

Hope that petition will lead to discussion in parliament

Campaign for better mental health services

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More than 1,000 signatures in support of improvements to mental health services were collected in Deal on Saturday, just two days before a TV programme revealed how little help is available to people.

Tracy Carr, of Langton Close, Deal, has been running Talk It Out, a self-funded support group for people with mental health issues and depression, for five years.

After a rise in the number of people in crisis and a lack of support from those in authority, she has started a petition to review, change and improve mental health services in Deal and the surrounding areas.

With help from about 20 volunteers including MP Charlie Elphicke and the Deal Regatta Court, she has so far collected 1,300 signatures. She would like to obtain at least 10,000 so it can be taken to parliament.

Mrs Carr said: "We were in the High Street for four hours and not one person said no."

"We've known for five years that it's bad but the situation in Deal has really become dire. "I want to say thank you to everybody who signed the petition. It's a step in the right direction."

On Monday, Mrs Carr shared her plight on BBC One's Inside Out.

The programme, filmed in Deal late last year, explored whether the NHS was ceasing to be a national service, and whether access can depend on where you live.



MP Charlie Elphicke, Tracy Carr and other volunteers helped collect signatures towards better mental health services in Deal; right, Tracy Carr



Picture, right: Chris Davey FM4640155

Mrs Carr said she feels her group is doing the job of the health services because of a lack of resources in the area, and that nearly all of her 100 members felt let down by the NHS.

Liz Masters, 58, has been attending the group since its inception. She suffers with depression after losing her mother, aunt and a grandchild.

She said: "When you don't get any help out there, our group is there for you. You can't put a price on that."

Kelly Smith, who suffers with post-traumatic stress disorder after she was attacked by her partner and then witnessed him stab somebody, also relies on the weekly group meetings.

Mrs Carr said: "The biggest thing is that people now know we're here."

"It would be nice if now the

services would take their own initiative to start up a base where people can go, where there is human contact."

Mr Elphicke is trying to help the group get a grant for a well-being cafe at the Landmark Centre in Deal.

He also organised round-table discussions between Talk It Out, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, and South Kent Coast Clinical Commissioning Group at Buckland Hospital at the end of last year.

'When you don't get any help out there, our group is there for you'

Mr Elphicke said: "Tracy and Talk It Out work tirelessly to make a difference to local people suffering from mental health problems."

"But they can't do it alone and I have real concerns about current provision, particularly from the Sussex Partnership, which is in charge of the main contract. They simply aren't doing enough to help vulnerable people in a timely, meaningful way."

"I want to see better mental health care in Dover and Deal and the surrounding areas – because support saves lives."

Mrs Carr is planning to take the petition to the streets of Ramsgate on Saturday, February 4, and later to Sandwich.

It is available to sign at the Mercury office in Queen Street. Alternatively, visit tinyurl.com/gv5lqy3

More police on town's streets pledge

The district's new commander has vowed to increase police visibility in Deal and the surrounding areas, in a meeting with MP Charlie Elphicke.

Ch Insp Mitchell Fox took over from his predecessor Steve Barlow in the autumn.

In a recent meeting with the Dover and Deal MP, he made assurances that his redeployment of officers, which began at the end of last year, will raise police visibility in Deal and the surrounding areas.

A Deal town-centre constable now works a shift pattern incorporating up to six days a week.

Officers from the local policing team are also based in Deal, ready to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day.

Ch Insp Fox said: "My dedicated team works tirelessly to deliver a quality service, place victims and witnesses at the heart of what we do, and in doing so ensure we do the right thing."

"I recognise the district is large and, in order to best serve the people, my recent redeployment of officers has led to an improved service to the victims who require our support, and to greater visibility across Deal and the surrounding areas."

"Dover and its villages are typically Kentish – tranquil and safe – and it is my overriding aim to ensure they remain so."

Mr Elphicke said: "The local force is fearless in its efforts to keep us all safe, and I was delighted to meet the new man at the helm."

"Bringing back officers dedicated to Deal is something I have wanted for a long time, so I am delighted Ch Insp Fox has made it happen."

"I know how much residents will welcome the greater police presence."

Right, Charlie Elphicke MP with Ch Insp Mitchell Fox



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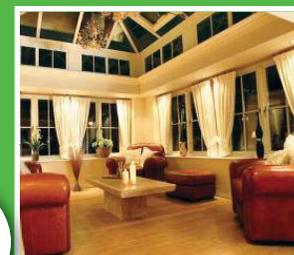
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