



Real People, Real Cuts 2016-17

July 2017

110

Total Responses

Online 88

Focus Group 22

About VOX

VOX is a national mental health service user led organization based within Scotland which aims to give a voice to mental health service users. We aim to drive policy and practice, facilitate partnership working and strengthen the voice of people who have or have had a mental health problem. We aim to do this by using a range of innovative and accessible consultation methods to involve members.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of the people who took time to complete questionnaires and attend focus groups, sharing their experiences and concerns regarding changes to the services they access. Also thanks to the people and VOX Collective organisations that provided guidance, help and assistance with this support.

(For full list of VOX Collective Organisations see appendix 1.)

Background to this report

This report is the 3rd of its kind following the experience that people with mental health issues have had in Scotland over the last 6 years of budget cuts and welfare reform. The 1st two reports were entitled Real People Real Cuts and this 3rd report Real People Deeper Cuts, reflects the increasing negative trend that people have experienced over the years.

110 people helped inform this report through an online survey, focus groups meetings and one to one contact. 93 of those contributors identified as having a mental health illness or condition and 17 identified as being a carer for someone with a long term mental health condition.

Key Findings

- ❖ 40% of people over the last 3 years had experienced a reduction in staffing levels at services due to the spending cuts.
- ❖ Over 17% of people had completely lost a mental health service, group or activity that they accessed in the past. This also resulted for those who could use transport in having to travel much further to reach other services.
- ❖ Over 71% of people received services from Voluntary organisations with only 28% accessing services from Local Authorities and the NHS combined.
- ❖ Almost half 50% of all respondents had seen a reduction in access to social/cultural and leisure services due to closures, reduction in opening times and or need to travel further to access them. And over 26% of people did not access any Social/cultural or leisure services at all.
- ❖ A negative or strong negative impact on people's mental health and recovery was felt by over 76% of people as a direct result of changes to services due to spending reviews. And over 82% felt a negative or strong impact on their social networks.
- ❖ Over 31.5% of respondents had also experienced a decrease in their benefits such as ESA, JSA, DLA or benefits paid through local authority such as Housing benefit or council tax.
- ❖ 31% of people had experienced an increase to their conditions of benefit entitlement such as being required to attend meetings, courses on regular bases in order to continue to receive their benefit, which has impacted negatively on their mental health condition.

Peoples Stories

Here is a collection of quotes, statements and examples that people wanted to share as a result of engaging with the topic of the impact of spending cuts on people who have a lived experience of a long term mental health problem.

“I worry more about money and feel I’m in a vulnerable financial position as I am unable to work more than 16hrs a week due to having Bipolar”

“I just have to get on with it-there is no help I am told-I do not meet the criteria for SDS- perhaps I am wrong in that I love my independence and just soldier on”

“I am financially struggling and I feel more stressed and it impacted on my mental health severely, where I attempted suicide by jumping from my top flat bathroom window. I feel like I am letting my kids down, not providing properly for them. I feel worthless and helpless.”

“Had a breakdown. Even job centre disability advisor was worried about my mental health. Took me a long time to get back on even keel. Gives me anxiety any time I have to deal with DWP.”

“I stress about PIP assessments as I rely on that benefit so much”

“ I’ve gone from someone who lived/worked full time despite an underlying mental health condition, to someone unable to work, unable to access health care (refused) or community support (When I have tried I’m told I am too unwell and need health care first) reliant on social care. The social care I’m allocated is unable to meet my needs. The Service I have found helpful is closing due to council cuts. I can’t see any hope at all; I’ve tried to keep going despite deteriorating health, but the removal of hope by both health care, social care cuts, benefit freezes leave me just functioning in survival mode and [I am] looking forward to the morning when I don’t wake up and don’t have to suffer anymore.”

“The ATOS/DWP system is disgusting. It actually makes people ill. There is no consideration given to people on benefits...Leaves claimants feeling disgusted at the system and themselves, leaves many with a sense of hopelessness...The current system does not work for people with mental health conditions.”

“ My benefits were stopped due to me missing two work capability meetings. I have panic attacks and the first time I had one [I] phoned a couple of days later to explain what had happened. I was given another appointment and when the same thing happened again, I was told that the DWP would not accept the same excuse twice. If I had known that I would only have two tries and then my money would have been cut off, I would have asked a friend to take me along. I have been doing my best to live on what I am being given until the tribunal date at the start of December.

I am receiving great support from the team at my local citizen's advice bureau and I am now attending CBT therapy which I think will be very helpful for me. However, I feel I have been let down by my GP. He changed my condition on medical certificate from "depression and anxiety" to "nervous debility" without consulting me so I made an appointment to discuss my symptoms but when I attended he told me that he didn't have time to discuss and was there anything else I needed. I was very upset and didn't leave the house for about a week afterwards. I was made homeless in 2015 and only got a permanent address about a month before I was sanctioned so I have had at least 4 different GPs since I first went to speak to my doctor about my mental health.

