Peer support: help from those who really understand
Dear Supporter,

At the Mental Health Foundation, we believe in the value of people’s personal experiences of mental ill health when it comes to supporting others. Knowing first-hand what someone is going through provides an invaluable insight into how to help them.

Our work places a real emphasis on peer support. People who attend our support groups say that what they appreciate most is having people there who truly understand what they’re experiencing. Not only that, the peer support workers find it helps their own mental health to be using their experiences to help others.

In this issue of TalkBack you can read about many of the ways in which we’re encouraging peer support as a way of improving everyone’s mental wellbeing. From self-help groups for people with dementia to those caring for someone with a mental illness, this important way of bringing people together to help each other is transforming evermore lives.

To mark World Mental Health Day on 10th October we will be holding our annual Tea & Talk event, and encouraging everyone to do the same. It’s the perfect way to provide your own peer support – by getting together to talk about mental wellbeing. Everything you need to know about holding your own Tea & Talk, including a delicious cake recipe, is on page 14.

Best wishes,

Jenny Edwards CBE, Chief Executive

Contents
03 Increasing access to mental health advocacy
04 Support in the community: Your Way
06 Dementia self-help groups
08 Deirdre’s story
10 Voice & Community
12 Carers peer support
13 Easy fundraising
14 Tea & Talk

Having an advocate to explain your rights to you is an essential safeguard for anyone who is subject to the Mental Health Act.

The Mental Health Foundation wants everyone who needs an advocate to have access to one. Since 2009, Independent Mental Health Advocates (IMHAs) have been available to help anyone who is subject to the Mental Health Act to help them understand important issues such as the treatment they might receive and their rights whilst in hospital. However, according to research published in 2012, apart from High Secure services, less than half of qualifying patients were accessing IMHA services.

This is a worrying statistic, and it’s important to understand why this is happening. It could be due to low levels of understanding among staff, carers, or patients on the role of advocates or because of the way IMHA services are currently commissioned by local authorities. Research indicated that patients from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, people with learning disabilities, and children and younger people (among others) were not being well served by current services. These are the people who may need the service the most.

We’re running a campaign to increase access to IMHA services. We want to do this by making sure the Department of Health can accurately monitor who accessed an IMHA and why. We will be working with IMHAs and other experts over the next year to design a service that will better serve the people that need it.

“Advocacy is a really important way of ensuring that patients feel empowered and listened to whilst in hospital or receiving care for their mental health. Now that people have a right to an IMHA we need to make sure that everyone understands that the service is there and that it must meet the needs of the whole community.”

Jonathan Savage
Policy Officer
Support in the community: Your Way

The research team has been hard at work on a long-term project with the charity Together for Mental Wellbeing. The team was commissioned to independently evaluate the effectiveness of its new, community-based model, founded on the principles of self-directed support for people with mental health problems.

Together developed Your Way in partnership with commissioners, service users and community mental health team staff to build people’s confidence and capacity to take control of their own mental health and wellbeing.

“Together firmly believes that the people we support are the experts in their own recovery, and this evaluation is all about finding out from them what works so we can focus on developing these areas. When we use people’s wants and needs as a starting point for designing and delivering their support, we can be sure that we have the best chance of helping them achieve the goals that really matter to them.”

Andrew Farquhar, Together’s Your Way Development Manager

Your Way offers practical, one-to-one, recovery-based support, social networking, group activities, and other services tailored to individual’s needs. It provides a flexible and individual approach to supporting people, based on the goals that they define for themselves. The services help people to link in to their local community, and to think creatively about finding ways to stay well that suit them.

Your Way places a large emphasis on peer support and user-leadership, and, at several services, peer support training is available, so that people can use their own experiences to help others. Together began transforming its first Your Way service in London in 2010 and now has Your Way services in 19 locations across England. Your Way currently supports over 1000 people per month.

Our three-year evaluation – funded by the Department of Health – is now well underway. Over a twelve-month period, we have been following up participants at a number of Your Way services, to assess the impact of the service on their lives in terms of improvements in mental health and wellbeing and progress towards personal goals.

To date, we have expanded our evaluation to 16 sites and are on target to evaluate the experiences of over 300 people using the service. In addition, 30 users of Your Way are taking part in interviews to gain more in depth information about their experience of using the service. These interviews are being conducted by peer researchers who have themselves used Together’s services.

