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Welcome to OSMHN's 8th Newsletter!

Welcome to OSMHN's 8th newsletter which is the second to be produced following the end of the HEFCE-funded three-year project and the first all-electronic version. During the intervening period since the last issue (autumn 2003) there have been a few changes:

- ❖ Deborah Williamson, who has been OSMHN's stalwart administrator since the beginning, has left for greener pastures in Warwick leaving a thriving project behind as her legacy
- ❖ Barbara Jackson, who has been an active member of the Network Group, is now the administrator one day per week.
- ❖ The Steering Group has continued to meet and has expanded to include additional key people from the NHS and the Disability Team at Oxford University
- ❖ Members of the Steering Group are liaising with key teams and working parties in the Mental Health sector. They also continue to support the publication of the Newsletter and the maintenance of the Web Site
- ❖ The Network Group has been instrumental in holding a successful workshop on Helping Students with Depression and are planning a second event on 16 June on the Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)

The Steering Group are hopeful that additional funding can be found to continue the work of OSMHN through 2004-5.

OSMHN's newsletter needs you!

A primary aim of the OSMHN network is to enable the sharing of information, knowledge and experience of student mental health issues across the education, health and voluntary sectors in Oxfordshire. Our newsletter is a key mechanism for achieving this.

OSMHN would love to hear from you if you have any information which you feel would be of interest to others within the

local network or if you have any difficulty reading this electronic version. Please contact OSMHN if you have any information which you would like to include in our next newsletter. Even if you do not have anything specific to include, we always welcome your ideas and suggestions for the content of the newsletter.

Please e-mail osmhn@brookes.ac.uk.

Oxford Student Mental Health Network Workshops

Helping Students with Depression

The Spring Workshop was held on March 17 at Oxford Brookes. The event was oversubscribed and was enthusiastically attended by a wide range of 50 participants including chaplains, academic tutors, junior deans, students, counsellors and administrators. Feedback indicated that participants appreciate a practical approach to common problems so that they can see the relevance to their work.

Jim Pye, the first presenter, is the Mature Student Adviser and Study Skills Advisor at Oxford Brookes. He talked with humour and enthusiasm about working with students whose writing is causing them to become discouraged and sometimes depressed. He has observed that students can become discouraged by unhelpful feedback from teachers early in their educational life. Critical, unhelpful tutors and lecturers in FE and HE can undermine writers in a similar way sometimes reawakening painful feelings from earlier school experiences. Conversely, supporting students in particular ways can nurture their confidence and help them to get “unstuck”. Jim gave examples of small, practical interventions that people in contact with students can make.

Yo Davies, the second presenter, is a College Nurse at the University of Oxford and a visiting lecturer in the School of Health and Social Care at Oxford Brookes. She introduced participants to the Problem Solving Approach, which has shown to be helpful in working with depressed people in a variety of settings. After outlining the approach, Yo invited participants to work in small groups using hypothetical student case studies to explore how the approach might be used. Both the advantages and the challenges of using this approach were explored in the groups.

Feedback on the workshop, as a whole, was very positive with participants wanting more time to look at the topic of depression and ways of helping.

OSMHN Summer Seminar

16 June 2-4:30

Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford

Return to SENDA

The OSMHN Summer Event is a follow up to last year’s successful workshop, which provided a useful introduction to SENDA (the Special Educational Needs Disability Act) looking at the implications for educational institutions and all those who support students with mental health difficulties. By popular request we are holding a seminar which will look at the legislation from a practical point of view. A panel of experienced people will discuss and answer questions based on their experience of implementing the act. The topics we aim to cover include:

- An overview of SENDA particularly in relation to mental health
- Creating a culture where disclosure feels safe
- Anticipating need
- Real examples of reasonable adjustments
- Documenting, sharing and retaining sensitive information
- What to do if I don’t know what to do

**Places will be limited. To
book a place email**

osmhn@brookes.ac.uk

The student perspective

What its like to feel depressed and how you can deal with it!!

(by an Oxford Brookes final year student)

At 20 years old you think everything should be ok, life should be fun and that you should be out having a good time!! Sometimes it isn't that simple. I started to feel very down when I left to go to university as things weren't easy for me anymore and nothing seemed to be going well like it used to.

I felt like I was swimming but getting nowhere. I didn't want to speak or be with anyone and it felt everyone was out to get me. I would wake up crying I was paranoid and felt trapped somewhere where I didn't want to be but couldn't stop myself feeling like this. Unfortunately you become isolated, cut yourself of from people who really care and forget about others. I was lucky to have supportive friends but for people living with me it was extremely hard. I became sure that they felt they couldn't speak to me and had nothing really to say. They were under pressure too and I am sure they had feelings of regrets

about living with me. People try but can't really understand what and why you are like it. However, I am so lucky to have had the support and friends that I did.

One day I completely had enough and spent the whole day crying in bed!! I decided enough was enough and seeked help. Pills and counselling do help, and I was lucky to have some fantastic counselling, but at the very core of it are you. I had to help myself; slowly I started to write diary entries of how I felt, what I needed to do and what I had done. I did things I enjoyed, whether that was eating a whole chocolate bar or going out with friends!!

