

## **Chair's Report - April 2014-2015**

The year 2014-15 saw positive results in terms of the number of partnerships supported and the beneficial effects of those partnerships, as indicated in the many positive comments made in the reviews with our befriendees. It was also overshadowed by an increasing concern about the funding of our service.

The previous year had ended with outgoings that exceeded our income by around £15,000. Fortunately we had some reserves to cover the first three to four months of the financial year starting in April 2014 and we managed to bring in some additional funds during the course of the year. However, it was becoming clear that the funding environment was changing in a way that made it very difficult for Tandem. We had a number of substantial funding bids rejected; the type of bids that had underpinned our staffing costs for two to three years in the past.

The background to these funding difficulties has its origins in the financial crisis dating from 2008. Trust funds were generating less income from their capital whilst at the same time other organisations, that had previously enjoyed support from national and local government sources, were now approaching those same trust funds in greater numbers.

I believe that Tandem's difficulties in obtaining financial support in this new more challenging environment came down to two main factors: the size and the nature of our service.

Tandem's budget was too big to qualify for certain grants aimed at supporting community groups, whilst at the same time it was too small to be considered for statutory health and social care funding. Increasingly funders are requiring evidence of hard outcomes, such as service users moving into employment. Tandem's outcomes could be described as 'soft' rather than 'hard' in that they are characterised by reports from our service users about increased self-confidence and self-esteem and the feeling that they are enjoying a better quality of life.

Despite a lot of hard effort by committee members and especially by our secretary Prue Sykes, who put in countless applications, we were not successful in raising sufficient funds to continue the service as it was configured, with our own office space and paid staff, going into the next financial year. Sadly this meant that we were unable to expand our pilot scheme in Bicester, although we continue to support the existing partnerships that had been set up. Lisa Ward who had done an excellent job in getting the Bicester service set up left us at the end of May 2014. In March 2015 with great regret we had to issue redundancy notices to our part-time coordinators in Oxford, Stephen and Setareh. It says much about their dedication and professionalism that their main concern for the duration of their notice was to ensure the best possible continuity of support for our befrienders and befriendees. I would also like to thank Patricia Lilly who stepped down as treasurer after many years with Tandem and to Mark Walsh who has fulfilled that role since joining Tandem's management committee in June 2014.

Tandem's work continues and supports 25 partnerships at present and we intend to recruit more volunteers in the near future. I would like to thank all those that have made our work possible. This includes those who have generously made donations to Tandem, as well as our befrienders, befriendees, committee members, Friends of Tandem and others such as Jim Osborn who helped us to develop our new website and our friends at Restore and Oxfordshire Mind who have offered very generous practical help during this difficult time of transition. Finally I would like to give a very big vote of thanks to Anton Saverimuttu who has generously given his time to continue supporting our partnerships in the recent months.

Jonathan Leach 2015.

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