GEORGE HOUSE TRUST

HIV POSITIVE LIVING

ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016

Our Patron
Russell T Davies

"It's an honour to become patron of George House Trust - the staff are amazing and their dedication is a lesson to us all. As the issues around HIV and AIDS take brand new forms, along with age-old problems, George House Trust is at the forefront of the battle."

- Russell T Davies

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Russell for all the support that he gives to George House Trust.

Why a HIV diagnosis is like no other

"People think that you acquire HIV by choice, by being promiscuous, whereas with cancer you are seen as a victim."

I am an African woman who was working as a care worker with the elderly, people with mental health issues and others with brain injuries.

Before I was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer, I was losing weight. I had a feeling of weakness and breathing difficulties. I also had stomach problems and eventually I was in a wheelchair.

Following the cancer diagnosis, I was treated like a queen. Where do you live? Who's there? We can provide a car to get you to and from appointments. I was assigned to a specialist nurse who was always available. I got counselling and help with hair loss - wigs, scarves, colour choice. I could talk to her about anything, and even the GP would only prescribe me sweet smelling products.

The cubicles are special, and food can be ordered whilst you are waiting. The nurses took great care with my immune system and were keen to know how I was surviving financially. I was referred to Marie Curie and they have funding for holidays and other things. All was provided without me asking.

Soon after my cancer diagnosis, the consultant asked the nurse if I had been tested for HIV. She immediately arranged for a test and the following day I got a phone call to say 'Really sorry, it is bad news, you have HIV.".

That was it, nothing else. The comparison to my cancer diagnosis could not have been starker. I was left to cope with the HIV diagnosis alone. I later learnt that lymphoma is an opportunistic cancer associated with late diagnosis of HIV. I had been living with HIV for 10 years without knowing it.

People think that you acquire HIV by choice, by being promiscuous, whereas with cancer you are seen as a victim.

A word from the Chair

"Like most people, I can remember my first visit to George House Trust as though it was yesterday. It was a cold, dark winter evening and I was incredibly nervous - I was desperate to make a good impression, and for them to like me. The lady I spoke to had sounded nice over the phone, and explained things really well, but I still didn't really know what was waiting for me on the other side of that door."

Like most people, I can remember my first visit to George House Trust as though it was yesterday. It was a cold, dark winter evening and I was incredibly nervous - I was desperate to make a good impression, and for them to like me. The lady I spoke to had sounded nice over the phone, and explained things really well, but I still didn't really know what was waiting for me on the other side of that door.

Like everyone else who steps through that door, what I found was a warm, friendly, diverse group of people who are passionate about ending the stigma and discrimination facing people living with HIV. Unlike everyone else, I then experienced possibly the longest and most thorough interview of my life. You see, I wasn't there as a new service user, I was there to be interviewed for the position of Chair of Trustees. The successful candidate would be the first Chair who wasn't a current service user or volunteer (a bold decision for a member-led organisation) hence the thorough selection process. Far from putting me off, the interview process made me want the role even more. That might seem strange, but I had my reasons. Firstly, any organisation putting that much effort into recruiting a Chair obviously cared deeply about their services and service users.

Firstly, any organisation putting that much effort into recruiting a Chair obviously cared deeply about their services and service users. Secondly, member representation on the three interview panels was clearly not just a tick box exercise – evidence that George House Trust truly was a member-led organisation (something that is really important to me). And last, but by no means least, everyone I met that evening was warm, friendly and passionate about the work of George House Trust. I was hooked - everything I'd read, and heard, was true – I wanted to be part of this! Needless to say, I was over the moon when David called to offer me the position.