It is very difficult for me get through a day the way I would like... this stress has worsened my condition; my panic attacks are more frequent and I am battling with suicidal thoughts all [the]time. I have been sent another appointment for work capability even though citizens advice requested I be assessed at home.

Focus Group findings

Three focus groups were held with a total of 22 participants. All the participants identified as having a lived experience of mental health problems. The focus groups were held in the highlands, Edinburgh and Glasgow. They involved the Highland User Group (HUG) and the Mental Health Network (MHNGGC)

The Key areas of discussion focused on;

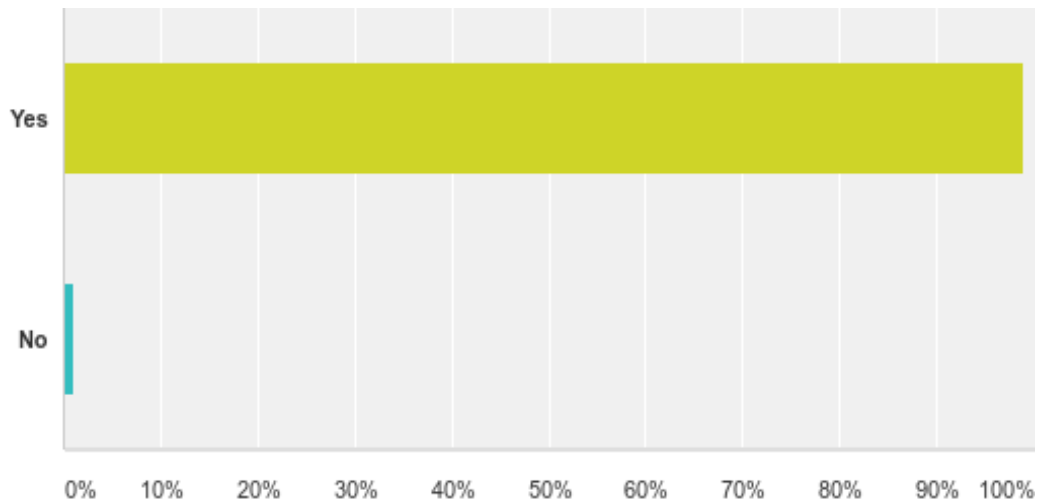
Access to mental health services, Transport, Access to third sector support services, Volunteering and Social Networks or Activities.

The following observations were made by members of the focus groups;

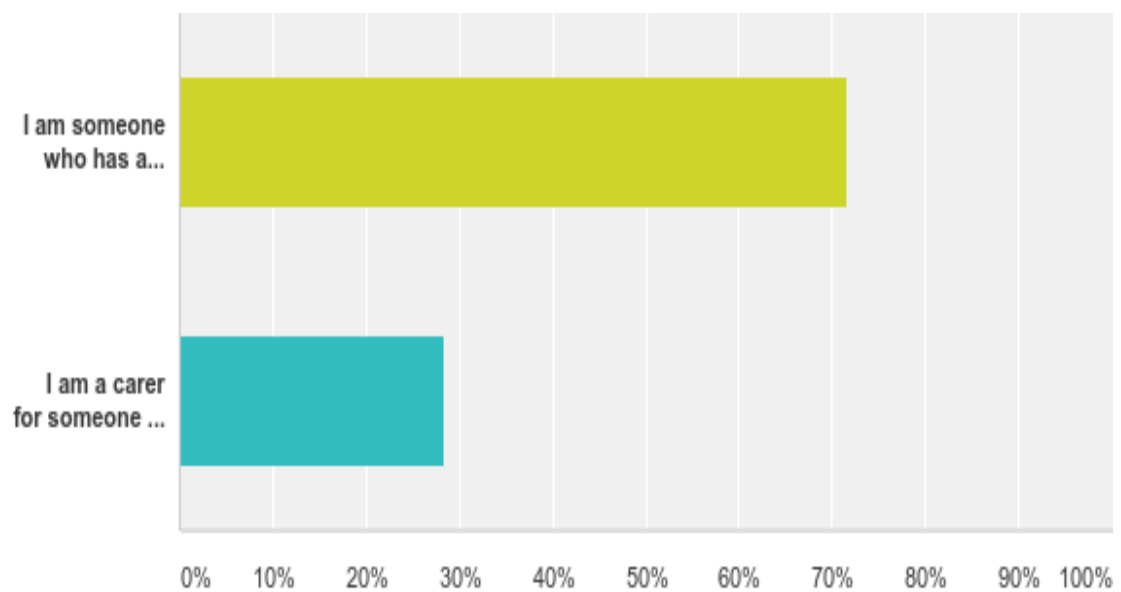
- Mental health support services both NHS and Voluntary sector had a reduced staffing level.
- It was noted that it can be very hard to get access to a (CPN) Community Psychiatric Nurse
- Drop-in services were in decline and being closed. For many that was their only social outlet during the week
- Costs of living along with benefit caps were in most cases causing people to have no social life at all.
- Benefit assessments by non- medical staff and sanctions were significantly affecting people's mental health, leading to extreme anxiety and depression.
- Although many people felt they would like to volunteer and increase their knowledge, skills and wellbeing there was a fear that they would be seen as fit to work and have their benefits stopped.
- Some people had not been directly affected by any spending cuts however the attitude towards people on benefits in the media was causing lots of concern and uncertainty.

