



National Survivor  
User Network

# Annual Report 2020-2021

We are a network of people and groups with lived experience of mental ill-health, distress and trauma. We come together to create, challenge and campaign. Join us.





**CEO, NSUN**  
**Akiko Hart**

It is hard to write about a year of loss and grief when many of us are still in shock and still mourning. As I write, in June 2021, the vaccination programme is underway, the sun is shining, and the media is full of the possibility of summer holidays. The temptation is to talk about “levelling up” or “building back better” when we have not yet accounted for all the losses. Too many people have lost loved ones. Others have seen their health, lives, families, or work drastically change.

Through this ongoing turmoil and chaos, NSUN has tried to do practical work. The NSUN Covid-19 Fund (page 8 to 9) was our defining piece of work in 2020/21. We awarded small grants totalling £125,280 to 88 user-led groups and organisations. The fund is NSUN at its core: people doing things, with and as part of their communities. But this work is also misunderstood and undervalued: part of our role, going forward, is to make the case for what gets called user-led activity to be valued and resourced. In particular, we need to build on the renewed focus on racial justice to ensure that groups led by and for people from racialised communities are centred.

Over the past year, NSUN has scaled and our work has changed. We have grown from an organisation with two permanent members of staff to one with five. The 2020/21 income is over double the 2019/20 income. We have undertaken a deep review of our policies and processes, and we are now looking at our membership offer and the best legal structure for

us as an organisation. This change has been in response to Covid, but also wider changes in the mental health landscape over the past ten years.

Through our Covid-19 Fund, we found that many groups do not define themselves as ‘user-led’, and that others do not talk about themselves as doing ‘mental health’ work. We learnt that the dominant narrative that user-led groups are precarious and threatened does not tell the full story: much vibrant community organising is not visible to the voluntary sector, funders, or infrastructure organisations. Not everyone who lives with mental ill health identifies as a service user, not least because due to austerity and cuts, access to services has changed. ‘Survivor’, in a mental health context, used to refer to being a survivor of psychiatric services or mental distress; now, the term is much broader and can encompass being a survivor of, amongst other things, trauma, interpersonal violence or forced migration. These conceptual and linguistic divides are particularly salient across generational lines, with community groups led by young people less likely to refer to their work as ‘user led’. Throughout community action and activist spaces, we are seeing a more intersectional approach: groups tackling mental health and racial justice for example, or LGBTQ groups addressing mental distress. NSUN’s challenge, in this context, is to hold the past, present and future, to create an intergenerational space where younger and older organisers can learn from one another, and to

**“Through this ongoing turmoil and chaos, NSUN has tried to do practical work. The NSUN Covid-19 Fund (page 8 to 9) was our defining piece of work in 2020/21. We awarded small grants totalling £125,280 to 88 user-led groups and organisations.”**

hold and honour the diversity of our network.

It’s been a tough, intense year, but one of the things that has kept me going has been my wonderful colleagues at NSUN: thank you for making all of this possible. ●





**Chair, NSUN**  
**Angela Newton**

When I think about what has happened in the world and to many people's lives over the past twelve months, there are many words that spring to mind – painful, debilitating, dark, difficult, destructive and of course, unprecedented. As I write these words, it feels almost impossible to attempt to do so, but to not acknowledge this period of time does not seem right either.

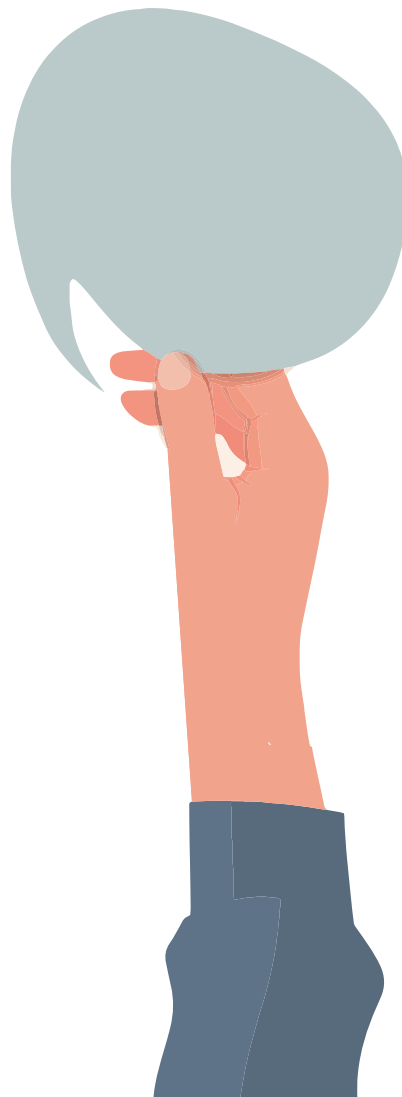
However, when I think about what has happened at NSUN over the past twelve months, it is a completely different set of words that spring to mind – humbling, stretching, critical, hopeful, and positive. It has also been unprecedented, but in a completely different way to the pandemic itself. It feels much easier to write these words and explain why I think this is the case.

We have been humbled by the insight and wisdom of our many members who continue to seek the changes that they need and deserve. During difficult times, people continue to have the energy, passion and drive to share their personal insight and experience to make a difference.

We have been stretched in a way that we did not expect or foresee, and have been able to not only expand the team and the work that we do, but to also reach those that others have struggled to reach during the midst of the pandemic. Our Covid-19 small grants scheme has meant that funding has been distributed to grassroots

organisations, many of which are led by people of colour. This work has been vital and critical, meeting people where they are at and providing the resources they need with speed and compassion.

We have learnt not only from our work during the past twelve months, but the work of others and we have listened carefully to what is most important to people right now and what they think will be most important to them over the coming years. We know that our mental



**“We have been humbled by the insight and wisdom of our many members who continue to seek the changes that they need and deserve, and who have the energy, passion and commitment to share their personal experiences in seeking the changes that are needed for themselves and others.”**

health does not exist in isolation and that everybody's lives and experiences are different.