“Everyone’s experience of mental ill health is different. Your Way is unique in the flexibility of support it offers to its users – people are able to access support at a time and place that suits them, be it in a local café, their own home, or as part of a social club. It allows people to take control.”

Earlier this year, Together held five Your Way Learning Events at various sites across the UK. These learning events offered the research team the opportunity to present the evaluation’s interim findings and allowed users of the Your Way service to come together to discuss their personal experiences of using Your Way and how the service could be improved in the future.

We’ve had a fantastic response to the evaluation so far and look forward to sharing our findings in 2015.
In September 2012, together with Housing 21, we started three self-help groups for people with dementia living in sheltered and extra care accommodation.

We aimed to teach practical skills to assist with independent living, deal with memory loss and improve wellbeing. It encouraged peer support to increase their enjoyment of life while addressing the stigmatisation of dementia and challenging the assumption that people with dementia can’t learn new things.

The two-year project has now finished. Two of the three groups continue to run weekly with volunteers and Housing 21 staff, but the most important thing is that the project showed how well this method worked for supporting people with dementia. Our evaluation, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, showed that the groups were successful in improving people’s mental wellbeing, reducing loneliness and increasing people’s social networks. The evaluation report is available online at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications

Members of the groups said the group allowed them to befriend others who understood their difficulties. They looked forward to meeting every week and being able to share stories and concerns with others and enjoy their company. They felt less lonely and more supported by other members.

“IT’S A GOOD THING PEOPLE IN THE HOME SHOULD GET TOGETHER. IT’S BEEN A GOOD THING FOR GROUP MEMBERS.”

The groups helped members deal with their memory loss day-to-day. They taught them techniques to help manage in their daily lives, like using association or patterns on a keypad to remember things like pin numbers. You can read more about the experiences of one of the group members, Deirdre, on page 9.

Importantly we received positive feedback not only from the members themselves but also their friends and families. They could see the difference the groups were having on their loved one’s memory and also their general wellbeing and enjoyment of life, because it was important that members recalled the good feelings they had gained, even though they may not remember specific content.

“She is getting quite a lot of stimulation – especially with the memory group, which I know she really enjoys. Even though she doesn’t remember, the energy of enjoyment stays with her.”

We are hoping that, following the success of these pilot groups, we will be able to secure funding to continue the project.
Deirdre is a Dementia Peer Support Worker at the Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster Memory Services.

“I'm from Australia originally, resident in London for nearly 60 years. I'm now 75. My memory used to be brilliant. I was an actress and at one stage I was playing weekly repertory theatre with my actor husband, and I had a leading role to learn every week. Our toddler son was with us, and somehow I managed each week to play one part and learn another.

“Later, having given up my acting career, my art history studies at university enabled me to work in London art galleries, and as a curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum. There I wrote a book on Victorian jewellery and contributed to others and later wrote criticism, especially of art and contemporary jewellery here and in the USA. I did picture research for art and history books for BBC Books and others, and until recently was studying for a PHD.

“It was my son who first noticed something was wrong. I was ignoring it really and thinking, 'It's just me getting older'. But I think he spoke to my younger sister and between them they mentioned it to my GP. My GP sent me to Imperial college, and then I was referred to Chelsea and Westminster hospital to have a brain scan. It was the scan that confirmed my condition. I was finally diagnosed with Alzheimer's about two years ago.

“I don't really get depressed about it. Well occasionally I do, but most of the time I stay on an even keel. My family have noticed that, and so has my cat. I think if there is anything we can do that is going to help other people then we all want to be involved to make the knowledge deeper and more widespread so there isn't this terrible fear and stigma. There should be programmes about it, with people who have Alzheimers' discussing it. That will take a bit of the fear and stigma away if people can see that we are reasonably articulate and can express what we feel about this.

“I am so blessed to live in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It was my GP who suggested I come here to the Memory Service. I've learned a lot while I've been here, and I've been given responsibilities. I'm even called an honorary peer support worker, which I'm deeply impressed about. I find being in this environment and being with people working on this kind of thing that it does a tremendous amount for one's general wellbeing.

“I certainly don’t want to die yet. I'm not young but I want to go on living as long as I can because it's just wonderful to be alive, and you can never stop learning things and meeting people and discovering wonderful things about the world.”

