

Bristol Mind Newsletter

Summer 2009



Welcome to our summer

Newsletter — we are currently enjoying a typical British summer – a few lovely days but a lot of umbrella weather. As with the weather we have some good news and some bad news. Our recent bid to the Henry Smith Charitable Foundation for a Director post has not been successful though Suzanne is planning further funding applications for a paid member of staff to head up the organisation. Some good news is that last week I gave some Bristol Mind t-shirts to Saul Pinnell who with a group of 5 friends has organised a sponsored cycle ride to Paris in aid of Bristol Mind – go boys!

We like to ask at least one member of staff and one volunteer or person who runs a support group here to write something for the newsletter about what they do and the member of staff who has written about her work below is Jo Burgess. Jo works at Eastwood Park and has described some of her experiences and what life can be like for women in prison.

Una who runs the Battle Against Tranquilisers meetings has kindly written a short article about how the group can help people (see next page) and we also feature some creative writing by two service users and the experiences of one of our office volunteers.

Thanks to all who have contributed.

Pat Diango, Office Co-ordinator and Suzanne Pearson, Chair BRISTOL MIND

Advocacy in a Women's Prison

My name is Jo Burgess and I work in a local Women's prison and have done since January 2006. I have been asked to write a short article about Advocacy in a Women's prison.

Working in a prison can be very restrictive and intense, you not only have the issues of the women to deal with, you have the restrictions of the prison such as limited visiting time, and negotiating around the other appointments or courses which they may

have to attend. Having keys helps because this enables me to walk with ease around the prison.

Similarly to hospital and community advocacy, I work with any issue which the women are finding hard to deal with whilst in the prison, usually due to the environment.

My clients often have numerous issues which they are unable to sort out whilst in prison e.g. worrying about the security of their home, family members, children, social services, husbands/partners. They may be a main carer for a parent, have no fixed abode and no medical or care plans or general support in the community upon release. Benefits take about 8 weeks to sort out upon release plus debt can be accumulated whilst in prison. These are just a few of the issues which occupy the minds of the women on top of their offence or pending court hearing.

A lot of the women in the prison are vulnerable and have a history of mental health issues, abuse - either or both sexual/violence, drug or alcohol, little social support and possibly learning or physical disabilities.

In my opinion women get harsher treatment than men, their sentences seem to be for longer when they have committed similar offences. As they are usually the main carers for children they can lose their homes and children due to their sentences.

As there are so few Women's prisons in the country, women can be placed 200 miles away from their home or family. This makes visits extremely difficult or impossible for most families or friends. And because of lengthy travel, women are often left on the reliance vehicles for extended periods, often without toilet breaks.

Due to the lack of support or being accustomed to a pattern of behaviour, women often go back to their usual lifestyle on release - being afraid to leave violent relationships or getting put into hostels which have prolific drug and alcohol problems. Without support the cycle is not broken.

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As an advocate I try to help with as many issues as possible and to reduce the anxiety felt whilst in prison. To my knowledge I am the only female advocate who permanently works within a Women's prison and I know that many more are needed.

If you have any queries in regards to this article please contact me on 0117 9800 386.

Jo Burgess - Women's Prison Advocate

Some facts about women in prison in the UK*

70 per cent of women prisoners have 2 or more diagnosed mental health issues
One in four women in prison has spent time in local authority care as a child
66% of women prisoners are mothers, and each year it is estimated that more than 17,700 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment

*statistics from Bromley Briefings produced by the Prison Reform Trust

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/subsection.asp?id=658

New Two way Street drop-ins

“The Helpful Drop-ins” for Black and African Caribbean Mental Health Service users in Bristol

All groups held at 35 Old Market Street, Bristol BS2 0EZ. There are four groups to choose from

SOMALI GROUP

(Somali, Urdu, and English spoken) Thursday
10am to 2pm

WOMEN ONLY

Thursday 11am to 2pm

SENSATIONS SOCIAL GROUP

Friday 11 to 2pm

MEN ONLY

Friday 3pm to 5pm

HOW YOU CAN GET IN TOUCH

Rachel Barclay: (Executive Director)
07780720952

Tim Douglas: (Hospital Liaison Manager)
07853598174

Yusuf Salah: (Somali Community Lead)
07931273880

Our office number is 0117 980 03 73

THE TWO WAY STREET

Positivity Multiplies Negativity Divides

Battle Against Tranquillisers (BAT)

Who are we? BAT is a registered charity. We provide support for people who take benzo-diazepines and Z drugs on prescription and for people who may use them in combination with illicit drugs and/or alcohol. We also have a large training programme. We are associate trainers for AWWP, The University of the West of England and South Gloucestershire Drug Action Team.

What can we offer to people who take these drugs? We run groups, drop-ins, a telephone helpline and email facilities on our website (www.bataid.org).

Why might you want to use our services?

If you are taking benzos or Z drugs, you might want to know more about these drugs and the effects they may be having on the way you feel. You may want to find out the best way to take your medication and what not to do. Some of these effects are panic attacks, depression, agoraphobia, fear and a gradual loss of interest in life.

BAT does not tell anyone what to do about their medication, but provides good, reliable information to help you to make your own decisions. We also support you in your decisions.

Which drugs are we talking about?

Most benzodiazepines end in 'pam'. So some of these are:

- Diazepam
- Lorazepam
- Clonazepam

But some don't. Eg:

- Chlordiazepoxide
- Rohypnol
- Clobazam

Also Zopiclone, Zaleplon and Zolpidem.

