AT WHAT AGE DOES STIGMA START?

Read more inside....
What age does stigma start?

On a visit to Hanley recently to the opticians to have my diabetic eye test done, I had to take my seven year old grandson with my wife and I. Prior to the appointment I was told to take a pair of sunglasses with me to wear after the test as my eyes would be dilated and sensitive to the light.

My wife left me there and went to the bank taking my young grandson with her. The test was done and I dutifully donned my sunglasses and went outside to await the return of my relatives. As they were walking down the street towards me my grandson noticed me outside the opticians and said in a forthright voice “Look Nanny, over there is Granddad and he is a psycho killer”.

We asked him where he had heard that and he answered “At school”. It appears to me that stigma starts in the playground and that’s where anti-stigma lessons should start.

Member of the Editorial Board.
The Stigma Nightmare Before Halloween.

Both “The Sun” headline on 7th October, which read “1200 Killed by Mental Patients”, and the mental health themed Halloween costumes which appeared in Asda and Tesco, seemed to show that stigma is still all too alive and well. However, responses on social media to these occurrences also showed that perhaps times are changing when it comes to what is acceptable in terms of the representation of those with mental illness.

In the instance of “The Sun” headline, many used Twitter to express their concern over couching the issue of mental health in such emotional rhetoric. Although the Sun’s managing editor, Stephen Abell, defended the article by saying that in its entirety it actually argued for “better communication between agencies” and portrayed those with mental illness as “victims” of the system, people and agencies such as Alastair Campbell, Labour’s health team and Paul Burstow MP strongly disagreed.

Also, those actively involved in mental health came out to condemn the headline. Sue Baker, director of the national anti-stigma campaign, Time to Change, Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, and Paul Jenkins, Chief Executive of Rethink Mental Illness, argued various points which showed the headline to be deeply stigmatising. For example, that people with mental illness are more dangerous to themselves than others, that they are ten times more likely to be the victim of a crime than the average person, that 95% of homicides are actually committed by people who have not been diagnosed with a mental illness, and that the number of murders committed by those with mental health problems has stayed at a fairly constant level since the 1990s. Indeed, in a statement to “The Independent” newspaper, the three said: “We can't afford for the call to improvements in mental health care to be led by a stigmatising debate focused on tragic but very rare incidents of violence.”
With regard to the Halloween outfits which appeared in Asda and Tesco, there was a similarly outraged response on Twitter, which ultimately led to the products being withdrawn from sale. The Asda costume featured someone covered in blood and brandishing a machete, and was branded a “mental patient fancy dress costume”. The Tesco outfit was a bright orange boiler suit called “Psycho Ward” and had the word “Committed” printed on the back. Both costumes seemed to draw on the reservoir of negative imagery which surrounds mental ill health, probably most evident in horror films. But after the huge and clearly disgusted Twitter response, both Asda and Tesco apologised for any offence they may have caused and, as has been said, withdrew the products from sale. In a nice twist to the tale, Mind and Time to Change are now working with Asda and Tesco to combat mental health stigma and avoid a repeat of such events.

So, what could clearly have been a stigma nightmare before Halloween turned out, in the end, to be quite positive. The huge response on Twitter to both incidents showed that many are no longer willing to put up with stereotypical or discriminatory representations of those with mental illness. Also, it perhaps showed that in this newly digital age, social media can be a powerful tool in combating stigma.

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We have heard that some people are struggling to claim benefits at the Job Centre. Has this been the case for you? We have been told that an individual got highly anxious when he received a form but when he went to the jobcentre he was told to go to the computer and no one was available to assist him. He advised that he was unable to use the computer as he didn’t know what to do and didn’t understand the questions that were being asked of him so he left. Is this familiar to you? Have you had a similar experience? If so please let us know. Details of how to contact us are on page 12.
Following the Annual General Meeting the NSUG new Board of Trustees are:

James Capewell (Chair). As a person who has suffered mental health issues for over 10 years and having been a service user I realise the need to support NSUG in order to benefit other mental health sufferers. I became a Trustee to use my financial expertise and personal experience to make sure NSUG continues to support members in the Stoke and Staffordshire area. I have been the treasurer of NSUG for the past 12 months and now look forward to leading it as Chair for the next 12 months.

