

Coming out!

It takes confidence to come out as someone whose mental health is not always at its best. In many respects mental illness is the final obstacle in society's quest for true equality.

Matters of race, sexuality, religion and gender rarely now provoke prejudice or distrust. Many commentators suggest that the journey to mainstream acceptance currently being followed by mental health campaigners is very similar to the gay rights campaigning in the last century.



My hope is that one day soon, it will be as socially acceptable to have a mental illness as it is to be gay. I have an uncle who is gay. He is 83 years old and in his lifetime has experienced the full spectrum of stigma. Public opinion and the law have changed dramatically; he has not!

I live with depression and recently gave a press interview about how I thought mental illness impacted on the workplace. It was a great opportunity to dispel some myths; it was also an opportunity to come out as one not ashamed to admit to wider mood swings than most.

None of us can fight the prejudice against mental illness single handed. It is up to us all to play a part. As a member of Rethink you have already nailed your colours to the mast. Perhaps now is the time to stand up and be counted. Together we can and will make a difference.

Robert Ashton
Chairman Eastern RRG

'It stirs up your emotions'

Just one comment from the more than 700 people, who between them saw the play *When Time Collapses* during the five days in January when it toured in Essex.

It presented a powerful picture of what can go wrong when serious mental illness is not identified in its early stages. It follows the gradual decline of Martin, 17, and the strain on his parents of the struggle for a diagnosis through the consequences of late intervention.

Workshops followed each performance where the audience was invited to suggest and enact solutions.

Funded by an £8020 Lottery Award to Braintree Rethink Carers Support Group, It was written by Polly Wright, director of The Hearth Centre.

www.thehearthcentre.org.uk



Stuff stigma conference

The March 2008 Stuff Stigma Conference, in Norwich's Maddermarket theatre, launched the Norwich part of a national campaign to fight prejudice.

The Big Lottery Fund has given Rethink, Mind and Mental Health News £18 million for a three-year campaign, called Moving People, to combat experienced by people who have had mental health problems. The theme of the conference was empathy and how to encourage it, as explained by the main guest speaker Roman Krznaric. Delegates were invited to share their ideas and even had to work during their coffee break coming up with suggestions for anti-stigma events.

The full list of their ideas is posted on the Stuff Stigma website www.stuffstigma.org/downloads/20080413

The Norwich conference was a great success, attracting 120 delegates, only one of whom ticked the 'less than good' box on the evaluation sheet; which means that everyone else found the afternoon good or better!

There are plans for a mass walk in October, workshops with schools and employers and Stuff Stigma will also have a stand at the Norwich Mental Health Alliance annual event at the Forum during Mental Health Week.

www.stuffstigma.org sign up for the monthly e-newsletter.



Rethink Graphics

A multi-purpose Social Enterprise scheme in Brentwood, Essex

"We received all the bits we ordered yesterday – FANTASTIC!... thanks for the speed, efficiency and quality provided. Really, really impressed."

a satisfied customer

Rethink Graphics is both an employment and training service and a commercial print shop funded by South West Essex Primary Care Trust but also partially funded by the income of the design and print business.

It provides assessment, support and preparation for work for people with severe mental health problems living in Brentwood, including paid/voluntary work, academic and vocational courses. Empowerment is important, as people give their time and skills to the team, rather than simply receiving a service generically designed as a program and paying little attention to the individual. Self-development occurs organically through mutual support and encouragement, following the Recovery Model.

Service Users receive:

- An assessment and recovery plan based on service users' needs and future aspirations.
- Work based skills using photocopiers, computer printing equipment, guillotines, binding machines and laminating equipment.
- Training in standard graphics packages, including Photoshop, Illustrator and Quark Express.

An individual can take part in all design, production, account handling, serving customers and administration (petty cash, arranging meetings, etc.).

Customers receive: a range of print and design services to a standard the prompts comments like the one at the top of this article. The print shop can do much of its work by e-mail so it can serve customers both in the local community and businesses and across the UK.

Rethink Graphics are the only Rethink service producing stationery and marketing materials, demonstrating increasing awareness of Rethink through use of the brand.



Co-ordinators and Links as Rethink Officers

Bill Scott, a link member from St Albans, has sent us a suggestion to reflect and recognise the work done by volunteers.

He suggests the title "Approved Voluntary Officer" for co-ordinators, who often handle sensitive information (liaising with carers, clients, Rethink staff, health authorities and other agencies) and are subject to the Data Protection Act.

Links, who do not usually deal with confidential information but make a valuable contribution to Rethink's work, could be called "Sub-Approved Voluntary Officer".



