North Staffs Users Group

the Voice

Issue 70  June 2014

for users, refusers, survivors & allies of mental health services in North Staffordshire

NSUG Volunteers enjoy a sunny day out at Chester / Chester Zoo ...........

WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
# INDEX

Page 3  NSUG Charitable Incorporated Organisation  
Page 5  Trustees Wanted  
Page 6  Jobcentre Plus Survey Results  
Page 7  Care Plans  
Page 8  User Rep Comment  
Page 9  Volunteer Thank You Event  
Page 10  Find out about NSUG  
Page 11  Shaun Stanley Updates  
Page 12  Hilda Johnson Updates  
Page 14  Emma Ford Updates  
Page 15  Anti-Stigma Workshop  
Page 16  Carole Stone Updates  
Page 17  A reader Writes  
Page 18  The Year 4 Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment  
Page 20  Community Scrapshack  
Page 21  Looking at the future of Mental Health Services in North Staffs  
Page 22  North Staffs Mental Health Inquiry Launch 2014  
Page 24  North Staffs Users Group  
Page 25  A Message from Stoke on Trent CAB  
Page 26  Reuse, Reduce, Recycle  
Page 27  Thank you  
Page 28  The Voice at the Back
Following approval from NSUG members at the last Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October, the Board of Trustees made an application to the Charities Commission to change the organisation’s legal status to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This was granted and approved on the 1st April 2014.

This is a new legal identity which has only recently become available to charities but effectively means that we are now equivalent to a limited company. This was viewed as important by the Board as it is unusual for organisations with our level of income and staffing not to have been incorporated, as this offers some protection for the Trustees. In our old legal form the Trustees were all personally liable for any issues regarding the running of the organisation even if they acted in good faith and this made attracting trustees difficult, as if they owned their own home or had an income or savings this potentially could have been at risk if things had gone wrong in any way.

The Charitable Incorporated Organisation gives some protection from this and now trustees are only personally liable if they can be shown to have been negligent or acted wrongfully in some way.

The important thing for members is that changing our legal status in no way changes what we do! Our charitable purpose remains:

“*To promote the relief of people with mental health needs resident or receiving care in North Staffordshire and the surrounding area through the involvement of service users in order to improve the conditions of life for people with mental health conditions*.”
A bit of a mouthful we know but that is legal speak for you. In essence, experts by experience are critical to improving the lives of future service users and should be viewed as such!

By learning from direct experience, services can be adapted and developed to improve in a way that is helpful and more beneficial to those that need that support.

The majority of rules that we have to comply with to be a CIO are largely the same as those we were already working to. We used the standard model constitution as recommended by the Charities Commission to ensure that we are compliant with Charity laws.

We are obliged to hold a General Meeting of Members every year where we report to members on our finances and activities. The members can require a further meeting to be called if the Board of Trustees receive a request to do so from at least 10% of the members of the organisation, or 5% if it is more than 12 months since the last AGM.

There will be a couple of changes that you will notice at the AGM that comply with good practice as recommended by the Charities Commission. This year one third of the Board of Trustees will resign by rotation (it used to be all of them). Any vacancies will be filled by the decision of the members at the AGM with any vacancies remaining unfilled available for the Board of Trustees to fill if they find suitable candidates. Anyone resigning from the Board will be eligible for re-election so long as they remain a member of NSUG. The other change is that once the Board has been elected they will decide who shall be elected as Chair and Vice Chair and these will be the only officer positions on the Board. This is to ensure that all Trustees share responsibility fully for all of their duties as board members.

Most importantly what hasn’t changed is that every member of NSUG is entitled to vote to elect board members and take any decision where a vote of its members is required.
So, in October when the next AGM will be held, please make sure you use your vote to help shape NSUG and its future.

If you are interested you can check out our profile on the Charity Commission website by entering our new registration number 1156479, or search the site for North Staffs Users Group. All future accounts and reports will be entered online to this site. On request we can also provide a copy of our new constitution, the rules that the Board of Trustees has to follow.

