



Press Release

Immediate Release

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Former Mental Health Patient Shortlisted for Great British Care Award

A former mental health patient from London has been shortlisted for a Great British Care Award which pay tribute to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding excellence within their field of work.

Raf Hamaizia, Expert by Experience lead at Cygnet Group, which runs services for individuals with mental health needs, learning disabilities and autism, is a finalist in the Co-production category.

The co-production award recognises the value of Co-Production in designing services. It recognises those with lived experience who have gone above and beyond to ensure services are shaped to improve quality and outcomes, and care professionals who adopt partnership working to ensure that people who use services have a voice.

A former mental health inpatient, Raf has been the Expert by Experience (EbyE) Lead for Cygnet since 2016, where he is instrumental in running Cygnet's EbyE programme, championing People's Councils, supporting advocacy, devising the organisation's co-production strategy and embedding the concept of co-production at every level.

In 2019 he launched Music2Empower, an initiative showcasing positive and therapeutic benefits of music on mental health recovery. He supported the introduction of Cygnet's first co-production artist to help bring creativity to service environments. He oversees Co-Sustain to encourage service users to be more environmentally friendly and he has informed the design and layout of mental health settings to better respect patient needs.

His experience of working on both a strategic and local level within Cygnet has been recognised as 'an area of outstanding practice' by the Care Quality Commission and a number of other external organisations. He is regularly invited to speak at national and international conferences about the value of co-production.

Raf explained: "I listen to individuals and ensure that they have a voice at the very highest levels of the organisation. I have walked in their shoes and the implicit trust between us means they feel safe to talk to me; they know I am on their side and my presence shows that it is possible to get better, that recovery is real and that there is hope."

On being named a finalist in the awards, he said: "I am really pleased to have been shortlisted for such an amazing award. Being part of an organisation that is so supportive of co-production has made this achievable.

"I would like to give a big shout out to the co-production team and all peers, experts by experience and the senior team that have supported with this work on the ground. This includes those behind the scenes who help us raise awareness and champion lived experience."

Cygnet Group CEO, Dr Tony Romero, said: "Thanks to Raf, Cygnet is one of the UK's leaders in true service user involvement. He has driven the agenda to ensure service users are involved in care planning, staff recruitment, training, planning and improving service quality.

"He thoroughly deserves to be named as a finalist in the Great British Care Awards.

"At Cygnet Group, we strive to provide the highest quality and standard of care and always put our service users at the heart of what we do. This is demonstrated impeccably by Raf.

"He is a compassionate, motivated and value-driven member of staff and we are incredibly fortunate that we get the benefit of his expertise and dedication. He is helping to change the lives of service users for the better and I wish him the very best of luck for the awards."

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Notes to Editors:

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