



“let us share our
voices of experience
in mental health”

VOX

NEWSLETTER

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Voices Of eXperience



VOX News

**You are invited to this years
VOX Winter members meeting
which includes a Consultation
with the Scottish Government on
the Mental Health Strategy for
Scotland.**

**Monday the 12th of December
at the Grand Central Hotel in
Glasgow for further details and
to register see inside this issue.**



John and Mahmud at Moving Minds III in Kelvingrove Museum. Read more about Moving Minds in our diversity update on page 10.

in this issue...

- HATE CRIME FOCUS GROUP • CHANGE FUND • VOX MEDIA POLICY
- DID YOU KNOW SPOT • THE YARD ADVENTURE CENTRE • NAMED PERSON ROLE
- OVER 50s COFFEE MORNING GROUP • GYPSY TRAVELLERS

Members Page

Two poems by VOX Member Glen Merrilees

STIGMA

I've been stigmatised and traumatised, through
no fault of my own

Bestowed with dirty labels, flesh ripped fae
the bone

Look he's an epileptic, depressed and lazy too
Never worked a day in years, still signing oan
the broo
...

I want to tell my story, I promise you no games
I'll give tae you the details, but I'll withhold
the names

There's some joabs ah did years ago, epilepsy
sealed ma fate

Sacked fur takin seizures, sacked fur runnin' late
...

Runnin' late... I'd took a seizure bloodied, ill
and sare

I'd try my best tae make it in, but they didnae
seem tae care

Application form no mention, of my illness no
one knew

Never would have goat they joabs, they'd have
changed their point of view
...

A gift... unwanted labels, madman, weirdo, worse
But remember I'm a victim, depressions
sickly curse

I've been stigmatised and traumatised, fur whit...
I've done no crime

Labels thrust upon me, noo I've got tae serve
the time
...

I'm a victim; I'm a target, depressions deadly curse
Y'er looks y'er twisted whispers, it only makes
it worse

We've goat tae stop this stigma, wipe it off the
planets face

We're just people with an illness, part of the
human race

AM I

I've sunk to the bottom, in a pit of despair
Screaming for help, is there somebody there?
...

Cowering in terror, trembling with fear
It's cold and it's dark, and it's lonely down here
...

Afraid of a shadow, I can't even see
Stuck in an eddy, that's swallowing me
...

Am I free as an eagle, folk say I look well?
My stomach in turmoil, my soul in a cell
...

Can't answer the doorbell, can't answer the
phone
Surrounded by loved ones, I'm still all alone
...

Can't express the feelings, that are cutting me
in two

Taking pen to paper, the best that I can do
...

Far too many questions, answers far too few
Never looking forward, tears obscure my view
...

Try to stagger forward, my crucifix in tow
Am I going to make it, honestly don't know
...

Don't treat me differently, for I am just the same
Though depressed and anxious, please just use
my name
...

Although my world is clouded, my thoughts
perhaps inane

I'm a fellow human being, and I'm not insane
...

Yes we all cry and we all bleed, a fact that's sad
but true
Perhaps I cry a little more, but I'm as good as you

VOX Winter members meeting

This year's members meeting will be held on Monday the 12th of December 2011, at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow; when we will be reviewing our members priorities which were identified at our Annual General Meeting and discussing the priorities for the coming year.

In addition as part of the day we will be facilitating our member and group members' responses to the Scottish Government consultation on the new 4 year Mental Health Strategy.

VOX/Scottish Government Consultation on new Mental Health Strategy

VOX and the Scottish Government will be facilitating a consultation day on the proposals for a new national mental health strategy.

The new proposals intend to build on the current approach and seek Stakeholder's views on the direction of work for the next 4 years to further improve mental health outcomes.

This event, built in as part of VOX's winter members meeting, is part funded by the Scottish Government and will offer our members, group members and associates the opportunity to directly feedback and respond to the Governments representative on the new Mental Health Strategy.

