

Self-Help Group

The recipients of our visiting service have talked in the past of how difficult they find it to get back into an ordinary social life and how they wish there was some way to spend time with people who would understand how they feel. To this end we started a self-help group in September. We received funding from Devon Step-Up Fund to help people take their first, tentative steps into employment or voluntary work.

The volunteers involved showed great patience as the group was painfully slow to get going, then, just after Christmas, the group suddenly gained momentum and we found ourselves with a real success on our hands.

To start with most of the people coming found it a real challenge just to leave their homes, get there and be among other people each week. While mental health has never been the subject of conversation there, everyone has been very open about their own struggles and extremely supportive to each other. New members are welcomed and made to feel at ease.

The group has always decided its own activities and these have ranged from merely chatting over a cup of coffee to card-making and computers, finding out about local history and visiting the Museum and Castle in Tiverton .



6 members undertook Food Hygiene training just before Easter and then arranged a coffee morning to invite their volunteers to celebrate with them as they received their well-earned certificates.

A visit to the Volunteer Centre resulted in ideas on how members can use their new expertise. Some have volunteered to arrange refreshments for the town's Volunteer Week celebration in June.

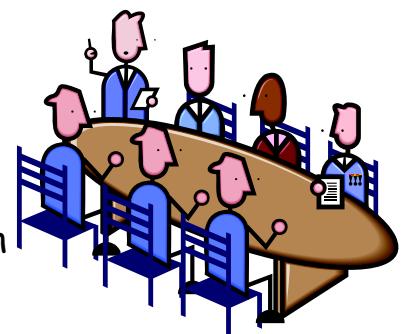
Our first group has become so popular that we now have a waiting list and we plan to launch a second group in May 2008. This will have its own character, again determined by its membership.

Behind the scenes, week by week, our volunteers continue to visit people in their homes. The people we visit are often faced with really difficult problems ranging from the aftermath of bullying at work to chronic illnesses which have robbed the sufferer of their previous life. Sometimes other elements such as breakdown in relationships, debt or the threat of homelessness exacerbates the situation. In such circumstances any of us can start to believe we are useless and should be able to 'cope better' (what ever that might mean). Our volunteers' input can help people to boost their self-esteem from rock bottom and then begin to work out ways of regaining control over their lives. We usually come away with huge respect for the way that people are managing in the most difficult of circumstances. This year we have been able to help 47 people, always focusing on empowering them to help themselves in making their own decisions. Then we can become redundant and go on to help others.



Underpinning all this work the Trustees have continued to work hard and unobtrusively to ensure that all we do happens smoothly and safely and we have the funding we need. They put a huge amount of effort into a raffle which served, not only to raise welcome funds, but to enhance our local profile . We are beginning to see the fruit of that in referrals received and volunteers coming forward.

In January the Trustees all met to share their considerable and varied experience and to discuss how to take our work forward. We decided to investigate how we might promote our work among groups with a significantly higher risk of mental health problems, such as ex-service personnel and their dependants and people with learning disabilities. Progress on the research has been hindered by the recent increased rate of referrals but we have uncovered a need that we believe we can meet and will be further investigating how we can best tackle this in the coming year.



Forums

Our forums have continued with **Remembering & Forgetting** in September and **Family Relationships** in November. Altogether 94 people, drawn from voluntary organisations, professionals and members of the public, have attended forums this year.

Remembering & Forgetting offered insight as to how we remember and what techniques can help when memory fails. We also had a feedback session when the Joint Locality Manager for Older People's Mental Health told participants the changes that had been made to the service in response to carers' stories which they had shared at a previous Best Practice day. This has led to a project with the voluntary and statutory sectors working together to try and design a mechanism to collect and handle people's views in a totally different way.



Finances



We raised £27251 in total this year: £22440 as grants from Mid Devon Primary Care Trust, Tudor Trust, Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, Yapp Charitable Trust, Allen Lane Foundation, Devon Community Foundation, Tiverton Town Council and Mid Devon District Council and Pennon Group. The rest came from generous individual donations, fund raising by our committee and from a benefit performance arranged by the Wightmore School of Ballet. Thank you for all your support!

Our costs of £19541 fell roughly into four groups. Our administration costs came to £1527. We spent £1146 on putting on the forums and £1508 on running the Self-help Group. The rest of our expenses are due to the cost of employing and supporting the Co-ordinator and the volunteers' travel and training costs.

A detailed break down of our finances is available if you are interested.



Mid Devon
Primary Care Trust



the
Tudor trust

Pennon Group Plc

Mid
Devon
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Where People Matter

Tiverton Town Council



THE YAPP CHARITABLE TRUST



DEVON
Community Foundation
Supporting Devon's Communities

