



Voluntary Support Scheme

Registered Charity Number: 1097279

Newsletter no. 20
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Heroes

In 1946 the mother of my sister-in-law was one of a band of East enders who were moved to action by the plight of Dutch women, devastated by the aftermath of war. Being practical women, they borrowed a lorry, loaded with soap, washtubs and scrubbing boards and drove it to Amsterdam where they rolled up their sleeves and turned into washerwomen. In Holland at that time many people were starving, driven to searching dustbins for food, and often without any way to wash their clothes or themselves.

I like this example very much because it kicks so many myths about voluntary work into touch. It is not just something for the middle classes. It is not about being on committees. It is not something you can dabble about at when the mood takes you. These women had been bombed out of their own homes, so they knew what the aftermath of war was like. Most of them had never been out of London before or spoke a foreign language, so they were definitely out of their comfort zones. They were moved by compassion and a deep fellow feeling that overcame differences of culture, language, class and religion. I think they were heroic.

I think all volunteers are heroic. Giving up your time, lending your experience, your talents and your skills for no money and doing it because you can see the need and identify with the needy is heroic. Around this time of year the Volunteer Centre at Involve celebrates national Volunteers' Week. Volunteers are often unrecognised, unsung, unacknowledged.

It takes courage to step forward and offer yourself as a volunteer. I hope that the remembrance of the washerwomen of the East end of London will inspire somebody to be a hero this year.



Sue Larg, Voluntary Support Scheme Chair.

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The Dark Internal Sea



I worked in mental health for 28 years, yet failed to recognise my own depression. It was insidious, slowly building into a huge black silent wave that utterly engulfed me. I sank beneath its crushing weight and could barely get my head above the surface to breathe. I lived like this for years bobbing back for air, but mostly floating just under the surface. If you looked very carefully you could see my face, a bit blurred but recognisable.

I never made a fuss and to my knowledge didn't 'look' depressed, so no one knew. My way of coping was to slip back under the wave until I felt safe enough to come up for air again.

I managed to work despite the depression because I've developed this incredible capacity for putting my own issues into a box and the box into a secure room which was locked in the recesses of my brain. It took a lot of energy some days to keep that door secured, but I managed it for years. Occasionally I'd open the door, even open the box, but I kept the contents under strict control with a force-field powered by a will of iron.

I hit my all time low one night at about 3.30am. There was no moon; it was pitch black and silent. The thick inky blackness of my wave had flooded the rest of the world. I became aware of watching myself. There was a running commentary going on in my head. I was acutely aware of every movement, every thought. I could not slow my brain chatter, it had slipped into overdrive. I was terrified and feared that if it didn't stop the stress would kill me. I considered suicide, planning how I could do it. Anything was better than this. I still did not recognise it as depression but I knew I needed help.

To get through the night I took painkillers and sleeping pills. The next morning I went to see my GP. It was the first time I let him see me cry and he recognised what was going on. As soon as he mentioned the word depression instantaneously I knew that he had named my black sea. I agreed to take antidepressants, I was desperate.

The antidepressants worked. Why was I so surprised? How on earth could I have manufactured more serotonin, or stopped my brain from sucking up and disposing of what little it was producing anyway? It took about two weeks before I began to see a glimmer of hope on the horizon, at least four weeks before I began to notice very gradual improvements. First the commentary began to fade, along with the thoughts of suicide. Then I began to have coherent thoughts and dare I say a sense of hope. I still felt tossed about by the black sea but some days I bobbed along on the surface.

Gradually my wave is withdrawing and I can paddle on its edges. I know it will always be there, on the horizon, but I know I can do something to stop myself drowning again. I may never be able to hold back the tide, but I do have some flood defences!

There are some things that definitely help me cope with depression:

- I have chosen to make my self accountable and I tell a trusted few how I feel, they know me well enough to be brutally truthful with me when they think I need help.
- I see a counsellor if I need to. This has been the most healing experience of all for me. Go to the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy www.bacp.co.uk to find one in your area. Make sure they are accredited.
- I tell my GP. If yours doesn't listen/understand, see a different one.

- I self - examine : is my behaviour normal for me, am I experiencing uncomfortable symptoms, have I changed, am I thinking differently, does this worry me? Keeping a diary of thoughts and feelings helps with this.
- I read : knowledge is power.
- Physical activity increases endorphins (the feel good chemicals in your brain), don't just sit there, DO something!
- Remember, the symptoms are different for each of us.
- Depression can be the result of something that's happened in your life like the loss of a loved one, a job etc. This is a normal reaction. Sometimes it's the result of a chemical imbalance. Whatever the cause - it is NOT your fault! However, it is up to you to seek and receive help.
- Lastly, accept the help on offer, be it chemical or otherwise. You would accept insulin if you were diagnosed with insulin dependent diabetes wouldn't you?
- Depression happens - you can get over it!



Kym Grosse

Have you ever asked:

- How can I support someone who has mental ill health?
- How do I know if someone has mental ill health?
- How can I create a healthy workplace?

You will find answers to these questions and links to other information on:
<http://www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk/>



STRESSED?



Stress Control Courses

Four-week (2 hours each week) courses are put on by the NHS Psychological Treatment Service to teach about stress and ways to tackle it. The courses are free and are run as educational classes, not group therapy so you wouldn't be expected to talk about your personal problems

The next course is likely to take place in Tiverton in June and is currently being planned as an evening course.

For more information contact Gill Mobbs on 01884 235561.



Family rules, OK?

11.00am-3.00pm,
Tuesday 30th June, 2009

at

St George's Church Extension, Tiverton

How do you know how to behave in your family?

How did you learn the rules?

What happens if your rules and your spouse's rules are
very different?

How do these rules change over the generations?

Our day will be led by Tim Giles, Siân Kinrade and Martin Tuckett, Senior Mental Health Practitioners in the Devon Partnership Trust Access & Well-being Team, Mid Devon which offers Family Therapy as one of a range of treatments.

The event is **free** but booking is essential (a charge of £10 will be made for non-attendance after booking). Lunch will be provided.

Book by email: voluntary.supportscheme@virgin.net, write to VSS, Beck House, Beck's Square, Tiverton, EX16 6PJ or ring 01884 258507, by **23rd June**.



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