To access a copy of the consultation please click on the following link: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/01163037/0>

We would like to invite all our individual, group and associate members to attend and take part in voicing their views on the strategy.

Lunch and refreshments will be available as well as travel expenses on the day.

The event will be on Monday the 12th December from 10.30am – 3.00pm in the Grand Central Hotel, Gordon Street Glasgow. Further information and programme will be available closer to the time.

To book your place or for group booking please contact VOX on 0141 572 1663 or e-mail jsteel@mhf.org.uk



Hate Crime Focus Group

VOX in partnership with Strathclyde Police and Glasgow Community & Safety Services held an information session on Wednesday 28th September 2011 in the Renfield Centre Glasgow. The session included information on the subject of Hate Crime, the law, and how to report it in relation to mental health.

The session was led by Pauline Kelly, Hate Crime Policy Officer from Glasgow Community & Safety Services and Constable Elizabeth Reid, Asylum Seeker & Refugee Liaison Officer from Strathclyde Police.

The presentation included information on the following:-

- a) The need for Hate Crime Legislation
- b) The commitment to stop Hate Crime
- c) The legal context
- d) Key issues for services
- e) Racist and Homophobic incident hotspots in Glasgow

The session proved to be extremely useful and there is a possibility that we may repeat it at a later date.

To access more information and/or to report hate crime visit <http://www.strathclyde.police.uk/index.asp?docID=6787>



Shirley Doig at the IIMHL 2011 Conference in the USA.

VOX in association with the Scottish Government was delighted to send member and service user Shirley Doig to the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership conference which was held in San Francisco from the 12th to the 16th September 2011. The IIMHL is a government to government endeavour of 8 countries and aims to facilitate the sharing of best practice.

The first 2 days of Shirley's trip were spent in Oakland, California at Bonita House. This is a homeless facility which caters for up to 90 individuals who suffer from severe mental illness. Many of the service users had faced adversity particularly through addiction and with the help of Bonita House had gone on to live happy and fulfilling lives. Shirley had the honour of speaking on the first morning of the conference on the subject of "Through the Eyes of People in Recovery - Envisioning Success". She spoke about her diagnosis of clinical depression and more recently her diagnosis of Bi Polar disorder. She states the whole experience was 'amazing' and hopes to present a full report at the next VOX members meeting in December.

Change Fund

As part of the Scottish draft budget announcement on 17th November 2010, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth announced the allocation of £70m in 2011-12 to a Change Fund to enable health and social care partners to implement local plans for making better use of their combined resources for older people's services. The Change Fund will provide bridging finance to facilitate shifts in the balance of care from institutional to primary and community settings, and should also influence decisions taken with respect to the totality of Partnership spend on older people's care.

Implementation of the Fund will draw heavily upon the work that has been ongoing across the country on IRF mapping, and lessons learned from the IRF test sites regarding making best use of joint resources - money and people's time. Practical aspects of getting the Fund working - including development of Guidance - have been delegated by Ministers to the Health and Community Care Delivery Group, which is chaired by Tim Davison (Chief Executive, NHS Lanarkshire).

Guidance that sets out the arrangements to enable local partnerships to access their allocation of the Fund has now been formulated. This guidance has been agreed by the Ministerial Strategic Group (MSG) for Health and Community Care and requires local partnerships to prepare Change Plans that set down how the funding will be used to achieve a shift in the balance of care. The MSG will oversee the development process nationally and will look for assurance that partnership arrangements are in place to deliver change locally. Local Delivery Plans will be submitted to the MSG to ensure that a coherent national picture is achieved.

Link to Change Fund Guidance

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/reshaping/guidance>

Link to Workshop Flyer 2nd February 2011

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/reshaping/workshopflyer>

Link to Change Plan Template (at Annex B)

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/reshaping/Annexb>

Local health, housing and social care partnerships were asked to submit Change Plans by 28 February 2011



in order to access the £70m Change Fund. Plans received from all 32 partnerships were considered and noted by the Ministerial Strategic Group for Health and Community Care (MSG) at its meeting on 15 March. In confirming the release of Change Fund monies to all partnerships at this meeting, the MSG commented that overall, partnerships have made a strong start and their Plans provide a good platform for progressing local Reshaping Care programmes.

