

Scotland's positive contribution to work on Mental Well Being

Report Of International Conference in Dublin - April 2005

Chex Practice Development Manager Elspeth Gracey, attended the three day International Conference on Mental Well Being in Dublin in April. As Elspeth has a specific role to create opportunities for the CHEX Network to share lessons in promoting mental well being, the Conference provided an excellent opportunity to gain insights into current work world-wide and promote these with the wider CHEX Network. Elspeth's observations highlight that Scotland is making a major contribution to work on mental well being

This, the first of an annual series of mental health promotion conferences in the UK and Ireland, was organised by the Clifford Beers Foundation in collaboration with the departments of Health for Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. Participants and presenters also came from across the world including Scandinavia, Australasia and Northern America.

A key aspect of the conference was the participation of people who identified themselves as 'service users'. People who have lived with the challenges of mental ill-health willingly shared their experiences. Their voices providing unique insights for other participants.

Health workers also shared their experiences providing evidence of lessons learned and how to improve things. Occupational Therapist Pat Gilmartin from Forth Valley and George McMeechan a member of the Be Active Stay Active (BASA) group gave us the story of BASA's development from both perspectives. Pat's acknowledgment of lessons learned was complemented by George's testimony of how much more beneficial his membership of BASA has been since he has been given a more empowering role, as a group participant with fuller involvement in deciding about the provision of services which best meet the needs and aspirations of group members. (a fuller account of BASA is provided in this edition of CHEX Point)

The Scottish perspective was well represented and encouragingly, Scotland was frequently cited by other speakers as epitomising best practice.

Edinburgh based 'Citadel Arts Group' illustrated the power of drama in exploring issues related to mental well being. Their play 'The Father of the Man' by San Cassimally, derived from reminiscence work in a residential home for older people in Leith portrayed 'Billy' who has early Alzheimer's. The play poignantly reminded us of 'Billy's' previously full and active life. The real-life 'Billy', pleased to have his story valued in this way, had given permission for its use in the play.

An asset-based approach to working with people with mental ill-health was illustrated by Jacqui Kilburn from South Queensferry who described working in this rural community by offering activities which encourage participants to explore their talents. Funds were raised by using craft goods produced by group members to provide days out for the group.

Jane Parkinson, is charged with establishing national indicators for mental well-being for Scotland and she presented an update of her work. Latest information on this work can be obtained via the following link

<http://www.phis.org.uk/info/mental.asp?p=bg>

Claire Keating of Age Concern in N.Ireland gave a clear, informative and entertaining presentation, explaining how important community development is in her work e.g. involving older people in determining the activities they will participate in. Claire refused to assume that a group of Chinese women would like to do Ti Chi, as suggested by a colleague, and we were shown the delight on one woman's face when she got her desired chance to participate in a 'Penalty Shoot Out'.

Reference to Richard Layard's work on 'Happiness' as a goal for governments, instead of striving for economic success sparked lively debate in several of the plenary sessions. Terminology was disputed by some who felt that 'happiness' is a simplistic term. One speaker felt it was unhelpful saying that they didn't feel they could explain their inability to work for most of their adult life because they had been 'unhappy'. 'Health' and 'well being' were also debated as terms for describing what we are all working towards.

Lynne Friedli spoke of 'reasons to be cheerful' and measures of health assets e.g. know how, creativity, access to resources etc. She posed the question "Are mental health problems like polio? If we strive for prevention could we achieve eradication?" She spoke of the need for more 'user led' research enriched by 'expert experience'. On the topic of 'Inequalities' she spoke of the tendency to problematise those at greatest disadvantage through "disproportionate focus on those who already find life a struggle". She specifically spoke of the role of power in relation to inequalities. Her concluding remarks further re-inforced the community development approach, suggesting that we should spend less time 'educating' the public and more time 'engaging' with them because they know how important 'feelings' are.

The conference provided an enjoyable and stimulating 3 days crammed with interesting presentations and workshops, providing a valuable opportunity to reflect on the practice of mental health promotion. Opportunities to network were many. The participation of 'service users' was a key factor in ensuring that health workers attending could not fail to hear their first-hand testimony.

As an inaugural conference it set a high standard. Which country will rise to the challenge of hosting the next one?