We believe that now is the time for us to build on the success we have achieved. As a membership organisation, we will be holding and strengthening the diversity of our network so that we work in the interests of everybody, and especially those that are the most marginalised. We are excited to do this in a way that honours our past, values our present and creates a home for different generations of activists and community leaders. We will build on our strengths as a user-led infrastructure organisation that can effectively, meaningfully and genuinely provide a sector voice for user-led groups, and create partnerships beyond mental health.

So, whilst I know that we are living in difficult and unprecedented times, I believe that NSUN is moving not only in the right direction, but in a direction that will bring more hope to more people. ●

# Our vision, strategic aims and history

About the National Survivor User Network

The National Survivor User Network (NSUN) is a user-led network of people and groups who have and do experience mental distress who want to change things for the better. We bring individuals and groups together to communicate and support each other, and we amplify and advocate for the voice of lived experience to challenge policy and practice. We are an infrastructure organisation and a sector voice for user-led or lived-experience-led groups who work to support the mental health of those in their communities.

## Our Strategic aims

The Board of Trustees have approved the following strategic aims for NSUN:

- Holding and strengthening the diversity of our network
- User-led activity has a past, a present, and a future: NSUN is committed to making a home for different generations of activists and community organisers
- Positioning NSUN as an infrastructure organisation and sector voice for user-led groups
- Creating stronger partnerships beyond mental health

**"It's an honour to work for an organisation where my lived experience is an asset, not a barrier, and to be able to make connections with the incredible groups and individuals that make up our network."**

Amy Wells, Communications and Membership Officer

## Our vision

Our vision is for the lives of people who experience mental distress, discrimination and disadvantage to be better.

## Our mission

Our mission is to create a diverse, inclusive and influential user-led network with the strength to challenge inequality and improve lives.

## Our aims

- To create and strengthen links between individuals and groups.
- To support and promote user-led groups and initiatives.
- To influence and inform policy and decision makers.

## Our values

- Solidarity – our network recognises commonality of interests and experiences, and facilitates mutual support.
- Equality – we believe all members should have equality of status, rights or opportunities.
- Integrity – we strive to express the views and experiences of our members in an unbiased and unfiltered way.
- Diversity – we understand, recognise and value difference - our different backgrounds, experiences, ethnicities, beliefs and abilities.

## NSUN History

**2003** 'On Our Own Terms' report makes a recommendation to form a national service-user/ survivor network

**2006** The 'Doing It For Ourselves' conference launches the idea of a national network and a steering group is set up to make it happen

**2007** NSUN is launched after securing funding for five years

**2008** NSUN is hosted by Together for Mental Wellbeing and shares accommodation with Catch-aFiya

**2010** NSUN becomes an independent organisation

**2011** NSUN holds its first annual general meeting

**2012** NSUN secures a further three years' funding

**2013** NSUN attracts over 2000 members

**2014** NSUN hosts the IIMHL Service User Leadership and Peer Support festival

**2015** The 4Pi National Involvement Standards are published and launched

**2016** The #NSUNthrive10 campaign is launched

**2017** NSUN increases membership to over 4500

**2018** NSUN launches the Reigniting the Space (for BME user/ survivor voice) Project

**2019** NSUN launches the 'Value of User-led Groups' campaign.

**2020** NSUN launches its first small grants programme: the Covid-19 fund distributed grants to user-led groups to adapt their activity during the pandemic, and membership increases to over 5000

**2021** NSUN secures over £500,000 in income for the first time in its history, including our small grants programme

## Our team

### **Akiko Hart**

Chief Executive Officer

### **Amy Wells**

Communications and Membership Officer (from July 2020)

### **Jen Beardsley**

Finance and Administration Officer

### **Sidona Assefa**

Policy Officer (from December 2020 to February 2021)

### **Ruairi White**

Project Manager (from October 2020)

### **Zoe Kirby**

General Manager

## Our trustees

Trustees who served the charity during the period were as follows:

### **Alisdair Cameron**

#### **Amy Rushton**

From 24th November 2020

#### **Angela Newton (Harris), Chair**

#### **Dawn Wills,**

Secretary until 9th March 2021

#### **Eleni Chambers**

#### **Emily Reynolds**

#### **Helen Oldfield**

Treasurer until 22nd June 2020

#### **Jonathan Rackham**

From 24th November 2020

#### **Julia Smith**

Until 24th November 2020

#### **Mark Wood**

Until 17th September 2020

#### **Nic Murray**

#### **Rachel Rowan Olive**

#### **Zoe Bennett**

## Our associates

We have a team of Associates who support us on specific project work. In 2020/21, they included:

**Alison Faulkner, Debbie Roberts, Emma Ormerod, Kirk Teasdale, Mark Brown, Mish Loraine, Rai Waddingham, Stephen Jeffreys, Vikki Price.**

## Our governance

The Board is responsible for the governance and strategy of NSUN and is elected by the members.

The trustees bring a mix of skills, experience and qualifications. All trustees have lived experience of mental health distress and/or service use and are mental health activists. Trustees are normally appointed for a renewable term of three years.

The Board meets at least four times a year and delegates day-to-day responsibility for the running of NSUN to the operational team. See the Scheme of Delegation: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Scheme-of-delegation.pdf>

The subcommittees meet to look at strategy, finance and Board development in more detail in between Board meetings.

As a charitable company, our governing document is our Articles of Association. A fair and open recruitment process has been developed to ensure that the Board reflects both the user-led ethos of NSUN and the diversity of the wider network. Following an application and interview process, successful applicants are proposed to the membership at the annual general meeting.

## Members' liability and governance structure 2020-21

Over the past year we have been strengthening our governance, including receiving legal advice about member liability in the unlikely case of insolvency. According to Article 2.1 and 2.2 of the Articles of Association, NSUN members (including Trustees) carry financial liability of £10 each should NSUN become insolvent, not just Trustees as we had previously believed.

This situation could only ever arise if we closed, and also left debts unpaid at closure. In practice, we would never chase our members for this liability, and we have been informed that if we became insolvent, creditors would be unlikely to do so either. We quickly allowed members to change their status to 'supporter', which removed the right to vote at the AGM but also removed any liability. We began work to revise our governance structure, which ties liability to members' voting rights on how NSUN runs, in order to find a new structure that is user-led but incurs no financial liability unless agreed.