Further work is planned as part of stage two of the Reshaping Care programme to more accurately establish funding and demographic projections for future years. Advice on this will follow in autumn 2011, taking account of wider developments both in Scotland and at UK level on the future funding of care and support.

To encourage sharing of ideas and good practice - and as previously notified to partnerships - all 32 Change Plans have been made available on the Joint Improvement Team's website. In addition, the JIT is developing an Improvement Network jointly with the Community Care Outcomes Framework's CCOF Benchmarking Group. An initial event, jointly run with the CHP Association, took place on 1 April 2011 and provided some good opportunities for collective feedback and shared learning within and between partnerships. Further information regarding the network will be published on the JIT website.



VOX Media Policy

We would like to share our media policy with all our members and group members for their information and adaptation if you were considering writing a media policy for your group/organisation.

This is what we feel at VOX is important when accessing social networks such as our own Facebook page and groups

Who are VOX?

VOX-Voices Of eXperience is a national organisation made up of, and for, people with mental health problems of any kind, past or present.

VOX is dedicated to ensuring people's views and experiences in relation to mental health issues are supported and encouraged.

VOX are committed to equality and diversity and that peoples, Age, Gender, Religion, Sexual orientation and ethnicity are not discriminated against.

Why did we create this policy?

VOX values social media such as Facebook as a good avenue and resource for people to have their voice and opinion heard and to learn from each other by sharing information and raising awareness of issues and events etc...

It is therefore important that people feel safe when communicating their views without fear of prejudice or discrimination. To make this happen it is also important that views, experiences and





VOX Media Policy cont.

comments are made in a respectful and inoffensive way, making sure that any criticism of services, organisations etc...are made in a constructive and appropriate way.

You may be aware that bullying can also take place online (known as cyber bullying), It is important that we all keep each other safe and VOX reserve the right to remove what we consider to be inappropriate and or damaging comments to protect us from cyber bullies.

What will this mean for you?

The content or opinions presented on our social network page and discussion boards are solely those of the individuals who left the comment/post and do not represent those of Voices Of eXperience, unless otherwise stated.

While VOX provides a space for people to post their views, we will not tolerate abusive or inflammatory language and we reserve the right to remove any such comments and block the user if they persist in doing so.

It is natural that people have strong opinions based on lived experience however, it is important to remember that although everyone is entitled to their views, they need to be respectful and mindful that these views may not be shared by everyone based on their own lived experience.

What happens if you are not well?

VOX don't provide a service however, we work to ensure people with lived experiences are involved at a national and local level in the development of mental health policies and services throughout Scotland.

If you feel that you need help please contact your **Doctor** or **NHS 24 on: 08454 242424**

You can also get confidential support from **Breathing space or the Samaritans**, see contact information below;

Samaritans offer emotional support 24 hours a day on **08457 90 90 90**. More information about Samaritans is available at: <http://www.samaritans.org/>

Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87 is a free and confidential phone line service for any individual, who is experiencing low mood or depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to. For operating times and more information please visit; <http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

What happens if I see that someone is in need of help?

If you feel that someone is not well and in need of help on one of the social networking web pages you should where possible try to direct them to some of the support services that are mentioned in the previous section.

How do VOX staff and volunteers access/use social media?

Staff can use social media and the internet for work purposes to update, manage and maintain where appropriate. Staff are also permitted to access the internet and social media for personal use within reason during breaks and lunch.

VOX staff and volunteers are not expected to accept social media befriending approaches to their own personal social media page from VOX members, board members, or any other work related contacts unless they chose to do so.