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CHEX, part of the Community Development Foundation, operates within the Scottish Community Development Centre and is funded by NHS Health Scotland to network information, ideas and good practice on community development and health.



'Healthy Communities in Mind'

Gregor Henderson, Director of the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well Being speaking in Edinburgh on 27th June said "The National Programme doesn't stand alone, it is the facilitator and catalyst for promoting the core messages for improving mental well being". Gregor reinforces the commitment of the Scottish Executive to support organisations and agencies from different settings. He recognises that Community Health Initiatives (CHI) working with local people on health priorities, important to them, are integral to the success of the Programme's strategies. This issue of CHEX-Point focuses on the mental health and community well-being derived from community-led approaches to health improvement.

Building Community Wellbeing is a key feature of the National Programme. At the start of the Programme in 2003, the then Minister for Health and Deputy Minister for Communities stated "The Scottish Executive is concerned with the well-being and mental health of our communities, what this means to communities themselves, and what people working and living in communities feel has the biggest influences on their well-being and mental health." The work taken forward has specifically focused on building community wellbeing with the four Exemplar Projects in Badenoch and Strathspey, East End of Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and West Lothian. The four projects, while very different in character share the aim of placing local people at the heart of planning and service delivery. Crucially, they are also seeking to identify the community mental wellbeing benefits derived from working in close partnership with community members. They are currently being supported by



West Lothian - Community Well Being Exemplar Project

the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health (SDC) to evaluate and share their lessons nation-wide. The Projects have provided CHEX-Point with an up-date of their current developments and explain how they are in the process of articulating the evidence from the outcomes of their work.

CHEX is collaborating with SDC to support good practice in community development (cd) and assist the Projects in sharing their lessons with the wider CHEX Network. Elspeth Gracey, Practice Development Manager is facilitating cd inputs at joint meetings and in conjunction with Allyson McCollum from SDC, is informing the National Task Group on Community-Led Health of ongoing developments. The Task Group will draw on the Project's

lessons through its qualitative research to improve understanding of evidence underpinning community led approaches to health. To complement the work of the Exemplar Projects, we share lessons from the CHEX Network, in particular service users and community members in 'Augment', Angus, and 'Be Active Stay Active' (BASA) in the Forth Valley. For further information on the Exemplar Projects and work on community wellbeing within the CHEX Network contact Elspeth Gracey on elspeth@scdc.org.uk.

Weblink to the National Programme for Mental Well Being

<http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/mentalwellbeing/>



Views expressed in CHEX-POINT are not necessarily those of CHEX, unless specifically stated.

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An 'Open Book' for Everyone

Kingussie in the Highlands of Scotland is the setting for this challenging project. Members of the committee, volunteers and staff of Caberfeigh Horizons Ltd provide us with insights into this developing and exciting initiative.

Community wellbeing for everyone is extremely important to us. We want to create the opportunity whereby people with learning difficulties can thrive, develop skills and confidence and contribute to wider community activity. The idea of The Bookshop grew from people with learning difficulties in the Badenoch and Strathspey area of the Scottish Highlands. Caberfeidh Horizons (a local charitable company) a development from the Carer's Group, worked with services users and staff of the local day centre to set up a Bookshop as a vehicle to:

- ✗ enable people with learning difficulties to make a positive contribution to the local community and to be recognised as being an integral part of the community
- ✗ combat the isolation, inactivity and marginalisation of many young people of working age with a learning disability
- ✗ raise confidence and self-awareness in people with learning disabilities in order to improve their quality of life and future prospects in our community
- ✗ break down any barriers of mistrust, misunderstanding, stigma and prejudice
- ✗ enable better integration into the local and wider community and to demonstrate the contribution they, our fellow citizens, make to our communities
- ✗ sell second hand books in a pleasant environment that will benefit the whole community (customers will be able to enjoy a cup of coffee and home baking while they make a decision on their purchases).

