

Newsletter 14 (Autumn 2007)

Welcome to issue 14 of the OSMHN Newsletter. The network continues to bring people together both physically and electronically to focus on the mental health and welfare of students. Colleagues from Oxford University 's Peer Support Programme and from Oxfordshire Mind describe their recent activities.

This issue also contains a summary of the OSMHN Autumn workshop which was entitled *Students and Depression: an Introduction*. The topic tapped into the concerns of many staff and peer supporters who deal with students on a day-to-day basis. The event was heavily over-subscribed and some consideration is being given to running this event again. We also hope to extend the reach of these events by offering electronic copies of the handouts when appropriate.

The next OSMHN event will focus on the work of network members – sharing ideas and practice. This issue also contains information about training opportunities and low cost / free groups which might be helpful to students. If you have any event or issue you wish to bring to the attention of the network, contact osmhn@brookes.ac.uk.

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1. MANAGING STRESS CREATIVELY



Oxford University Peer Support Programme 4th Annual Conference Saturday 10th November saw representatives of 26 Oxford colleges attend the 4th Annual Peer Support Conference for a day of group discussion, talks and workshops on the subject of Managing Stress Creatively.

The conference, held in New College, Oxford, began with an insightful workshop led by Caroline Merry, on Managing Stress Creatively. The workshop covered defining stress and its major symptoms and providing information on stress management including relaxation techniques. This was followed by talks from Jonathan Edwards (Brasenose) and Ben Britton (St Catherine's), giving insight into their experiences as Peer Supporters, and Nick Luxmoore, Psychotherapist and author, on the psychology of 'Stress and Distress'. Discussion groups on 'How does stress/distress affect me as a Peer Supporter?' highlighted the intricacies of supporting a stressed individual or being stressed and yet providing a high standard of support. This allowed further discussion on ways in which stress or distress caused by these situations can be minimized.

In addition to the information and practical advice given the conference also provided an excellent opportunity to meet fellow peer supporters from different colleges to share experiences and thoughts on a subject keenly felt by all students. The information provided by the Managing Stress Creatively workshop, in particular, would be a helpful addition to any Peer Supporters training. In short the conference, organized by Anne Ford, Coordinator of the Oxford University Peer Support Programme, was an interesting and informative day and a great success.

By Siobhan Moyes, Graduate Student and Peer Supporter, St Hugh's College, Oxford

2. OXFORDSHIRE MIND AGM

Oxfordshire Mind's 40th-anniversary AGM was held on Monday 26th November at the Saïd Business School in Oxford. The event was a great success with around 150 people attending. This year's speaker, Oliver James, gave a provocative talk on 'affluenza', or the negative effects of an excessively materialist culture on mental health.

A further highlight of the evening was the unveiling of the specially-commissioned painting 'Held Safely in Mind' by artist and service user Mary Smith, who spoke very movingly of how her experiences of using Mind services had inspired her work. Also launched at the AGM was the new booklet 'A Brief History of Oxfordshire Mind' by Jane Hope.

3. STUDENTS AND DEPRESSION: AN INTRODUCTION

The OSMHN Autumn Workshop presented on 13 November 2007 at Rewley



House, Wellington Square .

Dr Jo Trefusis, Clinical Psychologist at the Oxford University Counselling Service, and Dr Martina Mueller, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at the Warneford Hospital, provided an overview of depression and the many ways it may impact on students trying to cope with the relentless pace of academic life. The following points were highlighted initially:



- People are particularly vulnerable to depression during periods of transition or stress.
- Late teens/early twenties is a time when young people are negotiating significant developmental changes.
- Going to university represents a major transition from childhood to adulthood, where adult roles and responsibilities are taken on, often for the first time.

The speakers went on to include information about prevalence, symptoms and treatments. They also suggested practical ways of supporting students whose functioning may be impaired by low mood and other symptoms. Related concerns such as substance misuse and self-harm were also covered. The workshop was interactive and included time for questions and discussion.

If you would like to have access to the handouts (which are in powerpoint form but can be printed out), contact bjackson@brookes.ac.uk.

4. THE NEXT OSMHN EVENT

In late April /early May we are planning an event which we hope will enable network members to find out what interesting and effective activities are going with students in the local area. The success of this event depends on members being willing to share ideas, practices, descriptions of projects and even unexpected learning experiences (sometimes known as mistakes) with others also working with students in Oxford.

Maybe you have:

- run a group for students
- held a mental health awareness session
- put together a welfare team in your college
- written useful leaflets for students
- collaborated with colleagues from other services in an interesting way
- maybe you work in the NHS or for a voluntary agency and you would like to discuss the work you do with students

We are looking for short presentations of about 20-30 minutes (including discussion) with smallish groups. The idea is that we have a variety of presentations in a kind of market-place which participants can choose to attend. If you would like to be part of this exciting event by sharing your work, contact Barbara Jackson (bjackson@brookes.ac.uk).

5. TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



OCTS (Oxford Cooperative Training Scheme)

OCTS aim to provide high quality, low-cost and accessible training to front line staff within the voluntary and statutory sector in Oxfordshire. University and college staff are also welcome. If you would like information about their Spring programme of courses, check out their web <http://www.octs.org.uk/>

Mental Health Matters is a small, local charity that helps to build bridges between mental health services and the people who use them. They run low-cost courses such as:

- Introduction to Mindfulness
- Introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Mental Health Awareness
- Anxiety Management
- Self Esteem
- Working with People in Distress

If you would like to know more about their courses, check out their website <http://www.oxford-mentalhealth.org>.

6. LOW COST CBT GROUPS ACROSS THE COUNTY

The Oxfordshire Mind Spring Brochure is now available listing the CBT based Therapeutic Groups which will be running in various venues in Oxfordshire. If you would like to know more about the groups, the format and how to access them, go to the MIND web site:

<http://www.oxfordshire-mind.org.uk/groups.htm>

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:

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