The Alma Project - improving mental health through the arts



If you have ever been part of a supportive, friendly, creative group, then had it suddenly taken

away from you, then you'll know how the service users of Stepping Stones Mental Health Project felt. Stepping Stones was part of a bigger charity that had to go into liquidation. So although Stepping Stones had its own funding, it had to close too. Everyone involved in it was devastated.

But after a bit of grieving, a new project arose from the ashes – The Alma Project was set up by service users, staff, volunteers and supporters of the old Stepping Stones. 3 of those service users are on our management committee. And one year on, we have 5 groups up and running!

'Alma' means soul in Latin and was chosen as we all see the arts as being 'food for the soul' – health for mind and spirit.

If you have a mental health problem and live in Edinburgh or the Lothians you can come along to any of The Alma Project groups. The service is free, but we ask people to bring along a suitable pad of paper to use in the groups.

Service-user Referral Procedure

If you would like to come to any Alma Project groups/activities, you can telephone to find out if we have any spaces and to arrange a visit. (0770 36 39 334) Everyone needs a professional referrer to fill in our referral form. A referrer can be a support worker, CPN, GP or other health worker.

Where groups are held

The Alma Groups are all held at Duncan Place Resource Centre, 4 Duncan Place, Leith, EH6 8HW. It is behind Duke St. on the edge of Leith Links, Edinburgh. There are lots of buses go there. LRT buses 1, 12, 21, 25, 34, 35, 49 to Duke St. and 7, 10, 14, 16, 22 to the Foot of Leith Walk. Our Monday Art Group and Thurs. Life Stories groups are on the ground floor and fully accessible, but unfortunately the others are upstairs and there is no lift.

About The Alma Project Groups

Mon 12.30pm - 2.30pm

Art Group - Room 1

A relaxed, friendly art group where you can do your own thing but where the group will occasionally be shown techniques and ways of working with a variety of media.

Tues 11.30am - 1.30pm

Art Studio - Room 9

The Art Studio offers time and space for you to develop your own art. The group is not a taught class, although you can have practical help or tuition if you want.

Wed 11.30am - 1.30pm

Creative Writing – Room 16

These are structured, workshop style sessions for people interested in playing with words and using their imagination. Each session focuses on a theme, technique or writing style. You don't need any experience of creative writing.

Wed 2pm - 4pm

A2A: Audience to Artist - Room 16

Funded by Awards for All, National Lottery. Using inspiration from this year's Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, we will meet weekly to work on ideas and create an exhibition for next year's festival in Oct. 2012.

Thur 1.30pm - 3.30pm

Life Stories - Room 1

This group offers the chance to record some of your experiences, thoughts and opinions through art and writing. You will learn various techniques, use different media and have the opportunity to create your own art journal. There will be an in-house exhibition at the end. Life Stories is funded by Choose Life and is aimed at people who are at risk of, or have a history of self harm and suicidal behaviour.

If you would like to find out more, to refer or visit The Alma Project, please phone Alistair or Margaret on 0770 36 39 334 (Mon- Thurs). We look forward to hearing from you!

Margaret Allan
Nov. 2011

Did you know Spot?



The Honours of Scotland

The “Honours of Scotland” are the crown jewels and they consist of a crown, a sword and a sceptre.

The crown was made in 1540 from gold melted down from the previous one, with additional gold mined in Upper Clydesdale. More precious stones and pearls were also added and the crown was first used by King James V at the coronation of his second queen, Mary of Guise (mother of Mary Queen of Scots).

Pope Julius II presented the sword to King James IV in 1507. It was made by an Italian craftsman, Domenico da Suttri.

The sceptre is the oldest of the crown jewels. It was made in 1494 and was presented to King James V by Pope Alexander VI.

The three Honours of Scotland were first used together at the coronation of the infant Mary Queen

of Scots (daughter of King James V) in Stirling castle in 1543.

