

Healthwatch North Tyneside report of the Mental Health Service User and Carer Day on 15 May 2015

To mark mental health awareness week on the theme of mindfulness Healthwatch North Tyneside, in partnership with Launchpad, Time to Change and Mindfulness Based Therapies, held a day talking to mental health service users and carers in the over 50 age group.

What we did

We spent time together in a large group where the organising partners gave short presentations or led activities. We had inspiring talks from Denise Porter, a carer who is a trustee of Rethink Mental Illness, and Anthony Heslop, mental health champion working with Time to Change.

There were three workshop sessions giving people time in smaller groups where they talked about stigma, learnt mindfulness techniques and also the Healthwatch workshop where we asked people to share their experiences. Everyone had the opportunity to attend all three workshops.

Julia Charlton one of Healthwatch North Tyneside's board members was available all day for people who wanted to talk one to one. She was busy all day, hearing people's issues and information and signposting needs.

Sharing lunch together was a really important part of the day.

Who attended?

Service users and carers between the ages of 51 and 76 attended with 11 men and 8 women completing evaluation forms. 27 people signed in including facilitators.

What we heard

During the Healthwatch workshop sessions participants gave their views and talked about their experiences, some were recorded individually on post-it notes while others were shared with the group. We heard a wide range of issues about

services; positive and negative experiences and also questions people would like Healthwatch to help find the answers to.

GPs

- How many GPs have any specialisation in mental health? Many people said GPs lacked knowledge of mental ill health.
- GPs often don't show an active interest in mental health unless the patient raises it.
- A normal appointment is too short to discuss a mental health issue.
- "I have had wonderful care from my GP and the CMHT (Community Mental Health Team)."
- "I have nothing but good to say about my GP, Dr Dixon at Portugal Place, and this practice. The subsequent treatment for depression has been of great support."
- "Drs have no clue where to signpost you to and say don't go to the groups, don't go to the mental health groups."
- GPs – not knowing what different groups and services are available in the community
- GPs are not often seen at community forums or events to listen to mental health user concerns and understand issues

Mental health services

- Mental health help has been great.
- North Tyneside mental health providers don't talk to each other. Especially don't talk to the third sector providers. "We know better". Providers aren't linked into the community.
- People (professionals) in mental health services don't talk to each other.
- Dual diagnosis, mental health plus drugs or alcohol is a massive issue - what is the pathway?
- There is the new emergency care hospital for physical problems, what about mental health? Where to go in a crisis - could go to A & E and wait for hours and then there is no one trained in mental health.
- "Valerie Speed is an excellent and caring CBT therapist at Benfield Medical Centre, Walkergate."
- "Autism...they're hopeless at assessing it. Getting better because of legislation."
- Not enough in-patient beds, or easy enough access to mental health services.
- What ethical standards do psychologists have?

Waiting times

- Waiting list for psychologist is a problem. CBT was excellent, but I had to wait 18 months for it.
- There are many psychology graduates who can't get jobs. Surely these people could be employed.
- Waiting list was 8 weeks to see someone following hospital discharge and suicide attempt.
- Very long wait for gender dysphoria clinic and not much help for people on the waiting list.

Community support

- "There's a problem if you have mental health problems and can be socially isolated. I would like a drop in."
- "Is Safe Space still there? I would like it available every day, sometimes you just need 10 minutes."
- Lots of community support isn't there anymore.

Wider issues

- Transport. "It's expensive to get around. Bus pass saved my life. I got a disabled pass cos I lost my license when I was sectioned. But if you never had a driving licence you're not eligible for a bus pass."
- Money is rarer, less support.
- North of Tyne has much poorer mental health services and less well connected than South of Tyne.
- How can we get:
 - A carer's assessment?
 - A travel pass?
- When someone is sectioned who has to be there to do it?

What you said about the day and the Healthwatch workshop

Feedback about the day was very positive with many requests to do something similar again. For most participants information about Healthwatch was new and valued.

- "Good information about processes and useful issues raised."

- “Useful forum but function of organisation not totally understood. Good facilitator.”
- This comment reflected the need for further work in making Healthwatch relevant for more communities in North Tyneside.
- “Very useful. Hopefully Healthwatch will take the issues raised forward.”
- People appreciated opportunities to share experiences one to one and in groups. A number of people are interested in volunteering with Healthwatch.

What next?

We will:

- record all the issues and find out answers to questions raised
- feedback to North Tyneside service user forum and individuals where you asked for this
- let those who expressed an interest know how they can get involved with Healthwatch
- look at how we can influence decision makers to continue addressing issues you raised
- put information on the Healthwatch website.

For more information about our work on mental health please contact:

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