

HEADS UP

THE MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

Winter Newsletter 16/17

Hello and a warm welcome to the first newsletter for the HeadsUp project in Ealing! We imagine that some of the people reading this newsletter may not yet know about us. With that in mind, let us begin by briefly introducing ourselves.



The HeadsUp project is Mind's mental health network for service user involvement and co-production. We believe that those who have accessed mental health services are experts by experience, and should be able to have a say on how mental health services are developed and delivered. We provide a platform on which people can share their experiences, have their voice heard and influence mental health services in Ealing. We aim to do this through forums, focus groups, campaigns, and ensuring that service users are involved in the service development processes.

The HeadsUp project has been live in Ealing for the last six months. So far we have visited many of the different services across Ealing and met with those who access these services, as well as trust staff. We are always looking to expand our network and our membership has doubled over the last three months. But we want this growth to continue! Most recently, we have set up patient experience forums at the Wolsey unit so that patient's feedback can be shared with management. We also run a monthly Secondary Care forum at the Recovery College, and a weekly user involvement group at the Solace Centre.

Our editorial team has worked incredibly hard on this newsletter. They have written some fantastic pieces about themselves and what they find important in life. These are all featured inside this issue, alongside an art piece and other important information.

We hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it interesting and informative. We also hope that it inspires you to get involved with the HeadsUp project, have your voice heard and influence the way in which mental health services are delivered. Our contact details can be found on the back page so please feel free to get in touch and get involved!

Best wishes!

The HeadsUp team

Contact: 077 02562905 Headsupealing@mind-eh.org.uk

A Bipolar Christmas; a Story of Hope

It was nearly Christmas, and I was reflecting on the difficult times I had been through over the course of the year. I had promised to go and join my family members in setting up their home for Christmas day lunch. They were only too aware of my illness, and thought this would do me good.

Not today, please, I thought. Bipolar disorder is a hard taskmaster. I crawled further under the duvet and hid, hoping to eke another hour out with nothing to trouble my bubble of depression.

My only hope was a new medication I'd been put on 10 days previously. Another thing about psychiatric medications is that they take a week, if ever, to work. Psychiatry is an inexact science.

I had been the victim of a crippling depression for much of the year. You see, depression is largely an invisible illness. No one notices if you are in bed, shivering with a crippling bleak feeling. It's not what one would call a casserole illness. Friends are not going to turn up en masse to cheer you up and cook for you. No, you are largely an invisible quantity.

**“Not today, please, I
thought. Bipolar disorder
is a hard taskmaster”**

I had lost count of the amount of medications I had tried. Olanzapine, Diazepam, Effexor, Prozac, the list went on and on. I had also burnt my way through three shrinks.

The start of the year had been a different story completely. Something (perhaps a new medication, perhaps sleep loss), had triggered off a serious case of mania that went on for one month. To those going through a manic episode, there can be no better state of mind. Songs on the radio are played solely for you. Moviemakers edit special versions of their films when you go to the cinema.

Celebrities are stalking you. Hundreds of minions are toiling behind the scenes every day to ensure everything goes smoothly for you. You are influencing world events. Eventually, you can begin to think you are God, or at least one of his trusted right hand men.

This bout had been particularly serious. I'd book flights on whim, to expensive places like Vienna and Paris I'd stay in expensive hotels and buy things that I couldn't afford. Often, I'd think I was flying the plane and other psychotic related thoughts.

My psychiatrist had also warned me - "Your friends don't like you when you're manic". How right he was. Through my outrageous acts, I'd isolated myself. Inappropriate social behaviour is common for those with bipolar disorder. I'd fly off the handle for no reason, behave erratically, and upset people in other ways.

Finally, after turning up to a police station to report a crime of my own imagination, I was arrested and sectioned. Three weeks of hospitalisation followed, laced heavily with anti psychotics.

This morning, for the sake of my family, I resolved to pull it together and dragged myself into the shower. Suddenly, like crystals popping off in my brain, I felt positive and could see a future. I felt normal. The medication was finally working.

“I sat on the bed and began to compose an outfit for the day. I smiled, Maybe there was hope after all”

I sat on the bed and began to compose an outfit for the day. I smiled, maybe there was hope after all. I travelled to my relatives who were very welcoming and mindful of my fragile mental state. We laughed, put up decorations and the tree. I stayed all day.