Online Survey and Data

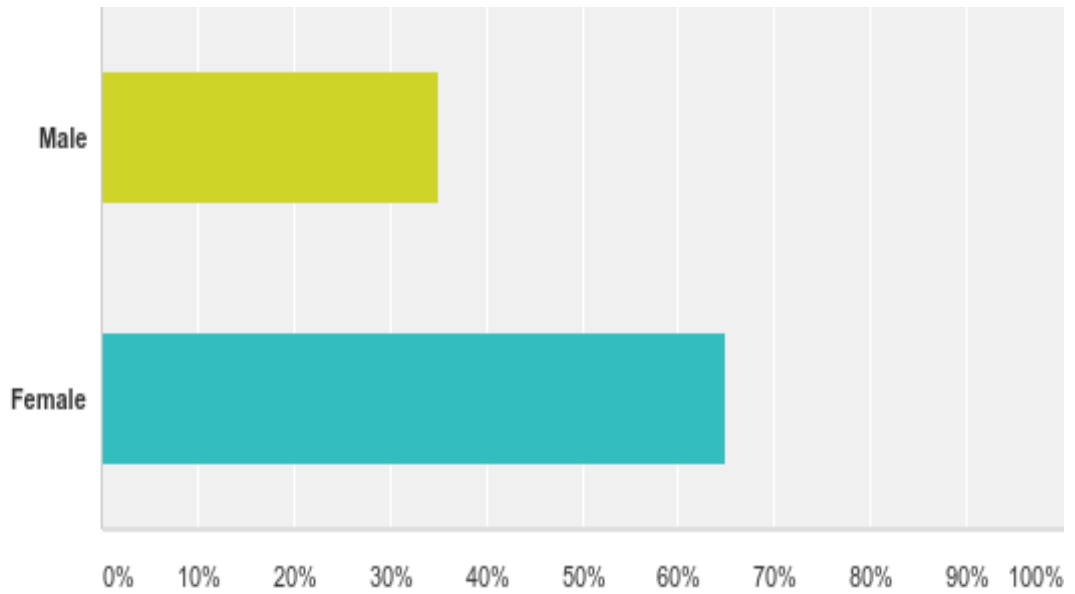
Q1: To begin, do You live in Scotland?



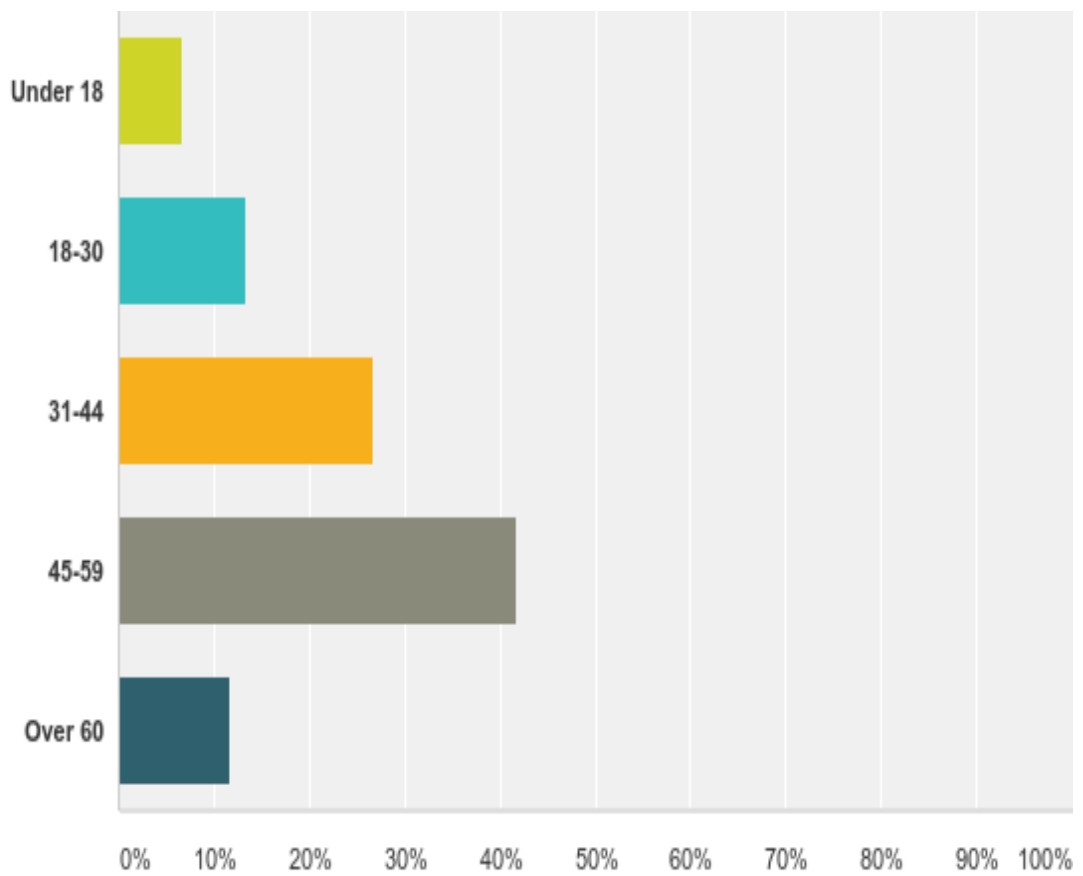
Q2: About you?



