



Centre for Better Health  
Annual Report 2021



**Contents**

Chair and Director's Statement	5
Better Health Counselling	7
The Better Health Hub	11
The Social Enterprises	13
Financial Report	18
Volunteers and Staff	19
Trustees, Partners and Supporters	20

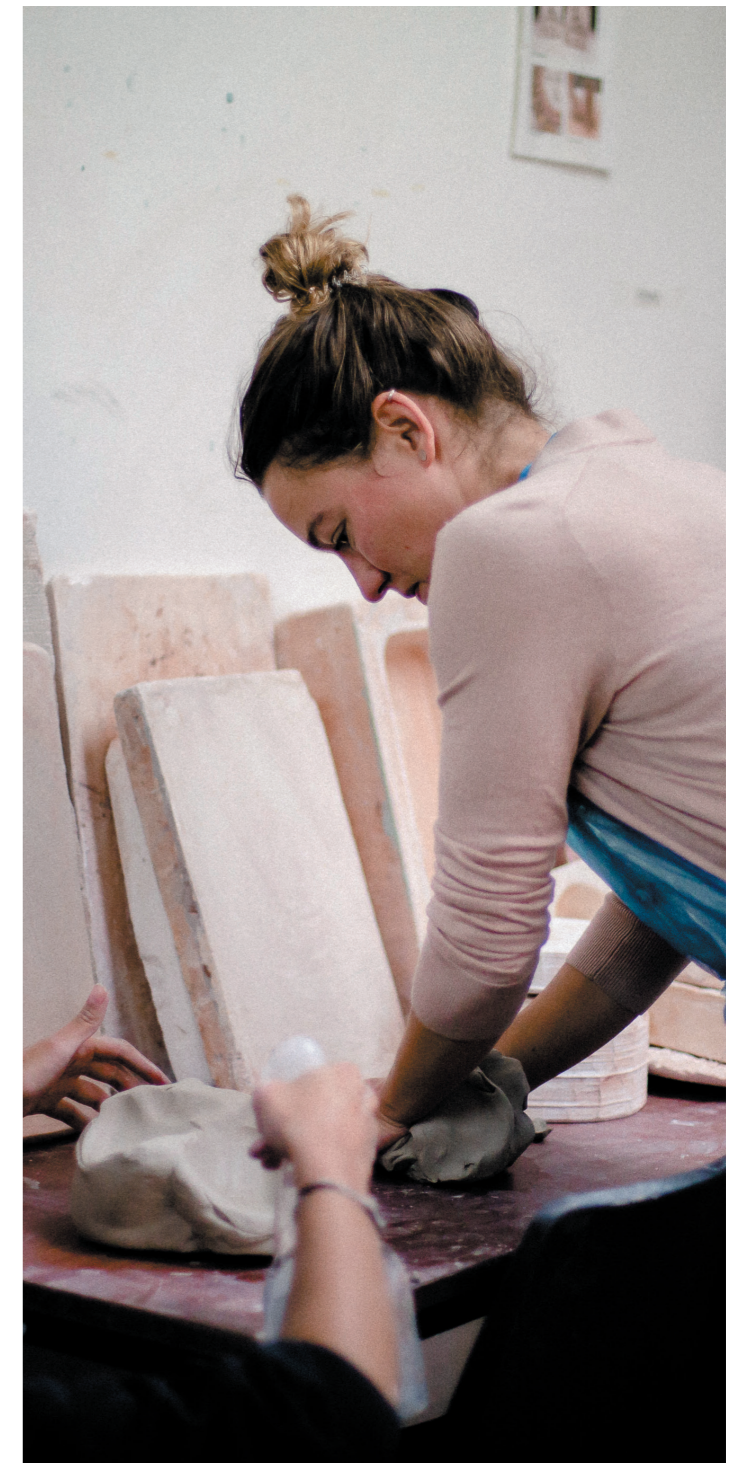
***“We know that extreme poverty and social inequality have a negative impact on our mental wellbeing, and there’s no doubt that this has become entangled with politics. The proliferation of the psychiatric disorders may – at least to some degree – serve the interests of people in positions of political power. Better it be understood that a young millennial who’s falling apart while struggling to pay two thirds of their increasingly precarious salary to rent a mouldy room in a shared house is suffering from a ‘panic disorder’ than countenance the possibility that the real sickness is located elsewhere.”***