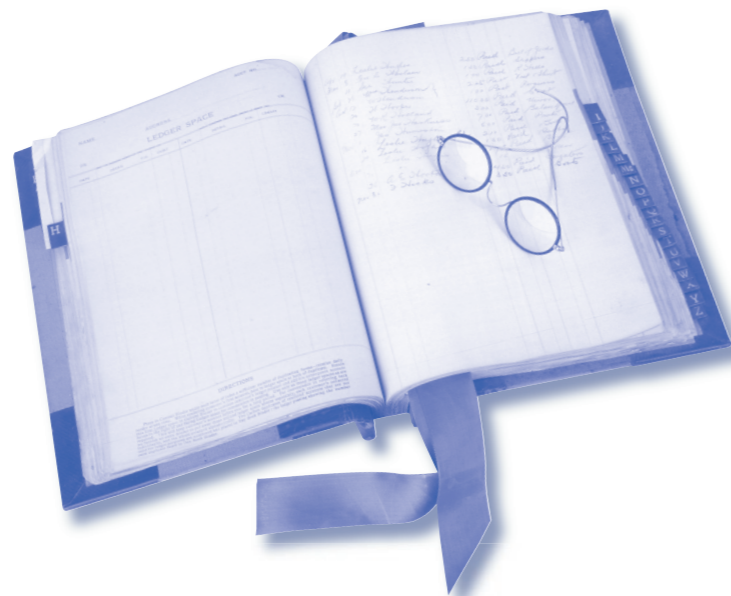
The shop will provide a range of experiences for people with learning difficulties. As well as developing hospitality skills, it will offer training in IT, and retailing. It will offer services to a range of settings, including local schools, by providing experience placements and support to pupils with learning difficulties. And directly link into the local residential home for the elderly by providing space to display books.

The book shop is well on its way to being opened. We at Caberfeidh Horizons have purchased and are refurbishing premises in Kingussie High Street. We have publicized our venture and news of it has been well received, even from local traders who might have been expected to view us as rivals. Positive support from local people has come in many forms, especially through donations of books.

Crucially, people with learning difficulties have been involved in activities and have participated in decision-making on establishing the premises.



We recognise that while this venture is extremely important to the people of Kingussie, it may also be of interest and benefit to those in other communities. Therefore, we are systemically recording our developments and recording progress in all aspects through a range of methods, including photographs, videos, written work and diaries. The facilitator from the National Programme for Mental Health and Wellbeing is supporting us in doing this. The monitoring will help to assess not only the impact on people with learning difficulties but also the attitudes of the wider community towards people with learning difficulties. We are keen to hear from anyone who is interested in our Bookshop Venture, so until our website goes live (in the near future), why not drop us a line at philclark2004@aol.com or Caberfeidh Horizons, Caberfeidh House, 7 High Street, Kingussie, Inverness shire, PH21 1HZ.



B.A.S.A

A Health Worker's perspective

Listening to patients' concerns about their own experiences in the process of moving out of hospital care provided the original inspiration for the 'Be Active Stay Active' [BASA] Project, based in Alloa, Clackmannanshire. A developing success story, BASA gained recognition in 2004 by achieving an award for Allied Health Innovation. The Project 'actively' engages with those individuals made vulnerable by mental ill health, although remains responsive to their particular feelings of isolation and loneliness. By careful encouragement to involve them through a variety of healthy activities (currently walking, swimming, football, aerobics exercise, food nutrition and cooking skills), confidence is regained and a real sense of well-being restored.

At the heart of BASA is the true sense of partnership working that has evolved between the Project's Members and its Facilitators, who currently comprise an Occupational Therapist, a Dietician, and Physiotherapists from NHS Forth Valley, a Community Food Development Worker, a SAMH Project Worker and a Recreational Facility Co-ordinator from Falkirk College. Evidence of the successful outcome of this partnership is as wide and varied as its Members. Formal training includes Volunteer Walk Leaders, in conjunction with Paths to Health, MIDAS-certified mini-bus drivers, through to developing Members' awareness and skills in group work, plus forthcoming sessions on Mental Health First Aid. All of these combine to build capacity and sustainability for the Project but, crucially, increase the likelihood of sustainable recovery for BASA Members.

Yet, upon reflection in preparing The BASA Story for presentation at the recent Mental Health Promotion Conference in Dublin, we realised that much learning has already taken place in order to develop this positive and productive atmosphere of partnership working. During the development of the pilot project away back in late 2003, in retrospect we did not include Service Users in the design and pilot of the Project. Indeed, more importantly, we



ignored the unique skills and strengths of the individual members. Yes, for example, little did we know that one pilot member in our midst had various certificates to her credit in taking exercise programmes!

In several ways, we realised we would have to shift our thinking if the "project" really was going to impact positively on people, could really support their recovery – and could ultimately be a project with a capital "P"!

