

Minutes of Mental Health Focus Group Meeting 27 May 2004

1. OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

This was the first focus group for clients with mental health issues. The objective was to use the experiences and knowledge that the clients have to help the Mental Health team progress in the future. It was also an opportunity to raise an awareness of the difficulties and barriers that the clients may face. The clients were of different ages and in different stages of progress within the project which meant a good cross-section of opinions and suggestions from within the group.

2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

- Difficulties faced when looking for work, what are the main things you feel stop you finding and/or keeping a job etc...
- What have you done to try and overcome or avoid these barriers?
- What attracted you to Bury EST?
- What other agencies have helped you?
- How has Bury EST helped?
- How and where do you look for work?
- What is your experience of using the job centre?
- What newspapers do you use when looking for work?
- Why do you use Bury EST and has using Bury EST been of any advantage to you or not?
- What improvements if any would you make to Bury EST?

There were two main themes within the discussion these were Barriers to Employment and Finding Employment.

3. GROUP FEEDBACK FROM THE TOPIC AREAS

3.1 Difficulties faced when looking for work, what are the main things you feel stop you finding and/or keeping a job etc...

- Lack of experience narrows the possible job search.
- Recovering from an illness can mean hospital appointments, a change in medication or having to work part-time.
- Location of a job.
- Identifying the types of work that would be suitable, sometimes due to illness you can no longer do the job you originally had and have to change careers.

3.2 What have you done to try and overcome or avoid these barriers?

- Courses and voluntary work.
- Not disclosing illness which is a sackable offence.
- For benefits assistance dropped in at Bury EST rather than job centre because it feels safer here.
- Citizens Advice Bureau outpost at Bury EST for any questions.

- Suggestion of using specific computer programmes to pinpoint suitable jobs.

3.3 What attracted you to Bury EST?

- Referred via Roch House and trusted their judgement.
- Key Workers suggestion.
- Doing things at a steady pace.
- Softly, softly approach taking one step at a time.
- Don't know what they would have done without Bury EST.
- Talking to an advisor without being judged. Feeling of acceptance.
- If you have any problems you can contact a personal advisor directly.

3.4 What other agencies have helped you?

- These are divided into both positive and negative experiences from the entire group.

Positive:

Family
 Friends
 Local Government
 Nurses
 Comple@t
 Self
 GP
 Employers

Negative:

GP
 Job Centre
 Employers

3.5 How has Bury EST helped?

- All of the staff have time to help.
- Given direction.
- Words of comfort and reassurance.
- Feel that the staff really do care about their welfare.

3.6 How and where do you look for work?

- Job Centre On-line
- Internal positions to get a foot in the door
- Work experience
- Voluntary work

3.7 What is your experience of using the job centre?

- Indifferent.
- Bad experience which was humiliating with no privacy.
- Feels impersonal and uncaring.
- The open plan layout makes you feel like everyone can hear you.
- Unhelpful.
- Good experience of the DEA's.
- Availability of DEA's. Really want to see a DEA when you feel good but you can't get an appointment when you want. Suggestion of a drop in day.
- Frightening experience filling in forms etc. More support required to guide through the system.
- Do not want to be sat in the Job Centre saying you have mental health problems in front of everyone.
- The computers are good but there is no-one to show how they work
- More helpful signage required.

3.8 What newspapers do you use when looking for work?

- Manchester Evening News
- Bury Times
- Radcliffe Times
- Bury Journal
- Guardian (national)
- Job Sheet (via library)
- Prestwich and Whitefield Guide

3.9 What improvements if any would you make to Bury EST?

- Waiting list too long.
- More advertising about what Bury EST do.
- Back to Work Skills courses. These were done previously by Bury IAG.
- More short courses at Bury EST.
- Employ a client at Bury EST to show a more positive image.
- Organise support groups to bounce ideas around.

4. **FINAL COMMENTS**

- The clients would like to see some invited guests at forthcoming meetings such as a representative of the job centre or a Disability Employment Officer
- Next Meeting suggested in 3 months time at 6.00 pm on a Thursday, date to be arranged.
- Clients were invited to be involved in the planning of the next meeting.