This Book will Change Your Mind  
about Mental Health by Nathan Filer

# Our services

**The Centre for Better Health supports wellbeing and recovery from mental ill health. Our services include a low-cost counselling service; the Better Health Hub, which offers movement, craft and therapeutic courses; and our social enterprise (comprising of Better Health Bikes, Better Health Bakery and Better Health Products), which offers work-skills training placements for individuals that have been distanced from employment owing to mental ill-health.**

With a focus on hands-on activities and crafts, such as painting and ceramics, baking and bike mechanics, our Hub courses and trainee placements share characteristics that make them well suited for self-care and promoting wellbeing. The multi-sensory engagement, the methodical, repetitive and meditative nature of the making process, and the promise of an end 'product' help to reduce stress and anxiety in the maker. These acts of making and repairing help us to slow down and be more present, and provide a healthy distraction from other stresses in our lives. We also strive to offer a relational aspect to our work, which in turn fosters a sense of community and helps to address the isolation that is all too prevalent in many people's lives.



The photos in this annual report are of a variety of staff, volunteers and clients and do not necessarily relate to the stories or case studies they are next to.

# Chair and Director's Statement

**To say that this has been an extraordinary year, is both a huge understatement and a statement of the obvious. COVID-19 and its impact on every part of society is something that we are obviously going to be living with for quite some time.**

As has been often shown over the course of the year, so many individuals within poorer communities have been disproportionately affected. This, when combined with the intersectionality of race, gender, disability and sexuality, has brought into sharp focus the inequalities that we all are challenged to face.

In terms of mental health need, this disproportionality, is, of course, something that has existed pre-pandemic. It is structural and demands a greater understanding and empathy from us all. CBH as an organisation is on a continuing journey to grow both in terms of knowledge and reach to ensure that its services benefit as diverse a range of individuals as possible.

Even though our delivery has been affected over the course of this year, in the following pages we have highlighted what has been achieved under these circumstances. None of it would have been possible without everyone's flexibility, adaptability and commitment.

We have been grateful for the way in which volunteer counsellors have adapted and risen to the task of delivering online counselling sessions. This was not an easy jump to make and required a new skillset. We are pleased to have been able to continue supporting adults in Hackney and the City through the Wellbeing Network, funded by the Local Authority and led by City and Hackney Mind. Our hub tutors have adapted and moved to an online service for courses and workshops which have helped so many through the isolation that they have felt over this past year. Most of all we have had a staff team who have been resilient and focused on their roles, whether working from home in sometimes trying circumstances or delivering work in person.

We are grateful for such a whole effort and hope that you enjoy this annual report.

**Paul Sheils** Chair  
**Ashwin Mathews** Director



Images are a selection by Better Health Hub participants

# Better Health Counselling

We offer low-cost counselling to help individuals make sense of difficult experiences, deal with negative thoughts and feelings and make positive changes in their life. We deliver our service, in large part, through counsellors in training, who represent a range of therapeutic approaches. A lot of the work done supports individuals to resource themselves and learn ways to navigate their thoughts, feelings and interactions with others.

The pandemic forced us to close our doors at the end of March 2020 and the following month we launched our online counselling service – bringing small groups of existing counsellors and clients on board at a time. After a few months, we were able to open up the service to new counsellors and clients, offering counselling by Zoom or telephone. We are proud to have been able to support 275 clients during a year that brought about unprecedented challenges for many. We know that the pandemic has had a devastating impact on mental health. Indeed, 56% of all referrals received during the year were partly or completely related to COVID-19.