Our full statement can be found here: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/news/statement-on-liability-of-nsun-members-in-case-of-insolvency-news/> ●

**"The AGM will live with me for a very long time. I've already signposted NSUN's YouTube channel of the event to my family and friends. All of the speakers connected deeply with me and I hope we will meet again."**

NSUN Member and AGM 2020 attendee

6

reports published

52

bulletins sent

£125,280

total funding awarded  
through grants

64

blogs and vlogs  
published

588

new members

4

Audio interviews

58,111

individual users on  
the website

8

media mentions

40

interviews and focus  
groups

20

events spoken at

13,000

twitter followers  
by year end

81,565

sessions (hits) on the  
website





**"It's a small pot of money but it's amazing what you can do with a small pot of money."**

NSUN Covid-19 Fund grantee

In 2020, we awarded grants to 88 organisations and groups, to support peer support, community action and mutual aid for people experiencing mental ill-health or distress during the pandemic.

The NSUN Covid-19 Fund consisted of an initial grant of £100,000 from Mind's Coronavirus Mental Health Relief Fund (CMHRF) via the Department of Health and Social Care, to distribute £60,000 in small grants. Based on the success of the first grant, we were then awarded a second grant of £50,000 to distribute 10 grants of £5,000 to existing NSUN grantees which were organisations or groups led by and for people from racialised communities. We then received an additional grant of £10,000 from Lankelly Chase, and the CMHRF then awarded us £5,000 to distribute to an existing grantee delivering helpline support. In total, we distributed £125,280.

The proportion of funding awarded to groups led by people from racialised communities was 63%.

15 (17%) of the 88 organisations were gender specific: 14 for women and one for men. Four (4.5%) were LGBTQ+ organisations or groups.

Most of the applications (c. 75%) were for some form of technology to enable online or remote connection with their communities, whether for software (typically Zoom subscriptions) or hardware (laptops, mobile phones or tablets). Two-thirds of these (30% of the grants overall) were asking for additional

items along with technology; examples of this include: training, creative or wellbeing packs to send out to members, facilitator costs for online groups and printing and postage. The remaining 25% of applications included staffing and volunteer costs, creative and postal projects, and translations.

Some applications were rejected on the basis that the group was not user-led, some for being outside the grant remit (e.g. not Covid related) and some because they were applying for food which was not within the remit of the fund. In the early days of the fund, a number of applications came from mutual aid groups where the link with the ethos of NSUN and the fund was not clear, which we were unable to fund.

We aimed to make the process as accessible as possible, using a light-touch form and offering support from an NSUN Associate undertaking a Grant Manager role. We also supplied an Easy Read version of the form, an opportunity taken up by three organisations. Grant applicants were contacted by a grants manager in the first instance, who was also available to support people with their

applications. The grants manager did an initial sift according to the criteria, arranged a phone call/ Zoom with the shortlisted applicant, and approved applications under £200 which met the criteria. The contact with the grantees was an invaluable part of the process. These applications and the notes were then put forward to a panel which met each week (the CEO, one NSUN Associate, one NSUN trustee and the evaluator). Successful applicants were then sent a grant agreement form based on similar forms from Awards for All and Lankelly Chase. We were able to fund applicants without bank accounts through the Equals Money Scheme which sends out expenses cards which people could use to make and track purchases.

Throughout the process, the grants team worked closely with the Finance Officer to set up strict financial controls, including receipts for all purchases, and requests for copies of organisational bank details.

The independent evaluation, undertaken by a survivor researcher, included a quantitative analysis, an in-depth qualitative analysis based on an evaluation form and 12 case studies, reflections on NSUN's learning, and 10 short videos from grantees: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/news/how-our-members-adapted/>

Akiko was invited to do a podcast interview with Healing Justice London where she talked about the work of

**"The NSUN package has made a concrete difference; we are able to support people in a way that's safe and secure, with things that work, they're not breaking down [...] To get the grant really quickly as well, get the laptops and phones out to people within a week."**

NSUN Covid-19 Fund grantee

- the Fund and NSUN's learning which could benefit the sector: <https://anchor.fm/healing-justice-ldn/episodes/Lived-Experience-Mental-Health-in-Times-of-Covid-19-with-China-Mills-and-Akiko-Hart-etor8v>

*"It is vital for funders and commissioners everywhere to recognise the value of a seriously small grants fund. There are so many small groups and organisations out there who, for various reasons, are unable or unwilling to try to apply for medium or large grants. They may not have the capacity or resources to embark on the process, they do not want to be funded out of their comfort zone, but they do want to survive and thrive, doing what they do best for their immediate communities." NSUN Covid-19 Fund evaluation, Alison Faulkner.*

## Covid-19 Fund grantees:

- 361 Lifesupport
- 3 Starts
- Adira
- African Caribbean Forum Kent
- Arts and Health Hub
- Badass People Demystified
- Boooooom CIC
- Bristol Disability Equality Forum
- Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living
- Breakdown Bolton
- Bury Veterans Hub Cafe
- By Your Side
- Chesterfield Bipolar Group
- Chime to Thrive
- Chronically Awesome
- CiLK (Centre for Independent Living (Kent))
- Community Action to Inspire Hope
- Community Enterprise East London
- Community Network Group CIC
- Compassionate Mental Health
- Depression Xpression

**"We launched our Black Hair Care project on Friday. It made it into our local newspaper... We had a call today from someone at Sheffield City Council who is a manager in the adult care services and they want to talk about referring black service users to get their hair done... This would not have been possible if NSUN had not believed in our project."**