They were last used at the coronation of King Charles II at Scone on 1 January 1651. During the occupation of Scotland by Oliver Cromwell during Puritan times, the jewels were hidden first in Dunottar castle. When the castle was besieged, the local minister’s wife smuggled them out and they were buried under the floor of Kinneff church.

Under the terms of the Treaty of Union in 1707, Scotland’s crown jewels were retained in Edinburgh castle. Forgotten for over 100 years, they were rediscovered by Sir Walter Scott in 1818 and put on display in the castle where they have been on view to the public.

The display of the crown jewels was added to on St Andrews Day, 30th November 1996, when the Stone of Destiny was brought back to Scotland - in 1296, 700 years earlier, King Edward had stolen this precious relic on which generations of Scottish kings had been crowned since the days of the Kingdom of Dalriada in the 9th century.

The Yard Adventure Centre

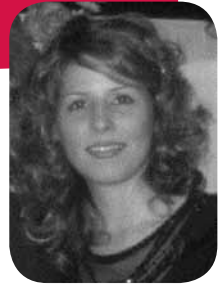
The Yard Adventure Centre celebrates its 25th Anniversary next year. The centre is situated in the heart of Canonmills in Edinburgh and is the only purpose built indoor and outdoor adventure play facility for disabled children in the East of Scotland. The Charity offers a wide variety of sessions including services disabled children, schools, youth clubs, family and holiday sessions and training. Last year they opened their doors to over 1,500 children and had over 11,000 visits.

The Yard Adventure Centre was described in its last inspection by the Care Commission as “An exceptional service that enables children with additional support needs to experience, explore and play in ways that are not available elsewhere.

If you would like to know more about the Centre and the long term benefits of creating safe, supported play areas for disabled children across Scotland please contact Celine Sinclair on 0131 476 4506 or email: celine@theyardscotland.org.uk



Diversity Update



Welcome to the latest edition of our diversity update. We hope you find this edition of the update interesting and informative in relation to some of our diverse strands of work.

As ever our diversity and equalities work has continued to develop with the addition of one or two strands of work which you will read about later in this issue such as our new women's Voices group. We continue to develop and support our existing diversity groups, LGBT VOX, Young VOX and our over 50's group and if you would like to be involved in any of these groups please contact us at the VOX office for more information on 0141 5721663.

We start our update with a big welcome to Atousa who is on placement with VOX and who has been volunteering at several of our events and projects. Atousa has kindly written a short introduction which I am sure you will find interesting to read;

My name is Atousa Khodadadyan and I am a student at the University of Glasgow.

I started my placement with VOX from August 2011 and attended their AGM. My keen interest in

issues affecting mental health of people in general led me to become more involved in VOX's diversity project and attended their conference also held in August 2011.

My experience and recollection from my country of origin indicates that people are generally reluctant to talk about their mental health issues, and regrettably, having mental health problems is still considered stigmatic in many regions of my country of origin. I am currently running a Women's Voices Project and have invited women from all ethnic minority groups to come together and take part in discussions on issues affecting their lives. My hope and desire is that by doing so I would be able to provide them with the opportunity to talk about the strains, stresses and difficulties in their lives as well as trying to explore the reasons behind them. My wish is to guide and support the participants in becoming aware of available useful services and having a voice in the society and ultimately leading to a better life.

Below is a small description about the group and my e-mail details if you are interested in being involved.

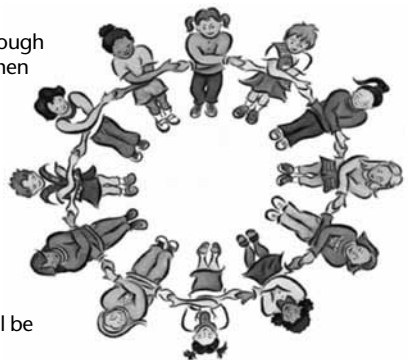
Women's Voices

"Women's Voices" is a project run by Voices Of eXperience through several sessions. The project aims to assist Minority Ethnic women to take part in informal creative activities and raise issues affecting their lives. The group activity will start from end of October 2011 (we will inform you of the exact date and time for future meetings in the VOX weekly updates and online).