## A look back at the past year

**275** clients accessed our online counselling service

**4,054** counselling sessions were attended

**97%** were satisfied with the service

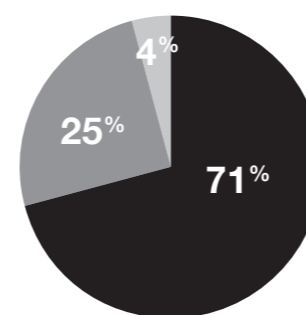
**97%** agreed that their counsellor fostered a safe and trusting environment

**91%** accessing counselling for anxiety felt their issue had improved

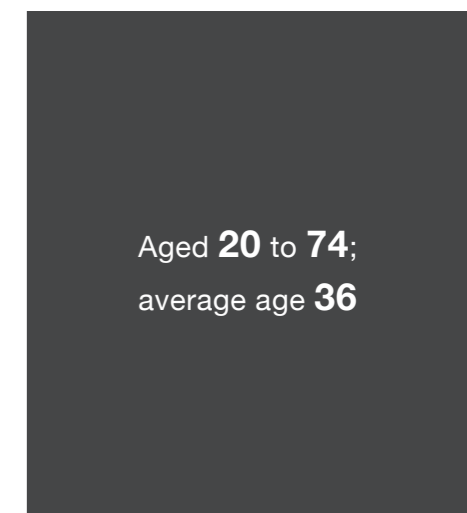
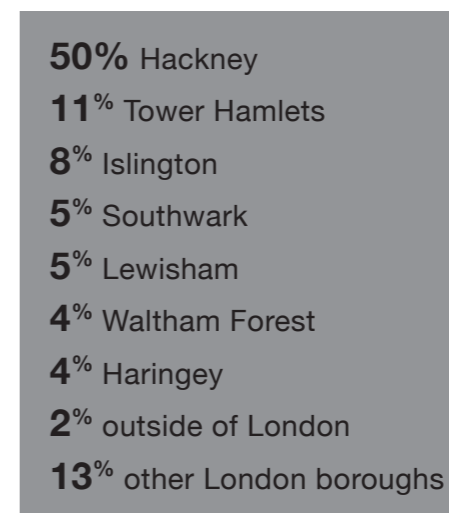
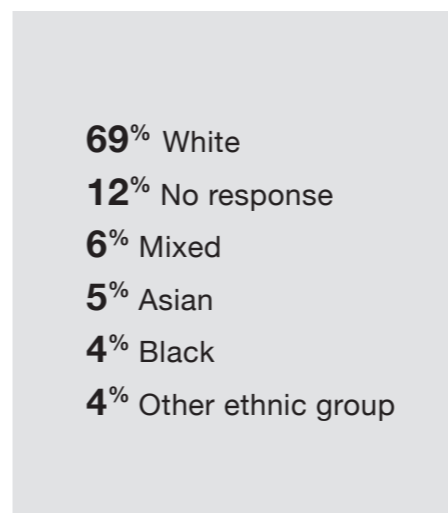
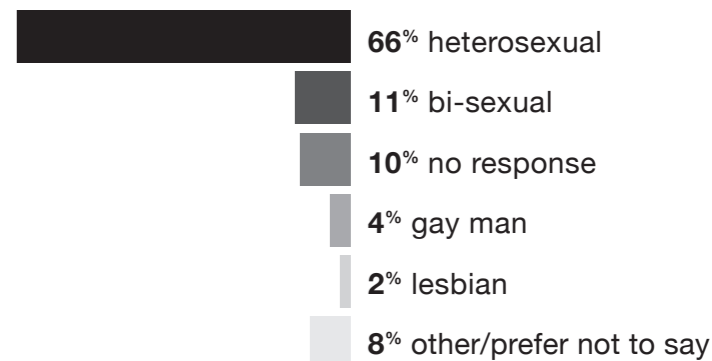
**87%** accessing counselling for depression felt their issue had improved



## Our clients



Female  
Male  
Prefer not to say/  
prefer to self-describe



“I’m really, really grateful. To my therapist and to the Centre. I’ve just finished a year of therapy, and before I started, I felt like I was drowning. Now I feel like I’m in a boat, and yes - there are holes in it, but I can spot them and try to plug them. Everyone I came into contact with, from reception to admin and my therapist made me feel welcome, supported and not judged. This is SUCH a valuable service that I wouldn’t have been able to afford otherwise. Thank you.”