Undoubtedly, nurturing this unique partnership between Facilitators and Members alike contributes to that special 'safe and secure' BASA experience.

In short, the BASA Project's guiding principles aim to facilitate sustainable recovery by satisfying a few basic human needs:

- ✗ Don't Worry: Feel safe and secure.
- ✗ People Love People: Connect with like-minded people and the wider community.
- ✗ Have a Purpose: Adopt worthwhile roles in life.
- ✗ Have Fun: Enjoy meaningful activities.

A Member's Experience

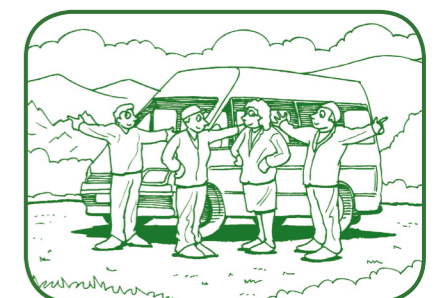
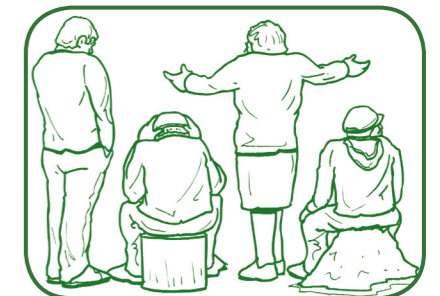
The two illustrations do not appear alongside these passages by chance. For me, they serve to demonstrate the current conflict between the consequences of what the Mental Health Services actually provided and what we, its so-called Users, in reality require.

In my capacity as a Service User / BASA Project Member, I sincerely believe in the benefits that BASA delivers to its Members. I hope I can therefore leave the reader with at least one of the many thought-provoking impressions as BASA did when first revealed to me.

The upper illustration could be compared to the multitude of faceless Service Users wandering aimlessly in the wilderness and not really sure where, or indeed if, they ever will find relief from their 'Hell on Earth' existence.

Conversely, the lower illustration represents a similar group of individuals, but now safe and secure in the company of their peer group within the BASA project. Confident to now turn around and face the world full on, no different from any other ordinary bunch of people on an outing – and clearly enjoying the experience!

Finally, I just have to slip this bit in and tell you about BASA's contributions to mental health conferences - an exciting development for all of us in spreading the word! Sharing our experiences at last year's 'Paths to Health' event in Perth was acknowledged by the Scottish Executive, and opened doors to participation in recent international conferences in Dublin and Edinburgh. BASA is now set to feature in a new coursework by The Open University – so watch this space – as well as the telly!



For further information contact

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Promoting Mental Well-being In Angus

Donna Banks and Andrea Stewart, highlight the enhanced mental well being from a user-led voluntary organisation in Angus.

Augment (Scotland) Ltd is a mental health service user-led voluntary organisation. We promote mental health service user involvement in all aspects of care provision and works towards the decrease of stigma associated with having a mental health issue. The organisation consists of individuals who have had or have experience of living with a mental health issue. Although based in Arbroath we cover the whole of Angus. Our structure depends on working groups whose members travel from all over to carry out 'in-house' work and attend meetings etc. To ensure service users from rural areas are represented, Augment's Involvement Officer and volunteers regularly hold 'forums' visiting groups and organisations throughout Angus for consultation exercises. Service users and members are encouraged to be involved by sending us information/ stories/ opinions/ questionnaires by e-mail, post and telephone.

At present Augment has four projects; collective advocacy (the voice of the people), information project, trainer group and developing user-led initiatives. Each of these projects' has a working group of individuals who undertake all tasks in relation to the running and development of these projects.

The collective advocacy project aims to promote mental health service users as "experts by experience" in relation to developing mental health services. Augment trains people with experience of mental health issues to become service user representatives. These representatives attend many meetings and highlight the user experience, opinions and suggestions in our aim to improve mental health services. The representatives also facilitate user groups and forums where they attain the knowledge and experience of the wider constituency of mental health service users to ensure they are as representative as possible.

Service users interested in becoming representatives are issued with a training pack which fully explains this role. The training pack covers everything from what a service user representative is, expectations, meeting procedures and terminology, dealing with difficulties and the consultation exercise to how to represent findings.

