

## Befriending - Mayo Mental Health Association.

Mayo Mental Health Association has been instrumental in the setting up, training, supporting, monitoring and funding our social befriending project which commenced in June 2009.

To date the association have facilitated a 16 hour training programme for volunteers wishing to become involved in the project.

Four volunteers completed the course in 2009 and are actively involved in befriending. In June 2010 - 5 volunteers were fully trained and ready to be matched with befriendees (person with a mental health difficulty).

### What is befriending?

Befriending is described as a relationship between a volunteer and a befriender which operates within a structured framework.

It is time limited and enables a person to widen their social network

Befriending provides an opportunity to meet the needs of people with mental health difficulties and activities can vary from socialising and developing hobbies to accessing training and education.

Isolation is a common problem for people suffering from mental health issues. Research has shown that support and social interaction are vital for people recovering from mental health problems. People with mental health difficulties are often cut off from family and friends because of the nature of their condition. The stigma around mental health difficulties means that sufferers can struggle to reach out to people around them. This can create a vicious cycle - where people with mental health problems are isolated within the community even though they need support and friendship to help them get well.

Mayo Mental Health Association sees social befriending as a complement both to the organisation's other services and to statutory services, and not as a substitute for home care or other ongoing support.

### **How can befriending meet the needs of people with mental health difficulties?**

The results of befriending can be very significant. Befriending often provides people with a new direction in life, opens up a range of activities and leads to increased self-esteem and self confidence. Befriending can also reduce the burden on other services which people may use inappropriately as they seek social contact.

- The ethos of befriending is to foster independence, promote self-empowerment, build self-confidence, self-esteem and reduce social isolation.
- Many people feel that following discharge from hospital feel isolated within their communities and are lacking in confidence and find it difficult to access amenities.

Befriending organisations, volunteers and users all considered matching volunteer and user to be a key to success. Matching is most often based on shared interests and on both parties living in the same area.

Befriending services have been developed by voluntary organisations to provide people in this situation with opportunities for social interaction and a sense of being part of a community.

### **Who is befriending for?**

- People over 18 years with mental health difficulties and may
  - feel isolated
  - need someone to talk to
  - need help to integrate back into the community
  - have goals they want to achieve
  - have hobbies they want to pursue

### How it works?

- Trained volunteer completes application form - included are hobbies, times available to meet befriender.
- Referral received from member of mental health team.
- Self referral from potential befriender.
- Befriender and volunteer are carefully matched by the co-ordinator.
- The befriender will define his/her personal goal and a contract is signed with the volunteer.
- The co-ordinator monitors progress and is available as a means of support and advice to both involved.

### Benefits to the Befriender

- Self confidence is raised
- Trust is built
- Isolation is reduced
- Independence is increased
- Decision making is promoted
- Involvement in new activities within their own communities is increased
- Relationship with family / carers / other professionals can improve

### Benefits to the volunteer

- Giving attention and support to others
- Helping people to help themselves
- Being a good listener
- Encouraging choice

- Helping reduce social isolation
- Having fun
- Learning more about ourselves
- Challenges our attitudes and beliefs

### Supporting community participation?

Ways in which befriending services aim to help people participate in their community include;

- using local services and facilities
- creating a new social link
- developing wider social networks
- meeting like-minded people through clubs and groups
- meeting people with similar needs and supporting each other
- changing social attitudes so that users become accepted and valued as full members of the community in their own right.

Mayo Mental Health Association aim is to continue to support and encourage social befriending through publicity which in turn will help to lessen the stigma of mental illness.

\*\*\*\*\*