



## Press Release

### Immediate Release

13 August 2024

#### Patient 'Social Hub' Project Shortlisted for National Award

A pioneering initiative which has seen mental health patients take responsibility for transforming clinical environments into homely 'social hubs' has been shortlisted for a national awards.

Cygnet's Social Hubs project has been named a finalist in the Environment of Care category at this year's Patient Experience Network Awards.

The Patient Experience Network National Awards are the first and only awards programme to recognise best practice in patient experience across all facets of health and social care in the UK.

The Environment of Care category celebrates services which provide the best possible environment of care, from first arrival/ impressions and throughout the care pathway. This can include the physical environment and/or the emotional environment.

Following feedback given at The People's Council, more than a dozen of our services have created **social hubs** (with more to come) and been given a stunning makeover in one day by adding a gaming zone/social hub featuring games consoles, arcade machines and adjustable sensory lighting.

On their regular visits to services, our Experts by Experience (those with lived experience of inpatient settings) worked with service users and management to identify the items for the proposed hubs which included everything from a full gaming suite, arcade machines and sensory lighting to an aromatherapy diffuser, bean bags and recording studio equipment.

Raf Hamaizia, Cygnet's Expert by Experience Lead, said he was delighted the social hubs have been recognised at the national awards.

He added: "The social hub concept has grown significantly since being pioneered by the experts by experience team along with staff and service users at Cygnet Hospital Bierley.

"As someone who has lived experience of being an in-patient service user and now works in mental health services, I have witnessed first-hand the profound impact that the built environment can have on mental health recovery. This insight has driven my passion for developing 'Social Hubs' within Cygnet services."

The concept of these hubs goes beyond physical spaces; it's about fostering a sense of community, engagement, and normality for both service users and staff.

Raf explained: "The sterile, often drab environments of psychiatric hospitals have long been a point of contention, with service users frequently describing them to me as "noisy, depressing, boring and too clinical"—feelings that can exacerbate their conditions, which is counterproductive to the very purpose of settings that are supposed to promote recovery.

"The idea behind social hubs is to transform these spaces into least restrictive, non-clinical, homely environments where service users can relax, engage in fun activities, and receive peer support.

"I am delighted how so many of our Cygnet services have embraced this project and it gives me genuine joy to see the incredible impact they are having. It has been a real journey of co-production and it is refreshing to see how quickly the hubs are growing and the amazing feedback we are getting from both service users and staff alike."

By fostering a sense of belonging and support, these shared spaces have become vital therapeutic tools, facilitating healing journeys and empowering individuals to reclaim their lives beyond the confines of their illness.

Raf added: "As we continue to expand the initiative, our vision remains clear: to provide every service user with a space that feels like a home away from home.

"By doing so, we not only enhance the therapeutic environment but also support the broader goal of mental health recovery and well-being. The journey is ongoing, and the future holds the promise of more transformed spaces and lives touched by the power of thoughtful, collaborative design based on co-production.

"Seeing what started at just one of our services now replicated around the country, both within Cygnet but also NHS Trusts and other organisations, goes to show that sharing best practice is real and we can make a difference through co-production."

The first social hub was installed at Cygnet Hospital Bierley, and its success paved the way for further installations at other Cygnet Hospitals including Churchill, Harrow, Storthfield House, Brighouse, Woking, and many others.

Winners of the awards will be announced on Thursday 3 October at an awards ceremony at The University of Birmingham.

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**Notes to Editors:**

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