

Ben Hall, Service User Involvement Co-ordinator, Health in Mind

Health in Mind has been around for about 30 years, it started out as Edinburgh and District Mental Health Association and changed to Health in Mind 5 years ago to reflect the fact that we were involved in more and more services around the country. We also changed our focus from a therapeutic model of support to a social and community based preventative model. Most of our work is in Edinburgh and the Lothians, but we now work in the Borders and deliver training across the country.

We have 10 different projects. Some were created to respond to a specialist need and some to meet the needs of a given community.

The link that we have across all the projects is service user involvement. Supportive mental health services need to be a shared journey, listening and responding to need. Being guided by other people's expertise in the services that they receive. This means that we are planning services alongside service users, delivering services alongside each other and then evaluating the services together. Service Users are normally involved in every aspect of our training, both internal, and training that is delivered externally.

And there are two real reasons why we put so much effort into involving people:

- firstly, it is very clear that the more we listen to the people who use our services the more effective we are at delivering services that are relevant and useful.
- The second reason is that we recognise the strong link between involvement and recovery. By allowing people to develop their own confidence and the skills required to contribute to, or take control of the services that they are receiving we are increasing the likelihood that people will grow in confidence as they contribute to or take control of other aspects of their lives. So we believe that service user involvement is a significant part of the therapeutic process.

The projects that we have start at the

Information Resource Centre

Based at Shandwick Place we have a good old fashioned resource centre. It is mainly staffed by volunteers, some of whom are service users from other projects. It provides a reference point for anybody looking for more information about mental health. It could be services or research. The volunteers also organise monthly training afternoons for the public. These are free and can be on any mental health associated subject. Recent afternoons have been on An Introduction to Art Therapy, Bipolar disorder and Complementary Therapy and Mental Health. Linked in with the IRC is Edspace which is an online resource for people in edinburgh, we are also currently establishing an equivalent in Midlothian called Midspace.

Support Accommodation and Respite Service

This is a service that aims to promote independent living for people who have or have recently had mental health difficulties. Support is practical and flexible tailored to each person. We also manage furnished flats to rent on behalf of the council, and we provide support within these flats. As part of this service we also provide additional temporary care for people so that carers can have a break and take some time to look after themselves. It is not uncommon that service users from here are also volunteers at the IRC.

Beyond Trauma

This is our counselling service focussed on, but not exclusively for, people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. They provide one to one and group support. The one-to-one work tries to help people recover from any kind of trauma, and there are mixed services for people who can pay and for those who cannot afford to pay, it is always a difficult balance to strike. There are good links here with SARS and people who are being supported at home within the SARS service can be receiving counselling from Beyond Trauma.

Re:Discover

Re:discover is a befriending service, we have projects in Edinburgh and the Borders. The service is largely delivered by volunteers. They meet up with clients over a period of about a year, and the aim of the meetings is to help people spend more time out of their homes and being involved in their communities. Because of the long waiting lists for the one to one service they now have social groups established for people on the waiting lists, these are social events determined by the service users and arranged by staff and a different set of volunteers. These volunteers also contribute to running the office and writing and producing a newsletter. It is not unusual that these volunteers are also service users elsewhere in the organisation or have been service users of re:discover in the past.

South Edinburgh Healthy Living Initiative & Altogether Better

These are two projects based in South Edinburgh that have a wider remit than just mental health and wellbeing. They both aim to reduce health inequalities in the community, a lot of the work is with parents, both providing parenting classes and support. They have classes in cooking and budgeting and provide opportunities for physical activity such as cycling groups, walking groups, dance, yoga and a gardening group. They have a complementary therapy service for people who would not be able to afford to pay for it themselves. And they also run stress management courses. Many of these services are delivered by volunteers, who act as the walk and cycle ride leaders, yoga tutors as well as helping with cooking and parenting courses.

Men in Mind

Men in Mind is a project that works with men from the BME communities in Edinburgh. Typically these men face increased isolation when dealing with mental health issues, this can be caused by language difficulties or through cultural differences. So Men in Mind provides services that improves people's access to mental health services, social and peer support groups and physical activity groups such as walking or gardening.

The Orchard Centre

The Orchard Centre is based in Bonnyrigg and is a focus of mental health services in Midlothian. Many of these replicate the services that I have spoken about already; they have counselling services, creative and social groups, complementary therapies and physical activity groups. Their emphasis on Service User Involvement is a good example to us all. They have weekly community meetings, where anyone can attend to listen or contribute their thoughts on how the centre is run. They run a community café staffed with volunteers, they have service users involved in research, in planning and evaluation groups, in recruitment and in delivering some of their services.

Lastly we have the

Guided Self Help Project

This is a relatively new pilot project that supports people who are referred by their GP, as they work through specific self help books, early comments are that it is very popular and enhances the effectiveness of self help work.

I talked earlier about Service User Involvement being at the core of how Health in Mind works. And as I look at all these services I can see how we have evolved to work alongside clients, on occasions being guided by them and on occasions leading the way. This shared journey is perfectly characterised by the extent that volunteers support what health in mind does. Volunteers can come from anywhere with many motivations, but often our volunteers are users of one or more of our services and the range of volunteering opportunities means that when people are ready, there is usually and appropriate placement waiting for them. Helping them make a difference and have a voice, and when they do, they can help us to make a difference and have a voice.