- Make sure the organisation complies with the relevant laws.
- Protect the aims of the Organisation.
- Monitor the money and how it is spent.
- Monitor the work of the Director
- Shape the direction of the organisation

North Staffs Users Group
01782 683043

NSUG TRUSTEES WANTED

Each year some NSUG Board Members are required to resign and NSUG members are asked to nominate themselves at the AGM. All NSUG Board Members are Members of NSUG so all have had personal experience of mental ill health.

If you would like to find out about being a Trustee please contact Lorien on 01782 683043

www.nsug.co.uk
Along with the January edition of The Voice, we included a questionnaire asking about your perceptions of Jobcentre Plus. Thank you to everyone who responded. The results were collated by South Staffs Network for Mental Health, and a full report has been presented to Jobcentre Plus in Staffordshire. Below is a table showing the statements that were contained in the questionnaire. The statements are in order, with those that most people disagreed with first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree to some extent</th>
<th>Agree to some extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable to object to something I did not agree with</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was put at ease within the first 5 minutes of entering the Jobcentre Plus entrance</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend the services offered by Jobcentre Plus to friends and family in the same situation</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt my advisor had a clear understanding of my mental health issues and how they affect my life</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the Jobcentre Plus reception and waiting area welcoming</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt my advisor had listened to me</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt the advisor offered suitable opportunities for training/education to fit around my needs, not the needs of Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel discriminated against by my advisor/Jobcentre Plus due to my mental health issues</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I was kept up to date by Jobcentre Plus and knew what was happening at every stage</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt my advisor spoke without using confusing language and jargon</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My experience of care plans for mental health recovery and well being. How a care plan works and how they can be improved...........

My care plan is a written document (table type layout) of five pages long. Mine was initially created by me (the user) and my Care Co-ordinator (Community Psychiatric Nurse) to reflect my current mental health needs. The general content of my care plan identifies my mental health needs and what actions need to be taken. When my plan was completed I read through this with my Care Co-ordinator and added a few details to make the plan complete. I was fully involved in the development of my plan and I agreed that I understood what was written and I also agreed that the information contained in the care plan will be shared with the people who are working with me including my carers. Once I was happy with my care plan I signed and dated the plan along with my Care Co-ordinator and a copy was given to me and my Care Co-ordinator and a copy kept in my notes.

To summarise the good points of a care plan is that it details everything I need to know about my mental health and this is important to keeping me well during my recovery. Also my family and friends can read through this so it is important to keep my care plan in a safe place so that other people can access it when needed. Also it can be a quick reference of who to call for some extra help.

However a bad point of a care plan is I found it overwhelming at times. The overall size of the plan is very long and sometimes too much to take in when I was unwell.

As a user a care plan can help you to understand what to do both when you become unwell and what to do to keep yourself well. The care plan is very useful and gives you a structured plan to read through when things become unclear. Sometimes I would keep
reading through my care plan again and again until it stuck. Once a care plan is completed the next review of your plan will take place at six month intervals along with your Care-Co-ordinator. A bad point about the reviewing of my care plan was sometimes this would not happen every six months and when it was, it was quite brief and mostly no change to the original copy of my plan. Also my Care Co-ordinator would not be present to go over my plan with me.

My plan has remained the same with only a few alterations during my recovery. I think as you become better your plan could be improved to show this. A lot of effort went into creating my care plan, however more effort should have gone into reviewing my progress during recovery. An updated care plan showing how far I have come would be very helpful to look at.

NSUG Member

What Do You Think of Your Care Plan? Please let us know ......

Member finds Hillcrest very helpful....

I find Hillcrest very helpful if I get my thoughts. I find going down there and watching t.v. and talking to staff distracts my thoughts. The staff are excellent and very caring. It is good in the day. The food is excellent and I meet up with people I haven't seen for a while. I know that I've got cover 24 hours if I'm not very well, and I feel like I should give something back by volunteering.

Jim Davis, User Rep
VOLUNTEERS THANK YOU
EVENT TO
CHESTER 2014

Friday 6 June 2014

Staff and volunteers alike were thankful for the sunny weather, which lasted for the whole trip.

The coach was comfortable and the driver friendly and helpful.