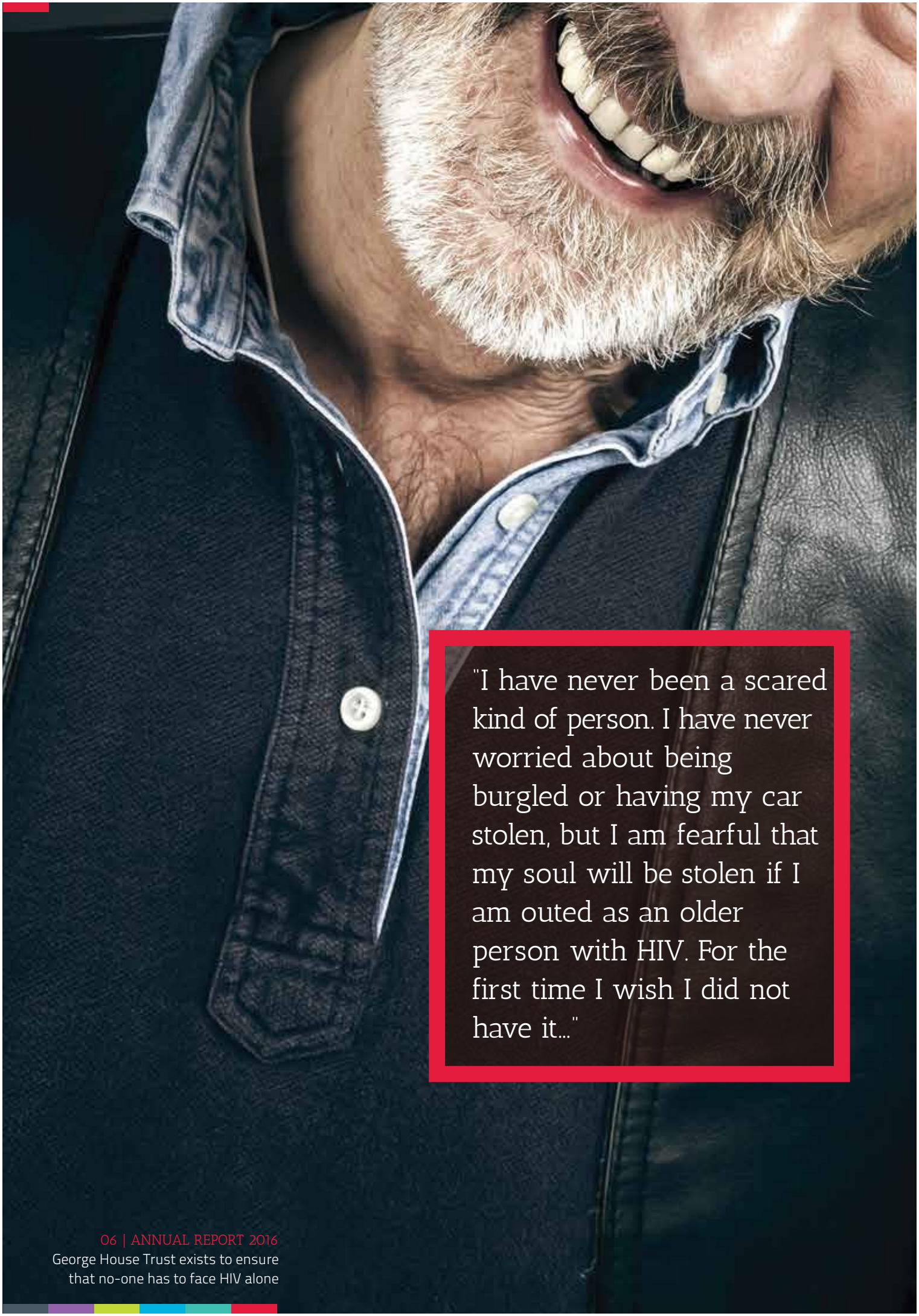
So, it's just over a year since I first stepped through that door, and what a year it has been! We turned 30 in July, and I feel incredibly honoured to have been selected as the new Chair in such an auspicious year; we held our first Drag Ball, which was an amazing success and is now a regular item in our events calendar; in August the Candlelit Vigil was, as always, a very poignant and moving tribute to all those we have lost to HIV; in September and November we elected new member Trustees, ensuring that Service Users remain at the heart of everything we do; December started (of course) with World Aids Day, and continued to be a busy month with the launch of our new website and the announcement of our first patron, Russell T Davies; and the Trustees and Joint Chief Executives have further strengthened systems and processes, building on the hard work of previous years.

