



Press Release

Immediate Release

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Cygnet Hospital Colchester Unveils New Social Hub for Mental Health Patients

A Colchester hospital for men struggling with their mental health has become the latest inpatient service to have a clinical ward space transformed into a homely 'social hub' as part of a unique collaboration between service users, former patients and staff.

Cygnet Hospital Colchester, on Boxted Road, is a 59 bed service providing a range of intensive support and rehabilitation services for men with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or mental health needs.

A space at the hospital's offsite activity centre, Joy Clare, has been given a stunning makeover and converted into a 'social hub'. Working from a wish list of items provided by the service users, a team of staff and Experts by Experience (those with lived experience of inpatient settings) worked together to spend a day at the service, transforming the space into areas which reflects the needs and preferences of the service users.

Not only did staff and service users create a main social hub space, they also created a social garden, music space and arcade space.

Also in attendance for the revamp were representatives from the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust and Mid and South Essex ICB.

Hospital manager Lynn McGhee said: "The social hub we have here is the biggest of its kind so far in Cygnet.

"The concept of Social Hubs is to create a relaxing, non-clinical space for service users and staff to relax and socialise in away from the ward, and in previous projects, has been very well received by service users and staff alike.

"The space that was created in Colchester is spread over four rooms and the garden. It looks amazing, and will provide a fantastic space where a variety of activities can take place, from playing video games, arcade games, interactive garden games, playing music, or just having some quiet time.

"There are comfortable and homely pieces of furniture and accessories, and it no longer looks like a clinical area.

"Our own Expert by Experience, Levi Kent, has been working hard with our service users over recent weeks to gather their thoughts and wishes for inclusion in the project.

"The Social Hub will really add a fantastic fun space that people will want to be in at Colchester and will be enjoyed by both our mental health and learning disability patients alike."

Levi Kent is the Expert by Experience at the hospital who helped kit out the social hub. He escorted service users to a local shopping centre to purchase the finishing touches for the space.

He said: "The social hub is an extremely important addition to the Colchester site as it will allow the service users to engage in activities in a non-clinical environment which will help them feel more at ease and will motivate them to continue making positive progression towards recovery.

"I believe the hard work from all involved will truly harvest fine results for the service users and staff too. I am extremely proud to be a part of such a positive action."

The Social Hubs have been designed and installed across more than 15 Cygnet Health Care services so far and all have been co-produced between staff and patients. The ambition is for every Cygnet service to have a social hub in due course.

Amenities in the social hubs also typically include arcade games, sensory lighting, music facilities, TV screens, electronic goods, inspirational artwork, board games, comfortable seating and much more to ensure service users have a safe space where they can relax and socialise together.

Raf Hamaizia, Cygnet Expert by Experience Lead, added: "I know first-hand the difference that the environment can make to recovery. People who end up in mental health services are there for treatment, care, support and ultimately recovery, not punishment.

"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."

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