

Spring

Spring 2000

Mental Health Employment Network



MHEN Newsletter

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Editorial

We have decided in this edition to focus on two themes which concern work and training for people with mental health problems: networks, and coping with work.

In focusing on the first issue we wanted to make sure we were doing what our mission statement says we should be doing, 'providing contact amongst members'. Coping with work addresses MHEN's second aim, to raise the profile of employment for people with a mental health problem. The various articles address different aspects of this theme.

In the first article Geraldine Monaghan describes Hammersmith & Fulham Mind's Small Jobs Project which offers people the opportunity to work for a few hours each week in ordinary workplaces.

The article 'Surviving work life' is a brief summary of Mind's booklet which looks at some of the causes of work stress and suggests ways of tackling it.

Sally Reynolds writes about the growth of Social Firms in the UK. She defines what is meant by a social firm and describes attempts to raise awareness of the model by the establishment of Social Firms UK, local networks, conferences and the Social Firms Resource Centre.

Andrew Webster's own experience convinced him of the need for real work opportunities for people facing difficulties re-entering the labour market after hospital admission. He argues that barriers which discourage people should

be eliminated and that 'open and clear employment policies' should exist for mental illness as they do for any other serious illness.

The article 'Coping with work' is my own attempt to make sense of some apparently inexplicable behaviour from a psychodynamic perspective.

Mike Calver's article offers some strategies employers and sufferers themselves can adopt to mitigate some of the effects of manic depressive episodes. Planning ahead can be made possible by identifying triggers and warning signs. Self-employment offers flexibility and control. He also gives a case study describing the Manic Depression Fellowship's 'Self Management Training Programme'.

Greg Everatt describes the work of the Association for Supported Employment (AfSE) as a resource for people on the ground and lobbying government.

We were aware of networks that exist not just geographically but also around issues. The articles from the Association for Supported Employment and Social Firms UK concern networks built around two very different models of employment opportunities for people unemployed because of mental ill health.

A lot of the work for this edition (passing articles between various people as well as the fancy new layout which we hope you like) was done with the aid of new technology and we have tried to include people's email addresses which we hope will help improve networking.

Lee Smith Hammersmith & Fulham Mind

MHEN MISSION STATEMENT

Made up of individuals and organizations who promote, provide or support meaningful work and training for people with a mental health problem, MHEN aims to:

- provide contact amongst members for mutual support, advice and information.
- raise the profile of employment for people with a mental health problem

Helping People to Cope in the Workplace

Hammersmith & Fulham MIND's Small Jobs Project

By Geraldine Monaghan

The Small Jobs Project offers opportunities for people with severe, enduring mental health problems to work for a few hours a week in ordinary workplaces. Placements of up to six hours a week are negotiated with local employers – businesses, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies. Work may be voluntary, or there may be a small payment which will not affect benefits. This arrangement gives people the chance to try out working in the 'real world', mix with a cross section of people and improve confidence. It can be the first step towards employment.

The project has a high success rate in terms of people sustaining their jobs and benefiting from their experience of work. There are three elements which account for this success. These are work preparation, careful matching and support.

Work preparation

New project members attend a work preparation course at MIND before being placed in a job. It consists of six two-hour discussion groups over a two week period. This requires trainees to attend for six hours per week, the equivalent of the maximum small job commitment. The first session clarifies what people can expect from the project and what will be expected of them, most importantly commitment, co-operation and communication, for example if they cannot attend their job or they have any problems.

One session is devoted to thinking about time keeping and attendance, what these involve, factors that affect reliability and ways of dealing with them. Another session covers the range of attitudes and qualities that employers look for in a worker, the work role, presentation for work and health and safety in the workplace.

Communication skills are discussed and practised in another session, which includes work on assertiveness and negotiation. A stress management and relaxation session helps trainees to understand stress and develop relaxation techniques. There is a session which focuses on medication and a community psychiatric nurse is available to the group to answer questions. Participants tell me that this affords a rare opportunity to discuss medication and side effects at some length.

The work preparation course starts the confidence building process and prepares people for work in practical ways. It is an opportunity for the project worker to assess people's reliability, social skills and commitment. It also begins to build a relationship between project members and the project worker which is vital for support later, when people start work.

If people attempt the course and are unable to complete it, or their attendance is erratic, this usually indicates that they are not ready for work. In such cases, the project worker will discuss this with the individual after the course and will usually suggest that they can try the course again when they are ready. People who have not worked for a long time, but think they have no need for the course, are often the people who need it most. Some individuals find it difficult to tolerate the group situation, but can be supported to sustain attendance and learn from the process.

Matching the person and the job

If people are going to thrive in their small jobs, it is essential that work placements suit individual needs and preferences. The initial assessment of applicants explores their experience,

skills, interests, aspirations, anxieties and support needs. Following the work preparation course, new project members are met individually again to discuss any issues that have come to light and explore work possibilities. People do a wide range of kinds of work in the Small Jobs Project, including office work, catering, care work, cleaning, gardening and shop work. We do our best to find the kind of work the individual wants, as long as it is realistic in terms of their skills and the availability of the work. More unusual placements have included clock repair, designing greetings cards and working in a pony centre. Sometimes people want to try out work that they have not done before. One project member tried gardening for a month and decided it was not for him. He was then placed in a small factory unit, where he was refurbishing fuel injection units, which he enjoyed.

As well as the kind of work wanted, careful consideration is given to other factors, such as how much support and supervision the individual needs, whether they need on the job training, whether a busy or a quiet environment would suit them, a large or a small workplace, the kind of people who work there, particular anxieties they have, perhaps regarding travelling or using the telephone. When we think we have found a suitable opportunity for someone, it is discussed with them and they decide whether they want to go ahead with an interview.

