

Newsletter 11 (Spring 2006)

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Welcome to OSMHN's 11th Newsletter!

- OSMHN continues to thrive with the support of our partners and the countless individuals who give so freely of their time and energy.
- In the office at the Harcourt Hill campus of Oxford Brookes University, Barbara Jackson continues as the administrator one day per week. Deborah Williamson maintains the OSMHN Web Site updating it on a monthly basis.
- The Steering Group has continued to meet and has expanded to include new members. Judith English has joined the Steering Group as chair of the Oxford University Student Health and Welfare Committee and Dr. Gordon Gancz now represents the College Doctors Association. Peter Quinn now represents Oxford University's Disability Service. Nicola Colao from the Oxford Brookes Disability Service, has joined the group following the death in December of Madeleine Collin. Madeleine was a great supporter of the OSMHN project from the very beginning and she will be greatly missed.
- 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 planning group have continued to meet and have been instrumental in planning the next two workshops to be held in March and May this year.

OSMHN's newsletter needs you!

This issue contains information about events, service developments and local resources. Also included are articles about initiatives designed to meet the needs of students in a variety of ways. Alan Percy writes about how his service has managed to create under pressure while Margaret Whipp describes the mentoring aspect of a University Chaplain's work. Isabelle Pelly, a Student Peer Supporter at Oxford University, describes the 2nd annual Peer Supporters Conference and Julia Peacock writes about an access course for students with a history of mental health difficulties. If you have heard of or are involved in any similar initiatives or you would like your event publicized, please let us know by emailing: osmhn@brookes.ac.uk

OSMHN Workshops

All the places for the March 14 Workshop "Talking About Alcohol " have been filled. Following the workshop a summary will be added to the OSMHN Web Site. If you missed this one and would like to see another workshop on alcohol, let us know.

Oxford Student Mental Health Network

Summer Workshop 2006

Basic Drugs Awareness

16 May 2006

Oxford Brookes University

What is it about?

- trends in drug use amongst students
- effects and risks associated with drug use
- drugs and the law
- how to effectively manage drug related incidents

Who is it for?

Staff and students in supporting roles (within Oxford City) including:

- Residential staff
- College nurses
- Chaplains
- Counsellors
- Tutors
- Junior Deans
- Mentors and Peer Supporters
- Students Union Staff and Officers

How do I sign up?

- There are two sessions – you must sign up for morning (9:30 – 12:30) or afternoon (1:30-4:30). There are 20 places for each session
- As with all OSMHN workshops there is no charge but a £1 donation for coffee/tea will be requested
- Email osmhn@brookes.ac.uk stating which session you wish to attend – morning or afternoon.

If, for some reason, you cannot attend, please let us know asap.

OSMHN workshops tend to be oversubscribed and there is usually a waiting list of people who could fill your place.

Preventing Student Suicide

The Autumn edition of the Association for University and College Counselling (AUCC) journal has a number of articles which may be of interest to those who work with vulnerable students.

The issue includes articles on:

- Preventing Student Suicide – an account of the work of the Responses and Prevention in Student Suicide UK-wide study
- Supporting Staff Dealing with Suicide – a straightforward practical approach for staff and institutions
- Hopeline UK - a new helpline for parents, carers, teachers, professionals and friends concerned about young people at risk
- Suicide: a student's perspective
- Assessing Risk vs Promoting Resilience –the importance of a 'whole institution' approach
- Students Against Depression web site
- Online Peer Support for Students – internet-based support for students at University College London
- Mentoring for Mental Health – a pioneering program at the University of Westminster

And many more interesting articles. In due course all the AUCC articles will be available in PDF form on the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy web site but for the time being, copies of the articles can be obtained by contacting gemma.green@bacp.co.uk

Mainly mentoring – a glimpse into the work of the chaplaincy

By Margaret Whipp, Oxford Brookes University Chaplaincy

Being trusted

The sheer variety of the chaplain's role does not lend itself to ready definition. Unlike many staff whose roles carry clearly defined professional expectations, the chaplain's presence in the

university carries a distinctively symbolic meaning which resists easy pigeon-holing. He or she aims to offer relationships more than 'interventions', and hopes to be a focus more of trust than of 'support'.

Being present

Being around and available and, above all, being interested is enormously encouraging to students. It is also surprisingly helpful to staff in every corner of the campus. The chaplain can move around very freely, making human connections and building gentle networks that restore some sense of community in a large and often impersonal institution. The presence of the chaplaincy room, however simple, can be an invaluable space for tentative questioning and human-scale hospitality.