The majority of people went to the City to visit what took their fancy – be it the very different shops to what we have in Stoke-on-Trent, historic monuments or the many cafes.

From the famous ‘Rows’ shopping area, to the world famous Clock Tower, St John’s Church (established 11th Century) and the Roman ruins, there was something for everyone.

The rest went to Chester Zoo, and enjoyed seeing all the animals, a special mention being given to the monkeys!

Some volunteers went on their own, and some took a friend along. But the volunteers who didn’t take a friend had their friends from the NSUG, so no-one was alone, unless they preferred it that way.

All in all, a great day out was had by all, and I’m sure the volunteers would like to say thank you back to NSUG for all the planning and thought that went into the event.

p.t.o.
As for the next one, there are many different opinions from the volunteers’ questionnaire completed on the coach on the way back. Below is a list of the suggestions you may like to think about for next time:

Bridgemere, Blackrock Zoo, Llangollen, Derbyshire, Ilam, Dunham Massey, Knutsford, Stafford Castle and City, Chester again, Ironbridge & Blitz Hill (the old village where you step back in time), Blackpool, Rhyl, York (National Railway Museum), Southport, Coventry, Liverpool, Shrewsbury, Alton Towers, Stratford-upon-Avon.

*Article by Wendy Hanson, NSUG Volunteer*

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**Do you want to find out more about NSUG?**

**Who we are? and what we do?**

**Why not join our Introduction to NSUG event at the Dudson Centre on 10th July.**

It’s a free event that starts at 1.30pm. You can find out why we still need a North Staffs Users Group, how you can have your say and how we can work together to improve mental health services for people like you and me.
Shaun Stanley,
Volunteer Coordinator

By the time you read this article, you will have missed the Volunteers ‘Thank You’ event for summer 2014. This year 16 of our volunteers visited Chester and Chester Zoo. It is our way of saying, “we appreciate all your time and commitment this year” “well done”. If you are thinking “why can’t I get more involved in the work of NSUG?” that’s a very good question. I am Shaun, the Volunteer Co-ordinator and I can help you to think through your options.

You could start by having your say. Listening to your compliments, comments and concerns is what NSUG is all about. Speak to one of our User Reps, complete one of our ‘Have Your Say’ leaflets or contact our office. You could try being our eyes and ears. You can be a great asset to NSUG by being aware of what’s going on at the services you attend and reporting back to our Staff or User Rep volunteers.

Our User Reps attend meetings at services and we offer Members Forums’ at regular intervals across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire for you to attend. Attend an event—from time-to-time NSUG stage one off events, information or training sessions and hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM). Why not come along and enjoy and mix with others, making new friends.

Help out with mailing the Voice—many hands are needed to help prepare this magazine for mailing, there is a lot of photocopying, collating, folding and envelope filling to do, or why not write for the Voice, yes you always wanted to be in print, now is your chance. It could be your own story or something that our readers need to know about.

Contact Shaun to arrange to meet up for a chat on Tel 01782 683043 and we will see you on the trip next year.
Hilda Johnson
Service Provider Development Worker, Updates You...

Harplands Hospital

NSUG have been working hard for some time now to get the Café reopened at Harplands and have been meeting with Managers from Combined Healthcare to discuss this. We are pleased to say that Carillion have taken over the running of the Café and it was opened on Monday 2\textsuperscript{nd} June. It is open from 8am until 7pm Monday to Friday. This will initially be for 6 months and if successful, Carillion will open it at weekends as well. The Café is for patients, visitors and staff to use and there is a variety of sandwiches, snacks and drinks available, so if you are visiting Harplands give the Café a try.

There have been a few problems with the heating at Harplands recently and it has been extremely hot at times and other times cold. Carillion have started work on replacing the heating and will be doing this in stages to minimise disruption as much as possible. They have started the work on wards 1 & 3 first and this work is expected to take up to 3 weeks. NSUG have been assured that extra blankets will be available on the wards for any patients who need them.