One project member recently completed a year's service in an administrative job with a voluntary organisation. Her confidence has increased considerably and so has her optimism about the future. She said, "This is just the right job for me." We want all our project members to be able to say that.

Support

When a work placement has been negotiated, the project worker accompanies the candidate to the interview, which is usually an informal procedure. A start date is agreed and the arrangement is put in writing, including the name of the person responsible for supervision at work. Thereafter, the project member attends the job on their own. Regular support is given to project members and contact maintained with employers to ensure that placements run as smoothly as possible.

There is a trial period of a month, at the end of which a review meeting is held at the workplace, attended by project member, employer and project worker. If the arrangement is proving satisfactory, it is extended and reviews are held every two or three months, or as necessary. Changes can be made at review, such as an increase in hours or the addition of new tasks, feedback is given and any issues are addressed. The project worker meets with each member soon after the start of a placement and then at least once a month. Project members and employers are encouraged to contact the project worker at any time if concerns arise. There is also a monthly support group which members can attend if they wish.

There have been few of the kind of major problems that employers are wary about, such as aggressive, disruptive or strange behaviour. Reliability can be a problem for a few individuals and this has to be worked on with them. People need support when they are taking on new tasks or there are changes of personnel at work. Many of the support needs of project members are associated with anxieties about their performance or about relating to people at work, or difficulties in their lives which affect work. Anyone who is becoming unwell is encouraged to take a break. Regarding performance, some

individuals find it difficult to accept positive feedback and they may find inadequacies when there are none from the employer's point of view. In some cases it is appropriate to arrange extra help with areas of work which the person is worried about, for example using a computer. Regular reassurance is required in any case.

Occasionally an employer or supervisor has an unhelpful approach, which needs to be addressed. In one instance, an immediate supervisor whose manner had been upsetting our project member, was astonished and apologetic when this was brought to her attention by the manager following our intervention. She had not realized how she was perceived and has since been very supportive.

Project members are often worried about colleagues finding out that they have a mental health problem. Employers know, but are not given details and they are asked not to tell other workers. Members need support to deal with inquisitive colleagues and decide whether to disclose, to whom and how. They often have an ambivalent attitude to their 'status' or 'identity' as users of psychiatric services. One project member told me recently that she was worried because people at work were treating her as a 'normal person'. She feels stigmatised by the diagnostic label she has been given, but at the same time she identifies with and feels dependent upon the sick role it has conferred on her. If she is regarded as 'normal', other people might no longer make allowances. In attempting to help people think through such ideas and feelings, we can challenge the usefulness of the concept of 'normality'. However, it is a sad fact that, in our society, people are required to have their identities spoiled in order to be entitled to the emotional and financial support they need. This situation will only be addressed by challenging the

stigmatisation of and discrimination against people with mental health problems. The Small Jobs Project contributes to this challenge by educating employers about the potential as well as the needs of people who have mental health problems.

Moving On

Doing a small job gives people a working life, structure to the week and social contact. People can develop existing skills and learn new ones. Support and encouragement, at work and outside, are vital if people are to cope with work and sustain their jobs. Preparation for work and placing individuals in suitable jobs also play an important part in making the small job a beneficial experience. There is no time limit to small job placements. Duration depends on the needs of the person and the availability of the work. People can progress at their own pace and are supported to move on when they are ready. A few people move on to full-time employment. Most people need to progress more gradually and may move on to training, education or part-time work.

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Surviving Working Life

By Alison Cobb

Having a job is good for your mental health, but work stress is a serious health hazard. How to stay well at work is an issue for everyone who has a job – those who do have a history of mental distress or a mental illness diagnosis and those who do not.

Mind would say that stress management is good management – working in a well-run organisation where there is good communication and flexibility is good for your mental health. However, while much workplace stress has to be tackled at an organisational level, there are many things that employees can do individually or collectively to care for their own mental health. Small steps that create a change can lead to bigger changes. Mind's booklet 'Surviving Working Life: the Mind guide to staying well in the workplace' looks at some of the causes of work stress and suggests ways of tackling it.

A first step is learning what you find stressful and what helps you work well – for example do you prefer structure to work within or clear objectives and the freedom to get on and achieve them at your own pace and in your own way? The self-knowledge and experience of users/survivors can – contrary to what employers might expect - make them better equipped than others to manage stress. Here are some more ideas.

Work organisation and environment

- make your own work environment as comfortable to work in and appropriate to your needs as you can, enlisting the help of a health and safety officer, or the occupational health or welfare service if there is one, if necessary;
- build your own support network;

- learn assertiveness and practise it to protect yourself from unreasonable demands;
- discuss workload or the organisation of your work with your manager or supervisor – if you cannot resolve problems of unrealistic goals or deadlines in this way talk with the personnel department, trade union representative or other relevant members of staff;
- make the most of supervision sessions to get feedback on your work, set realistic targets and air problems. See how your goals fit in with the organisation's overall aims and objectives;
- avoid long hours if possible. They may be all right in the short term if the work is purposeful and defined - a team effort to complete an urgent project may be very satisfying. However working longer hours does not generally lead to more or better results.

Organisational culture

- treat colleagues with the respect and consideration you would like back from them;
- seek and give support for taking on new challenges (eg talking through with a colleague how best to approach a new task, skill-sharing);
- be aware of any policies on harassment, bullying or racism so that you know what behaviour the company considers unacceptable, how to challenge it and what back-up there is;
- whistle-blowing – if you are aware of bad practice in the organisation (for example financial corruption or abusive

behaviour towards clients) find a way of speaking out about it. Do protect your own position and get advice, for example, from the union, employee assistance programme (if your organisation has one) or Public Concern at Work (020 7404 6609).