Alison Trigg (Vice Chair) – I have worked in the private sector for 12 years, and also in the public sector for 12 years. During October 2011 I was approved as a Business Mentor for the Prince’s Trust assisting new companies in the area. I have also experienced my own mental health issues in 2011 which have taken me a couple of years to work through, so I fully understand the issues faced by mental health sufferers. I have a BA (HONS) in Business Management. Currently I am also completing a Human Resource course in Leadership / Management and Employment Law. I feel that this knowledge and experience will be useful to the group.

John Gibson (Treasurer) - I have been a member of NSUG since 1997 and served previously as a trustee 2002-2005. I am currently a service user of local mental health services. I was a founder member of Media Action Group for Mental Health (MAGMH) serving as Communications Lead and Deputy Chief Officer. I am passionate about tackling stigma and discrimination and working towards people being treated as
individuals who happen to also have a mental health problem. I have experience in chairing meetings, managing projects and fundraising.

**Sean Whalley (returning Honorary Secretary).** I have been on the Board of Trustees for the last 10 years and I just want to change things and fight for people with mental ill health. I have been involved with NSUG for nearly 20 years, but I got more involved with NSUG in the past 11 years. I've been an experienced campaigner for the last 30 years, and I'm involved with other campaign groups. I suffer myself with Mental Health problems.

**Tasha Chinn** - I have experience of having bi-polar for the last 19 years and of using local mental health services. Locally I have helped to run the Bi-Polar Self Help Group for around the last 12 years and as such have experience of facilitating meetings, arranging speakers and fundraising. I have experience of successfully applying to local commissioners to fund bi-polar education courses. I am also a member of Rethink and keep up to date with all national developments in mental heath. I have previously been a User Rep for NSUG and have been a member for the last 15 years.

**David Conlon** - I want to help NSUG to make the transition to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. I have previous experience of being a trustee of NSUG and also other charities.
NSUG – Annual General Meeting

The day dawned clear on Thursday 24 October 2013 – time for the important event itself – NSUG’s AGM. As I entered the Rose Price room at the Dudson Centre, I was struck by how well attended the meeting was. Lots of chatting people stood around, enjoying the delicious buffet lunch.

However, it was soon time for the business end of the AGM. Phil Leese was in the Chair and he and the staff presented the accounts and reports for the year. The big issue this year was the proposed change in status for NSUG – from a charity to a “Charitable Incorporated Organisation” or CIO. Lorien (the Director) explained clearly why this was a necessary step forward and highly recommended by the Board of NSUG. The switchover to CIO should not mean any major changes to NSUG, but has one clear benefit – it should be easier to recruit trustees to the NSUG Board, as they would no longer bear the risk of being personally liable should NSUG be wound up.

People listened attentively to Lorien’s presentation and there were several questions. Finally, the vote! This went in favour of NSUG switching over to a CIO, which should now happen from April 2014.

All the voters were entered into a prize draw for a Potteries Centre voucher worth £25 and the lucky winner was an NSUG member and volunteer.

The Chair, Phil Leese, announced that he would be stepping down as Chair due to health reasons. We will miss you, Phil, as you have worked hard for NSUG over many years.
A big thank you to you from all our members! It was good, though, to hear that Phil would still be keeping in touch and will remain a NSUG User Rep.

It was also announced that there would be three new Board members – John Gibson (formerly of Media Action Group), Alison Trigg and myself. We are all members of NSUG and have personal experience of mental health issues.

One thing that stood out for me was that we should be very proud of the fact that we are still here doing important work and making a difference in a harsh time for charities in general. Long may it continue! Looking forward to seeing you at the next AGM in 2014!

Tasha Chinn, new Board member.

NSUG Welcomes back Emma Ford......

Emma will be returning to visit outreach locations in Stoke from January 2014. So if you live and receive services in Stoke say hello to Emma when you see her & let her know what you think about the services that you are being offered. We'll also need your help to bring her up to date with what she has missed whilst away on maternity leave.
Rochdale Borough User Forum

Following a visit to Stoke by Rochdale Borough User Forum (RBUF) in August, our Director paid them a return visit to look at the similarities and differences. RBUF is an organisation that is very similar to NSUG and works in a similar kind of area with an industrial town that has seen a huge loss of jobs and industry, and a rural area that sees little help or support.