NSUG were told in February that all out-patients who come to Harplands to use the Gym will have to access services out in the Community now but those patients would be given support to access those services. All out-patients have now stopped going to the Gym at Harplands. Some service users told us that they hadn’t been given any support to find
something out in the community, NSUG have spoken to a Manager for this service to make sure that people are given support. We are pleased to say that they are now receiving support and are happy now going to a gym out in the Community. The support from staff will only be short term until people are accessing services in the community.

*If you used to access the Gym at Harplands please let NSUG how you are getting on now in the community.*

**RESOURCE CENTRES**

NSUG would like to say thank you to those members who informed us that Sutherland and Greenfields were taking it in turns closing early in the evenings ie. closing at 5pm instead of 8pm. We raised this with Combined Healthcare and Commissioners as this should not have been happening without discussing this with service users and Commissioners first. We are pleased to say that as from week beginning 2nd June both centres will be open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday. We do welcome our members keeping us informed of any changes to services they know of as we can’t be everywhere, so please continue to tell us.

On a positive note Clare Cox the Manager at the Sutherland Centre was invited to come along to our last members forum at the Sutherland Centre to give us an update on the Centre. She told us that recently service users at the Sutherland had been involved in the training of the students there, by letting them be involved in their care.

As a thank you for all the help service users and staff at the Sutherland had given to them Dr Okolo has given the Centre £1,000. This was spent on items to benefit service users and staff at the centre and was much appreciated by everyone.
Hello again. I don’t know about you, but I can’t believe how quickly this year is flying by.

During the past few months I have continued to notice that not as many people are going to the drop-in’s that are at Bethel in Longton on a Thursday and at the Salvation Army in Tunstall on a Wednesday. Is this because you have found somewhere else to go instead, or is it because you are no longer getting what you want from these drop-in’s? Please get in touch with me and let me know.

It’s what I’m here for – to find out what you think of the mental health services that you receive and try to make them the best we possibly can.

On that topic, what would your ideal drop-in look like? What activities would there be? Where would it be based? Again, let me know!

I don’t know if you are aware, but Mind and Brighter Futures now jointly manage the housing for people who need support in the place they are living. NSUG go to a meeting with Brighter Futures, Mind and Stoke City Council, and we discuss how this service is doing. So that I can have more input at the meetings, I need to know what you think of living in a Mind or Brighter Futures house/flat. I do get to speak with some people who use this service, but I can’t get around to talking to everyone. So, if you have any issues that you would like me to know about, or would like to tell me something that gives me a better idea of what living in a Mind/Brighter Futures property is like, please get in touch with me. As always, you don’t need to give me your name, and if you do tell it to me, I certainly won’t pass it on unless you tell me that I can.

If you do want to get in touch, you can ‘phone me on 01782 683043, email emma@nsug.co.uk or write to Emma, NSUG, Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 5DD.

As always, you can contact me about any issues to do with local mental health services.
Anti-stigma workshop  
10 February 2014

This fun and interactive Members Forum was led by Deb and Fiona from the Cultural Sisters. They had been asked to do this by Stoke’s Health improvement Team (HIT).

The HIT want to find out the messages people think should be given out about mental health. The aim of these messages is to increase the awareness of, and combat the stigma that surrounds, mental ill health.

In the first part of the workshop we were split into small groups and asked to write down what messages we thought should be given out to people. One of the phrases our group wrote was ‘It could happen to you’.

We were then asked to write who this phrase was aimed at. We said that ‘It could happen to you’ was aimed at the general public (although in retrospect it could also be aimed at staff working within mental health services).

We then had some fun, as we cut the letters of our message out and glued them onto cardboard. These we then screen printed on to paper so that they stood out and looked really artistic.

While we were doing the printing, other members of the groups were suggesting items that the messages could be printed onto, for example, tea towels.

Deb and Fiona took our messages away to dry.

Deb, along with Michelle from HIT, and a commissioner (someone who decided that this project was needed) will be coming along to the next Members Forum in July (see the flyer enclosed with this mailing for further details) to tell us how the project is progressing.

Emma
Carole Stone, Engagement and Outreach Officer, Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle....

Hello, my name is Carole Stone and I started at the beginning of May as the new Engagement and Outreach Officer for Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle. I have spent most of May visiting groups across all areas, so I have met a lot of people in a very short time! I want to say a big thank you already to everyone that I have met, as you have all made me feel very welcome and have been so helpful in showing me around new places.