Personal issues

- use flexitime, if it is available, to suit your needs, for example if you have difficulty with rush hour travel, or need to leave work early some days to get to a support group, or to fit with child care;
- look after yourself through exercise, healthy eating, and tackling addictions to alcohol, smoking or other drugs;
- learn relaxation techniques, and practice them;
- talk to someone you trust – at work or outside – about what upsets you or makes you feel stressed. This is not a sign of weakness – it is taking responsibility for your well-being;
- work regular hours and take the breaks and holidays to which you are entitled. If things are getting too much book a day off or a long weekend;
- nurture your life outside work – relationships, recreation, interests, the abilities your job does not tap – or it might go away.

Career development – staying or moving on

- make the most of any opportunities for training and development offered by the employer;

- keep your c.v. up to date and plan for the future. It is worth analysing your career path whatever your situation, so that you can be positive about staying or moving on;
- use careers counselling or similar expertise if you feel stuck, bored, want a change of direction, or feel your job is doing you harm and you don't know what you want to do. A crisis can force a change of direction though it probably is not a good idea to make major life decisions when you are in the midst of it. Look at the options when you are able - there will almost certainly be more than you first thought - so you can act when the time is right;
- use whatever counselling or support is available if you are facing redundancy or retirement.

If stress, work overload, bullying or poor communication are issues for one person in the organisation they are likely to be more widespread. Sharing concerns with others could open the way to a more concerted attempt to get the employer to introduce changes.

The booklet goes on to look at coping with distress at work, rights under the Disability Discrimination Act and the scope for adjustments, and the risks and benefits of being 'out' at work.

Surviving Working Life: the Mind guide to staying well in the workplace, Mind, 2000. £1 each, £3 for 5, £5 for 10, £45 for 100, £350 for 1000.

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Note: Mind have also recently published *Managing for Mental Health: the Mind Resource Pack for Employers*, available from Mind at £14.99 + 10% p&p. This is reviewed elsewhere in this Newsletter.

High Wires And Safety Nets

by Andrew Webster

Illness and Unemployment:

My management career in the food industry was abruptly terminated by a hospital admission in 1990 with a mental illness, subsequently diagnosed as manic depression—an illness of extreme mood swings. I remained out of work for 4 years and encountered many seemingly impenetrable barriers to employment. Eventually it struck me that there must be many people across the country experiencing similar difficulties: that is to say people with skills and talents that society, and particularly employers, no longer recognised nor valued simply due to the label of "mental illness".

The Launch of Talent To Work:

I founded Talent To Work in 1995. The registered charity specialises in mental health and employment. It directly employed a number of people with severe and enduring mental health problems who were then trained as research assistants. Talent To Work marketed its business research capability and conducted business to business research commissions for public and private sector organisations. This high profile work for business leaders was not without its stresses, and in addition to preparing people for 'real work' rather than 'therapy masquerading as work', it generated fee income for the charity. This income enabled its research assistants to be paid salaries and made a contribution to the running costs of Talent To Work.

The High Wire Demands a Safety Net:

Talent To Work prepared a research-based report commissioned and funded by Devon & Cornwall TEC. This joint report entitled 'Breaking Dependency and Stimulating Employment' was conducted in

Devon and Cornwall in 1996 by Talent To Work's employees, who themselves had experienced mental illness and unemployment, amongst people who were themselves unemployed as a consequence of mental illness.

Talent To Work found that people who had recovered from mental illness were discouraged from going back to work because they risked losing benefit entitlement if they subsequently lost their job. The prospect of going through another qualifying period before they could re-claim State Benefit increased their 'risk of failure'.

Talent To Work's report for Devon & Cornwall TEC was submitted in evidence to the Social Security Select Committee's investigation into the workings of Incapacity Benefit. Its principal finding was that when people seek to leave Benefits' dependency to take up work their entitlement to their claim should be *suspended* rather than *terminated*. The report argued that by removing the pre-existing disincentive to work and in stimulating numbers of people to rejoin the labour market, the Treasury would save both in payment of Benefits *and* through receipts of Income Tax.

In February 1998 Mark Oaten MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesman on Disability, tabled an Early Day Motion on behalf of Talent To Work. Entitled 'Benefits for People with Mental Health Problems', the EDM won the all-party support of 109 MPs.

In the subsequent Budget Gordon Brown announced the extension of the Linking Rule of disability benefits from 8 weeks to 12 months... 'to improve the incentives for those on long term benefits to take a job'.

This was a welcome start, but fell short of suspension rather than termination of the claim, linked to strongly asserted opinion in Devon and Cornwall that... 'a lifelong condition requires lifelong support'.

Mark Oaten commented:

"When I tabled the EDM I hoped that it would result in Government action to make this simple but important change. I am delighted that the Chancellor has done this and I hope that it will help those suffering from mental illness to go back to work without fear of losing their benefits should it not work out".

Unfortunately the extension of the Linking Rule has had wholly inadequate publicity. People need to know that a 'passport letter', given to people when they leave disability Benefits to take up work, is used to confirm eligibility to further benefit entitlement if future loss of work is due to the recurrence of the pre-existing conditions of the claimant, i.e. mental illness.

Manchester Mental Health and Employment Pilot:

During the first quarter of 1998, not only did Talent To Work lobby Parliament for reform of Welfare benefits regulations, it also formed a partnership in Manchester and applied for one of only 10 contracts nationally under the Innovative Schemes element of New Deal for Disabled People. It was successful in both areas.