“From the very beginning of having my assessment to having sessions, I have had the best experience. It is often very confusing and filled with anxiety when you first start counselling. [My counsellor] was very black and white with me which I found helpful. She truly acknowledged how I felt and believed in me from the very beginning. She never judged me and put her two pennies to the situation which helped tremendously. I didn’t feel like I was having a conversation with myself. It was a discussion and it helped me understand myself better. Thank you for a very accessible, affordable service. I am truly grateful for everything.”

# Better Health Counselling

## A client's journey

I had a really terrible time at school (including a failed suicide attempt), with a great deal of teasing, name-calling, bullying, people stealing and vandalising my things, and, sometimes, worse abuse bordering on actual torture, for the vast majority of the time. No matter what I did, I didn't fit in there at all, didn't make a single friend; spent pretty much all the time I was there just trying to keep my head down, away from others, and survive each day as best I could with as little bother as possible.

I became very withdrawn, isolated, extremely lonely and miserable to my core; had severe problems in even just trying to forge my own identity as I was always in 'survival mode', with huge amounts of stress and anxiety with me constantly in anticipation of the next horrible thing that would come my way. I had serious difficulties opening up to people, and trusting others from then on too. These characteristics/learned patterns/behaviours, I suppose you'd call them, stayed with me well into my adult life of my 20s and 30s. I had recurring problems with depression and anxiety with multiple episodes since then to now, huge difficulties in forming any kind of relationship and finding and keeping work, and not being confident as to my own abilities and what I have to offer the world.

There's a lot of pain I can remember from back then, which I was finally able to let go of with thanks to the two wonderful people I came to meet and have discussions with at the Centre, after so long of

never really being able to address any of it. I was able to have some wonderful guidance in unravelling all of [those experiences], see everything for what it was, come to terms with, and accept it all in some form; draw a line underneath it, and proceed from here, with everything I have and know now afresh. It's still taking me to this day and beyond, pretty much, to finally figure out who I am, what I want out of life, making a living, and just be comfortable being myself and experiencing my place in society in the world at large.

I didn't know the reasons behind what was happening to me back then, but in my own reflections and discussions ever since, not least with those at the Centre, I was able to come to some understanding and indeed acceptance of it all, as hurtful and completely unnecessary as it all was. The Centre was able to help me, in the most meaningful and significant way possible, [and in a way] that nobody else and no other service, such as NHS-provided counselling, with its limited means and format, has ever been able to do for me before.

The experience [of counselling at the Centre for Better Health] has done me a great deal of good, such that I am feeling a great deal more peace and optimism. Also, so much so that I am now embarking on my own venture in social enterprise, with the aim to help improve people's mental health and overall wellbeing.

"[My counsellor] was fantastic, like talking to a friend without any judgement or worry that trust would be broken. Having someone to talk to regularly has helped enormously especially at this challenging time in the world."



## A counsellor's experience

I have been volunteering as a counsellor with CBH since January 2017. I really enjoy being a part of their mission and contributing to the wellbeing of the local community through the provision of therapy and social enterprise.

In response to the challenge of COVID, CBH has offered sessions online. One of my client's experiences serves well to illustrate the benefit of the work.

She came to CBH at a time she described as 'the autumn of her life'. This was not the first time she had chosen talking therapy as an option for dealing with a life struggling with anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem, with a particularly painful sense of self about her physical appearance.

Her childhood was experienced as ongoing trauma; an alcoholic father who was mainly absent, and a mother who was never able to bond and support because of her own struggles. As a result, my client had spent a lifetime being the emotional carer for her family, whilst struggling to find compassion for herself.

Since April we have had 20 sessions; the client has been a regular attender, often sharing her process with journal entries and drawings. During the first review, the client shared that our work together had given her a safe space to look afresh at how she might begin to explore self-compassion. This exploration has been fruitful in offering a better present and possible future.

During the second review, she expressed that there had been an opportunity for her to express a fuller range of emotions, including ones which were not encouraged by her family. I believe our work together is helping her meet her objectives for having therapy at this stage in her life.

It continues to be rewarding accompanying her on her journey.

The benefit to clients, of which the example above is typical, is supported by their feedback, which I find most encouraging; it is great being part of what we do at CBH.

"Thank you CBH and [my counsellor] for the excellent service. I'm very grateful that you walked with me for an important part of my life. You showed me kindness, compassion, understanding and supported me when I was alone and desperate last Christmas."