NSUN Covid-19 Fund grantee

- EleMental Music
- Empower the Invisible Project CIC
- FACE
- Ffena
- For Women
- Free2B-Me LGBTQ+ Community Organisation
- Freya
- FruitCake Creatives
- Hearts and Minds
- Hive South Yorkshire
- Humanity Concern Projects
- Humber All Nations Alliance
- Independent and Work Ready
- Kashmiri Arts & Heritage Foundation
- Kunsaka
- KwaAfrica
- Let's Talk About Loss
- Mad Covid
- Make it Happen
- Make Space
- MCRC Ltd
- Melancholy and Raving
- Men Up North
- Meridian Women's Association
- Migrant Empowerment Group
- Mom's Mindful Hub
- MSKT/BACA Whiteness and Race Equality network
- National Hearing Voices Network
- New Baby Network CIC
- Nomad Radio
- North East together
- North Tyneside Disability Forum Ltd
- On the Out
- Organisation of Support and Advice for Religion and Culture (OSARC)
- People Come First
- People First
- Pioneer LXP
- PND Mummies CIC
- Real Insight Consultancy UK CIC
- Release into Victory
- Rise and Shine
- Rising Moments community project group
- Safely Held Talking Learning Healing
- SARELI (SALFORD REFUGEES LINK)
- Self-Injury Self Help
- Self-Injury Support
- Shaftesbury Mental Health Peer Support Group
- Shining stars community group
- SM Talking Circles
- Surrey Coalition of Disabled people
- Survivors of depression in transition
- Survivors' Poetry
- SWAN (Supporting Women, Activities Network)
- Taking Control of Psychiatric Medication Group
- Talk for Health Chair and Share group
- Talking Sense
- Taraki
- The Clear Out Your Closet Collective
- The Cultural Connection
- The Octopus Foundation
- The Sunshine Group
- Traveller Pride
- Waltham Forest Hearing Voices Group
- #watchUsgrow
- We love carers
- West London Somaliland Community
- Wish ●



## PANEL 1.



Suriya Aisha



Meg-John Barker



Sabah Choudrey



Kes Otter Liefte



Amy Rushton

## PANEL 2.



Mark Brown



Steph de la Haye



Ursula Myrie

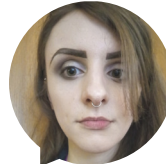


Shuranjeet Singh

## PANEL 3.



Peter Beresford



Holly Dale



Stephen Jeffreys



Jacqui Lovell



Dina Poursanidou

## PANEL 4.



Denise Brown



Rosie Tressler



Amy Wells



Liv Wynter

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the NSUN 2020 Annual General Meeting and Members' Event was held online via Zoom on the 24th and 25th of November.

We opened and closed with keynote speeches by Baljeet Sandu and Micha Frazer-Carroll, and alongside the formal AGM business session we held four smaller closed discussion sessions with a limited number of attendees and graphic facilitation done live by Debbie Roberts from Engage Visually. These focussed on peer support, reflecting on NSUN, what hurts and what works in mental health, and activism and creativity.

## We also held four panel discussions:

### 1 LGBTQ+ and survivor activism.

Chaired by NSUN Trustee Amy Rushton and with guests: Kes Otter Liefte, Meg-John Barker, Sabah Choudrey (Gendered Intelligence) and Suriya Aisha (Colours Youth Network).

### 2 What do user-led groups need?

Chaired by NSUN Associate Mark Brown and with guests: Steph de la Haye (Survivors of Depression in Transition), Shuranjeet Singh (Taraki), and Ursula Myrie (ADIRA).

### 3 Surviving and thriving as a

**survivor researcher.** Chaired by the Survivor Researcher Network (SRN) lead, Stephen Jeffreys, and with SRN guests: Dina Poursanidou, Holly Dale, Jacqui Lovell and Peter Beresford.

### 4 Youth lived experience leadership.

Chaired by NSUN Communications and Membership Officer Amy Wells and with guests: Denise Brown (4YoungMinds), Liv Wynter (Hearts and Minds), and Rosie Tressler (Student Minds).

The panel discussion recordings and the keynote speeches are all available to view on the AGM website (<https://nsunagm2020.com/>) and the NSUN

- ▶ YouTube channel. The NSUN AGM 2020 website includes the full schedule and also includes soapbox videos by members, a creative exhibition with art and photographic submissions from members, membership group videos, an update video on NSUN's work this year from CEO Akiko Hart, and a "meet the team" video.

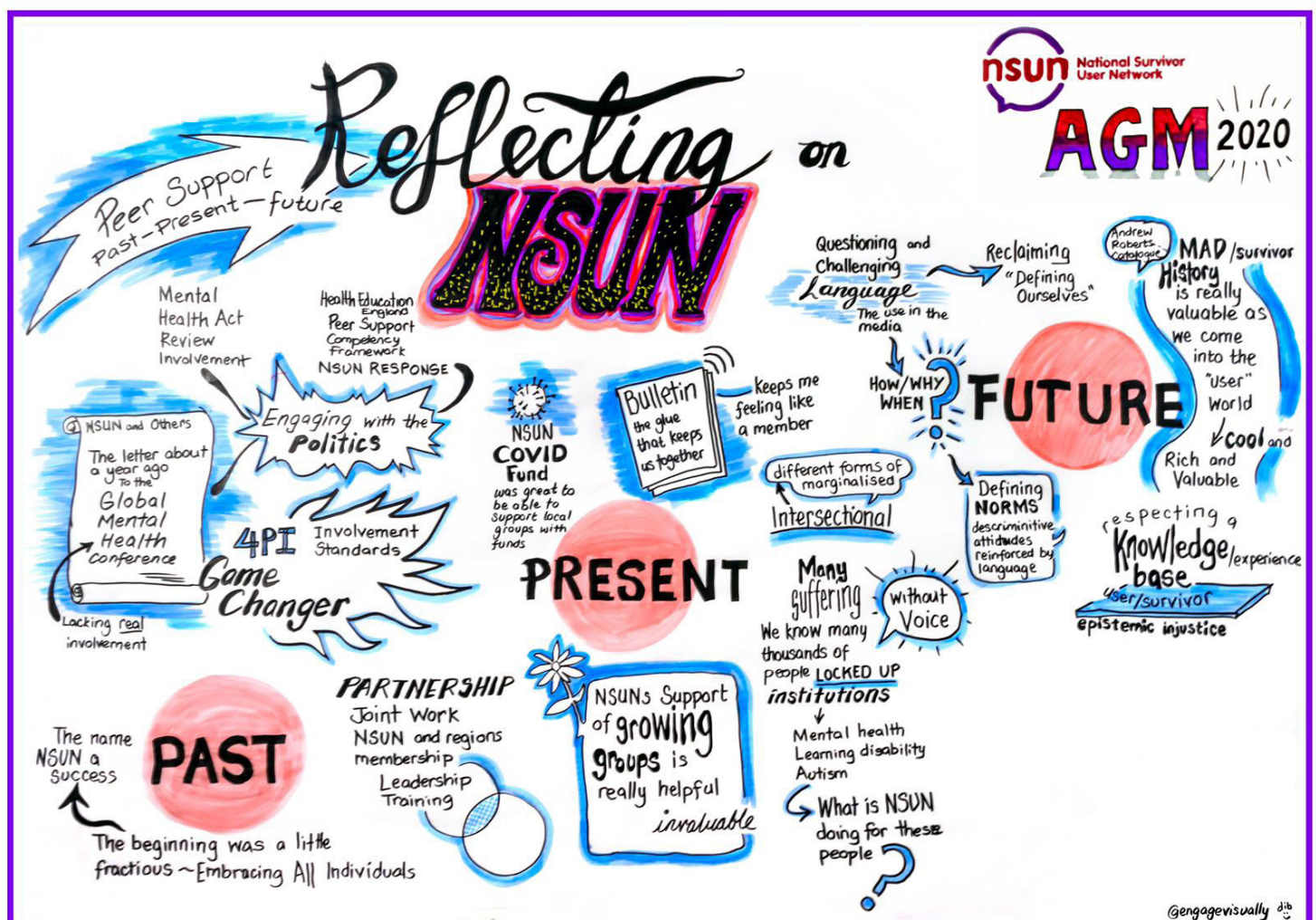
Accessibility was one of the main considerations for the AGM and