The extension of the Linking Rule became effective in October 1998. This coincided with the launch of the Manchester Mental Health and Employment New Deal Pilot. The partnership Talent To Work initiated was with Manchester TEC, Manchester, Trafford and Salford Health Authorities and sought new routes into mainstream employment. The New Deal Pilot was innovative for enabling people with severe and

enduring mental health problems to rejoin the labour market, and so become financially independent. The consequence of this has a major impact on quality of life for the individual, partners, family and friends. Talent To Work provides the final support into the open labour market, and as such complements the valuable work done to support people with mental health problems as they move along the health continuum from unemployment and benefits to salaried employment and financial independence. The Pilot was designed to help people with a range of difficulties arising from their illnesses, such as; lack of self-confidence, fear of leaving State Benefits, debt, drug and alcohol addiction, housing problems, bereavement, child abuse etc. Talent To Work had partners who would provide one to one counselling in these very personal areas, yet it was these areas which if not identified and effectively dealt with may have the potential to undermine long-term job stability.

The drama charity TIPP based at Manchester University used drama techniques to help people regain self-confidence prior to the ordeal of the employment interview. This important work ran alongside the one to one counselling, updating CVs, preparing skills inventories, job search activities and interview techniques etc. 3 Government Ministers visited the New Deal pilot based in the offices of Standard Life Assurance Company in the centre of Manchester.

Skill and Talents to Work:

The Government is no longer pulling away the safety net of Benefits at the time of greatest vulnerability, when someone tentatively treads onto the high wire of employment. People with mental health problems can and do make very significant contributions to society and to employment. They do have skills and

talents and society needs to recognise and value their contribution both in the workplace directly and by their example in reducing the culture of fear about reporting a mental illness. Mental Illness needs to be another work and people issue that is managed through clear and open employment policies just like any other serious illness. Allowing people what Talent To Work describes as 'Interrupted Employment' may well prove to be more than enlightened good practice, it may in time be proven to reduce overall costs of employment and thereby increase profit margin.

The concept of 'interrupted employment' is not a new concept, it is considered unremarkable in its widespread use in the form of maternity leave.

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Coping with Work

By Lee Smith

How do people survive in work? What is work and what is it that has to be dealt with by people struggling to cope with it? This is an attempt to consider these questions from a psychodynamic perspective. I will firstly give a definition of work, and from this suggest that work is about more than just filling in application forms, dealing with interviews and earning a living. I will define what I mean by the word 'psychodynamic', and then give an illustration from Freud in which he suggested that there is a 'sense in symptoms', that people may benefit from their situations however tragic they may appear. I then suggest what this sense might be by trying to explain it in terms of the impact it has on others.

First a dictionary definition of work. 'Something that is or was done; what a person does or did; an act, deed proceeding, business ... something to be done, or something to do ... action of a particular kind ... action involving effort or exertion directed to a definite end, especially as a means of gaining one's livelihood; (one's) regular occupation or employment ... in reference to any action requiring effort or difficult to do ... the labour done in making something' (the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles). According to this then a job, work done to earn a living, is at one end along a continuum of activity.

Most people reading this will be involved with people helping them find and keep work. We are not often called on to explain our interventions in terms other than these. We are asked how many people did you find work for? But what about the other senses of work. And what about our 'failures'? We know that in the lives of our clients there are difficulties with work in every other sense of the word and it is activity in this other

sense of work that arguably needs to be dealt with before we can begin think about getting a job. Somebody has to be able to 'do something', like get out of bed, before they can work as a shop assistant.

As this is an attempt to answer the question from a psychodynamic perspective I need to say what 'psychodynamic' means? As a way of thinking about other people (and myself) I began to use it to think about behaviour which to me seemed inexplicable. I was working with people who acted in ways which seemed to me to be contrary to their expressed wishes, self sabotaging. Psychodynamics to me it is a way of looking at the mind as made up of different parts which can sometimes be in conflict with each other. Some of these different parts of the mind can be more or less out of conscious awareness. Psychodynamics is a way of thinking about people's actions in terms of these conflicts.

To me this is an important way of looking at things. It helps me understand why employment is such a controversial issue. It raises questions about human nature that we all hold and which are important parts of our belief and value systems. Reducing the number of unemployed is about more than balancing budgets. It is also a moral question around which tempers quickly become frayed.

My own feeling is that people who are not able to work should be supported by those who can. I vote accordingly. But what about those who can but will not work? Who decides when someone is able but unwilling. Over the last few years working with people who are long-term unemployed I have seen behaviour which could easily be explained away as malingering and which has challenged my political beliefs.

People not turning up for interviews for the flimsiest of excuses or turning down opportunities.

Freud (1905) had his own example of this. He attempted to understand such situations by considering the motivation behind the behaviour. What is it that this individual stands to gain by behaving in this way?

Let us imagine a workman, a bricklayer let us say, who has fallen off a house and been crippled, and now earns his livelihood by begging at a street-corner. Let us then suppose that a miracle-worker comes along and promises him to make his crooked leg straight and capable of walking. It would be unwise, I think, to look forward to seeing an expression of peculiar bliss on the man's features. No doubt at the time of the accident he felt he was extremely unlucky, when he realised he would never be able to do any more work and would have to starve or live upon charity. But since then the very thing which in the first instance threw him out of employment has become his source of income: he lives by his disablement. If that is taken from him he may become totally helpless. He has in the meantime forgotten his trade and lost his habits of industry; he has grown accustomed to idleness, and perhaps to drink as well.

The point here is that Freud's bricklayer has good reason not to want to give up his injury. It is clear that the gain which has come from the injury has, over time, become a way of life.

Matters become much more complicated when we consider the much broader definition of work given above. Freud's example is clear because work is considered in the restricted sense of earning a living. What about work considered more

broadly, as an 'action involving effort or exertion directed to a definite end'. Like getting out of bed in the morning perhaps? Or getting dressed and making breakfast. What investment could someone possibly have in inertia?