# Better Health Hub

Our Better Health Hub offers a range of creative, movement and therapeutic groups and courses. We design our courses in a way that encourages participants to learn at their own pace, to make 'mistakes' and overcome setbacks, to feel that their skills are valued, and to meet and interact with other people.

During the year, we ran a rolling programme of online groups and courses ranging from 'Coping with COVID', 'Loss, Grief and Bereavement Support' and 'LGBTQI+ Support Group' to photography, mindfulness, watercolour and ceramics – with take-home kits for the latter courses for participants to paint and make clay figures and ornaments at home.

We closed our Hub activities to paying clients in order to focus our attention on the work that we deliver as part of the City and Hackney Wellbeing Network; a partnership of specialist mental health providers that offers high-quality free support to help people prevent the onset of mental health problems and alleviate issues such as stress, anxiety and low mood. We worked with 113 clients through the Network; providing 1:1 support and access to our groups and courses.

For some, this support was a lifeline during what was a very isolating time for many. We were able to offer something unique that enabled individuals to socialise with others, share their experiences and be creative. Despite some initial anxiety at joining an online group for the first time, we found that some participants engaged more in our online offer – both owing to the fact that it was easier to fit around other commitments, and that it afforded an additional level of 'safety' - given that participants could join in from the security of their own homes. Despite the online format, friendships formed and many participants stayed in touch beyond their groups.

## A look back at the past year

**113** clients accessed 1:1 support, groups and courses

**33** online groups and courses delivered

**289** course places filled from across the Network

**98%** would recommend the course to others

**88%** felt more confident as a result of completing the course/group

**74%** participants made friends and felt part of a community

**60%** showed an improvement in their wellbeing, based on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

"The concentration of learning a new skill is absorbing and helps to steady one's emotions and feelings especially in lockdown."



## A client's experience

"I started courses at the Centre for Better Health about 18 months ago and it has offered me a wealth of resources that have helped me make some tangible changes in my life that I can use to build a brighter future for myself. I have done a variety of courses with them from Mindfulness and self-care, various support groups, to painting and photography. It is a welcoming, encouraging and supportive environment that has offered me the space to learn, connect and find structure in a chaotic and difficult time.

I have struggled with mental health difficulties most of my life and the centre offered up a non-judgemental space that I have rarely come across before. I didn't have to explain myself and was able to share as much or as little as I felt comfortable with; always being supported by tutors and other service users. It gave me a safer place to explore what I was truly capable of and has helped me learn skills and build the confidence to change my relationship with myself and others for the better.

The regular classes and groups have given me structure in a difficult and uncertain time that helped me construct a framework for myself that anchored me in community, connection and creativity. I always had something to look forward to, something to focus on and work towards which has been invaluable to me.

Each course offered me the opportunity and resources to engage, no matter what my experience level was. There was nothing overwhelming and the friendly and knowledgeable tutors supported me to reach for achievable sustainable goals that helped me learn and were a little challenging but always enjoyable. There was never pressure to do anything more than just be present but the supportive environment made me

want to try more and more. We had the opportunity to share our thoughts and creations with each other, our difficulties and successes, which helped me learn but also feel validated and part of a community.

With each lesson and sharing, my skills increased and my confidence grew. With this confidence came a greater sense of self-esteem and things I once thought impossible became achievable. I gradually grew to have a real sense of pride in my work and myself by seeing and celebrating my progress and the changes in myself they effected.

The classes also offered me a sense of community and belonging. The opportunity to meet and interact with a wide array of different people helped me with building up my social skills and I have become much more comfortable in social groups. Being accepted and welcomed as I was helped me feel more at ease and interested in new people and things and this has opened up the possibilities for me in the future.

I have also been able to learn tools that I can use in my everyday life to help me experience, process and express my emotions through creativity and sharing in a way that has been of great help to my mental wellbeing. It gives me hope for the future and even dreams of building a career in the arts. By feeling heard and accepted, encouraged and valued, I am finally able to see that I have much to offer the world and lots of new ways of doing this.

