

## Stockport ME Group 2023-24 Co-Chairs' Statement

A lot of our activities last year took place early on in the 12 months as we had received funding from Stockport City of Culture that needed to be spent by the end of February; and we had GMCVO money that needed to be spent by the end of June. At times, we had almost too many sessions to offer, as we were balancing out excellent speakers we couldn't book for Friday meetings and funding committed sessions.

Events this year have included forest bathing, embodiment sessions, creative arts, a virtual trip to Chester Zoo, hypnotherapy, adapted yoga and much more besides. We also were able to offer a very popular session with Dr Perrin. At the time of writing, the recording of this event has had almost 700 views on our YouTube channel. In addition, the most recent video of the session led by Dr Shepherd of the ME Association might reach as many as 500 views by the time of the AGM.

One important piece of work we had hoped to progress, but have had to put on pause, is the production of instructional videos on topics such as pacing. We received £600 in grant money towards the costs of this and have earmarked a similar amount of money from a legacy donation but the specialist physio we were hoping to work with us has had health problems. We have been waiting to see whether she will be well enough to take on the work or if we need to look for someone else. It might even be that we have to find alternative uses for this money, in consultation with our grant provider.

We have managed to maintain all the usual Zoom meetings on the second Friday of each month, plus informal monthly Zoom meetings and our face to face socials have taken place most months.

### **Campaigning**

We have carried on campaigning and working with Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board to try to improve services for people with ME/CFS and Long COVID. For most of 2024, we have held monthly meetings with them. There remain considerable inequalities across Greater Manchester in terms of the levels and types of services that are available particularly for ME/CFS. We are also doing our best to tackle the potential loss of Long COVID funding which could leave existing ME/CFS services dealing with a massive increase in demand, whilst funding generally remains under pressure. We are making progress with getting support from our local MPs.

We have also continued to work closely with other patient-led support groups across the UK, including chairing some of the monthly meetings.

## **Membership**

Our membership numbers remain steady. We are almost hitting 300 Facebook “members” and might even exceed that number by the time you are reading this. After a very long period of service, our wonderful membership secretary Shirley is stepping down and Alanna has kindly agreed to take on the role. Any membership forms should be sent now to Alanna.

## **Thank You**

We do want to thank our committee for all the hard work they have done this year, particularly Shirley who has served the group as membership secretary for well over 20 years! She will remain part of this group and remain as a trustee and committee member, but this is still a significant change. We also want to thank Dianne who has stepped down as minutes secretary after over 10 years and Yara who has stepped down as Treasurer. And, we thank all our other volunteers who have helped with different things we have done whether it is writing articles or helping to edit our newsletter, facilitating groups or helping with one of the numerous other tasks which are needed.

Finally, we want to thank all of you; our members who have attended our events and readily supported others in our community when they have needed it. We are very proud that our community remains so kind, respectful and resilient. This comes through at all events and the supportive guidance we see so much of in our Facebook pages.

## **Looking ahead to 2024/25**

We could very much do with more volunteers. We were pleased to have one additional volunteer this year but we have had several people step down from roles they were doing. We currently have no treasurer, no deputy chair and we have 2-3 fewer committee members than ideal. We could also really do with an extra volunteer or two to help with running face to face socials as we have needed to skip one or two months this year due to not having enough people to manage them. If you or a family member of friend might be interested and able to spare some time to volunteer, then please get in touch - without obligation - to find out more.

We may not run as many sessions in 2024-25 as we did last year but we have already arranged some adapted Yoga sessions starting in the New Year We have put in a funding bid for about £1000 to finance some of the yoga sessions and also to run a project looking at neurodiversity in ME/CFS and Long COVID. We will still be running 3 regular sessions a month plus some extra events, as members request or as opportunities present themselves.