I am planning to have some Member’s Forum meetings over the next few months, so I would like you to tell me where the best venues are, which are most convenient to get to and what you would like to have as topics for discussion. Also if you have any ideas for guest speakers then please get in touch to let me know and I can start to make arrangements – look out in your Local Voice for details of these Forum meetings.

One potential discussion point for those of you who use the Ashcombe Centre in Cheddleton, is its possible move into Leek. Both Nigel and Richard are keen to get the views of people in this area about a change of venue and are planning to have some consultation with us – look out for further information. If you are concerned or happy about the Ashcombe Centre moving, let me know.

During June I will be starting more regular monthly visits to groups throughout Newcastle and the Staffordshire Moorlands – on the next page is a list of places I have planned to visit in June and July, others will be added as I make more contacts in these areas.

However if there is an issue that you want to discuss with me sooner than my planned visit to your local group, then please get in touch and I will try to arrange to come at an earlier date. You can ring me on 01782 683043, email: engagement@nsug.co.uk or speak to me when I am at your group.
All visits are planned to be monthly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biddulph Rethink, No64</td>
<td>1st Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheadle Rethink, Holbrook House</td>
<td>1st Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leek Rethink, Pennybank House</td>
<td>2nd Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidsgrove Rethink, The Fire Station</td>
<td>3rd Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kniveden Partnership, Leek</td>
<td>4th Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leek Rethink, John Hall Gardens</td>
<td>4th Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Days, Merrial Street</td>
<td>1st Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterton Art Group, The Pavilion</td>
<td>2nd Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Days, Ramsey Road</td>
<td>2nd Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Days, Higherland Church</td>
<td>3rd Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyme Brook Centre Drop In</td>
<td>3rd Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Days Coffee morning</td>
<td>4th Tuesday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A reader writes...........

I read the extract of the Guardian article in the last Voice. I couldn't agree more with what was said. I stayed in the Harplands last year. The reduction in costs is so profound that the patients are now being seriously affected. All therapy has been removed and the wards are merely for detention only.

The point I wish to make is the staff, whether deliberately or accidentally, press patients to present 'good news'. On my second ward round interview I felt so much pressure to present an improvement that I submitted and told them what they wanted to hear. The result was that I was granted 48 hours home leave and discharged after two weeks. That has never happened before. In fact I have never before stayed for fewer than 6 weeks. Shortly after discharge I was assessed under the Mental Health Act.
The Year Four Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment

This independent review, carried out by Dr. Litchfield, Chief Medical Officer and Director of Health, Safety and Wellbeing for BT Group, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine has made a number of recommendations for “improving the assessment of mental function” in the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which is used to screen those seeking to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). This is relevant for readers of “The Voice” as it affects those claiming ESA for reasons of mental ill health. It must be remembered, though, that these are proposed changes to the assessment, some of which are yet to be approved by the government.

The recommendations for improving the assessment are as follows:

1. Strengthen the requirements for Health Care Professionals to have suitable and sufficient previous experience of dealing with people with mental health problems so that they can contextualise findings at assessment.

2. Current Health Care Professional training in mental health should be reviewed to ensure that it is adequate and the evaluation results for these and other key modules should be considered by the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) before approving any Health Care Professional. Approvals should be reviewed on a periodic basis and reaccreditation should be dependent on effective refresher training in key subject matter areas.

3. Mental health training for Decision Makers should include dealing with distressed people on the telephone, interpreting warning signs of self-harm and signposting to appropriate sources of help.

4. The ESA50 (the form used for initial assessment) is redesigned to make it clear that evidence, particularly in mental health cases, from CPNs, Support Workers,
Carers etc is valuable, and giving guidance on the functional aspects that will help Decision Makers.

5. Consideration is given to a new reassessment period extending to five years in the Support Group for people who have very severe incapacity resulting from brain disorders that are degenerative or will not realistically improve.