I was very determined to get out of this state and become the fun loving person I once was and with a lot of help, I feel that finally I am starting to see how I have changed but believe me it takes time and effort but once you get there you can see that it is worth it!!

Disability Awareness Week

March 8th to 12th was Disability Awareness Week at Oxford Brookes

Oxford Brookes University recently held a Disability Awareness Week to encourage staff to think more broadly and creatively about what disabled students can accomplish and about how they can work with disabled students to enable them to fulfil their potential.

The main focus of the activities taking place during the week was a series of lunchtime seminars. These had a general theme of 'How Reasonable Can We Be?' Four focused on different areas of disability – sight, hearing, mobility, and mental health. The fifth offered disabled students the opportunity to discuss with staff how they have found life as a disabled student at Brookes and to explore the problems and positives they have encountered in their time here.

All the seminars were well attended and staff were unanimously positive about the sessions and speakers. The feedback from the consultant who ran the session on hearing impairment in many ways sums up the week: 'I was certainly impressed with the turn out, if your whole week was like that I suspect you are thrilled with the success'.

Full details of all the seminars can be found on www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/.

The mental health focus of disability awareness week

The seminar on Mental Health was led by Peter Bailey a consultant with the specialist disability consultancy 'Disability Matters'. Key areas covered by Peter in his seminar on mental health were:

- ❖ Many people have had little contact with disabled people and in that situation will tend to obtain their information from the media. Mental Health especially suffers from very poor understanding – consider the case of Frank Bruno & the Sun headline 'Bonkers Bruno'. Our image of mental health problems is invariably negative. This discrimination seems to be driven by stereotypes such as: Equating mental illness with evil Life can't be worth living "Mad" people's opinions are pretty much worthless
- ❖ The biggest adjustment that many people could make would be to acknowledge the need to offer more proactive support to students with disabilities. The 'why?' will lead on to the 'how?'
- ❖ Blanket exclusions on courses (e.g. No students with stress conditions on Medical degree courses) are likely to be unlawful. When considering what a disabled student can achieve think along the lines of 'blind people don't apply to train as airline pilots'. Disabled people are likely to be the best judges of what they can & cannot accomplish and if they think they can do something the chances are that they probably can. Talk to them to see what could be done rather than make assumptions about what couldn't.
- ❖ Few disabled people are born disabled. Most impairments occur through illness or injury and for many people the

experience is a life changing event which can be very damaging to self esteem. It has been shown that people who go through such an experience tend to show a similar response to those suffering bereavement. We will never know when we meet a disabled person, which phase of adjustment to their disability they have reached. In addition many disabled people would rather not discuss or disclose their disability and this is especially true of people with mental health concerns. Students may be struggling to come to terms with life in a university environment even if this isn't obvious from their behaviour. Don't assume they're fine even if they look fine.

- ❖ In those circumstances it is unreasonable to expect disabled students to remind staff of their learning needs & what adjustments they require. Students shouldn't, at what could be a time of great vulnerability, be expected to have to organise an institution and draw attention to their disability. The institution should take responsibility for being on the top of its game. It should have systems in place for information sharing that focus on the students' needs rather than on their disability.
- ❖ Checklists are useful for understanding the types of adjustments that may be needed, and for giving examples of good practice in teaching, but they are no substitute for talking to the students to find out from them what are the best solutions to any given problem. Don't be afraid to ask practical questions.

If you would like further information on the week contact Oxford Brookes University's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Co-ordinator Michelle Holliday: mholliday@brookes.ac.uk.

In print and online

Students getting help

March 2004 The Skill Journal, issue no. 78 “Seeking and Negotiating Academic Support in Higher Education: A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences of Students with Mental Health Problems” by Lorna Thomas, Disability Adviser, University of Edinburgh; The study, an MA dissertation, illustrates how suffering from depression, stress or anxiety can impair learning. It can also mean that asking for help is difficult and that such students may have low expectations of what staff could do for them. None of the participants perceived their mental health problems as a disability and assumed that the Disability Service was meant to help students with physical disabilities. “Emotional vulnerability and a distinct lack of information appear to be one of the driving factors as to how students present themselves to staff to discuss support.”

Money and depression

April 2004, BBC News “Money Woes Lower Student Grades” Professor Bernice Andrews and Dr. John Wilding looked at Royal Holloway students when they first arrived, at the end of their first year and again at the end of their second year. The research found 20% of undergraduates had become depressed by the end of their second year. Financial difficulty was a major cause given by the 350 students who completed a questionnaire. The research authors are calling for more advice on money management while still at sixth form.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/-/1/hi/education/3632471.stm>

Legal liability

April 2004, Education Guardian “Colleges Liable for Students with Mental Health Problems” by Roxanne Escobales. “Universities and colleges face mounting legal challenges to protect themselves from the growing number of complaints from students suffering mental health problems. Universities will need to take measures such as training staff in identifying students whose mental health is at risk and introducing reporting and recording measures.”

www.EducationGuardian.co.uk/students

Eating disorder research

Spring 2004 Association for University and College Counselling Journal “Action Research on Eating Disorders” by Vicky Groves and Julie Devlin. The authors describe the findings of a two year project carried out at Cardiff University. “Guided self-help would appear to be relevant and empowering as students can continue work at their own pace during recess holidays and consequent breaks in therapy.”