I used this experience to build on my recovery. I must emphasise to readers that it's not just the medication that aids recovery. Other things matter, such as having structure in the day, exercise, and seeing the right people.

And so I got stronger and stronger, and ended up having a wonderful Christmas day.

I hope my story of belief inspires people that no one should suffer alone. There is hope out there, but crucially, you need to make the effort to go out and get it.

Curran Matthews, 49, has suffered from bipolar disorder since 2005. He now works as a counsellor with people suffering with mental illness.



The Lotus Centre;

Mind in Ealing and Hounslow

What is the Lotus Centre?

The Lotus Centre is a day service that offers a welcoming and friendly environment for individuals with mental health needs. The service provides advice and support alongside activities that promote independent living. This in turn helps service users to feel more confident in engaging with the wider community.

What does the Lotus Centre offer?

The Lotus centre offers us a space to discuss any issues or problems we are facing and work together in overcoming them. It also brings people together so we can support each other and celebrate any new achievements that we have made.

Activities run throughout the day from Tuesday to Friday. Activities include; board games, creative writing, yoga/healthy living, relaxation, and IT classes. These activities give us the opportunity to develop our own skills, which we can take forward and use in our day to day lives.

If you would like to enquire about the Lotus centre, please call the number below.

Contact Us on:

020 8571 7454
info@mind-eh.org.uk



How does the Lotus Centre help me?

The Lotus centre improves my wellbeing and happiness, it is a good place for me to reduce the voices I hear. I have also found it to be a great place to meet new people and make new friends. Everyone I have met has been very friendly, understanding and supportive. Joining in with the yoga class helps with relaxing my muscles, as well as relaxing my mind. It gives me time to just focus on what we're doing and be in the moment.

I also love joining in with the art classes, especially when we are all creating new ideas and pictures as a group. It allows me to develop my creativity and enjoy seeing everyone else's work. It is a great activity that allows people to share ideas and create pieces of work together. These pieces are sometimes put up on display in the centre.

Coming to the centre makes me happier and feel more alive. I enjoy being with people who have had similar experiences. The Centre provides a supportive environment that allows me to confidently develop my own skills which I expand into my personal life. Recently I have been supported to enrol onto a reading and writing course. This will teach me to draft and write my own letters, and feel pride in what I have achieved.

By Charles Dillon, a member of the Lotus Centre.

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The Solace Center;

A place of comfort and support for those who are feeling down or worried.

There are a number of very important benefits I have gained, and continue to gain from being a member at the Solace Centre.

I have suffered with mental health issues for the last thirty years and they are still ongoing. So to have a place like the Solace centre, that I can visit on a daily basis, has been a huge benefit. I have been using the Solace Centre for over 15 years now and it has provided respite in times of stress, loneliness and anxiety. It has always been there, offering a safe haven where I and others can socialise, feel a part of our community and have complete unity and togetherness.



Painting from home; This painting represents a balance of self and of the feminine and masculine sides of a person.

At times I have found that being in my house for long periods can cause me to feel claustrophobic. Having the opportunity to get out and visit the Solace, has helped ease this.

There have been times where I have had relationship problems and where I have felt suicidal. The staff and fellow service users here are compassionate and understanding. They offer to listen and I have found discussing my issues to be beneficial to my wellbeing.

The Solace is an out of hours drop in centre and is always there when other services are not; such as evenings, weekend, bank holidays and Christmas.

I hope it will continue to provide all these benefits for long time to come.

The Solace Centre is a daily out-of-hours mental health resource centre. The service offers a safe, accepting and inclusive space for people with mental health problems who live in the London Borough of Ealing. The centre is open to people aged 20 and over. It has an active membership of around 85 people. This centre is a place where people with mental illnesses can meet in a relaxed environment, build confidence, make new friends. It can help with respite, long-term self-management, resilience and sustainability. Peer support can promote and enhance wellness. Staff can help you to resolve day-to-day mental health problems, ranging from advice on budgeting through to thoughts of suicide. The centre's objectives are to prevent relapse, hospitalisation, isolation and loneliness.