members' event, and the event included British Sign Language (BSL), captioning, a group agreement which enabled people to feel safe and respected, and a range of speakers who reflected the diversity of the membership. Following on from the AGM, NSUN supported 5 small user-led groups to access BSL captioning for their events this year.

**"I loved attending parts of the AGM event last week, and am really looking forward to catching up with what I missed on YouTube. It was a fantastic event, and so well planned."**

NSUN Member and AGM 2020 attendee

Graphic from discussion session "Reflecting on NSUN: past, present, and future" by Debbie Roberts, Engage Visually ([www.engagevisually.co.uk/](http://www.engagevisually.co.uk/))



## Peer Support Resources

Through our partnership work with Mind, we commissioned and published a number of resources for members on peer support. They include:

### Remote and Online Peer Support Resource

<https://www.nsun.org.uk/resource/remote-and-online-peer-support-resource/>

### Peer Support: Working with the VCSE Sector

<https://www.nsun.org.uk/resource/peer-support-working-with-the-vcse-sector/>

### Peer support case studies of Canerows, Suicide Crisis Centre, ReCoCo, Leeds Mind, and The CAPITAL Project Trust

<https://www.nsun.org.uk/projects/peer-support/>

## Principled ways of working

Following on from the Principled Ways of Working Peer Support Charter published in 2018, we commissioned and published a report, blog and video on “Principled ways of working: peer support in Sussex, learning from a local partnership”, looking back at the Principled Ways of Working network (a partnership between 13 voluntary and statutory organisations). The process enabled the partners involved to review their work together and discuss their achievements, as well as the benefits and the challenges of peer support partnership work across statutory and small and large VCSE organisations.

**Report:** <https://www.nsun.org.uk/resource/principled-ways-of-working-peer-support-in-sussex/>

**Blog by Anne Beales:** <https://www.nsun.org.uk/reflecting-on-a-peer-support-partnership-of-13-statutory-and-vcse-organisations/>

**Video with Principled Ways of Working partners, created by Flexible Films:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-4EiOCFR00>

*“The ultimate aim of the partnership has been to ensure ‘patient choice’ round peer support, signposting to what most likely will work for people based on a diverse and detailed map of what is available locally (all of whom work in a ‘principled way’ – see the Peer Support Charter). We are currently seeking funds to roll out a robust (service user or peer led) evaluation of peer support in our communities.*

*One day soon, hopefully, peer support will meet the needs of the magnificent diversity that exists in the communities this partnership covers. This report and video are a graphic illustration of the beginnings of what’s possible when service users across the sectors work in partnership to provide leadership.”*

Anne Beales, reflecting on the Sussex Partnership.

## Shared learning spaces

Through our partnership work with Mind, we also convened online shared learning spaces for members, in partnership with Make Space, Taraki, and LGBT Switchboard, on different aspects of facilitating peer support groups online. These were kept small in order to facilitate meaningful conversation between attendees, but the recorded parts of the sessions were made available online afterwards to make the learning go further.

You can watch “Building Community Online: learning from online LGBTQ+ peer support”, with LGBT Switchboard, and “Keeping a Safe Virtual Space in Online Peer Support”, with Taraki, here: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/news/shared-learning-sessions-on-online-peer-support/>. The third session, on navigating conversations around self-harm in online peer support with Make Space, was not recorded, but the facilitators wrote a reflective blog piece on the session: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/facilitating-brave-spaces-online/>

## The Competence Framework for Mental Health Peer Support Workers

Following on from our 19/20 campaign on the mental health peer support worker apprenticeship scheme, we responded to the Competence Framework for Mental Health Peer Support Workers: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/news/nsun-response-to-the-competence-framework-for-mental-health-peer-support-workers/>

**“Things will not change if we continue to accept invitations to be involved in areas which we should lead. Things will not change if those in power accept commissions in areas which they have no business to lead on.”**

Akiko Hart



## Resources for user-led groups

During 2020/21, we held a number of events (including the 2020 Members' Event and AGM) and created a series of resources to help build the capacity of user-led groups.

Thanks to a grant from City Bridge Trust funded from the London Community Response Fund, NSUN launched Community Constellations, a new capacity-building project for the vibrant but precarious user-led and community-led sector in London. Community Constellations takes as its starting point the fact that user-led community groups resemble the specific communities they serve more than they resemble an overall model. The project, works with partner organisations to create generative spaces in which user-led organisations can support each other and build for the future. Its work includes:

- Launching a regular online reflective practice space in partnership with youth mental health projects Voice Collective and Hearts and Minds
- Supporting the Survivor Researcher Network, currently hosted by NSUN, and Misery, a QTPOC sober mental health collective, with their journey to becoming constituted
- Working in partnership with user-led group Feeling Queer on a zine on queer mental health.