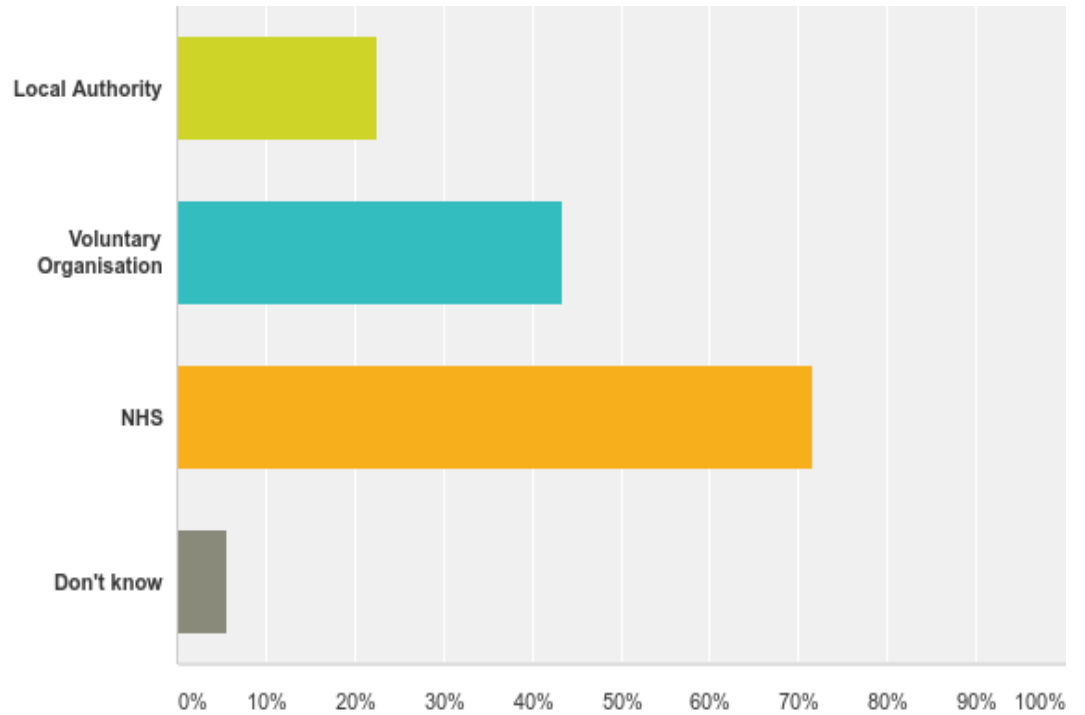
Q3: I/the person I care for is:



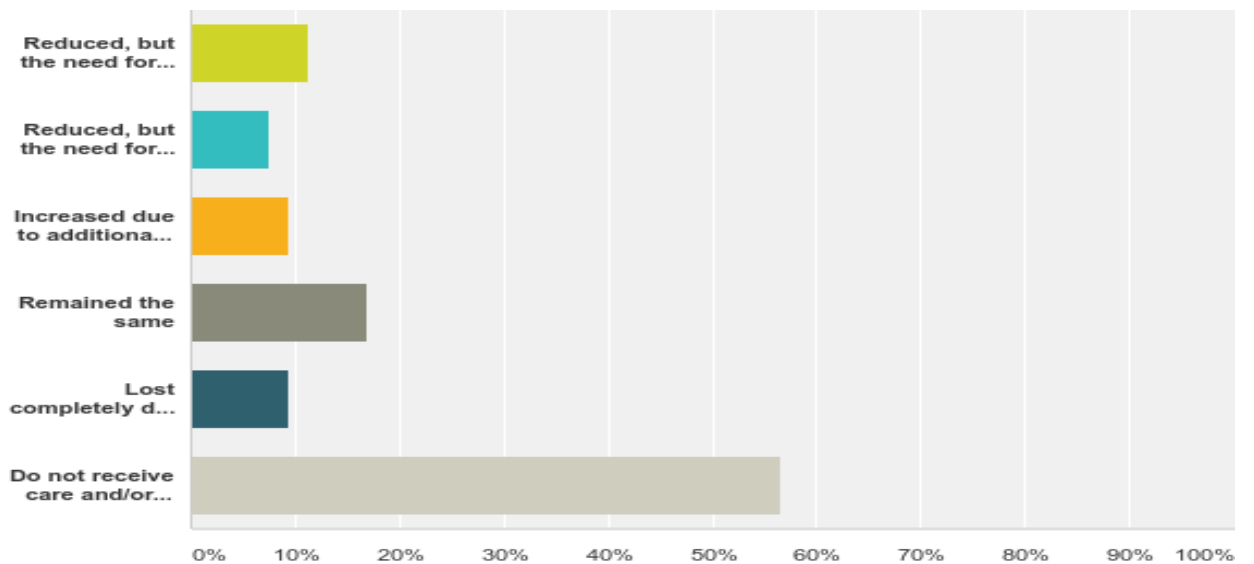
Q4: I/the person I care for is:



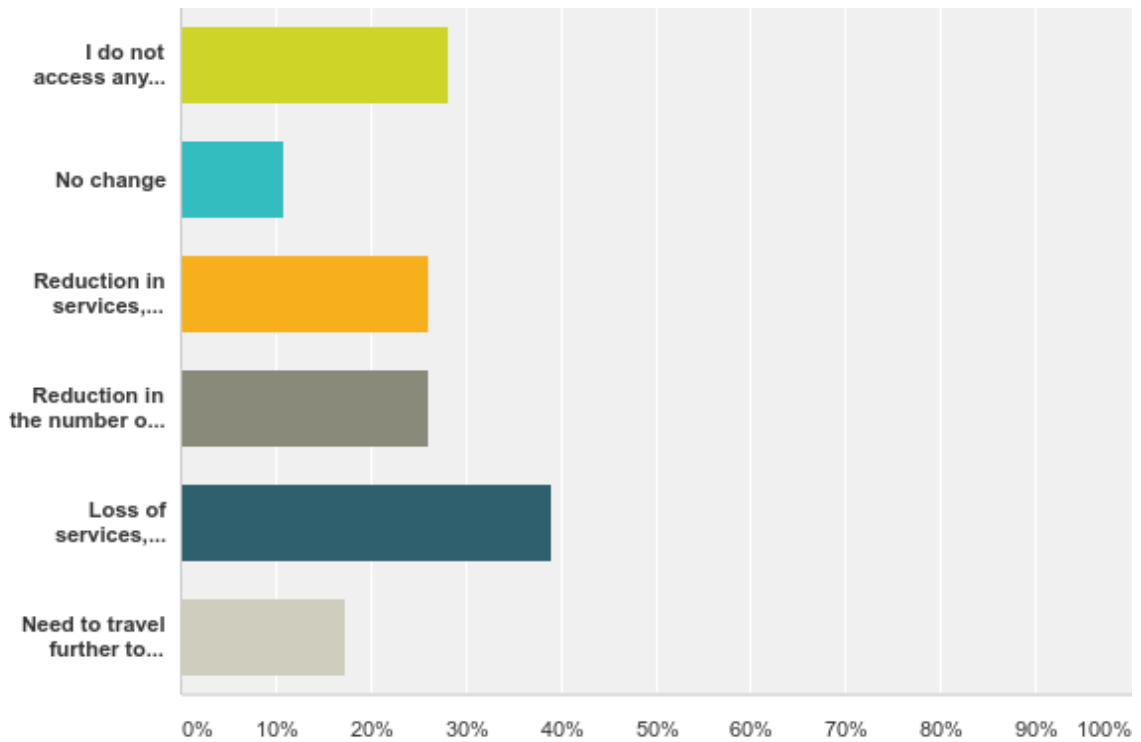
Q5: Who provides or has provided your care and support?