We invite all women from minority ethnic communities to come together and share their experiences, issues and take a step forward with well-being in Glasgow.

All sessions are free and refreshments, travel expenses etc... will be provided on the day.

For more information and show your interest please contact Atousa Khodadadyan by E-mail: AKhodadadyan@mhf.org.uk or contact the VOX office 0141 5721663.



VOX Moving Minds III a Day of events at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery

On Thursday 6th October 2011 VOX for the third year running, organised in partnership with see me and several other organisations and groups a day of diverse events and activities in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum.

Some of the workshops included:

- A showing of two documentaries called "Beyond Prejudice" and "Sanctuary" examining mental health and stigma within Scotland's black and minority ethnic communities and new comers to Scotland.
- "Dreamscapes", a workshop providing an opportunity to recall special memories and dreams.
- Maryhill Integration Network and AlbScot presented "Handmade in Glasgow", a traditional Eastern and Western fashion show and dance performance, the Network also gave an interactive demonstration of Tai Chi.
- Community led Dialogue, working together to challenge discrimination. Gypsy/travellers led a workshop with the Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project to increase understanding of their situation in Scotland, including issues affecting mental health and wellbeing.
- "Mapping Memories" event commissioned by VOX with poet and writer Larry Butler and dance artist Satya Dunning inspiring people to move, draw and write about places visited.
- "Reel Stories" was a workshop where people watched and later discussed three films "Seen and Heard" which told the stories of black and ethnic minority men, "Khamoshi" (The Silence) shared the experiences of men who were also deaf and "Our Vision-A Brighter Future" which shared the experiences of older people who had taken part in a peer mentoring project.

During the course of the day there were also a Curator Tour, a 30 minute tour of the Glasgow Stories exhibitions, exploring our history of mental health care and R D Laing's legacy. Over 200 people took part in the workshops with at least the same amount experiencing the Fashion Show, dance, music and interactive stalls available to the public on the day.



Maryhill Integration Network



Young Roma Singers



GAMH Interactive stall



Fashion Show



Festival Team



Maryhill Integration Network Fashion Show

Over 50's Coffee Morning Group

The over 50's coffee morning group has been meeting on a regular basis since the last edition of the newsletter. Much of the agenda has been around the topic "memories and dreams" which was one of the workshops at the "Moving Minds" event held in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery on 6th October 2011. One of the members of this group has added his own version of memories and dreams below:-

My favourite memory by James Caldwell Shanks

"My favourite memory is when I used to go away for the day to either Ayr or Saltcoats with my Mum and Dad on sunny days or in the car when we went to visit my Uncle's house at Kilcreggan, but they have since passed away and also because my health is getting worse. I now go out with Linda and David from Community Lifestyles for pub lunches and also to various coffee mornings and meetings at various venues. I also get to meet new friends, which I really enjoy, but my favourite friend is William Durham who I used to go to Clydebank College with, which I enjoyed."

My favourite dream by James Caldwell Shanks

"My favourite dream is to wake up in my own house and not surrounded by four brick walls and nurses in white coats when I was a prisoner in Lennox Castle for 23 years. But I can now go anywhere I like without having to tell people where I am going and what time I will be back again. Also I sometimes dream about my Mum and Dad and think of all the happy and good times we had before they sadly passed away, but they are always in my thoughts and dreams every day."

At one of the regular meetings held on Monday 3rd October 2011, 8 members of the Over 50's Group attended a focus group facilitated by Hannah Biggs, a researcher with the Mental Health Foundation, on the impact of participating in the arts on people's mental health and wellbeing. Participants discussed their own experiences of participating in a variety of different art forms including creative writing, music and visual arts. The group feedback the impacts people can gain from participating in the arts which included many mental health and wellbeing benefits. Participants

also discussed whether the arts provide any benefits that are unique to the arts. Participants then went on to discuss what makes an arts project successful which included discussions on the people that deliver the projects, the location and accessibility of the project and how participants hear about and access the project.