The experiences I have had at the Centre for Better Health have enabled me to transform many areas of my mental wellbeing and given me tools and confidence to embrace rather than fear my future. I will always be grateful for that."

# Better Health Training



Our trainee programme aims to support people that are out of work owing to mental ill health. Our placements provide a combination of skills development and work experience in a commercial yet supportive environment.



## A look back at the past year

In line with lockdown restrictions, we were not able to run our Trainee and Volunteer programme during 2020/21.

In October, we created a two-part online Mindful Baking course as part of our work within the City and Hackney Wellbeing Network. This can be accessed by members of the Network as part of an online resource portal, which contains webinars, courses and other online content to support mental wellbeing.

# Better Health Bakery



Better Health Bakery is a social enterprise bakery based in Haggerston, East London. As a Social Enterprise, we focus on providing work skills training placements for those who have been distanced from employment due to mental ill-health, while providing quality products and services to the local community.

## A look back at the past year

Our bakery doors were sadly closed for the first four months and last three months of the year owing to COVID-19. We reopened in August on a shorter working week to accommodate a reduced team and social distancing measures, and by October were able to move to 7 days a week production. We also returned to Stoke Newington Farmers' market on Saturdays, which helped us to restore visibility in the local community.

We changed our lunchtime offer to ensure compliance with COVID-19 health and safety measures. The café space closed and the team developed a new, seasonal salad 'lunchbox to-go'. We also developed 'zero-waste' sourdough crackers and introduced beigels, which could be bought as take-away snacks in addition to the salad boxes. We took the opportunity to over-haul our bread offering too, and launched an entirely new cakes and pastry menu, which allowed more efficient production and cost-effective ingredients.

Both the wholesale and retail side of the business suffered as a result of lockdown, the impact on the hospitality industry and the new trend to work from home. In line with many other retailers, we set up agreements with Click it Local and Pinga. Launched in September, customers are now able to buy from us online, with delivery or collect in store options.

In keeping with our community-based ethos, during the months that we were operating, all unsold, surplus bread and pastries were donated to local organisations and projects, including Foodcycle Hackney, which helps tackle food poverty in the local area, Olu's Soup Kitchen, a Hackney based service for the homeless, vulnerable people and people in need of support and advice, and Streetbox, which donates boxes of surplus fruit and veg to charitable organisations helping to fight food poverty and educating people on better nutrition.



## Better Health Bikes



Better Health Bikes is a bike shop and bike recycling workshop based in Haggerston, East London. As a social enterprise we provide trainee placements for adults recovering from mental ill-health. Our well-equipped and welcoming workshop, staffed by our team of five friendly Cytech-qualified mechanics, offers a range of quality bike services to the general public.

### A look back at the past year

Our bike shop was closed for the first three and last three months of the year owing to COVID-19. We opened between July and December on a shorter working week to accommodate social distancing measures. Given the new trend to get on two wheels instead of using public transport, the team were extremely busy with services as soon as we re-opened our doors!

Bike and bike accessory sales and demand for services increased, with bike sales only dropping off as a result of the struggle to find new stock. Despite challenges around procurement, we were

able to secure several new brands to sell in the shop – covering adventure, hybrid, folding and single-speed models.

We signed up to two voucher schemes, enabling customers to purchase bikes and pay for services via the Government's Fix Your Bike Voucher Scheme as well as Cyclescheme, one of the providers of the #cycletowork initiative. It was also a great period for bicycle donations, thanks to all the lockdown clear-outs!

We are proud to continue receiving positive reviews from happy customers and have seen our average rating rise from 4.7 to 4.8 in the last year.

## Better Health Products



Better Health Products is a leading supplier of thermoplastic film that is used in medical settings – for example for wheelchair covers and casting bags for prosthetics. We continued operating throughout the year on a reduced service.



# Financials

**INCOME £**

Voluntary Income  
 Investment Income  
 Income from Charitable Activities

**2021**                      **2020**

495,786                      575,328  
 5                                      19  
 179,297                      234,799  
**675,088**                      **810,146**

**EXPENDITURE £**

Fundraising  
 Charitable Activities

–                                      6,220  
 674,346                      803,435  
**674,346**                      **809,655**

Net Movement In Funds  
 Total Funds Carried Forward as of 31/3/2021

742                                      491  
 35,286

# Thank you



## Counselling Volunteers

Our counsellors contributed a total of 4,438 volunteer hours over the year.