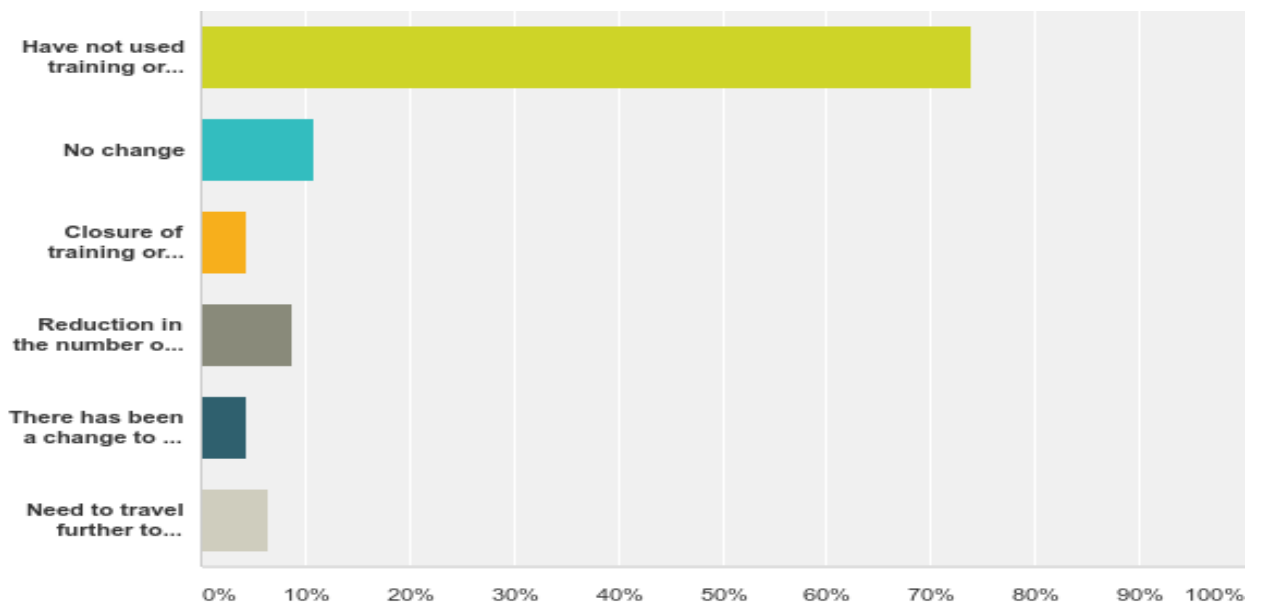
Q6: Over the last 3 years the care and/or support I receive at home has



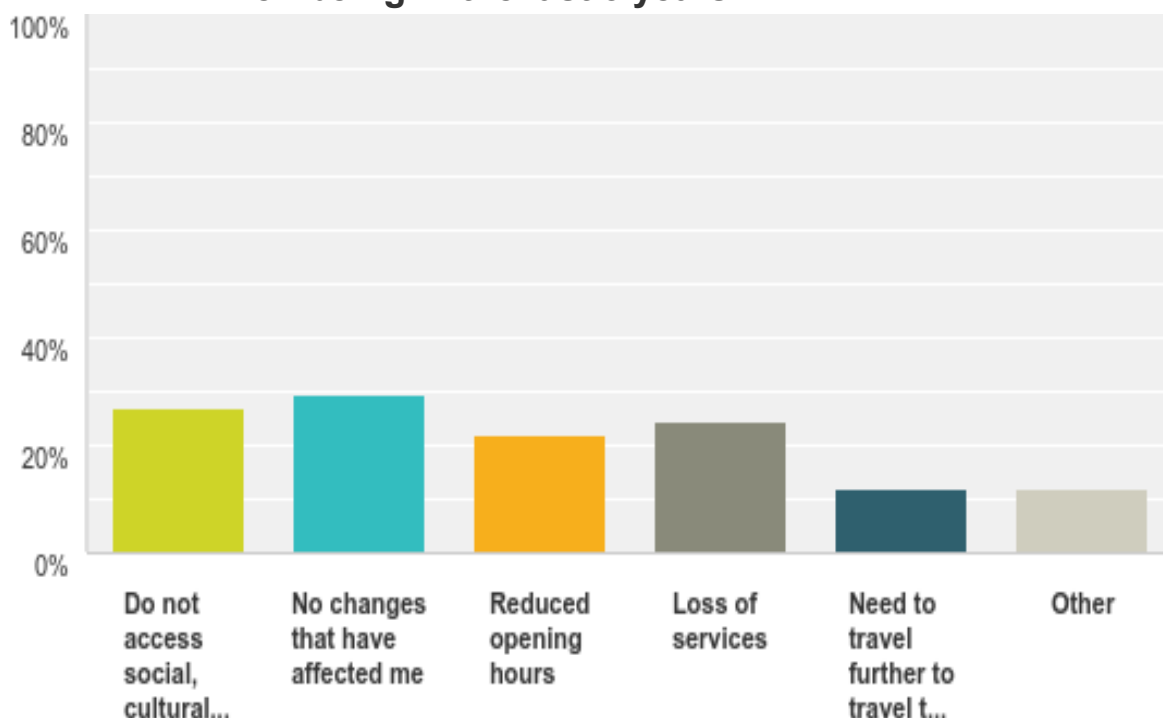
Q7: In the last 3 years have any of the mental health services, groups or activities that you access in the community been affected by cuts in funding?



