

Research Update: Guiding Lights

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The involvement of service users in both research and the evaluation and development of services is an important factor if they are to be relevant and meet user needs. The Mental Health Foundation's 'Strategies for Living Programme' <<http://www.mhf.org.uk/page.cfm?pagecode=PISL>> is just one initiative which encourages and supports users and survivors to conduct research and evaluation based on their own experiences. The programme currently supports 13 user-led research projects and a range of other initiatives. The Guiding Lights project, one of these initiatives, is an 18-month project funded with Section 64 money from the Department of Health. Launched in October 2002, the project aims to identify good practice in organisations and initiatives that adopt a user centred approach in their work. The project initially held two seminar events in December 2002, one in London and one in Manchester, which acted as a forum to gather together examples of best practice and look at different views and opinions about best practice in user centred mental health initiatives. Six key themes emerged from the conferences as being important in facilitating good practice: initiatives focusing on the whole life of the individual; well being; genuine partnership and collaborative working; valuing and acknowledging individual contributions; recognising and responding to individuality; and the need for adequate resources (both in finance and personnel). These themes are represented in the user centred evaluation tool (UCET) developed by the project. The UCET, available in paper copy and on the Internet, enables organisations to assess how user centred their initiatives are and identify areas where practice could be improved. Both the online and paper versions provide a facility for organisations to inform the Guiding Lights project of their own examples of good practice in user centred working. The project is also developing a directory of initiatives that will highlight 'good practice' elements in detail. Some background to the project can be found in the April 2003 edition of the Mental Health Foundation Update, 'User-centred initiatives: Guiding Lights – beyond users involvement' by Jim Green <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/page.cfm?pagecode=PBUP04#13>>. Further information about the user centred evaluation tool and directory can be found on the Guiding Lights section of the Mental Health Foundation website at <<http://www.mhf.org.uk/guiding-lights/>>.

For additional information from the project contact Carole Lovett, Project Development Worker email: clovett@mhf.org.uk.

Staffordshire Welfare to Work Joint Investment Plan (JIP)

This project from Staffordshire adopted a partnership approach to provide disabled people with training and support to enable them to carry out research into the barriers to employment they faced. The Staffordshire Welfare to Work Joint Investment Plan (JIP) brings together a range of different organisations, disabled people and their carers to work together to better meet the employment needs of disabled people. It is a three-year plan running from April 2001 to April 2004. Part of the JIP Action Plan 2001-2002 was to consult with disabled people to identify barriers to employment. The JIP Steering group believed that the research would be especially relevant if it was conducted by disabled people themselves. In order to achieve this, a partnership was established between the JIP Steering Group and the Centre for Health Policy and Practice, Staffordshire University <<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/health/centre1/whole.htm>> in February 2001 and the Consumers as Researchers course was developed. The course aimed to equip service user/researchers with the skills to be involved in all stages of the research process, from research design to the dissemination of results. Training was organised in a series of 10 sessions and included research study design, questionnaire design, interviewing techniques, compiling research results and dissemination. Those recruited to the programme would research barriers to employment for disabled people in the County and the findings would inform the work of the JIP Steering group. The first training session ran in May 2001, and was attended by 19 older and disabled people who were recruited through adverts in the local media. A second course ran in November, recruiting eight students, including people with physical disabilities, sensory impairments and mental health needs. During the second course the students further developed research proposals designed by the previous group. Focus groups were also held with those attending the training to discuss their own experiences of employment. As well as

providing useful information for the JIP Steering group, the focus group discussions were also used to develop a questionnaire drawn up by the previous group. The questionnaires were then distributed to 198 disabled people through a local organisation. Although only 43 questionnaires were returned (nine from people with mental health needs), the project was able to gather useful information about the difficulties facing disabled people in obtaining employment. Factors identified as facilitating access to employment included: equipment within the workplace; better physical access within the workplace; flexible working practices; supportive and flexible employers; and the need for better dissemination of information on employment issues. Negative attitudes of employers and colleagues were identified as barriers. Full details of the research findings can be viewed in the report 'Challenging the barriers: disabled people and employment' published by the Centre for Health Policy and Practice, Staffordshire University and Staffordshire County Council in August 2003. The report is available from Staffordshire County Council's Welfare to Work website at <<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/welcome.asp?id=1387>>. The Welfare to Work website was developed by the JIP Steering Group to improve the information available for disabled people on employment issues and provides a useful resource for disabled people and their carers, employers and service providers. Additional details of the Consumers as Researchers initiative can be found in the article 'Disability, participation and welfare to work in Staffordshire' by Michael Wood, published in the *Journal of Integrated Care*, 11(2), April 2003. For further details on the project contact Mike Wood, Planning and Partnerships Officer at Staffordshire Social Services.