Throughout all this we have continued with our most important activity – providing advice, support and advocacy services to people living with HIV in the North West. There is something for everyone at George House Trust – 1 to 1 support, group support, debt advice, welfare rights advice, peer support, services for over 50s, support for people who are newly diagnosed and for those who having been living with HIV for longer.

As I reflect on the achievements of the past year, it is hard not to think of those six individuals who set up the Manchester AIDSline in 1985. Insightful, brave and passionate individuals who were determined to challenge the fear, stigma and uncertainty facing people living with HIV. Over the last 30 years George House Trust has evolved and adapted to meet the changing needs of our service users, but one thing has remained constant – the determination to challenge that stigma, fear and uncertainty.

And so, as we approach the end of our 30th year, it is time to look to the future. These are changing times for HIV and for George House Trust. There will be challenges and uncertainty, both for the organisation and for our service users...but there will also be successes, achievements and truly special moments. I am proud of where we are today, and excited about where we are heading.

Jo Hancock
Chair of Trustees, George House Trust


"I have never been a scared kind of person. I have never worried about being burgled or having my car stolen, but I am fearful that my soul will be stolen if I am outed as an older person with HIV. For the first time I wish I did not have it..."

Ageing with HIV

I'm 57 years old this year. I was diagnosed in 2000, so I have been living with HIV for 16 years. I was lucky because the medical staff realised I had HIV through PCP (Pneumocystis pneumonia), I could barely see. They got me to A & E and got me better.

I remember the Registrar saying to me 'Don't worry about it, you will lead a normal and happy life, unlike some people we get in A and E. Keep taking the medication and all will be fine.". HIV never stopped me from working, though I work part-time now. I treat HIV like it's in the background, a bit like a heart condition.

Keeping normality makes me feel good and strong. Having said that, now I am 57 I am fearful about HIV, every day. I have to work hard at my mental health by staying busy and working in my garden. It helps me to stay focused. It's harder to cope with HIV in my 50's than in my 40's. Ageism is still out there, but ageism with HIV is even worse.

The medication is much better now. I don't have side effects or any aches and pains. However, I fear people finding out about my HIV, and I never felt like this in my 40's. I am physically fit and healthy and I eat well. My mental health is the worst thing. There is a sexual aspect to HIV because that is how it is transmitted, and being older and connected to anything sexual is a 'no no".

There is a real lack of compassion towards older people living with HIV. Where life used to be uncomplicated, it has now become very complicated, all as a result of HIV.

The over 50's group at George House Trust really helps ....I listen to others and it enables me to be honest and open in return. I gain strength from the group- it's like a form of nourishment. I see people there older than me, and they inspire me, more than any doctor could ever do.

I have never been a scared kind of person. I have never worried about being burgled or having my car stolen, but I am fearful that my soul will be stolen if I am outed as an older person with HIV. For the first time I wish I did not have it...

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Who we support

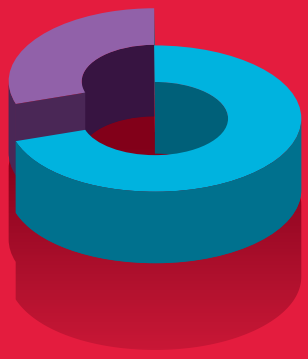
We delivered **64,668** instances of service, ranging from counselling sessions to money advice through to health & wellbeing sessions.

African 34%

White British 54%

Other 13%

33% of our service users define themselves as African, whilst 54% are White British.



x 559

x 1,305

From April 2015 to the end of March 2016 we supported 1,885 people living with HIV. 1,305 male and 559 female.

24% over 50

76% under 50

Ageing with HIV: almost 24% of our service users are aged 50+. This pattern reflects the global trend as people are ageing with HIV.

How we supported in 2015-2016

George House Trust Welfare Fund

£51,016 to 291 individuals

Counselling

42 service users received an average of **7 counselling** sessions each

Food parcels

39 destitute service users were given a total of **542 food parcels** in 2015-2016

Discussion groups

Living Your Life With HIV

100% of attendees said that they felt more confident talking about HIV and meeting new people.

Disclosure & Undetectable Viral Load

100% of attendees said that their understanding of how to have a safe healthy sexual relationship had increased.