Being a companion

Creating trust and building up relationships lay the foundation for the day to day 'work' of the chaplain. A typical day's engagements from the last week illustrate the range of responses to diverse human and spiritual need:

- Hosting an early morning communion service – a spiritual anchorage point for a small group of mature students
- Meeting a member of staff to help plan his mother's funeral service – a safe space in the day to talk honestly about grief
- Blessing a new business enterprise established by a bright Buddhist student – a not-infrequent example of inter-religious support
- Preparing publicity for a lecture on good practice in spiritual care – a collaboration with NHS chaplaincies and the university school of health
- Advising a young student on how to dress for her interview with a Christian organisation – an opportunity to explore the realities of work in the religious and voluntary sector
- Praying with a young woman shaken by a firearms incident the previous evening – absorbing the shock, and rehearsing personal safety advice
- Leading a music crit session – encouraging would-be Christian musicians to hone their writing skills
- Guiding an anxious student through the ethical challenges of a literature assignment – offering the reassurance of tested, resilient faith
- Fixing Sunday lunch for a new international student with a local church family – making a 'home from home' for one of Oxford's many birds of passage
- Corresponding with a Catholic student afraid of 'losing her faith' – allowing the space for intelligent questioning and mature integration
- Buying a new set of floor cushions – comfortable enough for calm meditation, fierce discussion, or exhausted slumber!

Mainly mentoring

The presence, trust and companionship of a chaplain on the campus offer a contemporary and contextually appropriate model for the traditional mentoring role of the religious 'elder'.

Oxford Brookes Health Visitor

Anna Hinton, University Health Visitor, is on secondment from Oxford Brookes for one year from 1st February 06. Anna will be working with Oxford City Primary Care Trust's Public Health Directorate on communicable disease control.

Her stress clinic and chaotic eating bulletin board has closed for the time being. Please refer students to their GP practice or to Brookes counselling service for help, advice or support.

However, Brookes Goes Walking - Charity walk 2006, will be running on April 5th as planned and is now being co-ordinated by the Students' Union. Please contact Rachel Leat, SU welfare executive officer, if you would like to join the design team and help to raise charity funds for our local mental health charities and the John Henry Brookes Bursary fund.

Useful Resources

The Mind Guide to mental health services in Oxfordshire is published by Oxfordshire Mind and Oxfordshire Mental Health Matters. Section one gives a brief introduction to mental illness, its various forms and what help is available. This is followed by an 'at a glance' list of help lines and a short list of national organizations.

Section two covers the statutory sector provision and section three covers the voluntary and some private sector provision. Each entry includes details of what service the organization provides and how to access it.

The Guide is distributed free to mental health service users and the organizations sponsoring the publication. Otherwise there is a charge of £5 per copy. You can order one by contacting Oxfordshire Mind, 125 Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6AH, tel: 01865 558680 or emailing info@oxfordshire-mind.org.uk.

RESTORE's Learning, Employment, and Potential (LEaP) project supports people into work and training and provides a variety of courses in The Michael Young Building (formerly The Learning Centre) located in Manzil Way off the Cowley Road, Oxford.

At present two services are offered by LEaP

- "Snakes & Ladders" which is a pilot project that provides business advice to clients
- "Step Ladders" which provides employment and training support.

All of LEaP's services are for people with mental health problems and are free. LEaP offers an array of free courses including such things as computing, introduction to drama, career planning, and English and Maths, among others. If you are interested in any of our services, please ring us on (01865) 455825 or email us at leap@restore.org.uk.

Oxfordshire Mental Health Matters is a local charity that helps to build bridges between mental health services and the people who use them. BASICS is a programme of training comprising some 40 one and two day workshops per year. Their new programme includes topics such as Mental Health and the Law, Introduction to Mindfulness Training, Self-esteem and Anxiety Management. To find out more, contact the Training Administrator on 01865 728981.

Defining disability

By Caroline Moughton, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Co-ordinator, Oxford Brookes University

The Disability Rights Commission is currently carrying out a consultation about the definition of disability to be used in the proposed Single Equalities Act. The closing date for the consultation has now passed but this is not the end of the process. This is a brief summary of the main issues. You can find the full consultation document on their web pages at <http://www.drc-gb.org/disabilitydebate/more/definition/>

What is needed is a definition that is clear and easy to understand and that functions in the context of disability discrimination law to reduce the prejudice, disadvantage and discrimination that has historically been associated with disability. This is not necessarily true of the definition in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The present definition of disability is drawn from a medical model. Many cases brought under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 fail because a person is unable to establish that they are disabled within the definition. It also goes against the spirit of the legislation for a person to be having to produce evidence of the negative effects of their impairment. The recent modification removing the requirement for a mental illness to be "clinically recognised" still fails to address all the problems.

