



Interview with Bruce White – MHBS Co-ordinator

The Mental Health Befriending Service has been running in the Winchester District since August 2010. The MHBS recruits, trains and supports volunteer 'befrienders' to befriend those with enduring mental health issues. They seek to provide companionship, thus reducing social isolation and enabling integration back into the community.

What is your background?

I have a background in administration and as a primary teacher. I first became aware of having mental health issues from about 17 years old.

Where were you born and raised?

I originally came from the Winchester area.

Went to college/school?

I went to primary school in the village of Hursley and then went to Peter Symonds when it was a Grammar School then sixth form college.

What profession did you follow after?

I went to Birmingham to train as a teacher and began my career teaching in the Black Country near Dudley.

And how did this lead you to the MHBS?

When I left teaching I became Facilities Manager with WACA then became Co-ordinator of MHBS in February 2011.

What is your earliest childhood memory you can remember?

That's tricky, probably having to wear my coat in class at school because I got my school shorts all wet!

What motivated you, personally, to work for the MHBS?

Having suffered with depression for many years I was keen to discover more about mental health, assist others with similar issues and help to challenge the misunderstanding, discrimination and stigma which surrounds MH.

What has been the highlight of your time so far with the MHBS?

There have been many, but I always get a buzz out of seeing befriending relationships work, working with so many amazingly brave and interesting people and I particularly enjoyed putting on the WOW! Conference last November.

In what ways has the MHBS been successful?

It is achieving all its BIG Lottery targets (outcomes) by connecting with so many people who need befriending and it has already exceeded the number of befrienders it requires. It has helped many to find a bit of a purpose and some hope.



PsyCope 'Coping with Psychosis'

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Bruce White, Mental Health Befriending Service - Winchester

The MHBS has put on various events in the past (are there any main one's that you would like listed here that I do not know about – before I came to MHBS??)

Throughout 2012 events headlined were 'Recovery Approaches to Mental Health Issues' by Tracey Butler from RAISE, 'Healthy Lifestyle and Mental Health' by Jaco Bruwer and most recently the 'WOW! Wellness over Winchester' mini-conference when presentations were given, a Q & A session held, local artist's work was exhibited and linked organisations displayed stalls and information. That will do!

What events are lined up for 2013?

We hope to have a big Get Together soon to look at the future of MHBS and put on a second conference in May/June which will be service user focused and based on workshops to provide ideas to aid recovery (hopefully in collaboration with other linked organisations).

What does the future hold for the MHBS? The BIG Lottery funding ends in August 2013 so we are working hard to find alternative funding sources. We are willing to talk with anyone who has ideas or suggestions about funding, (lots of money!) and inspiration! We are hopeful that the MHBS will continue in some form or another.

What is your favourite quote?

There are loads ... among them are:

"Don't judge anyone until you have walked a thousand miles in their shoes."