I attended their Open Forum which was attended by a number of mental health service users, carers and mental health professionals. I was taken aback at how similar the issues are that service users in that area are facing. Many of the issues that people raised were about systems and processes that just get in the way and don’t help at all. They were very concerned to see a change in a service which would lead to a change in support staff for many and there were lots of issues raised about continuity of care and how people had a positive relationship with their current workers and did not want this to change.

At the meeting there was a presentation from their local Healthwatch and they were given an update about the Clinical Commissioning Group, all of which are familiar to NSUG locally so it was interesting to see the similarities in a different area.

We were ahead of them in a couple of areas though and their Acute Care Forum was looking to Stoke as an area of good practice in the way that the Harplands Hospital is laid out. Currently the Acute Hospital in Rochdale still has mixed wards and there is no separate service for people who are detoxing from alcohol and drugs. I was quick to point out that although locally it may be better than what they currently have service users continue to tell us there is room for improvement on the wards and that it will not resolve all of the issues that they have identified. We particularly advised them to focus on improving discharge into the community and developing relationships before people are discharged. Also of encouraging independence on the ward so people don’t lose skills and confidence in managing their own care needs. We advised that although single sex wards are preferable, there does still need to be focus and attention on the most vulnerable service users and making sure that they are not put in an environment that could make them feel worse.
Their members are also being greatly affected by the changes to benefits and the Capability Assessments and like us they are working in partnership with their local CAB to try to ensure that people have the information that they need.

One significant difference is that RBUF have peer led groups that their members have set up, developed and run to help each other. RBUF provide the room and their members organise a number of activity groups, such as a music group and a recovery group. Some areas are still being tried and tested and they are looking at how they can improve the support for the leaders of the groups to make sure that it is a positive experience for everyone.

We are hoping that the visits may become a more regular event so that we can work together on areas of similarity to see if we can support each other and try to make more of an impact with a bigger voice.

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Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is now being claimed in this area. We are very interested to hear from anyone who has made a claim and had a PIP assessment carried out. We’d like to know how the process was for you and what you thought of the assessment. It will still be a while before existing DLA claimants have to make a claim for PIP. NSUG is already concerned that negative experiences of claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA) may put people off applying for PIP and in turn make them lose out on benefit that they are rightly entitled to.
Shaun Stanley, Volunteer Co-ordinator....

New Year - New Plans?

This time of year provides a great opportunity to reflect on what we have accomplished and think about what it is we would like to achieve over the coming year. This is true for you and me as individuals and for NSUG as an organisation. At NSUG we are making plans for our membership to better reflect the community we serve. To this end over the coming year we will be specifically targeting the recruitment of younger members (16-29) and members from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

It is also an opportunity for you to consider your commitment to NSUG. It’s a time to stop doing some things and to start doing others or to do some things differently. At NSUG we would like to encourage you to get involved in our work to improve mental health services for people like you and me. You can be a great asset by being aware of what’s going on at the services you attend and reporting back to our Staff or User Rep volunteers.

You can support the work of NSUG informally as an active member having your say. Complete one of our ‘Have your say’ leaflets - they can be found at any Resource Centre or write, email or telephone our office with your views. If you are feeling really brave, try attending one of our Members Forums scheduled periodically.

We are always looking for people like you to train as User Reps for your area. You would need to have a volunteer interview and be trained. You would then be supported by a named member of staff and established volunteers. If you need help in deciding what to do you can speak to me Shaun Stanley, the Volunteer Co-ordinator, for an informal chat and to discuss your options.

