

'Making the most of community links from a secure psychiatric setting'

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Structured therapeutic activity benefits mental health and wellbeing (Farkas et al, 2005). On Bowman Ward our focus is on recovery using a holistic approach through positive risk taking. This 'risk taking' is at the heart of our approach as we feel that in order to gain trust and responsibility people need to be shown trust and responsibility in the first place.

Put yourself in the shoes of a service user whilst they are on a low secure psychiatric ward:

- We will restrict aspects of your leave.
- You will be living with 11 other males, all detained and have some form of mental illness.
- You may be prescribed medication, which can make you put on weight (Shwartz et al, 2004).
- We expect this to help you to recover from your mental illness.
- We will monitor your risk and need to see a reduction before you can go into the community.

The above statements are bold but ultimately cover the main issues focussed on within patients care plans, reviews and care programme approaches. Through building peoples' social skills, confidence, trust and responsibility we can help them to overcome these difficulties and ensure that the environment they are in is as beneficial as possible.

As a social inclusion worker the main aim is to enable people to be in a position where they can forge links and develop support in the community. This will ultimately help them to be well enough to move into and remain mentally and physically well within that community setting (Oliver, 2004) and reduce relapse rates (Mueser et al, 2002)

In order to do this links have been made with various organisations within the community mental health setting which have been very positive. However, it is the relationship with an organisation that is outside of the mental health setting that has been particularly successful.

The Gaia Trust was contacted in the spring of 2013 with the aim of setting up a community conservation group at their Treraven Farm project near Wadebridge. The slogan is "Bringing People and Nature Together" which shares our holistically based approach. Due to their open-mindedness they were interested in the prospect and we got the ball rolling. After initial meetings with Gaia, we assessed the location and facilities and drew up risk assessments. The organisations directors were contacted as well as meetings with Bowman's multi-disciplinary team and most importantly speaking with the service users for their views on the idea we were able to set up a taster session. The feedback was positive and the reaction from the staff and service users was excellent.

We now have a group running at another Gaia Trust project at Bodwannick Farm, near Bodmin. The focus here is on gardening and patients again work very hard to maintain the gardens around the farmhouse. One patient has also been focussing on the interior of the farmhouse and has spent the past few months stripping the wallpaper on the interior walls as this is an area of expertise he has developed with previous painting jobs in the community.

One specific skill set is not focussed on but a range of activities are organised throughout a session from simple tasks such as cutting back brambles to tasks such as erecting a marquee that require high levels of teamwork and communication. Other activities during the sessions include; clearing areas for wildlife to flourish, collecting firewood, making tea/ coffee on an open fire, collecting litter, making nature trails, pruning branches, raking leaves, moving lawns, making gateposts, making lizard houses. These

are to name a few and a lot of the work that we do links in with other community groups such as Treraven's Sunday 'Family Nature Group'. We often help to set up an area for the families to enjoy such as the 'Halloween Troll Hunt' in the pine forest and more recently the 'Easter Forest School'. This gives the patients on Bowman Ward a sense of worth within the community which is difficult to achieve with the stigma that is often accompanied with being a psychiatric patient and can be so rewarding (Livingston and Boyd, 2010).

One patient went on to attend Bodwannick Farm without an escort as a volunteer for one full day per week. They continued this when they were on Fettle Ward, an open rehabilitation ward and are now seeking employment after a successful transition into the community.

In the past 18 months we have had one serious risk incident whilst out in the community which was dealt with immediately due to the risk management processes that we had in place. No tools have been misused and no injuries have occurred during any sessions (over 100 groups have been run). An analysis of risk warnings surrounding the groups that we run shows that there is a significant reduction in an individuals' risk surrounding the days of the groups with The Gaia Trust: only 20% of risk warnings fell on the day before, day of and day after the Gaia Trust groups. The remaining 80% of risk warnings fell on just four days of the week. Data was taken from all patients that attended the groups over the past six months.

When asked his views on the Gaia Trust and the groups he has attended one service user wrote his thoughts down:

"The Gaia Trust and the Bowman ward staff work in harmony to provide a rewarding working environment for Bowman residents. Wadebridge is a gateway to Heaven in Cornwall, so is Bodmin. They provide a great release, a weekly holiday if you will, from the stresses and strains of working life.

"Meg and the staff on Bowman go out of their way; raking, sowing seeds, cutting branches, building fences, erecting canvas tents for local fairs and local children to have priceless wilderness camp building experiences.

The experience is a lifelong gift, a treasure chest of delightful rewarding and fulfilling memories".

Through developing and maintaining our working relationship with The Gaia Trust it is hoped that more service users will be able to utilise their environment to develop their own skills. This in turn can help them to build a future in the community and remain out of hospital through wellness and recovery. At the time of writing this no-one that has been discharged from Bowman Ward into the community from these programmes has been recalled to hospital.

References

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