Q8: In the last 3 years have any Training and Employment Services you do or have accessed been affected by cuts in funding?



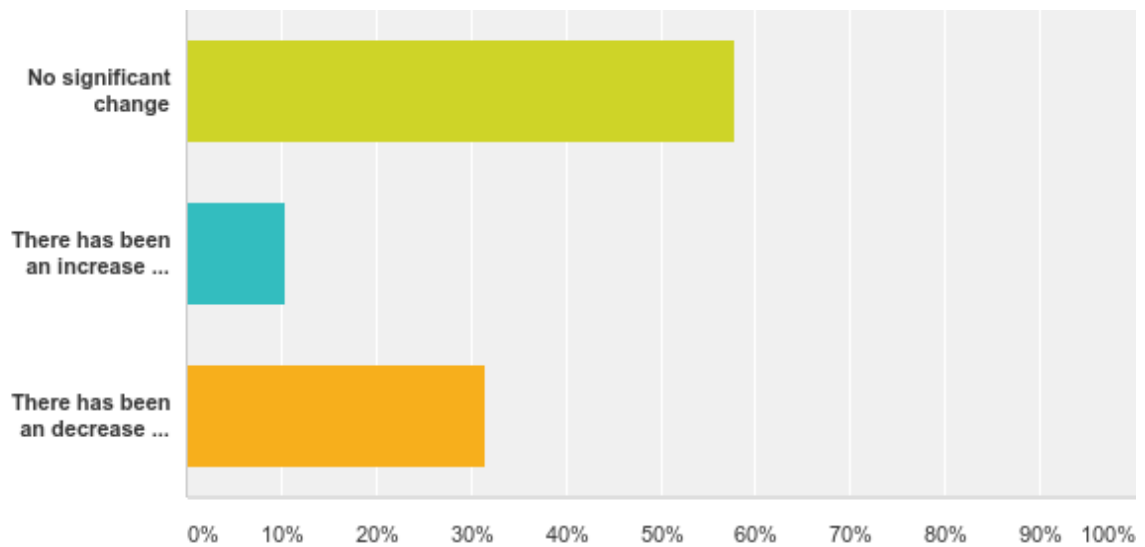
Q9: Have there been any changes to social, cultural and leisure services, (such as sports centres', museums and art galleries and libraries) that you feel have impacted on your mental health and well-being in the last 3 years.



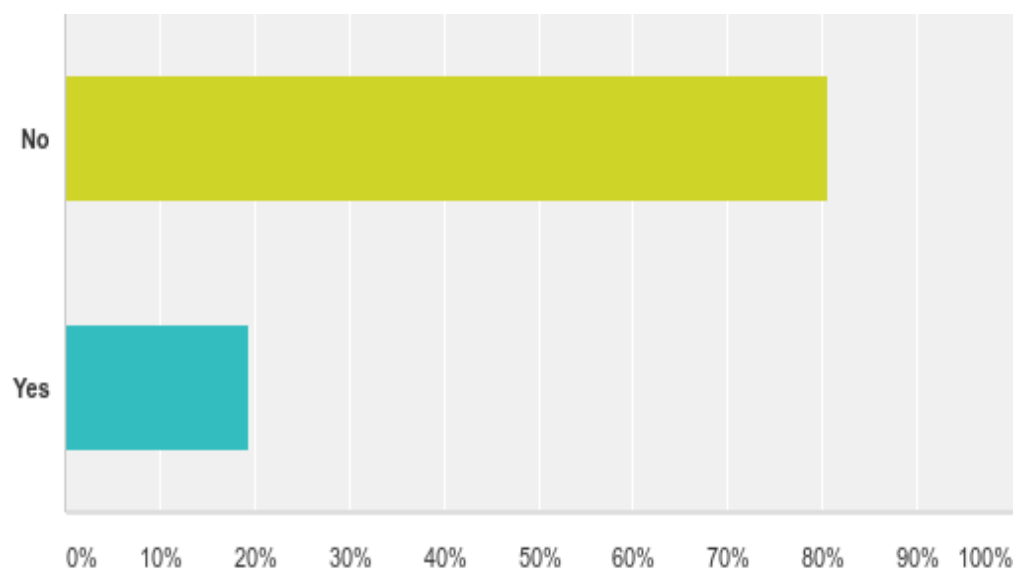
Q10: What impact (if any) overall do you feel changes to services due to spending reviews have had on your mental health and recovery?