The Mental Health Foundation has launched a major new inquiry into our understanding of some of the most challenging and distressing symptoms of dementia. The Inquiry will be exploring the issues of truth-telling, lying and finding meaning in the often different realities or perceptions of people living with more severe dementia.

We want to hear your views on these issues; you can contribute to the inquiry by completing a short online survey www.surveymonkey.com/s/DementiaInquiry
For the past two years the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities has been tackling the issue of bullying, harassment and hate crime towards people with learning disabilities.

This work has been shaped and informed by the knowledge and experiences of people with learning disabilities who have been members of the Voice and Community reference group. In the summer, this work culminated in a campaign and a number of resources to help people keep safe.

The campaign aims to change the way people with learning disabilities are represented on television and radio. A guide for broadcasters was developed giving five top tips to help them improve how they represent people with learning disabilities in the media.

The tips were accompanied by a short film where people from the reference group talk about how they feel they are represented and the simple changes they want to see made. Fundamentally, they would like to be seen as citizens who experience the same issues in their lives as other people.

We started a petition to Ofcom asking for a change in the way people with learning disabilities are represented in the media. It has already received over 1,200 signatures. We hope that this petition raises awareness amongst broadcasters of the need to more positively and accurately reflect the experiences of people with learning disabilities, and that the public will see the impact of using derogatory language about people with learning disabilities.

The project also resulted in two easy-read guides. Staying Safe on social media and online is for people with learning disabilities, their friends and family so that they know how to keep safe when they are on the internet. Social media is a good way of connecting with friends, keeping in touch and finding out about what is going on so we wanted to encourage people to feel confident using it.

Staying Safe out and about has information on how to keep safe, what to do if something does happen and what to do afterwards. The guide focuses on being out and about, at home, at work and mate crime.

The petition is still available to sign online www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/support-us/ld-media The more signatures we get, the stronger our call for change becomes.

You can download both the easy-read guides on our website www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/publications
Our team in Scotland has begun work on a new project that aims to improve the quality of life for those caring on an unpaid basis for an individual with a mental health issue, by developing and delivering a peer support model.

The project will run in Glasgow and Stirling/Clackmannanshire over a three year period. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund, it aims to reach both carers who are already receiving some formal support and carers who are relatively isolated in their role and may not have thought of themselves as a “carers” before.

The intention is that carers themselves should guide the progress of the project, informing the model as it develops in each area and bringing their skills, knowledge and experiences to the project to support fellow carers.

The project is being delivered in partnership with Glasgow Association for Mental Health and Action in Mind. We are leading the project and contributing knowledge and experience in peer mentoring from several recent projects. There are significant differences between the two geographical areas selected for this project, which we hope will contribute to the quality of what we learn and produce.

Over the course of the project there will be a number of ways for mental health carers in Glasgow and Stirling/Clackmannanshire to get involved: contributing personal experiences and ideas to the project; becoming a member of the local steering group; volunteering as a peer support mentor; requesting mentor support.

If you have an interest in the project, then we would encourage you to get in touch for an informal chat – there is no need to have a fixed idea in mind about how to get involved. You can contact Lewis Brown in our Scotland office on lbrown@mentalhealth.org.uk

The Buy Charity Christmas cards

Buy your greetings cards from the Card Shop online, and not just for Christmas but for every occasion. For every card you buy, the Mental Health Foundation gets a donation. Send them yourself or the Card Shop will hand write and send them for you. It couldn't be simpler, and there's 50% off your first card.

http://charitycards.mentalhealth.org.uk/

The Sell on eBay

If you have some homemade crafts to sell (or perhaps some unwanted Christmas gifts), head to eBay where you can choose a percentage of your sale price to donate to us. It's just like using the normal eBay but with added benefits – donating to charity and extra promotion on the site for being a charitable item.

www.ebay.co.uk/egw/ebay-for-charity/charity-profile/?NP_ID=19001

The Send flowers

Sending flowers this Christmas? Order your bouquets from Charity Flowers and the Mental Health Foundation will get a 15% donation when you quote reference MHF.

Order online www.charityflowers.co.uk or call 08705 300 600 – don’t forget to quote “MHF”.