With a wider definition, based on any kind of temporary or permanent impairment, the emphasis could be on establishing whether discrimination has taken place. Just as other discrimination legislation protects everybody from discrimination on the grounds of race or gender, there could be broader protection for everybody against discrimination on the grounds of a perceived or real disability. A similar approach has been taken in Australia and Ireland, without resulting in a flood of "trivial" cases.

The advantages and disadvantages of such a change in the definition need to be examined. On the one hand, it would move the legal process to examining the alleged barriers. On the other hand, it would be important not to lose sight of the genuine needs of severely-disabled people. Extending the right to request "reasonable adjustments" should not reduce their availability to those who most need them. This definition would purely be for use in the context of the legislation, and it would still be appropriate to use narrower definitions of disability to target resources effectively.

Many people who are currently covered by the legislation don't realise it, because they don't define themselves as "disabled". This is particularly important for people mental health issues, who can

find it very difficult either to recognise their own difficulties or to ask for help.

If you would like to raise any issues with me, please email me at cbmoughton@brookes.ac.uk

Oxford University Peer Support Conference

By Isabelle Pelly, Peer Supporter, New College, Oxford University

Saturday 4th February saw 60 peer supporters from 3 different universities convene for a day of interaction and shared experiences, hosted at St Johns College. This 2nd Annual Peer Support Conference integrated representatives from the Universities of Cambridge and Reading as well as Oxford, under the guidance of Anne Ford, Co-ordinator, Oxford University Peer Support Programme.

For all, this provided an opportunity to assess some of the successes and future challenges of establishing a Peer Support system into a University's wider administrative framework as well as on an individual informal level with students. The topics discussed, such as "common issues faced by peer supporters," "raising the profile of peer support" or "how to deal with particular difficulties" brought out a sense of unity amongst the students participating in the conference. This was reinforced by the psychological perspective provided by Elsa Bell's (Head of Counselling, Oxford University) highly appreciated discussion of the 'attachment theory'.

For students from Reading and Cambridge in particular, experiences from the 15-year strong programme at Oxford provided help for promotion and perseverance. Being surrounded by such a variety of individuals with a very similar rigorous training only served to underpin the value of our listening roles amongst our peers, whatever the challenges faced.

Benefits of using pre-intake/assessment forms

By Alan Percy, Deputy Head, Oxford University Counselling Service

During Hilary term of the last academic year, (January-March 2005) the OUCS had a longer than usual waiting time of several weeks for an initial counselling assessment. This was due to a number of factors, the details of which are too lengthy to explain here. In order to manage this situation and meet the needs of students as soon as possible, we had to think of a number of different strategies. One of them was introducing a pre-assessment form and this has proved to have a number of benefits. The reason I am mentioning the context is to remind us that it is still possible to think and be creative, even when a service is under pressure.

When a student contacted the service, instead of being offered an appointment straight away, which was the previous practice, they were given, posted or e-mailed a pre-assessment form which they were asked to complete and return before they were then offered an appointment. Most students returned the completed form within 24 hours. Students were also sent information on the service, where to find support during their wait, such as their GP, and also directed to websites offering self help material and information.

The form below shows the questions we decided would be most useful for us and the students.

This form has had a number of beneficial effects:

- It helps the student to think about their problem and what would be useful for them. Many students have reported that this process in itself had a positive therapeutic effect.
- It provides the service with information to help screen and assess those students who may be at some kind of risk, so they can be seen more urgently if possible, or directly referred for more immediate or medical help.
- It takes the pressure away from 'front-line' or receptionist staff from entering into longer conversations in order to assess the urgency of need of those students contacting.
- It helps the service to do an initial, if only partial, assessment of the student problem in order to place them with specific practitioners or a practitioner offering a specific theoretical model if this is appropriate.
- Over the last year the service has noticed a significant decrease in students who did not appear (DNA) for their initial session. We have gathered feedback that indicates that a number of students might be ambivalent about coming to counselling, or whose problems have lessened and therefore they feel much better, do not return their form and are therefore not given an appointment. In the past they would probably have not turned up for their assessment session, which for us would have been a wasted session. In order that these forms are not seen as a 'barrier' to counselling, anyone who does not return their form is sent one, if not two reminders. They are told they can speak to a counsellor on the telephone if they cannot fill out the form or if they find it too upsetting, and can then directly get an appointment. In using approximately 900 hundred of these forms only a

handful of students have contacted to say that they found filling in the form impossible or were upset at having to do so.

- The form gives the counsellor a brief outline of the presenting problem, which is very useful for them to be able to think about the student before the first session.