Since Freud, psychodynamic thinkers have tried to explain some behaviour in terms of the feelings that are provoked in others by that behaviour. As they have tried to work with increasingly ill people, therapists have tried to find ways of working which do not rely so exclusively on the ability to communicate verbally. Severe mental illness interferes with the ability to express things in this way, so that alternatives have to be found. One way is by communicating feelings directly, by provoking in someone else what it is that is to be communicated. One reason there might feel some urgency to do this is if the feelings are so awful as to be unbearable. If they can be shared then they may become at least tolerable.

All this will of course sound increasingly odd and for those who have already lost patience with Freud, this will be beyond the pale. To attempt an explanation like this might even be counterproductive and risk confirming the belief that psychodynamic therapy is nothing more than self indulgent, jiggery-pokery.

In defence of explanations of this kind I would say that if they appear to stretch belief, then so does much of the behaviour it is intended to explain. If we are not to abandon basic beliefs about tolerance and human dignity then we must take the risk of appearing credulous. It also helps me to understand why it is that some issues seem to inflame such debate. Unemployment is one such issue so that through what follows it is relevant to my point to consider what feelings might be provoked by

the behaviour described.

To return then to the client who apparently refuses to get out of bed in the morning? An initial explanation might appear to be idleness (*irritation and loss of patience*). But what about when the person then complains of having nothing to do, of being bored? (*serious loss of sympathy at this point*.) What about when the person refuses to attend or even go to see a local day centre, or training programme? (*accusations of malingering, cut off their benefits, force them to take any job that comes along!*).

What about if we approach the issue following Freud's example and ask what benefits there might be to such behaviour? How do they stand to gain, or what do they stand to lose which has become of value to them? There are many layers of explanation to this question and I do not claim to have all the answers. The fact that the debate quickly becomes so polarised however, thought being abandoned in favour of action, suggests that the behaviour is having the desired effect.

So what it is that has been achieved, apart from enraging a lot of people. (Why is it that the work the devil finds for idle hands is rarely constructive.)? My suggestion here is that it is just this that was intended, that winding someone else up has somehow made something more manageable. The recipient of the communication is left with a sense of exasperation and frustration with things, a wish that they are somehow not as they should be. It is just these feelings which for the client are intolerable and need to be shared around. Work has long been considered as a way of channeling aggression and energy. If this is true of work in at the 'earning a living' end of the spectrum, then it is equally true at the other end. This is a lesson

that is learned very early on. How are an infant's creative impulses welcomed? What response does it get when it makes a grab for something, or throws something for the hundredth time? Without a sense that something can be done with a personal wish to bring about change, the frustration is too much. Passing this on to someone else makes it more bearable.

So, what are the implications of all this for agencies working with people trying to cope with work. It is that dealing with the failures is an important part of the work. Perhaps that funders might be made aware of this is too much to hope. What we might be able to convince them of is that for someone to start a scheme, even if they then drop out of it, might for them be an enormous achievement. We need to be aware of what is being communicated in the process of our engagement with people in distress. Managing the frustrations of the work is part of the challenge.

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Manic Depression, Self Management and Work

By Mike Calver

Manic depression (also known as bipolar disorder) will affect 1 in 100 people at some time in their life. Extreme swings of mood are involved: 'highs' (mania) and 'lows' (depression). Untreated, the consequences of manic depressive episodes can frequently damage the lives of people with the condition and those close to them. Individuals who have experience of manic depression are aware of the stigma and prejudice attached to the illness, particularly by employers.

The Manic Depression Fellowship (MDF) has over 4,000 members, all of whom will benefit from a range of services including a 24 hours legal advice line, employment consultancy and mediation, career, guidance and counselling, and a self management training programme. MDF has a network of over 150 self help support groups throughout the UK. Over half of MDF's members have 'A' levels and a third have degrees, yet the employment rate is presently 57%.

Many individuals with the diagnosis have found that a good quality of life is usually possible with effective self-management. Self management techniques are as relevant in the workplace as they are in every other aspect of daily life. A great amount of emphasis is placed on the responsibilities of employers meeting the demands of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as well as general duty of care toward the mental well-being of staff. These responsibilities are of utmost importance, however there is also a responsibility on an employee with a diagnosis of manic depression to develop coping strategies, including management of medication and management of lifestyle around personal relapse signatures, if he or she is to hold down a position of employment.

We know from current research (Palmer and Gilbert, 1997; Perry et al 1999) that by identifying triggers and warning signs, forward planning becomes not just a possibility, but a powerful mechanism for controlling mood swings and improving quality of life. This forward planning is also a vehicle for ensuring that open employment is an option whether it be full time, part time, self employed or salaried.

The MDF self management training programme (SMTP), for example, is built on the principle 'that people with manic depression can become experts on their own mental health'. A self management approach aims to enable individuals with manic depression to gain confidence in their own capacities and to take control of their lives and this approach includes:

- *Recognition: learning when an episode of mania or depression may be approaching. (Triggers, warning signs and life charts)*
- *Action: knowing how to take action with the aim of preventing a mood swing. (Mood diaries, coping strategies, self-medication, support networks, the needs of others and action planning)*
- *Maintenance: helping to make future episodes of mania or depression less likely. (Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, developing awareness, crisis management and advanced directives).*

These techniques are not learned overnight, they take time, discipline and determination. From diagnosis onwards it is important that when looking to the future, gaining an insight into manic depression and learning management techniques, employment is not pushed to the back of a queue of priorities, but part of a more holistic approach.

It is interesting to note at this point that a significant number of MDF membership are self employed. For many, self employment offers a flexible and controlled approach to work, enabling a person to manage their work in a way which allows 'safety nets' to apply in periods of ill health. However, for some members self employment is not appropriate. The financial insecurity, and often the isolation, in which a self employed person works means that salaried employment can be the better option. In many cases the Manic Depression Fellowship has been asked to consult with employers and employees with a diagnosis of manic depression. We have found that employers are far more comfortable in looking at means of retaining the member of staff after they have understood exactly what manic depression is, how it manifests itself, and the management techniques that are available.