To enable representatives to carry out this role professionally and with confidence Augment offers a wide variety of training, which is tailored to the individuals existing skills and abilities. Training sessions attended by volunteers within the last year include: Training for Trainers, Assertiveness, Facilitation Training and Public Voices.

The information project produces a monthly newsletter, has developed a Mental Health Handbook and website and is in the process of developing an information point within Augment's offices. The aim of this project is to enable individuals to have informed choices about their care package, provide mental health

awareness sessions to external agencies and decrease social isolation of those individuals who are isolated by providing them with regular information and sharing of personal experiences.

The trainer group provides training to external agencies on the user perspective of what it is like to live with a mental health issue. Our training packages are tailor made to suit the requirements of the agency who are seeking training. Augment's trainer group have provided training to 3rd year medical students, trainee mental health officers, specialist public practitioners, ward staff, volunteer independent advocates, secondary school pupils and numerous other agencies.

The user-led initiatives project has developed four peer support groups; survivors of abuse, hearing voices, mental health and wellbeing and post-natal depression. Each of these groups has facilitators who are supported by Augment's staff and receive training to ensure they can undertake the task of facilitation effectively.

In addition to the work and the benefits it brings we have found that involvement in Augment's activities provides a therapeutic advantage. As one working group member explained recently "you don't enter Augment with a label, you are there to undertake a task and everyone provides support to help you be successful in any task you want to undertake." We have found that this approach has enabled individuals to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem and "move on" into further education, training, employment or volunteering.

The direction of Augment's work is determined by our members, working group members and this is then communicated to our Board of Directors through the Involvement Officer at regular meetings. Although there are always individuals who are "hard to reach" Augment's way of working enables the organisation to remain as user-led as possible.

**To contact Augment Tel 01241 434405
or
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'Generation Arts'

'Old toes, new toes' is just one of the exciting projects in 'Generation Arts'. Initiated by West Lothian Council and co-ordinated by a Steering Group comprising the Council's Arts and Leisure Services, Social Policy, Ageingwell, 50+ Network, Dedridge Good Neighbourhood Network, Acredale House and the MOOD project, over 2000 people are involved across the district. Robbie McGhee, the Council's Arts Development Officer shares the experiences of this innovatory project.

What we aim to do

Reduce isolation of older people through using the arts as a means of improving quality of life, stimulating mental and physical well being and recognising the skills, experience and aspirations of older people. By

- ✗ getting more older people participating in a creative and expressive arts programme, including those in residential care.
- ✗ working with a range of council services and other organisations and encouraging them to use arts as a means of working with older people.
- ✗ increasing the range of opportunities for older people to participate in the arts and ensuring truly inclusive and accessible ways of working.

How we have gone about it

A pilot project in 2003 taught us that speaking to groups directly was more valuable than posters and mail outs. Linking centre Managers together in regular meetings where they were fully involved in helping to develop what was happening also meant that they would encourage participation by older people using their premises. We benefited from the trusting relationships already established. Responding to feedback allowed us to adapt what was on offer.

The different activities that make up 'Generation Arts' have evolved through consultation with older people. The whole range of activities resulted from speaking and listening to participants. Programmes of activity have been devised by and not for them.

Arts clubs have generated their own material including CD's, story books and visual arts that are being shared between groups and the wider community.

Intergenerational work has helped to break down barriers between generations. 'Old toes, New toes' is bringing young and old together to work with a specialist in photography, film and animation on the theme "My Home" culminating in an exhibition to be premiered at Howden Park Centre.

Older people told us of the difficulty attending evening events, because of a reluctance to go out at night or lack of transport. We responded by organising Daytime Cinema, Concerts and Tea Dances. Low ticket prices and programmes designed to appeal to over 60s mean that these are now an established routine for older people benefiting from new opportunities to socialise both in the heart of town and in local venues.

The challenges we have faced

- ✗ Forming a working partnership with a range of voluntary and council service providers required time and discussion to make it work for all involved. Recognising that we could make a stronger impact by working collectively than in isolation.

- ✗ Making a break in the established routine of some establishments and providing something positive for the participants, staff and management of individual groups.
- ✗ Helping to overcome a lack of confidence in some older people.
- ✗ Creating a development programme that makes significant impact across the board but is flexible enough to meet the needs and desires of individual communities.
- ✗ Identifying high quality artists and supporting them to perform for and engage with small communities in non-arts venues.
- ✗ Supporting artists to develop their approach to best meet the needs of participants.