Adam D, Alexandra L, Arwa H, Candida D, Colby P, Dan L, David G, David R-M, Dean G, Dominic M, Emma B, Faye B, Frank B, George H, Geraldine M, Hasan D, Helena B, Isabel M, Ivan C, James B, Janine B, Jonathan H, Julia H, Karen B, Kate B, Kate D, Kathryn R, Kellie H, Kryshna P, Liam W, Lorna A, Lucas W, Luc B, Maciek J, Mark B, Max C, Mel G, Michael O'S, Michelle R, Neville C, Polina L, Rebecca De J, Rebecca J, Reuben H, Rhiannon (Libby) C, Roxanne H, Ruth D, Sam G, Sammy A, Sarah P, Sarah V, Sara V, Stefana G, Sushila B, Tiffany H, Tom E, Victoria Z, William L, Yali W, Yoni B-H

## Volunteer assessors

Our assessors contributed a total of 147 hours over the year.

David G, Julio C, Karen B, Nathan R, Victoria Z

## Hub tutors

Adam Day, Andrea Christelis, Brigit Connolly, Eva Bachmann, Julio Cervantes, Maria Alvarez Echenique, Nat Mady

## Staff

Ashwin Mathews	<i>Director</i>
Olivia Stewart	<i>Assistant Director</i>
Sabrina Naviner	<i>Office Manager</i>
Greg Morter	<i>Counselling Service Coordinator/ Clinical Supervisor</i>
Penny Collier	<i>Counselling Service Manager / Clinical Supervisor</i>
Lisa Donohue	<i>Social Enterprise Manager</i>
Ade Egbetola	<i>Finance Officer</i>
Cirillo Costantino	<i>Facilities Manager</i>
Nathan Roberts	<i>Better Health Hub Coordinator</i>
Pearl Spence	<i>Cleaner</i>
Nigussie Arress	<i>Platilon Coordinator</i>
Shemiah Philip	<i>Adminstrator</i>
Cara Ringwood	<i>Administrator</i>
Audrey Benson	<i>Administrator</i>
Sarah Fraser Steele	<i>Bakery Commercial Lead</i>
Sim Pereira-Madder	<i>Bike Commercial Lead</i>
Kyle Walker	<i>Lead Mechanic</i>
Graham Harvey	<i>Assistant Lead Mechanic</i>
Simon Drake	<i>Mechanic</i>
Benjamin Hagger	<i>Mechanic</i>
Marco Torquati	<i>Lead Baker</i>
Alice Hansen	<i>Lead Baker</i>
Adam McDonald	<i>Lead Baker</i>
Pere Domingo	<i>Lead Baker (left June 21)</i>
Jim Lister	<i>Baker</i>
Ignazio Cogoni	<i>Baker</i>
Debbie Lawrence	<i>Lead Bakery Retail</i>
Shirley Roach	<i>Bakery Retail</i>
Oscar Leyens	<i>Lead Baker (left Jan 21)</i>

## Trustees

Dr Ed Meltzer  
Linis Dolby  
Paul Sheils LLB, Chair  
Rab McNeill  
Sarah Rushton LLB

## Partners and Supporters

Garfield Weston  
The Gage Foundation  
Charities Aid Foundation  
Edmund Carr LLP  
NatWest Bank  
Mr NK Crace  
Ms C Finney  
Ms E Kemp  
Robin Cavendish Memorial Fund  
The Ericson Trust  
East London Foundation Trust  
Hackney Community College  
Hackney Local Authority  
City & Hackney CCG  
Hackney CVS  
City & Hackney Wellbeing Network  
The Association of Mental Health Providers  
The Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association  
MoonBeever LLP  
The Tana Trust  
Rocketseed  
The Blue Lizard





FS 551024

**Centre for Better Health Ltd.**

1a Darnley Road  
London E9 6QH  
0208 985 3570

[www.centreforbetterhealth.org.uk](http://www.centreforbetterhealth.org.uk)

Charity No: 292944

Company Registration No: 1949363

