# **Self CareForum Self Care Innovations Award2021**

# **Award Application Form and Eligibility**

***The Self Care Forumisinviting applications of good practice and innovations in self care, personalised care, and social prescribing that have made a difference to individuals, groups, or organisations.***

**Who can apply?**

This invitation is open to everyone, whether you are an individual, a community champion, an employer, GP practice, Local Authority,school, college, business,or services organisation (public, private, or charitable). For a guide, see examples table below.

**£500 bursary**

The winner will receive a £500 bursary to spend on a self care related initiative and the top entries will be included on the Self Care Forum website to share bestself care practice and excellence. The winners will be announced during the UK’s National Self Care Week (15 – 22 November) as part of its launch and promotional activity.

Closing date for admissions: **31st July 2021.**

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| Examples of possible initiatives | If specific health-related conditions were targeted, they might include |
| * 2020’s Self Care Week activities * Coronavirus related self care * Signposting to services * Protecting mental health and wellbeing * Promoting self care to the shielded population * Self care for the elderly or other specific groups * Self care introduced by employers * Local authority population or community initiatives * Pharmacy initiatives * GP initiatives * Self care education by schools, universities, or community groups such as Scouts, Guides etc * Empowering vulnerable groups | * Long-term conditions * Obesity * Diabetes * General health * Nutrition * Exercise * Mental Health * Self-treatable conditions/minor illness |

## Please use the form below to tell us about your self care initiative.

If you are typing directly into the form, do not worry if the box extends beyond the page – it will continue onto the next one.

## Title and contact details.

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| Title of Initiative(This should describe your initiative using 50 words max)  Supporting Sisters – holistic, trauma informed peer led services for women, including structured support groups, listening and befriending services, drop-ins around domestic violence & abuse and suicide & self-harm and social activities. |
| Name of Organisation and Region (please state context, ie general practice, community care etc)  Aspire Learning Support and Wellbeing - women’s service providing both in centre and online services to women across the North East from our Chester-Le-Street hub. |
| Name of person/team/individual being nominated  Aspire ‘Supporting Sisters’ peer led women’s support and wellbeing services |
| Contact name for entry  Janice Rokni |
| Contact email for entry  janicerokni@aspire-northeast.co.uk |
| Timeframe and dates of initiative  Supporting Sisters has been running since August 2016 |
| Date of submission  30.07.21 |