The focus group took place in the People's Palace in Glasgow and lasted for approximately an hour and a half. The focus group was part of a larger project commissioned by Creative Scotland which consulted with key stakeholders across Scotland to develop best practice guidance on delivering arts projects as a way to improve people's mental health and wellbeing, particularly those who are / have experiencing mental health problems. The guidance is aimed at policy makers, funders, referrers, service providers and participants. The VOX Over 50 Group was one of many sources providing a participant perspective to the project.

The Mental Health Foundation facilitated focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders across Scotland to explore their experience and views on arts on referral as a means to improve people's mental health and wellbeing. MHF is also carrying out a literature review outlining the existing evidence base for the impacts participating in the arts has on mental health and wellbeing.

The Mental Health Foundation is now in the process of writing the guidance based on the evidence they gathered. Once the guidance has been completed, it will be shared with all participants.



Gypsy/Travellers

VOX have been keen to ensure that the voices of Gypsy/Travellers are heard and that people are aware of some of the key issues that affect them. You may recall from our article on the Moving Minds III event in Kelvingrove one of the workshops was a dialogue facilitated by MECOP and Gypsy/Travellers.

In our final article in this diversity update we would like to share a short summary of the Equally Connected report offering a glimpse of some of the issues, a full report will be available online along with a shorter abbreviated one for your information.

Equally Connected*

Working with Gypsy/Travellers; Progress Report.

***Equally Connected** is an action research project using community development approaches, including the creative arts, to learn from Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities about:

- attitudes to, and experiences of, mental health
- what helps maintain well-being
- effective ways of challenging stigma and discrimination

This evidence will be used to improve understanding and help ensure that services and systems of care (such as the Integrated Care Pathway (ICP) for people with depression) are designed to meet the needs of the diverse BME communities within Edinburgh and the Lothians.

Equally Connected was funded and supported by NHS Lothian and NHS Health Scotland and was based in Health in Mind Edinburgh

Why Gypsy/Travellers:

Gypsy/Travellers are often regarded as a 'hard to reach' group. Service providers rarely recognise them as a minority ethnic group with a long shared history, common language, traditional culture, beliefs, and so on. As many families experience extreme levels of discrimination and as regards their health status, Gypsy/Travellers were more likely to have a long-term illness, health problem or disability and still face difficulties in accessing primary health care services.

Over the last six months we have been working with Gypsy/Travellers

- To gain a better understanding of their experiences of, and attitudes towards, mental health
- To learn about existing coping strategies and what helps maintain wellbeing.
- To design a regular programme of activities.

This short report will review the Gypsy/Traveller Health Fare for women held on 31st May 2010 and highlight a few of the emerging themes from some of the Case Studies we have been collecting.

Why we ran this project:

- A recent research report commissioned by



the Equalities and Human Rights Commission recommended “that urgent research is undertaken into the prevalence of suicide and self-harm amongst Gypsy/ Travellers.

- Gypsy/Travellers travel many miles to see a trusted GP/Health Visitor rather than face rejection/discrimination at a local practice.
- Gypsy/Travellers have amongst the highest levels of mental distress, depression and anxiety in the UK and these results partly from forced evictions, constant harassment and the physical health problems many individuals face. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests a high rate of mortality through suicide but no accurate figures are available. (The University of Sheffield research, Parry, van Cleemput, et al, 2004, The Health Status of Gypsy/Travellers in England)
- There is virtually no published research on Gypsy/Travellers and mental health in Scotland, or the rest of UK.
- Too often good practice seems to be dependent on individual interest or commitment rather than strategic planning
- To raise awareness of the range of interventions available in treating depression or anxiety.