Self-Esteem & Body Image

100% of attendees said that their feelings of self-worth had increased.

Chem Sex

100% of attendees said that the session had improved their understanding about the potential impact of taking recreational drugs on HIV medication.

Peer Mentoring

"I have been volunteering with George House Trust since 2013. I started volunteering not long after being diagnosed as HIV+, it was my way of dealing with my diagnosis and an opportunity to give something back after receiving support and guidance from George House Trust and other similar organisations."

During my time volunteering I've been lucky enough to try out a variety of different roles including positive speaking, volunteering over Manchester Pride and most importantly peer mentoring as part of the grant-funded **being+** project that launched about three years ago. The project was an opportunity for George House Trust to reach out to younger gay men and gay men in employment. I joined the Project Advisory Group along with another service user, a great opportunity to get actively involved in the design of the new programme and to offer a service user perspective.

being+ offered peer support for people who had been newly diagnosed and for those who are still struggling with their diagnosis, alongside this social events were organised to provide people with an opportunity to network and develop national peer support networks away from George House Trust. The events started off in bars but quickly morphed into information and social sessions where attendees could access up-do-date information on topics including new medications and HIV and the law.

I've supported four young men over the duration of the project, each relationship has been different although there have been common themes. Most of the people I've supported are newly diagnosed and coming to terms with what their diagnosis means for their future. I've enjoyed meeting the people I've supported, developing relationships with them and offering advice on topics as diverse as medication adherence, disclosure and sex and telling family members and friends – all issues that people with HIV face every day.

I've mainly supported men in their early to mid-twenties, a time when many peoples' lives are already quite complicated and our identities aren't fully formed, throwing HIV into the mix makes things significantly harder. I'm not there to give someone the answer, or to tell them what to do. We all have our own approaches to life and what's right for one person isn't necessarily going to work for someone else, my role is to be a friendly and non-judgemental ear as someone who has been through it myself and can talk about how I've dealt with things.

Living with HIV isn't easy, it can be an incredibly lonely experience so meeting someone who has been through it and is further down the line can have an incredible impact. It has to be an honest relationship too, it isn't going to help if I sugar coat things or lie about my own negative experiences – people face rejection all the time, it's not definitely going to happen but it's likely and people need to be prepared for that.

Through training, peer support and opportunities to meet people in a similar situation at social and information events, the project has empowered and educated a generation of young HIV+ men in Manchester.

I'll never forget the first person I supported, the last session was at George House Trust and we said goodbye in Ardwick Green with a hug – I watched him walk away, confident that I'd done my best to support him face the challenges HIV might bring.

56 service users had the support of a Peer Mentor on 239 occasions in 2015-2016. Over the next five years, we are planning to train more service users to become peer mentors as part of our sustainability strategy.