	Strong positive impact	Slight positive impact	No impact	Sight negative impact	Strong negative impact	Total
Your Recovery	0.00% 0	2.86% 1	22.86% 8	40.00% 14	34.29% 12	35
Your mental health	0.00% 0	2.70% 1	18.92% 7	40.54% 15	37.84% 14	37
Your social networks	0.00% 0	2.86% 1	37.14% 13	31.43% 11	28.57% 10	35
Access to support	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	17.14% 6	31.43% 11	51.43% 18	35
Access to employment and training	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	68.57% 24	20.00% 7	11.43% 4	35
Access to cultural and leisure activities	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	45.71% 16	34.29% 12	20.00% 7	35
Your personal finances	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	34.29% 12	37.14% 13	28.57% 10	35

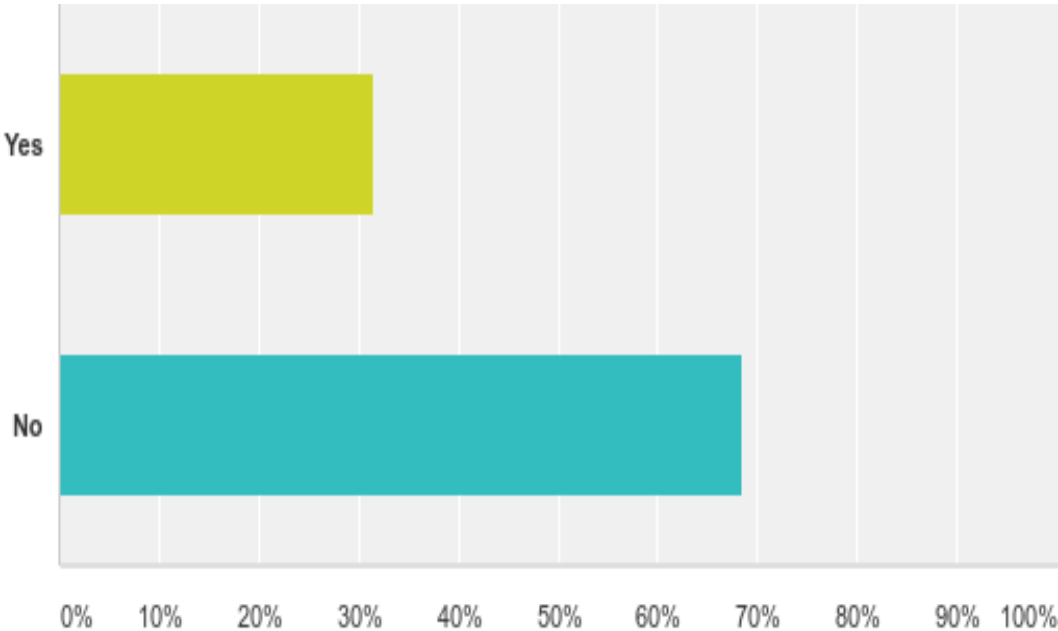
Q11: Over the last three years have there been any significant changes to your entitlement to welfare benefits? (This may include benefits paid by the DWP such as ESA, JSA DLA; or benefits paid for through the Local Authority such as Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit)



Q12: Over the last three years has there been a changes to your conditions of benefit entitlement where you are required to attend meetings, courses or do something else on a regular basis in order to continue to receive benefit?



Q13: Have there been any other changes introduced over the last 3 years affecting the services you receive or impacting on your mental health?



Q14: What Local Authority Area do you live in?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Argyll and Bute	0.00%	0
Aberdeen	2.86%	1
Aberdeenshire	0.00%	0
Angus	0.00%	0
Clackmannanshire	0.00%	0
Dundee	2.86%	1
Dumfries and Galloway	5.71%	2
East Ayrshire	0.00%	0
East Dunbartonshire	0.00%	0
East Renfrewshire	0.00%	0
East Lothian	8.57%	3
Edinburgh	20.00%	7
Falkirk	5.71%	2
Fife	5.71%	2
Glasgow	2.86%	1
Highland	11.43%	4
Inverclyde	2.86%	1
Na h-Eileanan Siar	0.00%	0
North Ayrshire	0.00%	0
North Lanarkshire	0.00%	0
Midlothian	0.00%	0
Moray	2.86%	1
Orkney	5.71%	2
Perth and Kinross	2.86%	1
Renfrewshire	5.71%	2
Scottish Borders	2.86%	1
Shetland	0.00%	0
South Ayrshire	0.00%	0
South Lanarkshire	2.86%	1
Stirling	0.00%	0
West Dunbartonshire	0.00%	0
West Lothian	8.57%	3
Total		35

Appendix 1

VOX COLLECTIVE ORGANISATIONS;

ACUMEN

ADVOCARD

Angus based Community Enterprise collective advocacy
project

BIPOLAR SCOTLAND

Borders New Horizons

HUG Spirit Advocacy

KLACKSUN

Lanarkshire Links

MHNGG

PLUSPERTH

Psychiatric Rights Scotland

Scottish Dementia Working group

USER & CARER INVOLVEMENT

VOX Scotland (VOICES OF EXPERIENCE)

West Dunbartonshire Mental Health Forum