NSUG Office Tel: 01782 683043
Email: volunteer.coordinator@nsug.co.uk
North Staffs Users Group

We are
- A democratic organisation
- Independent
- A registered charity
- Open to past and present users of mental health services

We stand for
- Active participation by users in improving local mental health services
- Working in Partnership with Health and Social Care to bring about change

We offer
- Free membership
- Information
- Support
- Training
- Opportunities to participate and volunteer
- Mutual respect and Equality of Opportunity

NSUG, FREEPOST ST 1947, Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 5BR
Phone: 01782 683043 and Email: mainoffice@nsug.co.uk

Thanks to all contributors

This issue has been devised, produced, printed and published by members of the NSUG. Thanks to all contributors and members of the Editorial Board. The views expressed by contributors to this issue of the Voice do not necessarily reflect the policies of NSUG or the views of the current Board of Trustees. We have gone to considerable lengths to check the accuracy of contributions and, as far as we know, details are correct at the time of going to press.

Whilst every effort has been made to check the content of websites mentioned in this publication, no responsibility can or will be taken by North Staffs Users Group for their content or that of any external links from them.

All photographs (unless otherwise stated) taken by Frank Squire.

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We held a Members Forum on the 6th November at the Dudson Centre and Sarah Honeysett and Chris Hughes from CAB came along to talk about Universal Credit, Personal Independent Payments and also Employment Support Allowance - members found this very interesting. Chris talked about a project that they want to do with service users around ESA. They will come along and talk to members about how to be better prepared for their ATOS assessment meetings. If any members are interested in finding out more about this project then either come along to the Members Forum at the Sutherland Centre in January details below or contact Hilda on telephone no. 01782 441631.

We have held a number of Members Forums at the Resource Centres over the past 12 months at Sutherland, Greenfield and Lymebrook and had a number of speakers attending to talk about various subjects and to give information to members. We are in the process of arranging dates and speakers for next year and will let you know these early next year. The first one will be at the Sutherland centre details below:-

Sutherland Centre Members Forum
Wednesday 15th January 2014 12-1.30pm
CAB will be coming along to talk about
ATOS ESA assessment interviews.
Some useful information from North Staffs Advice partnership Benefits Newsletter November 2013.......

Universal Credit for people making new claims for Jobseekers allowance will not happen in our area yet but the government should be announcing dates soon of when this is likely to happen.

People in this area making new claims who would previously have received DLA will now have to claim PIP and Capita will be carrying out assessments for people who apply for this.

Capita and ATOS have produced videos for claimants to let them know what will happen at an assessment. To view the videos go to:

http://www.capita-pip.co.uk/audiovisual.aspx
and
http://www.atoshealthcare.com/pip/

Note takers for ESA Work Capability Assessments

The bureau has trained volunteers from Keele University Law Dept to act as impartial note takers for clients attending Work Capability Assessments. Bureau clients have feedback that this is very helpful. If you know of any service users who would benefit from this project please contact:-

michelle.hatton@sncab.org.uk
Tel: 01782 408600
Resource Centres

NSUG have been attending meetings where weekend opening at Resource centres was discussed along with other service changes as a result of Phase 1 & 2. It was decided at the meetings to evaluate the weekend working to see how many people had been accessing the service since the beginning of the year. When we looked at the information, it showed that only small numbers were accessing this service. It was felt that staff could be utilised better working from a central base and so would be able to support people more effectively in the community, who needed support at weekends.

NSUG agreed on the understanding that staff would be used for this purpose and up until very recently we had not received any concerns from service users on the changes. However we are now starting to receive complaints about the lack of support for people at weekends when they need it since the changes. If you have experienced any problems with accessing support at weekends since the Resource Centres closed at weekends please let us know, as we will now be alerting Combined and Commissioners about these complaints.

Harplands

The Cafe at Harplands has been closed for refreshments for some time now but remains a quiet space for people to sit with their visitors and for people to spend some time off the wards. NSUG have met with managers at Combined to discuss getting the cafe up and running as soon as possible serving refreshments again. At the moment they are looking for someone to run the cafe and we will be meeting with them again soon to hear progress on this.
Contd/.....

We are still having complaints from people about the lack of activities on the wards and people are bored. There are 3 vacancies at the moment for activity workers as 2 members of staff have left and the other 1 is on a secondment for 12 months. We have raised this with Combined Healthcare on numerous occasions and although for a time things did improve, now with the 3 vacancies the situation is worse. We have met with managers and at the moment these jobs are being offered internally and hopefully we will have some better news soon.

Do you have an idea for an article for The Voice?

