

# Citizen Ambassador programme for Surrey Heartlands

## Background

Luminus/Healthwatch Surrey successfully delivered the Citizen Ambassador (CA) programme for Surrey Heartlands from 2018 to 2023. After working with local NHS research colleagues to support the design of the concept, we recruited 6 people with lived experience to become CAs for the following NHS transformation areas: mental health, digital, prevention, cancer, women & children, and equality. The CA programme was an integral part of Surrey Heartlands' citizen-led engagement and communications approach, and our independence was a key part of the concept. In 2018 the innovative, ground-breaking nature of the programme was recognised through the 'NHS 70' Healthwatch England award for putting people at the heart of care.

## The programme

Recruited, trained and managed by Luminus/Healthwatch Surrey, the Citizen Ambassadors brought insight from local communities and fresh, independent viewpoints to their workstream. They were trained to become peer researchers, giving them a good grounding in research techniques. Utilising our established networks of local community contacts, they gathered insight from a wide range of citizens, outside of those who would engage in traditional engagement patient forums. They reached out to those who do not often get their voices heard, but may have recent experience of a service or pathway. Insight was analysed and reported on in a structured format. Once the insight was gathered, we supported them to have the confidence and tenacity to use that insight to influence their NHS workstream, to challenge health inequalities and bring innovative ideas to their workstreams in the development of service change.

The programme ran for 5 years during which time the CAs delivered local insight to influence service design. In 2023, as the health and care system began to focus much of its delivery at the most local level, Surrey Heartlands wanted to focus their approach to peer research to match this, so the programme was brought to a close. Both Luminus and Surrey Heartlands were able to take valuable learnings and key principles of peer-led research and involvement of local people from the programme to apply to future initiatives.

"During its 5 years, our award-winning Citizen Ambassador programme saw us equip people who have diverse experiences of healthcare with qualitative research skills and enabled them to carry out focussed projects and engagements across Surrey Heartlands. The projects our CAs have delivered over the years have influenced the work of Surrey's NHS by contributing authentic insights about Surrey's population to those designing and delivering the services, through the themes of: mental health, digital equity, cancer, prevention, women & children, cardiovascular disease, muscular skeletal conditions, COVID-19 and beyond." - Surrey Heartlands