We also funded an additional print run of Asylum Magazine which Women in Secure Hospitals and Books Beyond Bars sent to women and LGBTQIA+ folk in forensic wards or in prison. This was part of our work to share mental health resources with people who were digitally excluded during the pandemic.

## Understanding our sector

In December 2020, we published the report "What do user-led groups need?", thanks to a grant from the London Community Response Fund: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/resource/what-do-user-led-groups-need/>

The report is the result of 19 interviews commissioned by NSUN with community organisations and groups using lived experience to deliver mental health support in England. These interviews took place in August 2020.

The objective of the research was shaped by our role as a national network of user-led mental health organisations and our experience of delivering a micro grants programme to support user-led community groups and organisations to deliver mental health related activity in the context of the first national pandemic lockdown in 2020. The research looked to understand what challenges user-led mental health organisations face and to explore what might help user-led organisations delivering mental health support to meet their aims and sustain and develop their activities.

This report contains a number of observations from the interviews carried out and a number of testable hypotheses for future action. Key findings from the report include:

- User-led organisations and groups can feel that their target cohort is too specific to attract the attention of funders interested in whole community change, even when the size of the funds required to meet the needs of that cohort are minimal. Making

a big change to a small number of people does not feel like an easy sell.

- User-led groups and organisations that have grown from racialised or marginalised community may define themselves and their lived experience in terms of their community experience primarily, even when their activities support the mental health of their community.
- User-led groups and organisations delivering support and opportunities to improve mental health can feel that outside bodies, including funders, do not understand what is specific about their work and the context in which it takes place and as such struggle to communicate the value of what they deliver.
- User-led groups and organisations may feel themselves to have few local allies or peers with which to share, discuss and develop ideas and partnerships, especially where the mental health elements of their work are not widely recognised as important within their wider community.

We continued to develop our relationships with grant-making trusts and foundations in order to influence the way in which they consider, value and fund grassroots user-led groups. This included participating in a roundtable on Disabled People's Organisations convened by the National Lottery Community Fund, and facilitating a learning session on mental health & inequalities for philanthropy consultancy Ten Years' Time' Grant Givers Programme.

## ► Amplifying our members' voices and campaigns

We published 64 members' blogs and vlogs and continued to share campaigns from the membership.

Highlights include "Call Before You Walk' for A&E – how will this impact treatment for self-harm?", by Self Injury Support Director Naomi Salisbury, responding to changes in the process for going to A&E for self-harm (<https://www.nsun.org.uk/call-before-you-walk-for-ae-how-will-this-impact-treatment-for-self-harm/>), and "Another shocking scandal - why does this keep happening?" - by People First Director Andrew Lee, in response to ten staff being suspended at Yew Trees hospital in Essex after reports of abusive behaviour (<https://www.nsun.org.uk/another-shocking-scandal-why-does-this-keep-happening/>).

A vlog called 'Youth Activism and Intentional Peer Support with Hearts and Minds' looks at the experiences of five young people whose places on Intentional Peer Support training we funded (<https://www.nsun.org.uk/youth-activism-and-intentional-peer-support-with-hearts-and-minds/>).

As part of our partnership work with Mind, we commissioned a series of focus groups and interviews to map out what is sometimes called 'Lived Experience Leadership' in different settings in England and Wales. The project engages with the questions, complexities and debates about Lived Experience Leadership, to see if there might be a role for NSUN or Mind in supporting its development. We also commissioned a series of

**"Doing this IPS training 3 years ago, and meeting a community of people who are still some of my closest friends, exposed me to alternative ways of viewing mental health that didn't view me as sick or in need of fixing... our vision is to create spaces where young people can explore these topics and come to their own conclusions – alongside gaining a qualification. The training is also a doorway to the amazing world that is the peer/lived experience/survivor movement. Young people may be financially vulnerable or out of work... NSUN amazingly funded 5 scholarship places for participants so they could complete the training for free."**

Beth Ingram, founder of Hearts and Minds

blogs and vlogs for members to share their views on what Lived Experience Leadership means to them, and, for some, the challenges of navigating a Lived Experience job in a mental health setting.

In the week before World Mental Health Day (October 2020), NSUN released a series of articles looking at the "new normal" as well as interacting cycles of poverty and distress: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/category/the-new-normal/>





## ► Policy and Influencing Work

We have continued to work closely with our policy partners in order to influence mental health and welfare policy, from the perspective of our members who might otherwise not have a voice in these spaces. We are a member of the following coalitions or groups:

- the Mental Health Independent Advisory Oversight Group, which tracks progress against the NHS Long Term Plan the Mental Health Alliance, which focuses on mental health legislation and which we currently chair
- two consortia at the Health & Wellbeing Alliance at Department of Health & Social Care (the Lived Experience Alliance, formerly the Win-Win Alliance, and the Mental Health Consortia). The Health & Wellbeing Alliance is a partnership between the voluntary sector and the health and care system to provide a voice and improve the health and wellbeing for all communities.
- the Disability Benefits Consortium, a coalition of over 100 charities and other organisations working towards a fair benefits system
- and regular Care Quality Commission (CQC) meetings and updates. The CQC is the independent regulator of health and social care in England.