University of Oxford Counselling Service
11 Wellington Square
Oxford, OX1 2ES
Email: reception@counserv.ox.ac.uk

Please return form either by post or email within 5 days

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FOR OFFICE USE

Date reviewed:

Action taken:

Form sent: Returned: Apt offered: Days wait:

Contact details:

Name College

1. Briefly summarize your main reasons for requesting counselling

2. How long have you been experiencing these problems?

3. Have you consulted a counsellor or another mental health professional before (e.g. counsellor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist)? If you did how frequent and for how long was the contact? If you are still in contact with any of these practitioners it would be helpful for us to know. If it was a counsellor here please tell us their name and approx dates.

4. Is there anything specific that has prompted you to ask for counselling now?

5. On a scale of 1 – 10 (with 10 being most serious) how seriously are these problems affecting:

Your academic performance

Your quality of life as a student in Oxford

6. What are your goals from counselling? We understand that everyone will want to 'feel better' but would ask you to think about what might be evidence for you that things had improved e.g. I would be less anxious in social situations.

7. A number of students have found it helpful to explore their problems through group work. Do you think that any of the following groups, led by an experienced practitioner, might be helpful for you?

Structured groups with a focus on practical strategies

Managing stress creatively yes no maybe

Managing depression yes no maybe

Managing anxiety yes no maybe

Groups that are more exploratory in feel and not focused on one particular problem i.e. students have the opportunity to talk about their own individual concerns and to learn from other group members and from the live experience of being in a group.

12 week group for undergraduates yes no maybe

One year group for graduate students yes no maybe

8. Who have you been able to talk to about the concerns that have brought you to counselling e.g. family, friend, member of the college peer support panel, JCR/MCR officer, College Nurse or Doctor, Chaplain or Tutor?

9. Is there anything else that you think is important that we should know?

10. Are you undergraduate/graduate?

11. Do you have exams this year?

Email Groups

The OSMHN email address book is fairly large but we are always looking for efficient ways of publicizing our events and reaching people with our newsletter. If you have a relevant email group (such as junior deans, mentors, peer supporters, SU staff and officers, residential assistants, hall managers) we would be happy to incorporate them in our mailings. We are grateful to all of you who do pass mailings on.

Supporting Students with Mental health Problems in Further Education

By Julia Peacock, Stockport College

I am Course manager of the Bridges Course at Stockport College, which is a course specifically devised for students in recovery from mental health problems.

Not all students are ready to access mainstream education. There was a definite 'No Man's Land' where some students found themselves too ill for main courses, but well enough to want to resume their education.

Fear can prevent learning. It can prevent people from even getting into the building.

Staff may be unsure about their own skills in working with vulnerable students, and they may also need support in identifying and dealing with personal insecurities surrounding mental health issues.

Counselling and therapeutic interventions may be a prelude to engaging students in the learning process, as well as educating staff and the college system to accept and provide a non-discriminatory environment.

Preparing people to learn who have a clinical diagnosis of a range of mental health problems is a challenge not only to the participants, but also to those who design and deliver programmes. That's why we offer a range of subjects, from Confidence and Relaxation, Art or Drama Therapy, Cookery and Computers.

The college has responsibilities to all students to provide a safe environment, with equal opportunities and a non-discriminatory charter.

Keen to take advantage of additional funding for courses that encourage wider participation, the Care in the Community Act made educational provision for people with mental health provision an obvious choice.

These strategies have had a direct effect on my own teaching style, as well as offering the support students with mental health problems need.

My research tried to develop insights into how good practice can be achieved, and explores the value of confidence as a precursor to learning.

I have spent a lot of time trying to reassure students that when they start at the college, although the course they are on is specifically designed for students with a history of mental health problems, when they walk down the corridors, or sit in the canteen, other students will not realise this. There are no outward physical signs, and their personal background will not be evident.

It is important that all students are treated with respect, and equality.

If you would like to know more about the Bridges Course and the philosophy behind it, email "Peacock, Julia" Julia.Peacock@stockport.ac.uk

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
Alan Percy, Deputy Head, Counselling Service
Dame Fiona Caldicott, Principal of Somerville College
Judith English, Chair of Student Health and Welfare Committee
Peter Quinn, Head of Disability Service

Oxford Brookes University

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

Oxford College of Further Education

Viv Miles, Student Services Manager

Oxford City Primary Care Trust

Yvonne Taylor, Head of Mental Health Services
Amer Akbar, Service Re-design Manager
Anna Hinton, Specialist Health Visitor

Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust

June Dent, Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Samantha Holmes, Service Director for Adult Mental Health Services
John Pearce, Service Manager for Adult Mental Health Services

General Practitioners

Dr. Ann Bevan
Dr. Neil MacLennan, College Doctor
Dr Gordon Gancz

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 OSMHN
Oxford Brookes University
The Lodge
Harcourt Hill, OX2 9AT

E-mail: osmhn@brookes.ac.uk