Manic depression, depression and schizophrenia are recognised disabilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and a number of cases have now been tested whereby the tribunal has found in favour of the Applicant (Cockbill v The Insolvency Service; Goodwin v Patent Office). With this in mind, it is all the more important that employers make themselves more aware and informed of the implications for an employee with a diagnosis of manic depression. Employers should understand support mechanisms and simple policies that can be put in place within the workplace, and the ease with which many valuable employees can be retained as valued members of staff rather than lost through lack of knowledge and prejudice.

Case Study

Dr A worked as a researcher in a well known University in the UK. After periods of depression in 1997 and

1998 he had his first recognised episode of mania in early 1999. An eminent researcher in his field and well respected world wide, his behaviours were of some concern to his colleagues and staff. Dr A was placing great demands on his staff, taking on far too much work for himself, subsequently staying up all night for weeks on end, further worsening his health. Work was left unfinished at times, others left to tidy up behind, and subsequently trust was being eroded, criticisms were being made, and Dr A's work colleagues were beginning to feel deeply hurt by some of the comments being made.

A decision was taken by the Vice Chancellor to send Dr A home to 'sort himself out'. Dr A visited his GP and was referred to a Consultant Psychiatrist who diagnosed manic depression, prescribed Lithium and recommended he join the Manic Depression Fellowship. With time on his hands (the University was not willing to have him back subject to psychiatric reports) Dr A began to take stock of his situation. The mania had subsided but he had entered a period of depression and anti-depressants were prescribed with the Lithium. He read as much literature as he could on manic depression, enrolled on the MDF Self Management Training Programme, and started to analyse the past three years, focusing on the start of the periods of depression and latterly the mania. He was able to form a picture of the events in his life and recognised a trend in the cycles of illness. The mania, he believed, was triggered by the workloads he had set himself: a recent funding application which was accepted and celebrated, the subsequent excitement of setting up a new laboratory with the funds (effectively carrying out the work of two people), while supervising his team of staff and lecturing on the world circuit.

Medication was showing to be

effective and the insight into his onset of manic depression proved useful in understanding how he would manage in the future. He now felt confident that he could work again although a little apprehensive in going back to the University.

The University had now decided that they were going to follow the disciplinary route, having followed no structured procedure to date. MDF, Dr A and his union representative held meetings with the University, exploring the options available and pointing out the responsibilities on both sides, legal and otherwise.

The suspension on Dr A was lifted by the University, a phased return to work plan was devised cutting down on responsibilities initially, but looking to return to his original role over a period of 1-2 years. Training on manic depression, the Disability Discrimination Act, along with a mediation service for resolving some of the outstanding staff issues, was provided by the Manic Depression Fellowship.

NB: The case study presented is a summary and somewhat oversimplified for the purposes of this article. Dr A was not working, but on full pay, for almost a year before his return to the University. Others are not so fortunate.

Mike Calver is the Employment and Service Development Manager at MDF. If you would like further information on the services MDF provide or a copy of 'An employers guide to manic depression' he can be contacted on 0207 793 2600.

St James's House

By Lynne Miller

St James's House is a small mental health charity based in Camden which provides computer training and work based rehabilitation programmes by running a small business with a re-cycling theme. We are very pleased to announce that we have been awarded funding to become the first mental health charity in the UK to join a network of Karten CTEC Centres (Computer Training and Education Centres).

There are currently 20 Centres based in the UK and Israel which are funded by the Ian Karten Charitable Trust. The aim of the centres is to provide high quality computer training programmes for people with disabilities.

The funding will enable St James's House to update all our hardware and software, network our system, and increase the number of training places we are able to offer to service users. We will also be able to further develop the computer work we do in our small business.

If you would like to find out more about our projects or would like to visit the project please call Lynne Miller, Director on 0207

The Ian Karten Charitable Trust

One of the Trust's main areas of work is the establishment, within suitable charities concerned with young people and adults with disabilities including mental problems, of special day centres for computer-aided education, vocational training, communication and recreation. Applications should be made in writing to Ian Karten and should include the charity's most recent set of accounts and its promotional literature.

Correspondent:

IH Karten, The Mill House, Newark Lane, Ripley, Surrey, GU23 6DP.

Tel: 01483 225020,

Fax: 01483 222420

Supported Employment and the Need for Effective Networks

By Greg Everatt

People with a disability who want to work often need support; support that takes a great many forms and comes from a range of sources, some informally from family and friends, some more formally from a range of agencies.

These support agencies range from national services such as DEAs in the Employment Service to small community based voluntary organisations, some having been established to provide support for just one person.

What they all have in common is the need to be able to negotiate a complex path through conflicting pressures that come from agencies, both local and national, and society.

At a national level the Departments of Health, Education and Employment, Trade and Industry, and Social Security can all have a significant impact on the effectiveness of support services. Locally the Local and Health Authority as well as Further Education Colleges and TECs can supply a further layer of help, or obstruction.

Supported Employment agencies can be located within Social Services Departments, Training Departments, Colleges, Health Authorities or be voluntary agencies or private companies.

Against this backdrop of diverse service providers operating in a sector where government policies interact, not always harmoniously (e.g. the National Minimum Wage and Welfare Benefits) there is a clear need for a co-ordinated approach.

It was for this reason that the Association for Supported

Employment (AfSE) was formed in 1991. AfSE grew predominantly from the impetus of Supported Employment services working with people who have a learning disability but has since widened its scope to work for the needs of all people with a disability who wish to be employed.