Want to share your views with other members?

Do you have a mental health related issue that you feel passionate about?

If so, contact us on 01782 683043

Email: mainoffice@nsug.co.uk
Some of you may be aware that the future of the local Mental Health Trust that provides services at the Harplands and the Resource Centres is currently being reviewed. What is known is that currently the Trust is not suitable to become a standalone Foundation Trust (something that the Government has indicated all NHS trusts must become to achieve more independence) and needs to consider other options for a secure future. The Trust Board (the group of senior managers responsible for the mental health services provided across North Staffordshire) are also concerned that, with the changes in all NHS services locally, the focus on mental health might be lost if provided by such a small organisation.

Consequently they are now undertaking a process with the NHS Trust Development Authority to consider the best options. The Trust Board is currently working through a business case to assess all the options and provide evidence for these, which will need to be reviewed and approved in the new year. Previously the Trust Board has said it was considering being acquired (taken over) by an existing NHS Foundation Trust (preferably one which provides mental health services) but they need to follow a specific process to reassess this along with other options in the new financial and political climate, and work with local and national health partners to find the best solution.

So what does this mean for us as service users? In the short to medium term probably not much, as it will remain business as usual for services. We are keen that any anxiety that staff may have about the future and their jobs is not passed onto people in their services and that the care and quality of services remains paramount to all staff.
In the long term, the future of NHS service provision at the Trust will in part depend on commissioners and what services they want to see developed or no longer wish to support, and commissioners will be undertaking an important review of local services.

Although uncertainty is unsettling, this is an opportunity for the Trust to work with local and national health partners to understand how best to improve services, what service users need and protect the long-term future of services for local people.

NSUG has been attending some meetings in relation to this process to ensure that service user satisfaction and experience remains a critical part of the Trust’s future and that this is considered in any decisions. We remain committed to taking what opportunities we can to represent local service users and make your voices and concerns heard. We will keep you up-to-date with what is happening and through us you are welcome to raise any questions or concerns to take forward as part of this process.

IMPORTANT

The CAB are struggling to get note takers for Work Capability Assessments – please give it a go or else it will finish

See page 14 for further details
North Staffordshire Advice Partnership

Smarter Advice : Stronger Communities

Benefits Newsletter November 2013

Personal Independence Payments
Delay in the start date for the roll-out of Personal Independence Payment

There has been a delay in the roll-out of PIP for claimants who currently receive DLA who live in Scotland, the North and South of England and Northern Ireland.

However, DLA claimants in Wales, the Midlands (including people with ST postcodes in Cheshire) and parts of East Anglia will have to claim PIP if :-

- they have a change in care or mobility needs on or after 28 October;
- their fixed term award is due to expire on or after 17 March 2014 (those who have a claim which expires before that date can continue to claim DLA);
- they turn 16 years old on or after 7 October 2013; or
- they chose to claim PIP instead of their DLA.

DLA claimants in other parts of the UK will continue to claim DLA in the above circumstances. This delay does not affect new PIP claimants.
Useful links:


**Capita and Atos videos for PIP claimants**

Capita Health and Wellbeing and Atos Healthcare have produced videos for claimants to let them know what will happen at an assessment. To view the videos go on to [http://www.capita-pip.co.uk/audiovisual.aspx](http://www.capita-pip.co.uk/audiovisual.aspx) and [http://www.atoshealthcare.com/pip/](http://www.atoshealthcare.com/pip/)

**Universal Credit**

**The Public Accounts Committee Report**

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee published a report on the progress of Universal Credit, which condemns the management of the Universal Credit programme and suggests that at least £140m spent on IT systems may be written-off.

**Universal Credit roll-out**

Despite this report, the DWP is continuing with the roll-out of Universal Credit for jobseekers making a new claim for JSA/HB, who are single, childless, have no housing costs (i.e. mortgage interest payments) and have a bank account. The Universal Credit will only be introduced in the following areas between Oct 2013 and Apr 2014:

- **28/10/13**, Hammersmith Jobcentre
- **25/11/13**, Inverness and Rugby Jobcentres
- **24/02/14**, Bath and Harrogate Jobcentres
- **24/03/14**, Shotton Jobcentre (Flintshire)
Ian Duncan Smith has told Parliament that he will be announcing the full roll-out programme in the next couple of weeks.

