

MEETING: 10/01/2017

Ref: 13550

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Improving Londoners' Mental Health

BiPolar UK

Adv: Julia Mirkin

Amount requested: £199,127

Base: Westminster

Benefit: London-wide

Amount recommended: £200,000

The Charity

Bipolar UK (BUK) is the only national charity dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by Bipolar disorder, formerly referred to as Manic Depression. There are over one million people in the UK with Bipolar, which is characterised by manic highs, alternating with suicidal lows, and for which there is no known cure. It takes, on average, 10.5 years to receive a correct diagnosis of Bipolar in the UK. During 15/16, BUK supported more than 80,000 individuals and families - an increase of c.12% on the previous year. Demand for services is growing, reflecting reduced statutory support; increased profile; and new services offered by the charity including: volunteer mentoring; support groups; crisis support; a youth service; as well as BUK's eCommunity, an online community of people living with Bipolar who offer peer support through a moderated forum, for which funding is now requested.

The Application

BUK proposes to develop and enhance its e-Community, a 24-hour monitored forum, enabling it to accommodate a growing and increasingly young range of beneficiaries. The request – and the sum recommended – is larger than a “typical” grant you might make but is not unreasonable given the demonstrable need to be served, some of it concerning life or death situations.

The Recommendation

BUK has been providing moderated forum support for 15 years and 72% of eCommunity users state that it reduces their isolation, particularly at night or during weekends. During 2015/16, 35 people were referred from the eCommunity to crisis support services having been identified as at risk of suicide. BUK's CEO is Chair of the Mental Health Alliance, ensuring BUK is well networked and that all potential signposting routes are established and utilised.

£200,000 over three years (£65,300; £60,500; £74,200) towards 25% of the full-time Information & Support Manager's salary; part-time Moderators; eCommunity platform development; IT support and on costs.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
09/09/2010	£105,000 over three years (3 x £35,000) for the salary costs of a Youth Co-ordinator for London.

Background and detail of proposal

The symptoms of Bipolar can change during a person's lifetime, depending on hormones, medication and external 'triggers'. Behaviour can range from an individual sending a flurry of five-page emails to their boss at 4am; to knocking down a supporting wall in the family home. On the other end of the spectrum, someone might feel unable to leave their room for weeks. Bipolar increases the risk of suicide by 20 times (NHS choices: Suicide – causes). BUK's eCommunity project allows

individuals, their peers and BUK moderators to ensure appropriate support is received by users at the right time, whenever that may be.

The eCommunity is growing: in 2013/14 there were 7,800 members, now there are 15,100, of which 15% are Londoners. The eCommunity project is increasingly attractive to under 18s, currently representing 10% of membership. In 2013/14, there were 500 members aged under 18 years; in 2014/15, it was 1,600. The charity believes that the eCommunity site is 'fast approaching tipping point': the frequency with which it becomes 'unavailable' is growing as membership and user traffic grows.

BUK proposes to increase the eCommunity's server space, allowing it to accommodate increasing users and reduce site crashes; it proposes to improve functionality, allowing greater expression in online communication through the use of images and colours and multi-sensory engagement; member recognition will be enhanced allowing a more personalised service and more sophisticated connectivity. BUK also proposes to create a secure section of the forum specifically for beneficiaries under the age of 18. This area of the site will have greater safeguarding and moderation functions; it will offer scheduled and structured discussions and online activities managed by a Youth Officer. The proposal is for the costs of forum development, IT support and eCommunity moderators and ongoing ITC support.

Financial Information

Deficits in last two years (14/15 and 15/16) were caused by spending down a £300K legacy, used to build capacity in the team, specifically making an investment in fundraising. Income exceeded expenditure in the three preceding years prior to this. Unrestricted free reserves are currently just below target, which is based on 3-4 months unrestricted expenditure. However, given that such spend will be lower than in recent years, the organisation expects to enter the reserves target range in 16/17.

BiPolar has implemented a number of governance, public awareness and service-level changes in response to substantive user consultation and an organisational review five years ago. Broadening the organisation's unrestricted income sources has been a particular focus and has been achieved by developing fundraising from legacies and donations; introducing a Christmas appeal; and seeking unrestricted grant funding implementing full-cost recovery.

The organisation's 16/17 budget is aspirational: it seeks to increase activity in order to continue developing services in response to growing demand. It does, therefore, include project costs beyond those that are for core operations and can be scaled back if funding is not secured. A more realistic income projection for 16/17 is between £1m - £1.1m and the projected unrestricted deficit is £62,000. The organisation has confirmed that its Board has agreed to focus on building unrestricted reserves over the next three years.

Year end at 31 March	2014/15 Audited £	2015/16 Draft Accounts £	2016/17 budget £
Income and Expenditure			
Income	772,224	773,091	1,331,200
Expenditure	852,024	979,717	1,1327,674
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(131,231)	(171,792)	(168,578)
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	51,431	(34,834)	172,104
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(79,800)	(206,626)	3,526
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	(10.3%)	(26.7%)	0.26%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	144,435 (18.7%)	154,404 (20%)	222,191 (16.7%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Unrestricted free reserves at Year End	327,581	134,941	(33,637)
months' worth of expenditure	4.6	1.65	(0.3)
Reserves Policy target	213,006-284,008	244,929-326,572	97,000 – 126,000
months' worth of expenditure	3-4	3-4	3-4
Free reserves over/(under) target	114,575-43,573	(109,988)- (191,631)	(130,637) – (159,637)