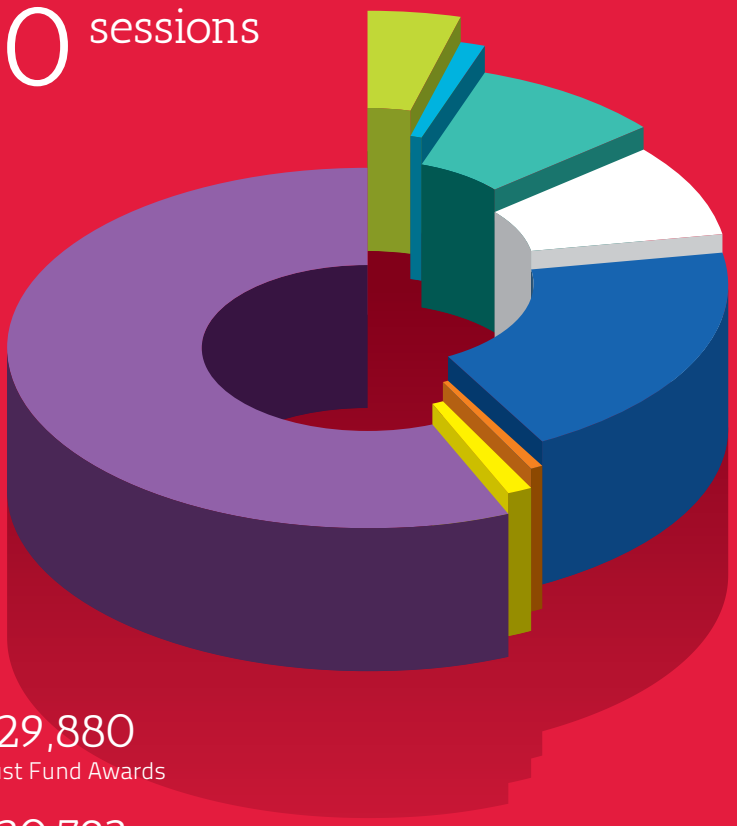
Money Advice Service

George House Trust is extremely proud of the Money & Debt Advice Service.

The project provides advocacy and support around debt and benefit issues, which affect many people living with HIV. We maximise people's income, find solutions to debt problems, help with talking to creditors, provide benefits advice and find grants for people to help with utility debts.

This service really helps to improve the physical and mental health of service users. If you have had your welfare benefits sanctioned or drastically reduced, how can you live a happy and healthy life with HIV?

193 service users used the Money Advice Service an average of 1.9 times, totalling **370** sessions in 2015-2016.



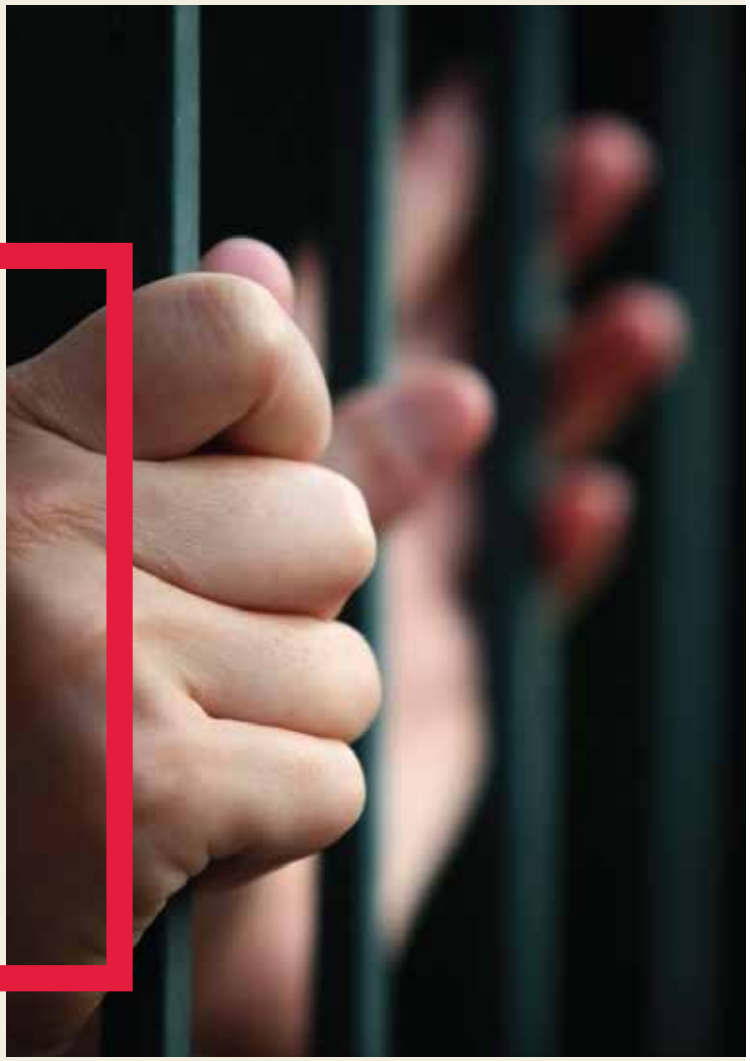
Total Monetary Value:

£354,849

1st December 2014 to 31 March 2016

- £200,588 Benefit Gained
- £4,200 Warm Home Discount
- £1,708 Miscellaneous
- £69,856 Debt Reduction and Write Offs
- £29,880 Trust Fund Awards
- £30,793 Debt Reduction Through Insolvency
- £3,306 Tariff Savings
- £14,517 Discretionary Housing & Council Tax Payments

Living with HIV in prison



"I get satisfaction from knowing that I am helping someone in a particularly dangerous and precarious situation to cope with the everyday stresses of being in a prison environment. Andy always looks forward to my visits and I look forward to them too."

