

The volunteers seem to act as a catalyst and people move from very isolated lives (sometimes not even leaving their own homes) back into the mainstream; doing the simple things like shopping that other people take for granted and taking up other activities they enjoy, such as doing voluntary work caring for animals.

The volunteers are very dedicated. They were out there, straight after Christmas Day, visiting people at a time when all other services were closed. They happily bring to VSS the skills they have from other areas of life. This has resulted in them donating about £1000-worth of training; fundraising skills, walk leading, administrative and financial help. As well as the time they spend on their visiting the volunteers commit themselves to meet bimonthly to review their work, support each other and to receive further training. The skills the volunteers bring with them and develop, and the back up we can call on from Trustees and from the local Community Mental Health Team, mean that we are now able to offer support to people coming to us with much more complex needs. This year we were able to help 52 people.

Self-Help Group



As a complement to the one-to-one visiting our Self-Help Group goes from strength to strength. Now about a dozen people belong and 9 or 10 of them meet each week, supported by volunteers. As well as activities varying from line-dancing to bus trips; cooking for each other to mastering the computer, the members have happily taken on

Volunteers' Week 2008 responsibility for representing VSS. They ran a jumble stall at Tiverton Charter Fair, a cake stall at Bampton Open Day and provided the refreshments at the Volunteers' Week Street Fair and Firewalk, handing out publicity for VSS on each occasion. These are huge achievements for people who often found going out at all difficult. Individuals now have the confidence to take up voluntary roles themselves and we work closely with the Volunteer Centre.

The value people place on the group is shown by the fact that people very rarely miss a meeting and when they do it is usually for a very good reason. The group are hugely accepting and supportive of each other. Activities are planned so that members with physical limitations are included and there is absolutely no hesitation in welcoming new members who have extreme difficulties.

"It's just good to meet with people and learn to stick with them and them with me"

Self-Help Group member

Not Christmas

While some members of the Self-Help group celebrated by sharing a Christmas meal at East Devon College other people we have contact with find Christmas a very difficult time for a variety of reasons. With them in mind we ran a pilot project this year, in partnership with the Volunteer Centre. This brought together 26 people, ranging in age from 10 to nearly 90, on the 25th December, to relax, and enjoy activities and bangers and mash. There was not a piece of tinsel or mince pie in sight. Afterwards we got a message from one participant to say it was their *"Best Christmas ever!"*



People enjoying 'Not Christmas'
25.12.08



Forums

Our forums have continued to give mixed audiences drawn from professionals, volunteers, clients and members of the public the chance to get together and investigate subjects of interest in a relaxed way. This year we had a total of 149 people come to look at **Mother and Daughter Relationships**, **The Art & Science of Contentment** and **Assertiveness**. Feedback from the events suggests that they raise people's awareness of issues, teach them new aspects and give them confidence in what they already know. The Assertiveness forum even resulted in a local organisation setting up a course for its members to look into the subject in greater depth.

"The best speakers I've heard for a long time"

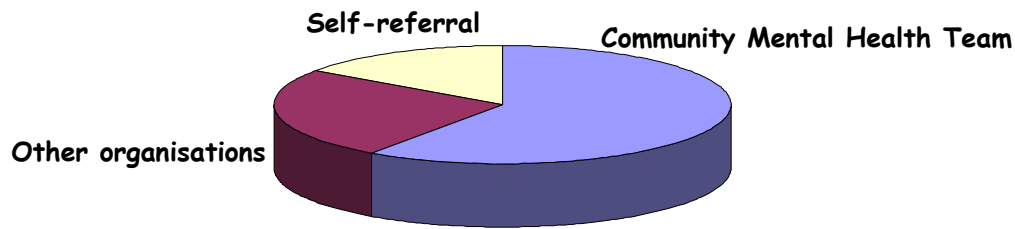
"Very stimulating The small groups were a nice contrast - more intimate and confiding informative and very useful"

"Thank you very much. It was a great day and so informative and a brilliant lunch!"

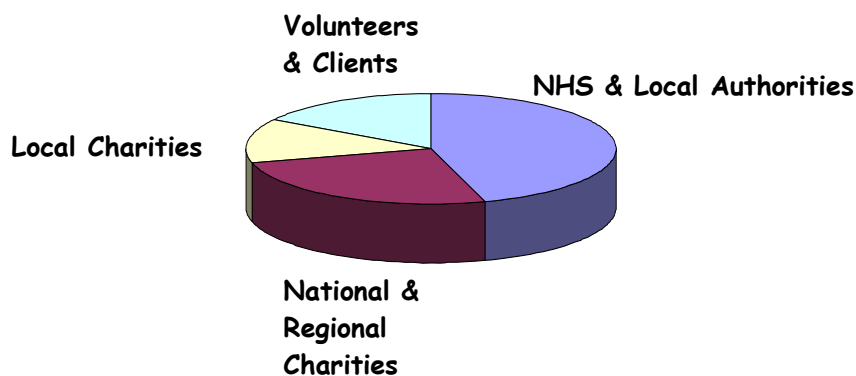
Feedback from Forum participants

Referrals and Resources

Yet again the number of people we have been able to help has increased (to 52). The sources of our referrals are:



To fund this work a massive amount of voluntary time goes into setting up and taking part in local events (this year £600+ came from a Firewalk) and into filling in many grant applications. We are very grateful to the organisations both locally and further afield which support what we do financially and take a real interest in our work. Major funders are listed below. It should also be said that, not only do they donate hours of their time, but some volunteers also support the work financially, underscoring their commitment to VSS. Our funding was received from:



Last year we raised £18,317 and spent £21,327, using some of our reserves. £1,261 was spent on administration, £966 on forums, £1722 on the Self-Help Group and the rest was the cost of employing the part-time Co-ordinator and training and travel for the volunteers. A full break down of expenses is available on request.