AfSE seeks to develop supported employment in two broad ways, by providing information to people on the ground, service providers, users, carers and employers. And by identifying obstacles and drawing them to the attention of the appropriate government department.

AfSE produces a monthly newsletter that is distributed to all members which has articles on a range of topics, recent issues have covered such topics as Disabled Person's Tax Credit, the impact of the National Minimum Wage, Health and Safety training, Select Committee reports and more. We also have a range of publications which we offer for sale, and have negotiated a discount for our members with another distributor.

AfSE provides members with briefing notes on a range of topics and has a benefits calculation software package. Learning from others is also an essential element of developing services and AfSE not only organises an annual conference but also arranges local opportunities for people to come together to share ideas and experience.

Networking is not limited to formal gatherings though, members looking for advice on a wide range of topics can turn to the 'Skills and Resources Register' a source of contacts with specific expertise that is willing to share that knowledge with other

members of the association. If the knowledge required is not covered in the S&RR members can always call the co-ordinator, who if not able to help himself, will often know where specialist help can be obtained from. AfSE has been included in a range of consultation exercises during the development of the New Deal for Disabled People and has taken a lead in a number of key areas such as the evaluation of the impact of the National Minimum Wage on people with a disability, and the development of a national strategy for supported employment. AfSE is ready either to work alone on these issues, or to establish effective partnerships with other organisations with an interest in the development of supported employment.

As a democratic organisation AfSE is always ready to listen to issues raised by members and whenever possible include local issues when developing national policies. It through membership of organisations such as AfSE that people working locally can not only keep up with changes that are occurring but can ensure that issues that are important locally are not forgotten when national policies are being developed.

To find out more about AfSE write or call the co-ordinator Greg Everatt at;

Pennine View
Gamble sby
Penrith
CA10 1HR

Tel/ Fax 01768 881225
Email: afse@onyxnet.co.uk
Or visit our web site at:
<http://www.afse.org.uk>

Social Firms UK and its regional networks

By Sally Reynolds

Background - UK Social Firm Support Group

In 1997, the UK Social Firm Support Group was established by organisations in the UK involved in Social Firm development in order to provide support and technical assistance to existing and emerging social firms. Partners involved in establishing and operating the Group included Ermis EEIG, Birmingham City Council, Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust, Richmond Fellowship Workschemes, Edinburgh Community Trust, ITO Northern Ireland, Shaw Trust, Centre for Mental Health Service Development and the Networks Project in Inverness. The project was supported by a grant from the European Social Fund Horizon Initiative in 1998 and 1999, which has now been extended through to the end of June 2000.

Definition:

The following definition is on the Social Firms UK website and has been taken from the definitions agreed by CEFEC members in 1997 (European Confederation of Co-operatives and social businesses). The definition is used throughout the UK by the regional social firm networks and is also in widespread use in Europe. Although the social firm definition was the product of a CEFEC conference working group and may not convey all the characteristics of social firms in this country, Social Firms UK is happy to promote this definition to advance the understanding of what a social firm is.

- A social firm is a business created for the employment of people with a disability or other disadvantage in the labour market.
- It is a business which uses its market-oriented production of goods and services to pursue its social mission.

- A significant number of its employees will be people with a disability or other disadvantage in the labour market.
- Every worker is paid a market rate wage or salary appropriate to the work, whatever their productive capacity.
- Work opportunities should be equal between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged employees. All employees have the same employment rights and obligations.

Additional characteristics are described by Social Firms UK in the compilation of the Social Firms Directory in 1999:

A social firm is a business that:

- Pays wages to its employees at or above the standard rate for that job and employees should have a contract of employment. A minimum of 25% of the employees of a social firm will be disabled people.
- The business will be a viable concern which operates on the open market. This doesn't exclude income from training, grants or other sources but social firms earn more than 50% of their overall income from sales of products or services. Businesses which are heavily subsidised during start-up phase or don't yet employ disabled people on market wages are classed as 'emerging social firms'.

Social Firms UK

During 1999, in anticipation of the end of 'Horizon' funding, the UK Social Firm Support Group established a charitable company, 'Social Firms UK', to carry on the support work after 1999.

The aim of the company is to raise awareness about the potential of social firms to create meaningful,

lasting jobs for disabled people and other workers. A key aspect is to increase the level of understanding about social firms at a national level among organisations and public bodies in the field of employment and job creation. In addition Social Firms UK is researching the effectiveness of social firms from financial and quality of employment perspectives to assist the development of national employment policy with respect to disabled people. This awareness programme and dissemination of information has so far been carried out through a programme of conferences and seminars and the production and distribution of materials by the Social Firm Resource Centre.

Conferences

Eight different conferences and events, including one summer school for social firm managers, were held throughout the UK during 1998/99, in order to raise awareness about social firms. An average of 130 delegates attended each of the conferences, but at the last conference in London there was an attendance of 320 delegates, with a further 100 enquiries which were not accommodated due to venue size. The high level of interest at this last event signalled the progress of the programme since it had come into being two years previously and reflects the amount of social firm start-up activity currently taking place throughout the UK. These conferences enabled Social Firms UK to launch regional social firm support networks as only one network (West Midlands) had existed previously. These networks allow Social Firms UK to support social firms at a local level with local partners.

Regional Networks

There are currently six regional social firm networks: Scotland, Northern Ireland, North of England, West

Midlands, South East England and South West England, some of which are registering as charitable companies. Each of these networks has elected a representative to sit on the board of Social Firms UK, so that the national support structure is owned and controlled by the social firms from each region.