## Problem(s) and how you tackled them.

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| What was the problem you were trying to tackle? (max 200 words)  Aspire offers a holistic, person centred approach, enabling women to choose their own pathways through our services, some are seeking short term support through challenges, others stay for many years as Aspire becomes embedded in their routines and friendships. We offer women a variety of routes to assist them to live the lives they want to live; this could mean being signposted to additional specialist support, increasing their confidence and self-esteem or progressing to volunteering with our services (following extensive training). Aspire recognises that women may have multiple challenges and needs, and our services reflect this diversity. We offer several specialist support services including suicide & self-harm, mental health and domestic violence & abuse and are currently growing our existing budgeting, benefits advise and poverty support.However with a holistic approach embedded in all we do, Aspire recognises that women coming to us will often be facing multiple connected difficulties, affecting their emotional, social, economic, physical and relationship wellbeing. |
| Please give a brief description of your self-careinnovation (max 250 words)  Our women-only centre is a welcoming and friendly place to learn, socialise and gain confidence. Our programme is evolving as we change with the needs of our women and the current Covid situation, however this is an outline of the Summer 2021 offer:  Stay Safe Feel Well is focused on positive activities for women affected by the trauma of suicide and self-harm. We offer a 6 week, relaxed, in person support and activity group as well as a monthly online drop-in where women join our Suicide and Self Harm Champion volunteer facilitators to ask questions, share experiences or just choose to listen, in a safe, unpressured and non-judgemental space.  Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) support is available via our DVA Champion volunteers, support packs (essential food and household items for women and families in need) and monthly online DVA Drop-In sessions.  We have a weekly online friendship group for women aged 50+ (Mature Friends)and more structured online support is available via our Positive Changes group to help women cope with life's challenges.  We also offer wellbeing services in centre with qualified podiatrists and holistic therapists, an onsite creche and one to one listening and befriending services. |
| What challenges or barriers were you faced with and how did you solve the problems or overcome the barriers? (max250 words)  Covid19presented us with challenges linked to digital inclusion – many of our women were anxious or unskilled to use online services or had no access to the internet or internet enabled devices. As a team we worked hard to offer telephone services wherever possible, including support accessing zoom. We used funding, signposting and donations to help supply our women with devices and affordable internet packages where possible.  We found some of our women were unable to engage with our services during lockdown as they had other priorities and commitments (a particular challenge for our volunteer capacity)or a lack of privacy in their homes and we ensured we made regular welfare checks via emails and phone calls. As soon as we were able, we launched a volunteer recruitment campaign that reflected our current services, and this was a huge success – with the current cohort about to graduate into service delivery. During the Coronavirus pandemic, social media became even more important in communication and connection. The Aspire Facebook page continues to be a significant link for many women who do not engage with support services online but want to stay connected to the Centre.  In April 2021, we held an online staff development day to come together to reflect on the last year and consolidate our priorities going forwards. Managing the impact on staff morale and resilience continues to present challenges, it was a great opportunity to reconnect as a team and gain perspective on the work we'd done over the last year. |
| Did you collaborate with other partners or organisations, if so, who were they?  Aspire has a clearly defined Partnership Working Framework which clearly sets out our aims through partnership working and collaboration:   * Link with Women’s Organisations across the North East * Explore and develop partnership opportunities for mutual benefit * Explore opportunities to work together for mutual benefit, for example, joint funding bids * Develop and maintain relationships with key statutory organisations to influence community-based delivery plans.   Currently we are receiving funding from the National Lottery Community and Fund, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner, the Suicide Prevention Fund, Country Durham and Durham County Council. We are also part of the current cohort of the national ‘Headlining Mental Health’ training and funding programme from the Media Trust.  We are also delivering health and wellbeing learning opportunities in partnership with New College Durham and Durham County Council Community Learning.  Aspire are members of several local community groups including the Chester Le Street Area Action partnership, Durham Universal Credit Working Group, Advice in County Durham Partnership, and the local Mental Health Provider Forum and have worked closely with Karbon Homes.  Aspire is always open to collaborative working, sharing best practice and exploring new partnerships.  In 2020 we developed a collaborative partnership with Women’s Health in South Tyneside (WHiST) to share good practice and explore joint funding opportunities across the two counties of Durham and South Tyneside.  Although we were unsuccessful in a bid to support women experiencing issues of poverty we continue to see the benefits of collaborative working and having built a good relationship continue to be open to new opportunities, whether that may be funding, project or activity based.  Other organisations in the area we have linked up and developed closer relationships with are:   * Karbon Homes * Durham County Council * Social prescribing – link workers * Community mental health. * Various women’s and voluntary sector   This year for International Women’s Day we collaborated with a cohort of eight women’s organisationsin the North East to co-produce and deliver an online event to celebrate International Women’s Day.  Led by WHiST, (Women’s Health in South Tyneside), and usually an in personevent, ‘Stronger Together -Women Supporting Women’ was a virtual event for the first time. The working group shared resources, skills and costs, co-ordinating the programme of activities for the day from several locations where every organisation delivered an activityto contribute to the day’s programme. The event allowed more women to participate as it facilitated access from their own homes and with their own personal circumstances.  In March 2021 we partnered with women’s organisations throughout the northeast and Cumbria to present our good practice at a region national lottery community fund event.  At the 2021 TUC Women’s Conference, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, was invited to speak at the ‘Delivering Award Winning Learning, Support and Wellbeing for Women in the Community’ panel discussion and was joined by one of our Supporting Sister volunteers.  Aspire has connected with and formed a mutually beneficial and positive relationship with the Chester le Street Social Prescribing Team.  Having arranged meetings, online during Covid, we have had open discussions and shared information about what we do, our systems, including our referral system, what Aspire does and our approach and provided information about our activities and who would benefit.  The Social Prescribing Team have likewise shared what they do and we have a strong ongoing relationship with the members of their team. They receive regular updates about Aspire’s activities and we have regular contact through email, telephone and meetings to discuss any issues and needs and work with one another to iron out issues or simply to keep in touch. This means that Social Prescribing workers are able to also offer their GP’s the latest information keeping everyone in the communication loop. Ultimately this facilitates helping women make informed choices to help them move forward in their lives for the benefit of the benefit of their health and wellbeing. |