Perhaps readers will agree that all the proposed improvements would be welcomed by those claiming ESA for reasons of mental ill health. However, as has been previously stated, not all the recommendations have yet been accepted by the government. Its response to Dr. Litchfield’s findings, in corresponding order, are as follows:

1. Decision deferred. All Health Care Professionals receive training and Continuing Professional Development in mental health. Further work is needed to understand exactly what Dr. Litchfield means by “suitable and sufficient” and how the government would respond to his interpretation of this.

2. Accepted subject to the outcome of further scoping work on the overall effects of changing the current approvals and training approach.

3. Accepted. The DWP recognises that a review of this package of training might suggest ways to further build Decision Maker capability to deal with distressed people or those who may be at risk of self-harm.

4. Accepted. The DWP currently reviews the ESA50 twice a year. It will incorporate these changes as part of the review which will be completed in October 2014. DWP is also reviewing the contents of the letter sent with the ESA50 (the ESA51) to ensure this information is contained in the letter.
5. Accepted subject to the outcome of further scoping work. The DWP will ask Dr. Litchfield to examine the Support Group criteria as part of the fifth independent review and consider what specific criteria might be applied to address this recommendation.

So, while some of the recommended changes have been accepted, decisions on others have either been deferred or accepted subject to further examination. Whatever the changes, I’m sure everyone hopes that the Work Capability Assessment is there for the government’s declared purpose: reducing barriers to work for the disabled or ill, and not simply a cost-cutting exercise.

By David Sweetsur, NSUG Member

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Community Scrap Shack
Not for profit organisation
Save money and find the creative potential of 'scrap'

Opening hours
Tues & Thurs 10 am - 4 pm
Wed 10 am - 8pm
1st Saturday in month 10 am - 1pm

We reclaim surplus waste materials from local businesses and make them available as affordable creative resources. Our scrapstore is filled with a selection of paper, card, vinyl, fabric, plastics, wood and unusual items suitable for art, play and creative activities.

Daily and annual membership options are available for:
Schools, pre-schools nurseries, out-of-school clubs,
childminders, community & uniformed groups crafters families and individuals

Tel : 07956 606334
Email scrapstore@hotmail.co.uk
www.communityscrapshack.btck.co.uk
Elsing Street, (off City Road), Fenton, ST4 2PR
A draft document has recently been produced that we have seen that looks at the future of mental health services in North Staffordshire. It says that:…………………….

People want:-
* Services closer to home and family *
* Access to services when needed to avoid admission in a crisis *
* Information on the options available to them *
* Services that are appropriate to them *
* Choice *
* Greater support in the community *
* More active support and help with day to day living so that they can live more independently *
* To be treated as a whole person not a diagnosis *

Do you agree with the above – are these things important to you?

The document also says that…. 

People have asked that:-
* There are clear pathways through services so that they get the intervention they need quickly without being referred over and over again *
* If they are unwell that treatment at home is considered before admission to hospital *
* If they are admitted to hospital there is a discharge plan agreed with them and they know who to contact if they are in crisis so that they don’t have to go back into hospital *
* If they are admitted it is for as short a time as possible and it is clear to them why wherever possible *
* They are involved in planning their care – wherever that is delivered*
* They are part of setting their own outcomes and that these outcomes matter *

Would you agree with these statements? If not, which ones don’t you agree with?

Please let us know what you think by contacting us at mainoffice@nsug.co.uk, 01782 683043, or writing to NSUG, Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, ST1 5DD.
Hi Everyone, I would like to tell you about an event that I attended on 4th June. It was the launch of the Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire Mental Health Inquiry. Mike Wolfe, the Chair of Brighter Futures, opened it. He began by telling us about names sometimes used to describe people with mental ill-health. He then told us to have one minute to think about what it is like to suffer from mental ill health. He said that at any one time in Britain 1 in 6 adults will suffer from mental ill health. Stoke-on-Trent is above the national average and it is not helpful having all the cuts to services.

The next person to speak was Chair of the Inquiry, Sarah Hill. She read a poem and did a presentation on the findings of the inquiry. She said that they talked to 150 people and asked them what their real experiences are.