'Generation Arts in action'

The benefits we have experienced so far ...

- ✗ Collaboration with partners has produced networks of previously unconnected staff, some working with vulnerable older people, enabling better understanding of peoples' needs.
- ✗ The diverse and experienced staff of the working group created welcoming creative environments which have uncovered a huge amount of hidden talent in both staff and participants; brilliant poets, photographers, singers, drummers and comedians. Seeing this happen led the entire working group to re-evaluate their own assumptions about people.
- ✗ Improved relationships between the Voluntary Sector and Council Services.
- ✗ Making the Arts an integral part of people's lives.
- ✗ Generation Arts has given older people an effective voice in the formulation of a range of policies and initiatives that previously tended to be devised for them.
- ✗ Care staff are now more likely to say "could we be involved" than "we don't do that sort of thing."
- ✗ A strong sense of ownership from participants should make it easier to sustain funding.

Working together we have re-created a feeling of belonging. Thousands of West Lothian's older people are now socialising more often, having more exercise, more opportunities to be creative, more entertainment and more laughs than before.

For further information on the project contact Robbie McGhee robbie.mcghee@wled.org.uk

'Steps to Health'

Janice Scouler, Principal Health Promotion Officer, NHS Greater Glasgow, highlights the benefits of adopting community development approaches to working with young people on positive mental health in Glasgow's East End.

The 'Steps to Health' Project grew from initial consultation events, including 'open sessions' with mental health service users as well as the wider public combined with work carried out in a pilot project in the East End of Glasgow, as part of the Scottish Executive's National Programme for Mental Health and Well-being. These events provided a better understanding of the processes underpinning community-mental health and well-being and identified what local service users and community representatives felt were priority issues. These included the need to address low levels of self-esteem and aspirations amongst young people, high levels of territorialism, and poor perceptions of safety, financial poverty and poor health.

Recognising the need for a long-term approach and building the infrastructure required for sustainable change a community development approach was adopted by embedding responsiveness to local community issues and priorities. A range of local agencies were therefore involved including the local community health project, Social Inclusion Partnership and others.

Young people in particular identified that a number of local agencies tended to respond to them with negative stereotyping and part of the work of this project was to establish a mechanism which would bring young people together and also to support a more positive collective approach to young people across all the local agencies. Ensuring a community-led agenda and building capacity by developing the knowledge and skills of people living and working in the community; engaging with public and local service providers to develop new approaches to service planning and delivery, which put local people at the centre are key.

A pilot project was proposed, with the main aim of developing, piloting and implementing a series of structured training and development programmes, to:-

✕ provide a practical mechanism for individuals to recognise their value,

change behaviour, raise aspirations and achievements, particularly in relation to education, training and employment;

✕ increase the capacity of services and groups operating within the East End, changing the culture of organisations and increasing their effectiveness; supporting a multi-disciplinary approach and joint working,

✕ build a healthy, thriving and cohesive community, where people feel valued and respected and want to live and work.

The main target group is young people.

Discussions were held with the key stakeholders within the East End community about the proposals and building a local partnership and joint working arrangements. A positive response was received by a wide range of services and organisations and from the wider community. Successful funding applications were made to the National Programme, East End Social Inclusion Partnership and Greater Glasgow NHS Board.

Over the last year, 25 workers from various local organisations have undertaken training run by the Pacific Institute. There is now a core group of local facilitators ready to take forward the programme with different groups and individuals from the East End. A Joint Steering Group has been established with representatives from the local partners. A Facilitators' Network has been set up to allow the on-going exchange of support and information. The training has been received positively, one local worker commented:

"I feel it has been a voyage of discovery... All aspects of my life have benefited from this programme- as a mum I am aware of how negative talk can affect my children, I pass on tools learned from the programme that will hopefully benefit them in later life. I find myself using the learning both for myself and with my colleagues in the workplace - for example within supervision and to motivate and enable staff to fulfil their own capabilities."

Work is now progressing on using the skills and knowledge learned to work with local people, particularly young people. Courses have already been undertaken with students studying at the local further education college and



with young people looking to move into employment.