## Highlights from policy and influencing work include:

- The proposed changes to mental health legislation in the Coronavirus Act expired (sunsetting) thanks to campaigning work by NSUN and other organisations

**‘NSUN is incredibly important to my organisation as we are not only survivor-led but also support people from an African-Caribbean background. So in regards to finding that NSUN provide culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate help, support, advice, signposting, events and funding, the NSUN team are incredibly warm, patient and very present.’**

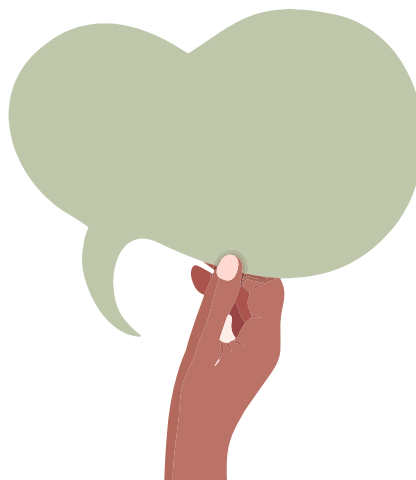
NSUN Member Adira

- Work on the Mental Health Act in the run-up to the publication of the White Paper in January and during the subsequent public consultation, including co-hosting two webinars with the British Institute of Human Rights, commissioning and publishing a series of blogs on members’ personal experience of being detained under the Act, consulting with members through online surveys, and publishing a response to the consultation: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/projects/the-mental-health-act/>
- NSUN’s submission referenced and included in the Joint Committee on Human Rights report “The Government’s response to COVID-19: human rights implications”: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/9268/html>
- Partnership work with mental health charities which culminated

in the publication of the Social Contract, a manifesto for a mentally healthy society <https://www.rethink.org/media/3840/a-new-social-contract-for-a-mentally-healthier-society-final.pdf>

- Policy work on the Competence Framework on Mental Health Peer Support Workers
- Launching the new 4Pi video and project page in November: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/projects/4pi-involvement-standards/> alongside a new blog on its use: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/how-can-organisations-use-the-4pi-involvement-standards/>
- Publishing ‘Keeping Control’, a series of resources on hate crime and abuse in mental health, including a report translated into Bengali, Urdu, Arabic and Gujarati, and available in Easy Read. It also included a series of audio interviews: <https://www.nsun.org.uk/resource/keeping-control/>

Our work was presented at numerous events, including a Coping with Covid webinar organised by the United Nations, the ACEVO (Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations) conference, and the House of Lords Select Committee on digital mental health and Covid.



## ► Hosted Projects

### What is a hosted project?

Hosted projects are supported by NSUN, but carry out their work or activities under their own name. The arrangement will depend on the organisation, but sometimes NSUN provides administrative support or banking, or we can offer mentoring. NSUN used to be hosted by Together for Mental Wellbeing before it became independent. It can be a really good way to get a project or network off the ground, minimise financial risks and share learning.

## North East together

North East together (NEt) is the regional network for people with lived experience of mental health conditions living in the North East of England.

In the last year NEt continued to stay in touch with our members during lockdown by purchasing a Zoom licence and holding members' meetings online.

NEt has also been able to continue support via online meetings Pride in Mind, a social and support group for members of the LGBTQ+ community with lived experience of a mental health condition.

Work has also progressed with involvement in A Weight off Your Mind, a regional plan to support those within secondary mental health and learning disability services to manage their weight. The secretary is now involved with two steering groups to roll out the work across the region and NEt are also involved in some associated research on the plan.

In the next year NEt has agreed a service level agreement with the Northern Clinical Network and Senate

to engage and measure the impact Covid 19 has had on people with lived experience, particularly around access to mental health services.

## Survivor Researcher Network

The Survivor Researcher Network (SRN) was originally formed after the 'Strategies for Living' Mental Health Foundation project (1997-2003) and was hosted by the Mental Health Foundation until 2011 when it moved to NSUN.

The network aims to provide mental health service users and survivors who are involved and interested in research with a forum for networking, sharing information and supporting each other. SRN produces a bulletin of research opportunities, events and articles every two months. Information is also now shared via the SRN Twitter account at @SurvivorResNet.

In 2020/21, Working Group members completed their chapter titled 'How can we survive and thrive as survivor researchers?' for the Routledge Handbook of Service User Involvement in Human Services Research and Education, which was published during Autumn 2020 in hardback and a more affordable e-book format. SRN staged a panel discussion at the NSUN AGM under a similar title.

They contributed to the March 2021 LivPsych meeting, 'Survivor Research Perspectives: Unmasking the Black-White Mirror to Save Black Lives in the Mental Health Sector' with Colin King and Doreen Joseph.

The SRN bulletin with information on relevant opportunities and publications continues to be

**"Doing things to help people's mental health is hard. Doing it on your own without colleagues, contacts and peers is even harder. Doing things that no one else is doing where you are is even harder still. NSUN, for me, represents a kind of home and a kind of family. If user-led mental health work in communities is a world separate from the broader world of charity and NHS mental health activity, then NSUN is always my way of entering it."**

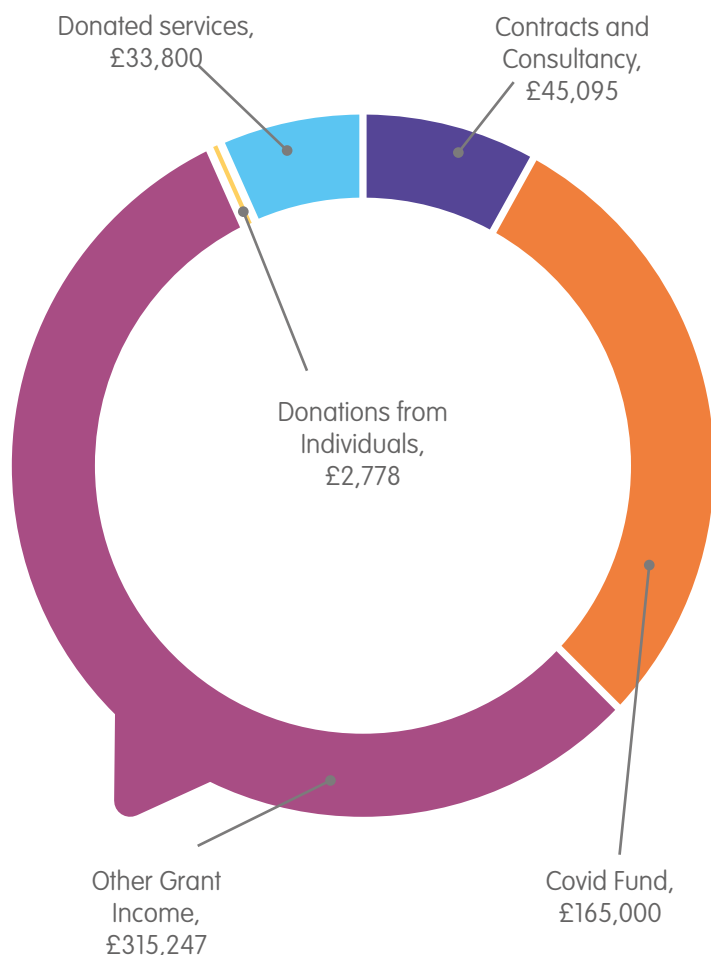
Mark Brown, NSUN Associate

circulated every other month to NSUN members on the mailing list.