## Impactand outcomes

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| Who was the initiative directed at and what were the benefits to the targeted group or individuals? (max 250 words)  Aspire has always been available to all women aged 18+.We encourage and enable mums to attend by providing crèche services and have a group specifically for women aged 50+ but our services and volunteers are generally quite diverse in terms of age and economic circumstances, which allows women to benefit from a real breadth of lived experiences and find a more balanced social experience.  Our specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse and Suicide and Self Harm programmes are just two examples of how we can offer tailored support but still maintain the holistic approach, helping women to expand their support and activities into new areas such as joining our classes and courses including Encouraging Healthy Weight and Healthy Eating, mindfulness and meditation, Healthy Cooking and Express Yourself Through Art.  As restrictions begin to lift, we are looking to how we can safely transition support services back into the Centre, whilst continuing to provide consistent remote support. Although we know there is an urgent need for face-to-face support, we also know that for many women, this transition will be very challenging. The anxiety created by the pandemic means many women are anxious about the risks of returning to the Centre or may now face additional barriers through deteriorating mental health, financial hardship or increased caring responsibilities because of the pandemic. |
| Were therefurther benefits to you, your colleagues, your organisation or to a wider area such as the NHS? If so, what were they?(e.g improved job satisfaction, smoother running of facility, happier service users, better use of scarce resources, cost saving)  As a holistic service we see that the benefits our women feel extending to other areas of their lives, their wider social networks and communities. We ensure we partner with relevant organisations and institutions wherever possible and attend numerous networking and committee meetings linked to wellbeing, health and the women’s sector to ensure we are taking advantage of opportunities to the benefit of our women and bringing our specialist knowledge and experience to other services.  Our collaborative working approach means that we can both share and gain best practice ideas as well as talk through any issues with other organisations we have developed good relationships with. This means we can bring new ideas to our team and service, this also facilitates our ability to link up other organisations and services’ where we see there are commonalities of service offer and potential opportunities for sharing and joining up.  This often occurs during group meetings and individual conversations allowing us to share what might be useful to others. These would occur, for example, through attendance at the Mental Health Provider Forum, Advice in County Durham Partnership, Universal Credit Working Group, Mental Health Framework as well as attending webinars and more specific events such as ‘Rolling out Social Prescribing’, ‘Breathing Space -Debt Solutions’, ’The Role of the VCSE in Social Prescribing’, and Lottery Women and Girl’s Community Calls.  When the centre closed, we were undertaking a review of our support for victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence, to consolidate our approach across the organisation and explore further areas for development. We have continued to reflect on, strengthen and develop our work in this area. Women with lived experience form part of Domestic Violence and Abuse Steering Group of staff and volunteers has now been established, following our coproduction model. Supporting Sisters volunteers will bring their skills, knowledge, and lived experience to influence how our services develop to support victims/survivors both in centre and online. |