When former Norwich Rethink Bridges manager Debbie Cass and her partner Debbie Thompson decided to move to a small, rural village, called Monbrison, in the SE France, they couldn't have predicted the consequences.

An article about them in the local newspaper happened to mention that Debbie Cass had helped set up the Norwich Bridges day centre and soon they were getting letters from the families and carers of French people with mental health problems making clear the need for a similar service in their neighbourhood, which has few support services for people with mental illnesses.

So, Debbie Thompson helped to set up a small day centre, called GEM (Groupe d'Entraide Mutuelle), in the village.

The French project has only been going for six months but already staff and service users from Norwich have visited Monbrison and played host to an exchange visit by the French.

Community Mental Care Worker Stephanie Watson, Centre Manager David Pilgrim and two service users went over in December, staying with French families in the village.

"They welcomed us with open arms," said Stephanie.

Understandably there had been some anxiety among the service users before the trip, but confidence grew very quickly, she said. "When they came

back there was a sense of achievement and some of them are still in contact with their hosts."

March this year saw Norwich offering hospitality to nine French visitors, three staff and six service users. All stayed with local families, in some cases with people who had not themselves been out to France.

The visitors were given a reception by the Norwich mayor, had a tour of the Norwich City football club and were given free admission – plus a French interpreter – at the Castle Museum.

More trips are planned next year and the exchange has already had mutual benefits, not only in the increased confidence of the service users.

The Adult Education service in Norwich is now providing French lessons at the Bridges centre while GEM is benefiting from Bridge's experience and support as it grows and develops.



About Rethink Bridges, Norwich

This drop in centre is open daily Monday to Thursday as well as evenings and weekends.

It has links with training bodies and support services throughout Norwich as well as providing people with mental health problems with an opportunity for social interaction.

There are a range of activities, including art, creative writing, photography and the option of doing NVQs through City College. Now, of course, there are also French lessons.

Centre users are encouraged to use its kitchen to learn to plan, cost, prepare, cook and serve meals, giving them both life and possible employment skills, and there is also a weekend ramblers' club.

Bridges is busily fund raising for the next French exchange trip and plans a two-day sponsored walk along Wherryman's Way, a 38 mile route from Norwich to Great Yarmouth – expected to be June/July.

Publicity about the French exchange has already attracted a donation, but more will be needed.

Anyone who would like to contribute please contact:

Rethink Bridges
52 Magdalen Road
Norwich NR3 4EQ
telephone 01603 403411
or email: bridges@rethink.org

Bedfordshire Carer Support Service 70's Party Night



In was a case of in for a penny, in for a pound when we decided on the 70's theme for our night out for carers.

After putting in writing that staff would perform a surprise routine on the evening there was no going back and as if nerves weren't bad enough, when Paul Jenkins, Chief Executive, replied to an invite to say he would be joining us, then we really had no choice.

So 'Absolutely not Abba', in full costume, were inflicted on our poor unsuspecting carers.

However, once the nerves wore off and the carers gave a rapturous response, it went to our heads and when an encore at the end of the evening was suggested, there was no holding us back.

The evening was attended by 48 carers and cared for and the atmosphere was amazing, everyone joined in dancing and enjoyed the disco and 70's themed finger buffet.

Our events are becoming something of talking point now and numbers grow with each event, so the pressure is on for our next evening, a number of ideas are already being thought through.

The responses on our feedback forms show that carers value these events immensely, as respite, a chance to meet other carers, to have time for themselves, to re-energise, laugh, relax and meet friends.

Newmarket Carnival

Eastern RRG has a stall at this event to raise money and awareness of mental health issues

Saturday, July 5
2pm-5pm
Rowley Mile Racecourse
Newmarket

Carnival theme this year is Television and the procession leaves the Severals at 1pm. Entry is free and there are buses from the town centre.



Art Exhibition, Braintree

Braintree Rethink Carers Support Group will be holding its 5th Creative Minds Art Exhibition in October



And finally... Robert Ashton 1962

Tough luck in the shape of an Achilles tendon injury forced ERRG chairman Robert Ashton to pull out of the London Marathon shortly before the date after months of training hard.

His plan was to raise money for Rethink – but, we can report, all is not lost as several people have agreed to honour their pledges regardless.

Tim Edwards, who is a member of the Rethink's Eastern RRG and also sits on Rethink's national public affairs committee, decided to get his own back for our caption competition of him and whiskery friend in the last issue.

Tim challenged Robert to publish his most embarrassing picture to earn the sponsorship money he had pledged – so here it is!



Rethink is the operating name of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

Welcome Team **0845 456 0455**
Website www.rethink.org

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Editor: **Alison Withers**