Programme:

The varied programme consisted of health awareness activities such as a zumba exercise class, complementary therapy tasters (reflexology, face massage and back/shoulder massage), health checks by the Keep Well nurse, basic first aid and a relaxation taster session.

In addition, there were a range of stalls including smoking cessation, healthy eating, Shelter and Edinburgh and Lothians Racial Equality Council. We also, wanted to gather some initial evidence about attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing.

1- Key Health Questions

In order to get some insight into different attitudes towards, and understanding of, mental health and wellbeing, large colourful posters, with lots of images, were designed, asking three mental health related questions. As the women arrived at

the event they were given coloured dots and asked, in their own time, to visit the posters and put a dot on their preferences. The posters were also used by EC staff to initiate discussions throughout the day. This method was chosen because it was very visual and seemed to be a non-threatening way of raising issues about mental health. Also it was a way of allowing people to remain anonymous in an environment that was new to many.

1/1 If you were feeling stressed where would you go/what would you do?

It is interesting to note that no-one put their dot next to ‘visit GP’; however ‘friends/family’ was by far the most popular option.

1/2 Which of the following affect your emotional health?

‘Religion’ and ‘how others see us’ scored highly.

1/3 How do you look after you emotional health

The two highest scorers were ‘phone a friend’ and ‘scream’. It is interesting to note that ‘take exercise’ did not get any votes.



2-Stalls

At first the women were very reluctant to visit the stalls around the room, preferring simply to socialise with each other and chat. Eventually some stall holders decided to 'take the stalls to them'; this resulted in several women inquiring about and accessing information about smoking cessation and trying out fruit smoothies.

At the Equally Connected stall we were also collecting comments/thoughts about what should happen next.

3- Activities

3 /1 zumba.

3/2 The First Aid session

3/3 Complementary therapy tasters

3/4 A lot of informal discussion about the stresses of day-to-day life, and it was acknowledged how little time Gypsy/Traveller women 'get to themselves'

4- Evaluation

As the women left they were asked to rate their experience of the day using a poster with happy and sad faces. The women were asked about the venue, food, activities and health information. Whilst the day was undoubtedly a success for those who attended it is useful to reflect and consider what worked well and not so well.

5- Case Studies

So far we have collected six case studies, in depth discussions, from Gypsy/Traveller women about mental health and wellbeing.

6- Next Steps

- The success of the event on 31st May is encouragement to try to arrange further days with other groups
- Continue collecting case studies

- Full analysis of case studies
- Design and plan regular programme of health and wellbeing activities to start in the autumn
- Continue to work in partnership with Keep Well team

To access the final report visit:
<http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/5504.aspx>





If you need to talk to someone call the following numbers

Samaritans

08457 90 90 90

Samaritans provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.

Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87 (6pm-2am)

Monday to Thursday 6pm-2am
Friday - Monday 6pm-6am

Breathing Space is a free and confidential phonenumber service for any individual, who is experiencing low mood or depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to.

NHS 24

0845 4 24 24 24

An online and telephone-based service which can answer your questions about your health and offer advice.

Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland

0131 313 8777

Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace,
Edinburgh, EH12 5HE
Fax: 0131 313 8778
Email: mwscot.org.uk

The views expressed by our members in this newsletter are not necessarily the view of VOX.

Become a member of VOX - it's free

There are several benefits to becoming a member of our organisation.

- Our members have a common interest, and we hope to further its cause.
- You will have access to information on mental health issues.
- An opportunity to become involved and an opportunity to influence policy, practice, legislation, services, care, wellbeing and recovery both nationally and internationally.
- You will receive VOX's quarterly magazine.

Membership form

Our membership form can be accessed from the website, or from our office.

For advice or information on any aspect of VOX please contact us at our office at:

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Email: mal-gailani@mhf.org.uk

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Our next newsletter will be produced in Spring 2012. If you would like information on a particular subject to be included in the next newsletter or would like to contribute to it, please contact Mahmud using the details above.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in an accessible format, please let us know and we will try to meet your request.