**Bedroom Tax and Local Housing Allowance**

**Bedroom Tax and Local Housing Allowance rules for disabled children**

The DWP has decided not to challenge the *Gorry* Court of Appeal decision and has amended the Housing Benefit (HB) size criteria regulations (relating to bedroom tax and local housing allowance) relating to disabled children who are unable to share a bedroom. There will be no reduction in HB entitlement in respect of a ‘spare room’ which occurs because a disabled child, who is receiving the middle or high rate care component of DLA, is unable to share a room with another child. However this is not an automatic entitlement, the local authority still needs to be satisfied that the child is unable to share. The Social Security Advisory Committee had made other recommendations which have not been included in the legislation.

**Toolkit for challenging bedroom tax decisions**

Housing Systems has produced a Toolkit for challenging Bedroom Tax decisions. For details of how to get a copy see

http://www.housingsystems.co.uk/BedroomTaxToolKit.aspx.

Or contact the office

**Jobseeker’s Allowance**

**Claimant Commitment for Jobseekers**

The DWP has announced that the claimant commitment is to be introduced for jobseekers from 14th October 2013 starting in Inverness and Rugby and extended to include 100 Jobcentres a month; in North Staffs this will be between Jan and Apr 2014.
Mandatory Reconsiderations Reminder
The DWP has introduced a new appeals process for all DWP benefit decisions from 28th October 2013. If a claimant wishes to appeal s/he has to first request a reconsideration of the decision either by letter or telephone within one month of the date of the decision; there is no form. An appeal cannot be considered by a Tribunal until the mandatory reconsideration has been carried out. If the reconsideration is unsuccessful the claimant must appeal directly to the HM Courts and Tribunals Service using form SSCS1.

STOP PRESS...........STOP PRESS...........STOP PRESS..............

Work Capability Assessment Judicial Review Upheld

On the 4 December, the Court of Appeal rejected the Governments appeal against a landmark ruling by the Upper Tribunal that the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) discriminates against people with mental health problems.

The claimants’ solicitor said:
‘It is regrettable that the Government chose to appeal against the tribunal’s finding that people with mental health problems are disadvantaged by the current system, rather than take the steps necessary to improve it’

For more information on this story please visit Rethink’s website
Just Text Giving

You can now donate to North Staffs Users Group by text!

Every penny you donate comes to us.

How it works
North Staffs Users Group have set up the code NSUG11, which means the charity receives your donation when you text this unique code.

How much to donate
The service allows you to donate between £1, £5 or £10.
You can make a text donation as regularly as you like.

What it costs
The charity gets every penny and there are no running costs.

How to donate
To donate enter this message on your mobile phone:
NSUG11 (followed by the amount you would like to donate)
and send to 70070

For example:
NSUG11 £5 sent to 70070 will donate £5
Following your donation, you will then receive a text message receipt, and the chance to add Gift Aid. If you complete the Gift Aid declaration, North Staffs Users Group will receive an extra 25p for every £1 you donate. If you haven't added Gift Aid straight away, Just Text Giving will send you a reminder text 24 hours later.

Your donation will help improve local mental health services
Benefit Sanctions

There has been a lot of publicity about the number of people whose benefits have been stopped for failing to do something the Jobcentre say is a condition of them receiving that benefit. Between November 2012 and June 2013, 580,000 ‘sanctions’ were placed on the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claims of about 440,000 people. There were also 11,000 ‘adverse sanctions’ on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claims.

If you are claiming JSA, or ESA ‘work-related activity’ group, it is very important to make sure you understand your rights and responsibilities. Common reasons for JSA sanctions included failing to attend Jobcentre advisory interviews, refusal to take part in training or Work Programme activities or failing to ‘actively seek work’, but people are often being sanctioned when they have made genuine mistakes or when illness or family emergency has stopped them getting to an appointment or applying for the right number of jobs.

Try not to refuse outright to do something your adviser says you must do. For example:

- if you are told to upload a CV and look for work using ‘Universal Jobmatch’ but you can’t use a computer confidently, don’t say you won’t do that. Instead, ask for support or training and make sure that what is offered is recorded.