They were asked what triggered their illness. For some people there were multiple triggers like losing their job, some people were living in poor quality accommodation, some people suffered from anti-social behaviour, verbal abuse, harassment. Other triggers were childbirth, isolation from family, problems at work, carers feeling isolated and stressed, and personal budgets being withdrawn.

They were asked about the impact of their illness. Some people went on benefits, for some people it affected their ability to maintain and form relationships. They avoided getting close to people or had mistrust of people. Some people had dropped out of education. Some people suffered from self harm, like cutting themselves, misused substances like drugs and alcohol because it made the pain more bearable. Some people had support off their family but some families weren’t supportive and were the cause. Some people needed more practical help and respite. Some had positive support off their GPs, others didn’t. Some were prescribed an easy option – medication – sometimes this was inappropriate for
their condition. People said they needed to be treated with dignity and respect.

It was difficult when claiming benefits and some people were having to wait a long time. Cuts in services were a factor. Also staff changing was not helpful and having to go over the same story time and time again. With Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), people preferred seeing people face to face instead of over the ‘phone. Sometimes it was too long waiting for help and people struggled to get help after hours. Often people were passed from service to service. Sometimes getting help was like walking through a minefield. Occasionally people weren’t given the right help.

We then had a presentation from Anne Cager, a contributor to the inquiry. She wanted to challenge common misconceptions of mental ill health. She had had a negative experience. She had witnessed people being treated cruelly who had been self harming. She tried to get talking therapies, but was told there was an 18 month waiting list. She has a supportive family network and now has a good GP.

The next person to speak was Jenny Edwards, the Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation. She said that a quarter of the people in the room will have mental ill-health. She also said that the Foundation has been around for 65 years and that they do a lot of research with other organisations like Help the Aged. She said that nearly half of people with mental ill-health wait three months for help and 1 in 10 wait a year or more. The Foundation’s research found that most people are more anxious than 5 years ago. Young people are worrying about relationships. People with mental ill-health are more likely to die from physical illnesses like lung cancer. She also mentioned that the Equality Act makes mental health discrimination illegal. She said that schools and workplaces are good places to reach people about mental health and that education about this needs to start in childhood. She also said that she had spoken to the Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, and asked why mental health services have been cut. She then said that stress is usually the first sign of mental ill-health and that if pregnant women are stressed this can be passed to the baby
(stress hormone) and leave them vulnerable in later life. She mentioned about some courses that can help. One of them was called Mindfulness which is online and there was another course which helps parents interact with their babies. She said that psychological therapy targets are minimal. She also said that most people’s mental health is affected by benefit changes and economic reasons are most likely to affect people’s mental health.

We then had a round the table discussion and opportunity to share our thoughts, but unfortunately we were unable to have the planned feedback from the groups because the conference was running over time. Sarah Hill, the Chair of the Inquiry, closed the conference and said that our feedback sheets would be typed up.

Finally, I would like to say that I found the conference interesting and informative.

Susan Johnson, NSUG Volunteer

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

We can be contacted at: NSUG, FREEPOST ST 1947, Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 5BR, 01782 683043 Email: mainoffice@nsug.co.uk
A message from Stoke-on-Trent CAB

Please support us to make Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) fit for work. Right now, if you’re refused ESA and challenge the decision, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) cut all your benefits while they look at your case again. We’ve started a petition to stop this.

We need your help to get the Government to listen. Please take 30 seconds to sign and share the petition – here’s the link:


We launched the petition with Gary, one of the contributors to our Fit for Work blog. He was asked to give evidence to the DWP stating that he was not fit for work, while being forced to apply for jobs he knew he wasn’t able to do. This is due to a new process called ‘mandatory reconsideration’ which often leaves people with no money at all while they wait for the benefits to be paid, forcing them to turn to food banks to get by.

Please sign and share our petition calling on the Government to put an end to this ridiculous and unfair policy which is wasting taxpayers’ money.
Can you help save cost to NSUG and help the environment?

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Thanks to all contributors

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

Articles and contributions wanted!

The Voice welcomes contributions on any relevant topic. You may wish to express a view about mental health services, or send in an article or cartoon. If so, send them to NSUG, FREEPOST ST 1947, The Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. ST1 5BR. If you would like to know more contact us on 01782 683043.

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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