

# Service cuts 'could push mental health patients into crisis'

By **LINDSAY BURNS**

A MENTAL health charity has said cuts to mental health services may send patients into "crisis".

The South London and Maudsley (SLaM) is facing a £3.7million budget cut under local health authority plans.

Cuts to its £65million budget planned by NHS Southwark will see support teams make fewer trips to people's homes.

Residents with mental health needs will only get home visits for the first six months after being discharged from hospital.

Instead, mental health patients will be referred to GPs, who are to be given extra training to cope.

CoolTan Arts in Walworth Road, Walworth, is a charity running art classes and training to people with mental health issues.

Many of its clients are, or have been, SLaM's patients and it is also partly funded by NHS Southwark.

Rosie Agnew, a CoolTan Arts co-ordinator, said: "Reducing the case load for SLaM's community mental health teams is going to put people at risk.

"The patients were worried that



**TRAINING: Staff and members of the CoolTan Arts studio with some of their fashion designs**

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it could push them into crisis.

"This would be more costly in the long run. Also, many are concerned that GPs will not have the experience and specialist knowledge to deal with them."

Ms Agnew said she would like to see GPs prescribing art classes or training at CoolTan Arts as part of their therapy

She said: "There is real evidence that exercising creativity has a real therapeutic effect and keeps people well. People really get a lot out of coming here away from the

institutionalised environment, socialising, building up skills that could help with training or jobs.

"We would support the PCT by offering Cool Tan Arts classes on prescription. It would be half the price of computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) that is currently offered."

SLaM referred CoolTan's concerns to NHS Southwark, which said it had met with SLaM staff, patients and carers to ensure people's needs were met.

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