYMENT®

Making opportunities count

A full programme of skills-based tasks tailored to job-getting in the competitive labour market. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Preparing for Learning, Employment and Career Progression.

ENOUGH'S ENOUGH®

Taking back control

Our victim domestic abuse programme, designed to provide the skills to enable people to move on from abusive relationships. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Understanding Domestic Abuse.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP®

Responsibility online

An introduction to the digital world for people with little or no digital skills. Completing learners will receive NOCN Entry 1 in Basic Digital Skills.

SKILLS-TU LIFE®

Building resilience for life

Our mental health awareness programme, designed to provide alternative ways of thinking about mental health and skills to improve it. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Building Personal Resilience.

KIND REGARDS®

Building positive relationships

A violence reduction programme, Kind Regards teaches anger de-escalation and is ideal for those who struggle to control their temper in difficult situations. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Behaviour Management (Aggression).

THIS ENDS HERE®

Changing attitudes

Our hard-hitting, short duration domestic abuse perpetrator programme, delivering skills to immediately desist from coercive and abusive behaviours. Completing learners will receive NOCN Level 1 in Understanding Domestic Abuse.

AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME®

Empowering people through education

Underpinned by a Level 2 IAG, with additional training in domestic abuse awareness and boundaries, this programme provides training for volunteers and trusted prisoners to carry out their roles in a professional, skills-based manner.

Are you interested in developing a LERO to support your Recovery City? We would love to hear from you.
w: intuitivethinkingskills.co.uk • e: peterbentley@intuitivethinkingskills.com • t: 0800 069 9198