The Shop online

Whatever you're buying – clothing, gifts, food, holidays and so much more, you can raise funds for better mental health – at no cost to you. Thousands of stores will donate to us when you shop through Give As You Live. It's simple, straightforward and 100% secure.

www.giveasyoulive.com/mhf

Easy fundraising

Christmas may seem a long way off, but by planning ahead you can save time, money and potential stress. That's why we want to tell you about some great ways you can contribute to the Mental Health Foundation at Christmas, without any extra cost to you, and they're probably things you'll be doing anyway.
It’s nearly time for Tea & Talk

“Hello there Tea & Talkers, allow me to introduce myself – I’m Calami-Tea Jane, Tea & Talk’s brand new mascot.

“Hello there Tea & Talkers, allow me to introduce myself – I’m Calami-Tea Jane, Tea & Talk’s brand new mascot.

“What’s Tea & Talk you ask? Well it’s the Mental Health Foundation’s annual fundraising and awareness-raising day, held on World Mental Health Day, the 10th October. We are encouraging everyone to hold a good ol’ fashioned tea party, with tea, cakes, finger sandwiches and most importantly, positive conversations about mental health.

“You see, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health condition, most of them silently, afraid to talk about what they’re feeling for fear of judgement and being told to ‘snap out of it’. Tea & Talk was created to give people a platform to share their experiences openly, perhaps for the first time.

“The topic for this year’s World Mental Health Day is schizophrenia, a serious mental health condition which, according to the World Federation for Mental Health, affects 26 million people worldwide.

“Tea & Talk has been a huge success over the past 6 years. We have had many Tea & Talkers saying what a wonderful experience it was to talk openly about themselves, or about a friend or relative, that has been affected.

“Don’t forget that Tea & Talk is also a great way of raising much needed funds for our work to improve everyone’s mental health. We are delighted that it has raised over £70,000 so far, and are hoping to raise lots more in 2014.

“This year we are inviting you to get involved in what is looking to be the biggest Tea & Talk yet! Visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk/tea to request your free pack and start planning your event.”

There are plenty of other fun ways to improve your own mental health and raise money to support other people’s. Running, cycling, sky diving, trekking or whatever takes your fancy.

Interested? Email events@mentalhealth.org.uk or call 020 7803 1123

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Cake

- 200g unsalted butter
- 200g golden caster sugar
- 175g ground almonds
- 250g cold mashed potato
- Zest of 3 lemons
- 2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 4 medium eggs

Drizzle

- 4 tbsp granulated sugar
- Juice of 1 lemon

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1. Preheat your oven to 180C (160C fan) / Gas mark 4.
2. Butter and line a deep 20-22cm diameter round cake tin.
3. Beat the sugar and butter together in a bowl until light and fluffy.
4. Gradually add the eggs, beating the mixture after each addition.
5. Fold in the almonds, cold mashed potato, lemon zest and baking powder.
6. Tip into the tin, and smooth the top with a spatula.
7. Bake for 35-45 minutes until golden – to check the cake is cooked through, a skewer inserted in the middle should come out clean.
8. Allow to cool for 10 minutes then turn the cake out onto a wire rack.
9. Mix the granulated sugar and the lemon juice together and spoon over the top of the cake, allowing the mixture to drip down the sides.
10. Add lemon slices to the top, or another garnish of your choice.
11. Wait for the cake to cool completely before slicing.
Supporting each other for a happier future

People experiencing mental health issues can feel isolated and like they are struggling alone. It can sometimes be difficult for those close to them to understand what they are going through and provide the right support.

Our peer-support workers are trained to provide that support, but importantly they can also draw on their own experience of living with mental health issues. This can be hugely beneficial and is often cited as the most valuable aspect of our groups by those who attend them. Peer-support workers themselves often experience an increase in their own mental wellbeing too as a result of helping others.

This is just one example of how we help everyone live a mentally healthier life. We rely on people leaving a gift for us in their will. By doing so you can ensure you continue to support our essential research, campaigning and project work long into the future.

To leave a gift in your will to the Mental Health Foundation, or to let us know you have already done so, please contact our Legacy Team on 020 7803 1121 or legacy@mentalhealth.org.uk You can read more at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/legacy

If you would like to make a gift towards our work, please go to www.mentalhealth.org.uk/talkbackdonate

Alternatively you can call 020 7803 1121, or to donate by text, simply text the word MHFP11 followed by the amount you wish to donate (between £1 and £10) to 70070.

For regular updates on our work via email, please sign up to our e-newsletter at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/newsletter