I visit Andy, a man in his thirties, who is in prison in Greater Manchester. He was referred to George House Trust by the Safer Custody Unit, which looks after prisoners' wellbeing. He had presented to them as a man living with HIV.

When George House Trust asked me to support Andy I said yes straight away. I firmly believe that it's important that people in the prison service are made aware of HIV, especially as prison policy is not to condone sex between men. That makes it hard to ask for a condom, and men who have sex together are usually split up within the prison, so that they have no contact.

I don't see Andy in the main prisoner visiting area. Staff at the prison have given me a room on the wing for my support sessions. I was trained by the prison staff for three days, so that I know what to do if there is a 'lock-down' situation, or I am taken hostage or there is a riot. I wasn't scared by this, because I am a retired social worker.

When I first met Andy, I was with a George House Trust member of staff. We offered monthly meetings to give him information about HIV medication, managing side effects etc. Andy contracted the virus in another prison and is keen to learn all about it. We also offered support, because he is quite isolated.

Andy says he loves my visits and he has told staff at his HIV clinic that he doesn't know how he would have coped without George House Trust. Sadly, if he goes into his HIV clinic he is usually cuffed, so Andy likes it when nursing staff can visit him in prison.

Andy is at the stage now where he wants to access psychological support, and I am going to play a role in supporting him under the direction of the psychologist.

I get satisfaction from knowing that I am helping someone in a particularly dangerous and precarious situation to cope with the everyday stresses of being in a prison environment. Andy always looks forward to my visits and I look forward to them too.

I wish more prison staff would refer prisoners that are living with HIV to George House Trust, we can make such a difference. We offer a safe space to talk about HIV, reduce their sense of isolation, help people to adhere to their medication and support people to practice safer sex in prison.

Volunteer drivers

"I became a volunteer at George House Trust in 2013. I was lucky enough to have retired and I wanted to give something back. Because I had lost friends in the late 1980s and 1990s to HIV, I chose George House Trust."

We saw people falling ill in the USA, and when a new drug came along people were desperate to volunteer for the drugs trials. If it meant they died in two years rather than the following week, then that's what people living with HIV had to do.

Now of course, the medication has become much more advanced and most can live well with HIV. But back then, with those terrible AIDS tombstone adverts, it was so scary on the gay scene. People were saying that they were never going to have sex again.

After I had completed my volunteer induction, I was given a choice of roles. I chose community support, reception and driving. As a Volunteer Driver I take people to their appointments at hospital, who couldn't get there by themselves. They are mainly disabled or socially isolated.

I bring one man into George House Trust from the outskirts of Greater Manchester to take part in group activities. Because of the side effects of his HIV medication he has serious mobility issues. He benefits hugely from getting out of his home to interact with other people living with HIV.

I really enjoy being a volunteer driver. I enjoy chatting to the service users when they are in my car (I usually find out a bit about them before I meet them so I know how to make conversation and put them at ease). I learn a lot about other people's lives, and I learn a lot about other cultures, particularly African cultures.

People are always really grateful for the driving service. I remember one service user thanking me at the end of a hospital trip and adding 'You know, I always feel safe with you.".

In 2015-2016 30 service users were provided with volunteer drivers who made 101 journeys.

Thank you to everyone for supporting George House Trust financially

CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Manchester Pride Community Fund
Morrisons Foundation
Awards for All
Manchester Relief In Need Charity
The Clothworkers' Foundation
The Monument Trust
Big Lottery Fund
Comic Relief
M.A.C. AIDS Fund

AMBASSADORS

Michael Atkins aka Cheddar Gawjus
Lee Baxter
Ady Blake
Gary Bramwell
Philip Collinson
Nick Curtis
Christian D'Arcy aka Misty Chance
Mark Geary aka Billie Jean
John Hamilton
Iain Scott
Lord Lieutenant of Manchester
Dr Ash Sukthankar
Daniel Wallace aka Anna Phylactic
Adam Zane

PUBLIC HEALTH TEAMS

Manchester City Council
Salford City Council
Bolton M.B.C.
Bury M.B.C.
Rochdale M.B.C.
Trafford M.B.C.
Oldham M.B.C.
Tameside M.B.C.
Stockport M.B.C.
Wigan M.B.C.