News from Oxford Brookes University

“*Healthy Ways to Manage Your Stress*” is the name of a workshop being held for Oxford Brookes University students on 27 May from 1-2pm in Gibbs Building room 303.

The workshop will be run by Sue Wilkinson and Marion Casey from the Counselling Service.

Please contact ssrecept@brookes.ac.uk for further details.

Conference news

Universities UK conference in February 2004 'Mental Well-being in Higher Education, Policies and Practice' A personal perspective by Clive Robertson, Head of Teaching and Learning Development at Oxford Brookes University.

I found this a fascinating conference from a number of perspectives, not least because, as Head of Learning and Teaching Development at Brookes, it reminded me of the importance of good health generally and mental well-being in particular to effective learning and achievement.... and to effective teaching. There were, of course questions of definition to resolve. Were we considering the promotion of well-being generally, of which mental well-being is a part, dealing with mental well-being as a quite separate issue, or concerned only with extreme cases of mental illness and our capacity to recognize and deal with them? Were we considering the well-being of students alone or of students and staff? And were we fully recognizing the range of study modes now available ... on campus full time to work-based learning, Foundation Degrees to PhDs ...

My thoughts as I listened were of my own institution and my ignorance of the scale of support and intervention which these different scenarios required. What is the scale of mental ill health at Brookes. How are we coping? What are we doing well? What are we missing. In my current role and as a former Head of an Academic School, this was information I which I should surely have had more awareness.

The essential nature of collaboration, cooperation and networking to promote

mental well-being and to respond to mental ill health were major themes, but "turf wars" and rivalries were evident undercurrents. Yet another example of where petty politics and artificial territories are a hindrance to progress! Nothing new here! But what is it like at Brookes I wondered. Are we a team, with different contributions to make, pulling in the same direction? Or are we sometimes pulling in different directions, unintentionally for the most part, competing for limited resources, and not gaining the benefit of more "joined up" planning?

"Where are the academics today" was a lament heard on a number of occasions," they should be here". Well, "they" were probably not aware of the conference in the first place and nor, like me, were they aware of how important their involvement is. There is surely a need for those working in the area of mental well-being to actively seek out the conferences and publications of the academic community ... Subject Associations, Subject Centres in the new Higher Education Academy, professional bodies... and in institutions, School Boards, Staff Development activities, in-house publications. It requires some effort, but I am sure that the knocking will be on open doors and that together we can address more effectively the well-being of our students – and our colleagues.

News from the University of Oxford

Peer support training mini conference – Friday 11 June 2004

The day will look at some models currently in use in universities, ways of financing the programme and a bit about what is already available in terms of evaluation of such projects.

Cost: £60 per head

For further information contact Oxford University Counselling Service on 01865 270300.

Resources

Oxfordshire Mind

Oxfordshire Mind has many years of experience in running groups to help people learn to manage their anxiety, cope with depression, or to develop greater confidence and self-esteem. Groups are based on the cognitive therapy model. To find out more, contact Linda McDiarmid: telephone (01865)310830 Ext 25

Oxfordshire Mind also publish a useful guide to mental health services in Oxfordshire. For more information telephone (01865) 511702.

Bristol Crisis Service for Women Training Days

Working with Women who Self-injure. Workshops; one day workshops in May and June: topics covered include:

- Why do people self-injure?
- What are their needs?
- What issues does self-injury raise for workers?
- Responding helpfully.

Enquiries: Telephone:0117 927 9600

OSMHN Steering Committee members

OSMHN is supported and advised by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from its partner institutions. The present members are as follows:

Oxford University

Elsa Bell, Head of Counselling
Dame Fiona Caldicott, Chairman
Committee on Student Health & Welfare
Hannah Young, Disability Adviser

Oxford Brookes University

Keith Cooper, Head of Student Services
(Chair)
Marion Casey, Senior Counsellor
Sue Wilkinson, Counsellor

Oxford College of Further Education

Pam Woolley, Manager of Student Support

Oxford City Primary Care Trust

Yvonne Taylor, Mental Health and
Substance Misuse Lead
Anna Hinton, Specialist Health Visitor

Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust

June Dent, Consultant Clinical
Psychologist
Samantha Holmes, Service Director for
the City CMHT
John Pearce, Adult Services Management
Team

OSMHN contact details

OSMHN is unable to offer direct support or advice to students, but aims to collaborate with those organisations and services that are involved in supporting students with mental health problems. OSMHN is currently staffed by a part-time administrator one day a week, Barbara Jackson, who can be contacted at:

c/o Student Services
Helena Kennedy Student Centre
Headington Hill Campus
Headington
Oxford, OX3 0BU

Telephone: 01865 484689

E-mail osmhn@brookes.ac.uk

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/osmhn>