In the South East, there are approximately 50 members, all either running an established social firm, operating an emerging social firm or actively interested in developing such an enterprise, who attend regular meetings across the South East. By bidding for funds from Social Firms UK, the network is able to organise events or resources which will be of direct benefit to its members concerning the development of their social firm. Members started meeting as an informal grouping in Spring 1999, but as the membership has expanded (with over 35 new members joining as a result of the conference in London in November), is now considering the process of registration as a voluntary organisation. A training day on social firms is being planned for March 2000, a trading catalogue of member services is being printed by Twining Employment Resource Centre (one of the original network members), and the engagement of a business advisor to support the member businesses is currently under consideration.

The Social Firm Resource Centre
Based in Redhill, Surrey, the Social Firm Resource Centre collects, compiles and stocks all available material on social firms. This ranges from videos and cassettes to publications and research papers. All this material is available to any interested parties in the UK who wish to make use of it - either photocopied at a nominal rate, loaned with a time limit, or available for purchase. Where there are gaps in the range of material needed by projects and organisations, Social Firms UK works to produce new resources. In 1999

Social Firms UK produced its most significant piece of research into the UK social firm sector to date: The Social Firms Directory. This publication goes into comprehensive detail about the 22 existing social firms and 50 emerging social firms in the UK, and can be purchased from the Social Firm Resource Centre.

The Social Firm Resource Centre is open for enquiries by telephone, fax or e-mail. It serves as the main contact point for Social Firms UK. If anybody is interested in joining any of the regional networks, the contact details can be obtained from the Resource Centre. By contacting the administrator, you can ensure that you are on the mailing list of Social Firms UK to receive details of new events including the summer school planned for June 2000 and the annual conference planned for later in the year, as well as regular updates of the resource centre materials.

Tel: 01737 764021

Fax: 01737 281032

E-mail: socialfirms@cqm.co.uk

Website: www.socialfirms.co.uk

Social Firms UK Programme 2000

Membership and Registration Scheme – *company membership and social firm/emerging social firm registration will be available from March 2000*

Social Firms Summer School – *3 day residential event to be held in Cambridge in late May/early June. Dates and venue TO be finalised.*

Social Firms UK Annual Conference – *currently proposed for Edinburgh, October 2000.*

Financial Support – *a sectoral bid to acquire development funds for the social firms throughout the UK is being planned with a focus on Objective 3 of the European Social Fund and the new European Community Initiative – Equal*

Technical assistance – *each of the regional social firm networks is being funded by Social Firms UK in 2000 to run programmes including, business support to social firms and emerging social firms, regional conferences, training days, dissemination events, production of catalogues and resource material.*

The Social Firm Resource Centre - *will continue to deal with social firm queries, distribute resource material and act as secretariat for events in 2000.*

MHEN User Network

MHEN has always been open to users as members, but has not provided a service for them. Two enquiries recently have convinced me that there could usefully be a separate network for users - ie people whose working lives are affected by their mental health problems. This could provide for information exchange and mutual support around work-related issues.

Anyone interested in joining such a network should write to me at the address below. I will reply to all letters, and will treat letters as confidential. I will **not** circulate your names to each other unless you agree that that is what you want.

MHEN members reading this, please publicise to your clients and colleagues. Thanks

David Martyn
114 Glenarm Road
London E5 0NA

Mental Health Employment Network

MHEN News

Annual General Meeting, 1999

MHEN held its Annual General Meeting on 30 September 1999 at Kensington & Chelsea Mind, London.

In fact, this was the first general meeting of the Network since 1996. Meetings had been held quarterly until 1995, when members had decided to reconfigure the Network around publishing a newsletter and directory of members.

We agreed that it would be good to start having occasional meetings again, in order that members could have personal contact. Two meetings a year seemed manageable.

We acknowledged that holding MHEN meetings in London will exclude members from other parts of the country. It was suggested that we should try to compensate for this by encouraging regional networks and inviting regional groups to feed their news into the newsletter.

Other suggestions discussed were:

- Having a website or internet discussion group
- Seeking to affiliate to a larger body which would offer us support/worker time.

A new committee was formed consisting of the following:

Chair David Martyn
(Haringey Social Services)

Treasurer Christine Starnes
(Kensington & Chelsea MIND)

Membership secretary Jonathan Beder
(Jewish Care)

Directory group Christine Starnes,
Jonathan Beder, Caroline Grew
(Jewish Care)

Newsletter group David Martyn, Lee
Smith (Hammersmith & Fulham
MIND), Fiona Webb (St. James's
House)

Annual General Meeting, 2000

A date for your diaries. The 2000 AGM will be held on Thursday October 5th at 4pm, at Portugal Prints, Portugal Street, London, WC2 2HB.

London and South Region Meeting

An informal members' meeting was held at St. James' House on 16th March 2000. Committee members reported on the progress of MHEN activities since the AGM, particularly the new Newsletter, and the work on updating the Directory. This was followed by a sharing of issues of interest to members present at the meeting.

No formal minutes were kept, but from memory I can recall that Gaynor Reynolds of Portugal Prints initiated an interesting discussion of a proposed research project comparing the strengths, weaknesses and outcomes of different models of mental health employment service, while Tony Heyes of Focus presented some draft checklists he had prepared: for service users seeking employment; for service providers seeking to cater for users' work needs, and for employers who wanted to be able to employ people with mental health problems. Tony was seeking collaborators to comment on and perhaps pilot the checklists.

Lynne Miller gave a short talk about how St. James' House has changed since it moved into its new premises last year. She told how the staff as a group had visited a number of different projects and had worked out the model of service provision they wished to adopt by drawing on the best of other projects. The new St. James' House seemed to me to have a very warm and inclusive atmosphere. Users seem to feel that they belong there - indeed, that they own the place! There is an interesting mix of training and therapeutic work.

SJH really seems to have it worked out, and is well worth a visit. Thanks to Lynne and Fiona for hosting the meeting.

David Martyn

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News and articles for the next Newsletter may be sent to any of the above.