



Newsletter no. 19
January 2009

Voluntary Support Scheme

Registered Charity Number: 1097279

The Science and Art of Contentment

11.00am—3.00pm

Tuesday 17th February, 2009

St George's Church Extension

The sessions will be led by Jennifer French, psychotherapist & group analyst.

Being OK with how things are

This session will take a look at modern research into the brain and our experience of happiness. It will introduce you to Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence for recurrent depression) and give you some simple exercises to take back into your everyday life.

Dealing with difficult feelings

This session will look at the body's response to emotion. It will introduce you to 'oases, anchors and the safe place', simple techniques that can be used to restore a sense of well-being when the going gets tough.

This day is open to anyone with an interest in the subject, whether professional or personal. It is **free** but a charge of £10 will be made if you book and then do not turn up.

Booking is essential, by 10th February, please (see contact details below)

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Website: www.voluntarysupportscheme.org.uk

Find a moment for yourself in a quiet spot or a crowd.

Taking a break is good for your mental health and wellbeing. It's important to take some time out to relax.

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of free podcasts to help you relax and improve your sense of well-being.

These can be downloaded and listened to either on your computer or your personal MP3 player.

Some are designed to be quick fixes and some are the full works, so you can download the ones which fit into your lifestyle. They range from stress management techniques, relaxation and breathing exercises to positive thinking to reduce anxiety.



The podcasts can be found at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/relax/



Do you want to know more about mental health conditions, treatments, medicines and side-effects?

A multi-sector partnership including the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE), the UK Psychiatric Pharmacy Group, the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), the Pharmaceutical Schizophrenia Initiative and the Norfolk & Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust have put together a website which offers people information about medications used in the mental health setting to help people make informed decisions about medication. Anybody can use this public website on their own or together with their family or someone they care for or with a doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

You can find it at <http://www.choiceandmedication.org.uk/>

A New Year

As I write this I am surrounded by piles of paper because I am "sorting out". This usually means moving everything in my office around until it's back in the same place. Surprising things come to light – that lost address, the list of things to do for May 08. New Year is a good time to do this kind of thing. I have a friend who used to "audit" himself every January, listing his assets and liabilities (and not just financial ones but skills and abilities, friends, family and work). He approached every New Year as an opportunity to improve on the last year, and to draw a line under the mistakes of the last year and move forward. I wish I could do the same.

In 2009 if all goes well, I shall be moving house, so this is a very scary time. Starting again in a new place is a challenge. This will be the 12th house since I left home. Recently I have been calling them "My last house" but life keeps changing, so that what fits at one time doesn't fit so well at another. Sooner or later I will not be able to make these choices and will have to put up with what I have.

When I pack my china in newspaper I am always distracted by the old news I read surrounding my cups and plates. I cannot remember any of these newspaper articles, and have only a hazy memory of the events they so vividly describe. What seems vitally important as the story unfolds fades into history, and my memories are unreliable and sometimes bear little relationship to the events others recall.

I understand that we are only conscious of about 10% of our brain activity. Somewhere in there, nestling in the folds of my brain, are all the memories I have ever had, all the reasons for my actions, all my dreams and hopes. I have very little access to them, but they probably guide my thoughts today. It is comforting to know that when I move house I will not only be taking all my photograph albums but also all my memories of this house and all the others I have lived in.

I wish you all a thoughtful New Year.

Sue Larg, Chair of Voluntary Support Scheme.

Not Christmas



Last year Voluntary Support Scheme worked with the Volunteer Centre at Involve to offer an alternative to people who find Christmas difficult, for whatever reason.

On the 25th December over 25 of us met at St George's Church extension in Tiverton and enjoyed each others' company, activities ranging from Wii games to card-making and bangers, mash and posh ice-cream for lunch. There wasn't a mince pie or piece of tinsel in sight.



Judging by the buzz of chat going on all day and people's reluctance to leave the day was a success. Thank you so much to all the people who made the Alternative Christmas in Tiverton possible by giving of their time, money, inspiration and welcome. We hope we will have the chance to have a similar event together again sometime.

Three Years as a Volunteer

My resolution at New Year 2006 was to spend less time with my vegetables so along I went to the Volunteer Centre then in Gold Street. I came away thinking I'd been grumpy and awkward. National Trust? "Too middle class". Conservation? Guided walks? "Do these already". A mild interest in 'working with people' led me to approach two charities with a national profile and a local charity called the Voluntary Support Scheme.

It took months and months for the big charities to come up with CRB checks but the VSS woman had it all arranged within a month. I was puzzled when I first met Dawn, then Sue. Surely I must fill in lots of forms and be trained in box-ticking? There is training at Support Groups and forums. There is also an informal but, I began to realise, highly competent form of oversight.

I must have absorbed something of the cultural approach for I soon had a client and after three years I am on number nine. Some are with me for only a few weeks but number two is still around after two years. I've discovered that clients are very diverse but they are so similar in their need for a companion week-in, week-out while they can work their way through their misfortunes.

I have found that the sense of survival is strong even in those who appear withdrawn at first. Often I wonder what I can contribute and I'm sure other volunteers are much more creative than me. All I can offer I tell myself is a friendly, open approach and a common-sense perspective. As I am not a professional health worker I can then respond in an ordinary human, way and if I'm lacking inspiration or uncertain I can seek the advice of Sue or Dawn. Their perspectives may be different and I'm glad of this for I've learned there's no right way and the clients must decide for themselves.

For myself, there is a sense of being involved and doing something good which helps my self-esteem, well-being or whatever—but that is another story to tell. Certainly I would say my general knowledge has grown. The Benefits System. The Bankruptcy Process. The correct sequence of Schumann's symphonies. The Law on Shot Guns. I've even tried to understand the routes of the local bus services but I wonder if anyone understands about the 1A and 1B.

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Voluntary Support Scheme

Are you going through a rough time?

Would it help to have someone to talk to?

The **Voluntary Support Scheme** was set up to help people who are suffering from anxiety, depression or isolation.

A volunteer will visit for an hour a week to offer ordinary human companionship to help you over your rough patch. The volunteers do not offer counselling or home-help type skills. They will listen to you and help you to decide what you can do to improve life. If you think that would help please contact us. Our contact details are on the front page.