- if you can’t attend a meeting because something important clashes with it – like a medical appointment you cannot rearrange – let the Jobcentre know beforehand and agree a new time for the Jobcentre appointment.

- if you cannot do something due to a health problem, can you suggest an alternative that would be just as helpful to you finding work but takes account of your condition, or are their any special arrangements or adaptations you would need from the Jobcentre.

- keep a copy of your Jobseekers Agreement or any work preparation plan you make for your ESA claim, and make sure it includes any special agreements. Don’t trust verbal agreements – you may see a different adviser next time.
if you are sanctioned and the decision seems unfair, make sure you get a proper letter explaining why your benefit has been stopped and then ask for the decision to be reconsidered. You then have the right to appeal if the reconsideration does not remove the sanction.

remember that you have only one calendar month to ask for a reconsideration or to appeal, so if you need advice about a sanction contact the CAB or other advice agency as quickly as you can. Do not miss your deadline!

Do not be put off challenging a sanction by the Jobcentre saying it will take a long time, or because you have managed to cope during a short sanction. If you are sanctioned again for a similar issue it may be for many more weeks if it counts as a second or third ‘offence’.

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**DOG BREEDS WORD SEARCH PUZZLE**

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F W D T B A S S E T H O U N D E E
D V Z N I V A N J D H S P A M G
N Y F V A Z F B L O O D H O U N D
E F W B I J X P T U W H I P P E T
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F A R V A E E C D J S Q C H C A H
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N T H N M K E E S H O N D E H A D
D B S U Q A U F U X A C L K I E A
L E E O P X S A D R A G U T P R C
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N N T R S U K M I E F M F W E N S
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**BREEDS LIST**

- BASENJI
- BASSET HOUND
- BEAGLE
- BLOODHOUND
- BULL TERRIER
- CHIHUAHUA
- DACHSHUND
- DALMATIAN
- GREAT DANE
- IRISH SETTER
- KEESHOND
- NAFFIC
- NEWFOUNDLAND
- OTTERHOUND
- Pekingese
- POMERANIAN
- SAINT BERNARD
- SCHIPPERKE
- WEIMARANER
- WHIPPET

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Please don't throw this edition of the Voice away.

Pass it on to someone and/or RECYCLE IT
The NSUG produce a number of publications which are listed below. The leaflets are free of charge to our members but a small charge is made to non-members and organisations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaflet</th>
<th>Please tick to select</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression : Strategies for Survival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression: Local sources of help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression : What it means to you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care co-ordination: What it is and how it works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care co-ordination: What to expect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you feeling low? Anxious? Depressed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Disorder: Possibilities for treatment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Disorder : What the diagnosis means</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar Disorder 1—Experience &amp; Symptoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Admissions: Rights and Procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment: Information &amp; Consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge: Mental Health Tribunals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sections and Sectioning under the Mental Health Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing your Consultant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you would like to order any of the above leaflets write your name and address in the box below and return to: North Staffs Users Group, FREEPOST ST 1947, The Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, S-o-T, ST1 5BR or telephone 01782 683043 or email mainoffice@nsug.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1041846  www.nsug.co.uk
The Voice At The Back...

Have you checked out our website www.nsug.co.uk.
For those who struggle with reading, the website now has a facility to speak the text including reading The Voice to you. Click on the BrowseAloud icon to discover more.
As well as telling you more about our work and volunteering opportunities we offer, there are links to other websites that you may find useful.

Helplines

Please check with your network provider the cost of making a call from your mobile.

Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline—0808 800 2234
(Calls are free)
Mon—Fri 19:00—02:00, Sat—Sun 14:00—02:00
www.staffordshirehelpline.co.uk

Samaritans—08457 90 90 90 (local rate call)
24 hours—listening service
www.samaritans.co.uk

Hearing Voices Network—0845 122 8642 (local rate call)
Mon—Fri 10:00 to 16:00
www.hearing-voices.org

Anxiety Alliance—01926 851608 (national rate call)
Daily 10:00 to 16:00
www.anxietyalliance.org.uk