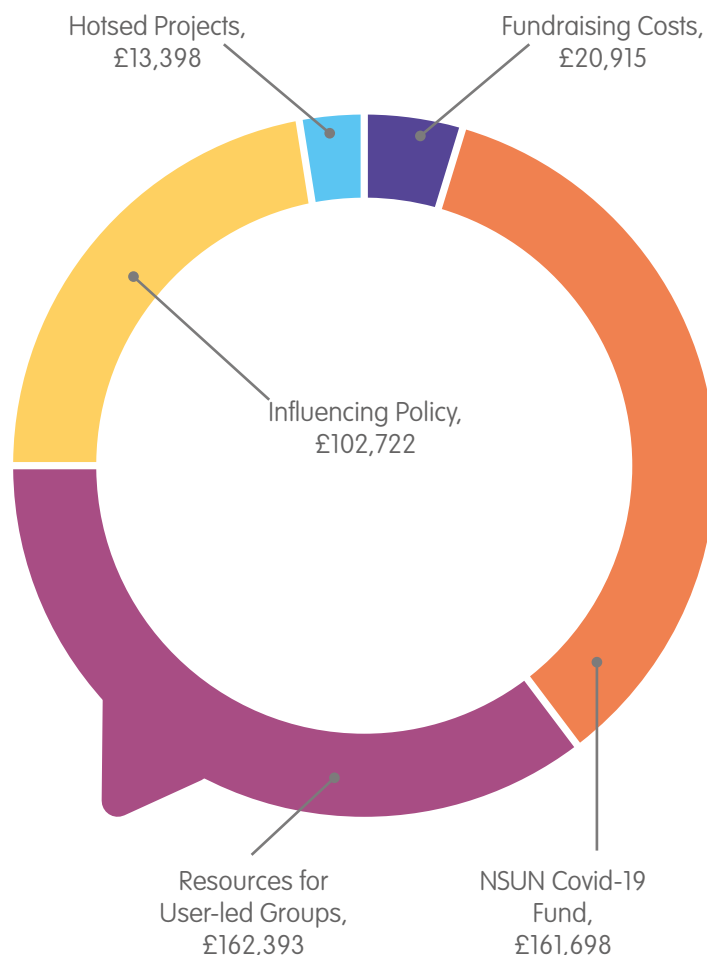
Over the winter months SRN successfully established an online Discussion and Support Group for those interested in using their lived experience in mental health research. There has been considerable interest and three meetings have taken place. Meetings include a topic for discussion and free space to bring issues of concern.

The Working Group has met regularly and considered options for the future development of SRN. The hosting and funding arrangements for SRN with NSUN are coming to an end in 2021. The Working Group are currently building a new SRN website which can offer a platform for interaction and resources for survivor researchers, establishing a community interest company and seeking alternative core funding. ●

## Total Income £561,920



## Total Expenditure £461,126



### Income

Our income grew by 138% during 2020/21 to £561,920 driven by grants specifically responding to the Coronavirus pandemic and £165,000 towards the NSUN Covid-19 Small grants fund.

### Expenditure

During the year, NSUN expanded with expenditure increasing by 100% to £461,126. Spending on charitable activities was £440,211 including the NSUN Covid-19 fund with costs totaling £161,698. Total costs of fundraising were £20,915.

### Summary financial information

The above information has been extracted from the full financial statements and is not intended to give a full overview of the financial performance or position of the charity. The financial statements from which the information has been taken have been Independently Examined and an unqualified report was given. The full Financial Statements, Trustees' report and Independent Examiners report can be obtained from [info@nsun.org.uk](mailto:info@nsun.org.uk) or downloaded from the Charity Commission.

### Funds

Total funds at 31st March 2021 were £134,548 and were made up of restricted funds of £61,091 and unrestricted funds of £73,457. The Trustees review the charity's reserves policy annually and aim to hold 3 months of fixed staff and running costs plus other specific amounts based on levels of unrestricted grant funding held for use in the coming year and other key risks. At the 31st March 2021 unrestricted free reserves, excluding fixed assets, total £76,952 and was 61% of the target set. ●

The NSUN Board of Trustees submits its statutory Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021. The Trustee's Report and Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2006, the Charities Act 2016 and comply with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP). They also comply with the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard, also known as the Charities (FRS 102) SORP. Exemptions from disclosure: This annual report does not omit or withhold any reference or administrative details.

## **Public benefit statement**

In reviewing our aims, objectives and activities, the Trustees have taken into account the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit. The Trustees ensure that the activities undertaken are always in line with the charitable aims and objectives as set out in NSUN's governing document. This annual report does not include exemptions from disclosure. ●

**"It was fantastic to be involved – I was just reflecting on how genuinely nurturing and accessible a space it was. Would love to be involved with NSUN in the future in any capacity."**

AGM 2020 keynote speaker.

**NSUN would like to thank our supporters for their recognition of the importance of our mission:**

- **City Bridge Trust - London Community Response Fund**
- **Charities Aid Foundation**
- **Disability Rights UK**  
(via Department for Health and Social Care)
- **Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust**
- **Lankelly Chase**
- **National Lottery Community Fund**
- **Mind**
- **The Tudor Trust**
- **Trust for London**

We would also like to thank James Ellis-Rees and Christina Mouktari from Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, who provided legal counsel through the LawWorks pro bono legal scheme.



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**Registered Charity No.  
113598**

**Company number:  
07166851**

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2021**