## Evidence

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| Please quantify the benefits of your initiative.(e.g. cost improvement, numbers of people helped, time saved)  33% of women disclosed a mental health issue and 26% of women disclosed a long-term condition or physical disability (at point of referral based on those accessing Aspire since September 2019)  In June 2020, we sent out a survey to women accessing our support groups online. The survey asked a range of questions about accessibility and benefits of online support, as well as questions from the Office of National Statistics survey on the impact of the pandemic. Over ¾ indicated they were worried or anxious about the future and/or feeling stressed or anxious.  During lockdown (Mar-Aug 2020) we supported 32 women through our Check-In and Chat service, 12 women accessing one to one listening services, 10 women regularly accessing our befriending services and May to August 2020 our online groups supported 25 women. This is an understandable drop from our peak pre pandemic where we were supporting 171 women via group support and 143 using wellness services, numbers we hope to soon return to as restrictions ease and women rebuild their confidence to return to the centre for our new blended delivery approach.  For the period September 2020 to July 2021 Aspire received 12 NHS referrals from the Social Prescribing Team. |
| Do you have formal or anecdotal evidence of success? (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, informal feedback?)  Research from our year 4 National Lottery funder report (page 6, August 2020) showed that our women said of Aspire’s services that:  The non-judgmental ethos of Aspire and our staff meant women felt more able to access wellbeing services.  Our gender-specific provision and women-only centre increased women’s confidence to access wellbeing services.  The holistic nature of our services, where “everything is under one roof” made wellbeing services more accessible for women.  Women felt comfortable with our Wellness service staff and were able to discuss their concerns openly and seek support.    “Aspire groups online are a great help. They are a lovely bunch of people.” (Service user)  “It’s even more important now because people are feeling isolated. And the whole point of the group is that people get to realise that they’re not alone.” (Aspire volunteer)  “The Aspire group online has been a lifeline to me” (Service user)  “We can still reach more women, women who can’t get into the centre… (Working online) is something we can carry on doing.So there’s a lot of positives come out of it.” (Aspire volunteer) |
| What was the cost of this initiative in terms of time, money, and/or other resources? Please be as specific as you can  The services cost in the region of £100.000 per year to run this programme with the majority covering staff costs in relation to volunteer coordination, support worker, administration, marketing, data collection, impact and evaluations, Crèche provision, overheads and resources for the programme. |

## And, finally…

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| Are there any lessons you learned or top tips that you would like to share?(max 200 words)  We have been running and developing these services for several years now and although we monitoring and evaluate all we do Covid really made us stop in our tracks and throughout lockdowns we spent time consulting with the women we were supporting and reflecting on our practices. We now know that giving more one to one time at the initial stage of engagement supports the trusting relationship better and we know that women stay engaged for longer and progress onto other services more readily. So the top tip is invest more resource and time into the initial contact stage for longer term rewards.  Aspire has also learned the benefits of building strong relationships and collaborating with others. Working in partnership does not necessarily mean formally – it is good practice to instigate open conversations and discussions and maintain lines of communication. To stay in touch, to share ideas and invite discussions around ideas and issues is a two-way caring approach that both supports and benefits everyone. |
| Did you use any of the Self Care Forum’s resources? If so, please specify.  Aspire follows the Self Care Forum across all our social media and regularly likes/shares its posts. We participate in Self Care week each year using our social media and in centre awareness raising via internal noticeboards, comms and events. |
| Why do you think this initiative deserves to win the award? (Max 100 words)  Aspire takes a strength based approach, recognises everyone has something to contribute. This approach empowers women accessing or delivering services to raise their self worth/value, putting them in the lead, supporting a sense of collective ownership. Women feel accepted at Aspire, not judged by their circumstances. We support with no time limits enabling women to become resilient to cope with change and challenges they face, not only benefits individuals but their families and their communities. Our award winning women’s centre consistently delivers innovative and adapts support responding to need recognising the 5 ways to wellbeing promoting self care. |
| Do you have an image, materials or weblinks to supplement your application?Please supply no more than 2 images which may also be used to promote your application if successful.  Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/aspire.northeast>  Twitter: @AspireHouse  New website currently in development – launching October 2021  A picture containing text, clipart  Description automatically generated  A group of people posing for a photo  Description automatically generated |
| Your application may be chosen to be uploaded to the “best practice” page of the Self Care Forum website to share excellence so that others might use the learnings in your application to empower more people. We will also include your email address so that people may get in touch with you. Please give us permission below by choosing a, b or c (please delete the two that don’t apply).   1. Yes I give permission for my application to be uploaded to the website with my contact details |

We look forward to receiving your application. Please email your completed form to:

[selfcare@selfcareforum.org](mailto:selfcare@selfcareforum.org)

**About the Self Care Forum**

The Self Care Forum supports people-facing organisations in helping their communities and service users better understand how to self care. It is the leading independent provider of best practice around self care and the ‘go-to’ place for top quality resources, current opinion, and self care interventions in the UK.It is a charity and aims to improve public health by promoting self care at national policy level. It creates resources, runs the UK’s National Self Care Week, and supports robust research evidence.

For more information about the Self Care Forum please go to the website. [www.selfcareforum.org](http://www.selfcareforum.org).