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

We would not have been able to do many of our community fundraising and awareness raising activities throughout the year without the support of the following:

VILLAGE VENUES

AXM, Bar Pop, Churchill's, Clone Zone, Company Bar, Cruz 101, Delicatezze, Eagle Bar, Eden, Eva, G-A-Y, Iconic, Kiki, Napoleons, New York New York, Oscars, Richmond Tea Rooms, Sackville Lounge, Taurus Bar, The Goose, The Lodge, The Molly House, The New Union, On Bar, The Rembrandt, Thompson's Arms, Tribeca, Vanilla, Via and Velvet.

CREATIVES

Lee Baxter, Precinct Seager Galvez-Soto, Joel Goodman, Ian Rayer-Smith and Nic Stacey

DRAG QUEENS

Anna Phylactic, Belinda Scandal, Billie Jean, Blaq Ivory, Cheddar Gorgeous, Coco Pop, Danny Beard, Divina de Campo, Grace Oni Smith, Gypsy, Krystal Kane, Lill, Madam Phylissan Von Hollywood Aries (Nana), Mae Tyler, Miss Cara, Misty Chance, Roxy Hart and Violet Blonde.

ORGANISATIONS

Adactus Housing Group, Canal Street Manchester, Contact Theatre, Epicerie Ludo, Five Saints ATC, GHAP Badminton and friends, Give it the V, Gorton Monastery, Holier Than Thou, Hope Theatre Company, MAC Cosmetics at Selfridges, Manbears-Manchester, Manchester Centre for Sexual Health, Manchester Frontrunners, Manchester Quakers, Manchester Roller Derby, Rainbow Trikes, Pod Deli, Rob Shop, Salford Ladies United Temperance Society (S.L.U.T.S.), Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, University of Manchester School of Nursing & Midwifery, Salford University School of Nursing & Midwifery, The Village Off-Licence and Village People Weekend.

CORPORATES

BNY Mellon and Halifax Building Society. Corptel Telecommunications Ltd, deserve a huge thank you for sponsoring our Drag Ball 2016 and our service user Christmas Party in 2015.

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We would also like to thank the many generous individuals who donate to George House Trust on a regular basis. Your support for our work means so much.

The George House Trust
Drag Ball 2016

George House Trust exists to ensure
that no-one has to face HIV alone

OUR VISION

George House Trust's vision is for all people living with HIV in the North West to live happy and healthy lives, and be free from stigma and discrimination.

George House Trust's vision is for all people to know their HIV status and to be HIV aware.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

George House Trust will provide good quality services to people living with HIV, which enable them to feel empowered and able to live happily and healthily with HIV.

George House Trust will raise awareness of HIV, promote safer sex and encourage all sexually active people in the North West to know their HIV status. George House Trust will ensure that HIV is prioritised by public bodies across the North West, given that it has the biggest population of people living with HIV outside of London. George House Trust will challenge HIV stigma and discrimination and promote a better understanding of HIV.

OUR VALUES

DIGNITY
We treat everyone with dignity, show respect and value them.

INTEGRITY
We demonstrate integrity by being honest and having strong principles.

RESPECT
We show respect by considering people's feelings, wishes and rights.

RECOGNISING DIFFERENCES
Everyone is unique! We embrace and celebrate diversity and difference.

EMPOWERMENT
We believe that people need freedom to act, think, initiate and make decisions.

PASSIONATE
Our ambition is to put as much heart, mind, body and soul into our work- and it shows!

PQASSO QUALITY MARK level 2
Charities Evaluation Services

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS

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George House Trust is a registered charity in England and Wales (No. 1143138) and a registered company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (No. 07575379)

Our audited accounts for 2015-2016 are available on our website.