Mental Health Information for Teenagers (MHIFT)

The next study is a qualitative evaluation of a mental health promotion initiative in Lewisham, the Mental Health Information for Teenagers (MHIFT) initiative. MHIFT focused on young people aged 12-19, who were disengaged from, or at risk of disengaging from mainstream education. The initiative used drama to raise awareness about mental health issues, whilst promoting the

emotional and social well-being of young people. The project was funded from September 2001 to September 2003 under a Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone <<http://www.lslhaz.org.uk>> research and development programme 'Bridging the Gap', which encourages the involvement of young people in the planning and development of services. The evaluation took place between September 2001 and 2002. In order to assess the effectiveness of the MHIFT initiative, the evaluation included an examination of how the project was implemented; how young people were involved in the project, how the project was experienced by the project worker and the young people participating; how the project evolved and how effective the activities were in reaching their aims. The evaluation included classroom-based observation; analysis of a logbook kept by the project worker; semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders; and group discussions with young people at the end of each sequence of workshops. The material was then indexed and interpreted, and main themes identified. There was evidence of a number of qualitative outcomes for the young people participating in the initiative including: improved social skills; increased self-esteem and confidence; and experience of developing positive relationships with other young people. However there was little evidence that the initiative had raised awareness of mental health issues, increased knowledge of support available in the area of mental health, or that it had challenged negative beliefs of mental illness. The project initially aimed to use drama to raise awareness and provide information about mental health issues. The experience of the first year suggested that to engage young people and encourage them to participate in sessions, activities had to be relevant to the young people involved. This resulted in less planned exercises with mental health issues as a theme. The results from the evaluation helped to refocus the project in its second year. Involving the project worker in the evaluation process also resulted in a greater degree of reflection and helped the project evolve and develop. In the second year, the project emphasis was on promoting the mental health of young people through positive social and emotional experience using drama, rather than to provide information about mental health. This highlights the importance of service evaluation and user

feedback into the aims and development of a project. The full report by Martin Kemp 'Acting out: a qualitative evaluation of a mental health promotion project for young people', published by Healthier Lewisham is now available. An article which summaries the findings of the evaluation, 'Acting out: a qualitative evaluation of mental health promotion for young people' by Martin Kemp was published in the Journal of Mental Health Promotion, 2(3), September 2003. For more details about this project contact Martin Kemp, research and development co-coordinator, Healthier Lewisham, Lewisham Primary Care Trust.

Minority Voices

Minority Voices is a Young Minds <<http://www.youngminds.org.uk>> project, which is being led by researchers Cathy Street and Zarrina Kurtz. The project aims to investigate access to and use of mental health services for young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The study will review initiatives aimed at providing access to mental health services for young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds; analyse barriers preventing access to mental health services and identify innovative practice. A key part of the research is to talk to young people themselves, look at their experiences and obtain their views of mental health services. In addition to gathering the views of young people, the project will also have a steering group of young people to assist in identifying issues for the project; advise on the language used in interviews and focus groups; help interpret the findings; and ensure any information

materials produced by the project are useful and accessible. This national project will focus on six sample areas in England and Wales. The project will use a qualitative methodology that aims to be flexible to encourage maximum participation. The first part of the research will be a data collection exercise to review activities and initiatives in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) aimed at providing access for young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Observational site visits will also be carried out to explore the specific services in the six in-depth study sites. To gather information from staff, parents and young people from minority ethnic communities about access to services, semi-structured interviews will be conducted within the six sample areas. Focus groups will also be used to gather the opinions of young people who have not used mental health services. The project is due for completion in October 2004. Its planned outputs include information for young people in the six sample areas and an information booklet highlighting innovative practice. Findings will be disseminated through a completed research report; executive summary; regional workshops and a national seminar. Outputs from the project will also be available on the Young Minds website. Further details about this and other research projects from Young Minds can be found on the research section of their website <<http://www.youngminds.org.uk/research/>>. The Minority Voices project is keen to hear from anyone who has information that may be of help to the project and can be contact at email: minorityvoices@youngminds.org.uk.