Where could you find us? There is a support group at: Bristol Mind, 35, Old Market Street every Wednesday evening from 6.00-7.30pm. You would be very welcome to come along. We don't need to know you are coming. Just come along. Contact us on 0117 9663629 or www.bataid.org

What are our groups and drop-ins like?

They are friendly, confidential, safe and very supportive.

The Pearl Diver's Saliva

Martin Williams is a member of one of the service-user groups that meets at Bristol Mind's offices. At the age of twenty one he was diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia. We would like to share an extract from his book "The Pearl Diver's Saliva"

"The saliva of the Pearl Divers of Zanzibar is both extremely rare and expensive. The saliva itself is more acidic than that found elsewhere and it would appear that this is a direct result of inbreeding amongst the islanders. Although quite how its acidity has any bearing on island life is not clear. However its collection and use is perhaps better documented. All around the globe museum curators and picture restorers vie to purchase just a few ounces, which they then use to clean some of the world's most valuable art.

So it is that we find Bill Owen, a curator at the National Portrait Gallery, precariously balanced over a huge canvas by Botticelli working away with a tiny pot of Pearl Divers saliva and some cotton wool. To say Bill Owen had a relationship with these fine works of art is to make an understatement in the nth degree. After nigh on thirty years as a curator and restorer he still found himself immersed implacably in the beauty that surrounded him.

It goes without saying that there were other varieties of saliva available, but Bill prided himself on using only the best, and using it, he knew by instinct what was and was not the genuine article. For it goes without saying that there were those that would supply a lesser article, or, sin of all sins, water down the genuine substance. What drove such philistines was merely the tremendous amount of money one stood to make. But while a passerby or some other person with an untrained eye may have perceived Bill working as well as on any other day, Bill knew himself his heart was not in it and he was struggling to concentrate. What kept popping in and out of Bill's brain were events that were to come some two weeks hence. Bill was retiring."

Martin's book has been published by Chipmunka Publishing, a company that gives a voice to writers with mental illness around the world. The direct link to read more information about his e-book is http://chipmunkapublishing.co.uk/shop/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=1354 The book will be published as a paperback in a few months

One of Bristol Mind's office volunteers has written about what she has learnt from helping out here on a regular basis

I have been working as a volunteer in Bristol Mind's administration office for over a year now and in this time have gained a real insight as to how the organization co-ordinates its many services and responsibilities, not to mention the many support groups whose meetings it promotes and facilitates.

There are so many people involved, each playing a vital role and their combined efforts make something I think is really special.

From the emails and phone calls I have received while working in the office, I have learnt that very many people from all backgrounds are affected by issues relating to mental health: be it their own or that of someone close to them. It feels good to be able to refer someone to our advocacy service or Mind Line and in this way let them know that they do not have to suffer alone.

Sometimes when people write in they have no idea of the amount of services and groups that are out there and waiting to help them. The simple act of sign-posting them can provide a turning-point in their journey towards coping because it lets them know that if they ask for help they'll get it - and sometimes from unexpected sources. The message is that taking the initiative and facing problems head on is empowering.

With limited and uncertain funding, the quality of Bristol Mind's service comes down to the staff's determination to make it work and the knowledge they have that what they do changes lives. In short I have found it an incredibly inspiring example of what can be achieved in the service of others.

Lucy – Office Volunteer

The human condition

*Each of us – is an individual.
We often experience our world in a slightly different way. Our instinct and function has a strong biological drive: an inborn pattern of behaviour – characteristic of a species and shaped by necessities such as survival and reproduction*

A human is a person that is viewed especially as having imperfections and weaknesses. Being a living thing brings a multitude of challenges, that being from the moment of conception.

In order to stay alive – humans must have food, water – oxygen, sleep and exercise. We all depend on these 5 vital things to keep our body functioning correctly.

All healthy humans have a constant thought pattern and it never stops – even during sleep. It is healthy to think with ‘positive thoughts’ that you have in your mind. Unfortunately we are all prone to suffering – an ageing process, and constant change.

I believe our individual lives are a personal challenge – designed as a special quest of endeavour

This contribution comes from a mental health service-user (Ian) who is keen to share his experience of learning to deal with schizophrenia and use his creative writing skills to help provide information and insight to others – especially young people – who might be having their first experience of a mental illness.

Jobs at Bristol Mind

Bristol Mind is looking to employ two exceptional people with the enthusiasm and commitment to take on a new and challenging role as Independent Mental Health Advocates (IMHA's).

1. **Independent Mental Health Advocate, 21 hrs, includes developing our service to people from BME communities**
2. **Independent Mental Health Advocate, 21 hrs, includes developing our service to older adults**

Both posts: £24,402 – 26,016 pro rata (pay award pending) 25 days A/L + 6% pension.

Join our team of advocates to develop and deliver Mental Health Act Advocacy and generic independent mental health advocacy in Bristol. These are diverse roles and require a flexible, enthusiastic approach to ensure effective promotion and accessible delivery of this service. The successful candidates will have experience of working with disadvantaged groups or individuals, sound knowledge of current mental health legislation and have an understanding of and commitment to advocacy and user empowerment.

The post-holders must have strong organisational, communication and interpersonal skills. These posts are also subject to an enhanced criminal records bureau check.

For an application pack please contact: Tom Hore 0117 9800386 or email: advocacyinaction@bristolmind.org.uk

Alternatively download it from our website www.bristolmind.org.uk

CLOSING DATE: Noon August 7th

INTERVIEWS: August 13th / 14th

Bristol Mind aims to be an Equal Opportunities Employer