Some participants were actively recruited by facilitators doing outreach work going to where young people gather and explaining the courses to them.

Some of the young people in training courses are from the most challenging client groups in the area. Course facilitators have adapted timings of courses in response to participant feedback and have also overcome issues like the fact that some young people didn't respond well to videos which didn't portray anybody with a Scottish accent by using role play to get information across.

An important part of the process is to develop an evaluation framework, which will track the impact of this work. Tracking people and the changes they undergo is challenging and we are exploring use of creative arts as well as more traditional questionnaires.

Early indicators are that worker attitudes within the partner agencies are more understanding of young people and therefore likely to be more receptive to listening to younger clients.

This is encouraging given our aim of promoting positive mental health and well-being amongst young people, changing thinking and approaches within organisations and our long-term ambition of improving community well-being

For further information on the project contact Janice Scouler at NHS Greater Glasgow janice.scouler@gghb.scot.nhs.uk

Beyond the School Gates

The "Community Well-being Project", within the Integrated Community Schools in East Renfrewshire is where nurturing a whole family approach within a school setting is enriching the lives of the families involved. By addressing the needs of not just children but parents too the project reaches beyond the school gates in both directions. Project Co-ordinator Hugh Graham describes the activities and benefits of this lively project.

Being a parent of very young children can be an isolating experience. When situations become difficult lack of confidence and self-doubt can set in. What lies ahead may seem like dark tunnels with no escape. There is a way forward whereby parents are supported to work together on topics of interest to them. This innovative project set up to support families within a school brings real meaning to the term Integrated Community Schools. The project provides opportunities to talk and listen to other parents, who are going through and have been through the same experiences of parenting and come through the other side.

"I used to beat myself up - I'm rubbish, I should not have had another child - I can't cope with the one I've got. But through contact with other mums - I'm normal." (Quote from a parent who attended "Time for Yourself" at Busby Primary School, May 2005)

What you need, as parents have told us, is a child free zone; a time for parents just to be with each other. We call it 'prime time', two hours in the morning or two hours in the afternoon, when siblings are at school or nursery. However, it is essential to provide a crèche for under 3's. Parents value these arrangements and have commented; "You would not get peace without it," "If kids are not catered for it's just a struggle," "Apart from this group, I'm never alone from my child."

One of our facilitators of these sessions commented "parents used laughter as an outlet for dealing with tensions - there have been many humour-filled retellings of difficulties faced. Groups respond with warmth and empathy. This benefits individuals struggling with the loss of a sense of self in the new role of being a parent."

Most parents recognise the loss of identity through being viewed as only someone's Mum or Dad. Previous relationships of parents to schools where they simply left or collected children from the school gates re-inforced this. East Renfrewshire's project acknowledges the full potential of parents by welcoming them into the school and providing activities in response to the needs they have expressed e.g. first aid classes were provided but parents felt they needed more confidence in dealing with young children's health and so a tailor made 'Baby First Aid' course was devised.

When parents are involved in the planning and development of programmes they have highlighted the importance of family events during school holidays. This is often a time when, they feel isolated and run out of ideas to occupy their children. In response to this we arrange lets in local schools, and together plan programmes to cater for all family members. But, most important of all, we establish a 'Parents' Lounge' with teas and coffees, an area just to chat.

Getting parents involved in the first place requires being very proactive being part of nursery induction days, chatting to people when the opportunity offers, helping to build a good relationship built on trust and acknowledging the parent's role.

Working with families of pre-school aged children gives an opportunity to engage and be inclusive. We address barriers which exclude people e.g. we provide an interpreter for a parent who is deaf. This meant they could be fully involved in our drama 'The Washday Circus'. That parent said "The ethos was very good, it was therapy for me. It helped me get involved. I was mixing with everyone within the hearing community." This also raised awareness with hearing parents at another school who have had 'Deaf Awareness Training' from 'Deaf Connections' as a result. This illustrates the kind of long-term impact we are having on the community.

We are working with the consultant provided through the National Programme to capture the lessons learned as we go along. We already have a collection of photographs pictures and quotations which provide compelling evidence of the effectiveness of our approach.

We learn from each other sometimes by simply getting to know each others' names, rather than being identified as somebody's mum or dad!

For further information please contact Hugh Graham, Coordinator,

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Thumbs up for 'Community well Being'