

# The Wales Mental Health in Primary Care (WaMH in PC)

## **Bursaries 2004**

Name of Applicants: Powys Mental Health Alliance

Subject: Volunteering on Prescription – An Action Research Pilot

### INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this 'pilot' has come from one of the Coordinators of Healthy Friendships – a mental health befriending scheme in Powys. A recent evaluation has highlighted

- a) the 'added value' that people who have experienced mental health problems bring to volunteering in this befriending scheme
- b) the positive outcomes for those volunteers in terms of their own recovery from mental health problems.

As a result of these evaluation results and the demand for new volunteers the Coordinator has approached a number of GP surgeries in Montgomeryshire to 'float' the idea of volunteering on prescription. An idea, which has attracted considerable interest. This has now led to wider discussion and debate and brings together a number of strategic services and themes

1. The move towards a more primary care focused mental health service that could 'triage' to the voluntary sector
2. Recommendations from the Working Futures Report <sup>1</sup> which highlight the importance of maximising volunteering opportunities for people with mental health problems as part of a Valued Occupation Strategy (the survey indicated high levels of activity and interest in carrying out volunteering).
3. The comprehensive network of Volunteer Bureaux and Community Support networks across Powys (12 bases corresponding to 16 practices) and the wide range of volunteering opportunities available.
4. The move towards a social inclusion agenda and more emphasis on the importance of social capital in mental health services.
5. A number of emerging mental health promotion initiatives seeking volunteers – Pyramid Trust, Health Promoting Schools, a community speakers programme re. stigma, plus existing mental health projects.

A small interim Steering Group has subsequently developed to explore this initiative and develop this action research 'pilot'.

### PROJECT AIM

1. To establish a pilot volunteering on prescription site in one surgery in Powys
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the project and process at 6 and 12 month stages
3. To evaluate personal outcomes for those taking part in the Project

---

<sup>1</sup> Working Futures – Valued Occupation for People with Mental Health Problems in Powys – Nov 2001

## METHOD

1. Build on the existing Steering Group to ensure representation from key partners in the locality chosen (to include GP, volunteer bureaux. Powys LHB, and service user(s))
2. Employ a P/T Project Manager for up to 3 months to
  - a) Ensure agreed referral criteria and systems for operating the scheme
  - b) Establish a working relationship with the local volunteer bureaux to ensure volunteering options, benefits, training and support mechanisms are in place
  - c) Ensure appropriate publicity and awareness of the scheme and run briefing sessions for GP's, primary health care staff, and others (as appropriate).
  - d) Confirm evaluation tools to be used – ie. Compliance, gender/age, reasons for referral, quality of life measures etc.
3. Once the scheme has been running for six months undertake evaluation -- (To establish whether the initial aims have been achieved and to make any necessary adjustments or changes)
  - a) Identify reasons for referral and outcomes including drop-out, levels of engagement and any subsequent follow-on activity
  - b) Effectiveness of the scheme from the point of view of key stakeholders
  - c) Review and assess status.
4. The Evaluation to be repeated at 12 months

## DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR THE PROJECT

- Increased uptake of volunteering for people with mental health problems through referral at a primary care level.
- Reduced levels of isolation and improved social functioning for those using the scheme
- Increased numbers of volunteers available locally to projects requiring them
- Positive evaluation allows for a roll-out of the scheme to other GP practices

## SOME INDICATORS FOR AN EVIDENCE BASE

- *Social isolation is an important risk factor for deteriorating mental health and suicide* <sup>2</sup>
- *Approximately 9 out of 10 adults with mental health problems and one quarter with severe mental health problems receive all their support from primary care.*<sup>3</sup>  
*Around 30% of GP consultations concern mental health problems* <sup>4</sup>
- *" Social prescribing " can increase social networks and opportunities* <sup>5</sup>
- *9 out of 10 people with experience of using mental health services said that volunteering gave them a sense of purpose and achievement. More than 8 out of 10 also said that it had a positive effect on their mental health and 4 out of 10 said it had increased their chances of employment*<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Dept of Health – Safety First 2001

<sup>3</sup> Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health – Executive Briefing 19 2002

<sup>4</sup> R. Jenkins et al 2002

<sup>5</sup> Mental Health & Social Exclusion Report – ODPM June 2004

<sup>6</sup> Volunteering for Mental Health – National Centre for Volunteering 2003