

Hospital Garden goes ahead



Rada and Dennis (Viewpoint) with garden designs

the Unit to win a £50,000 capital grant to create a garden around the Mental Health Unit. Rada Veerabudren, Modern Matron, is the inspiration behind the project.

She says, 'I am positive that the garden will be somewhere beautiful, which provides access to fresh air and creates a safe, home-like and a non-institutional setting for people who use

our mental health services.

This garden has been an ongoing request from service users, carers and staff for over a decade. Money was

always an issue but it seems that a dream has come true. I would like to thank Viewpoint, service users, carers and all staff involved for their full and committed support in this project.'

The views of service users, carers and staff were sought and considered in the design of the garden. There will be disabled access and the garden will be divided into several areas for different activities. There will be a quiet area, a recreational area with a giant chess board, a designated smoking area and a section to grow plants in cold frames. The view of the car park will be obscured by natural wood fencing and the structure of the building will be painted in bright colours.

The garden will be developed in stages and, hopefully, will be finished this summer. Viewpoint will remain on the Steering Group of the Garden Project to monitor its progress and help service users to become involved in the maintenance of the garden.

The surrounds of the Mental Health Unit at Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Welwyn Garden City are undergoing a transformation. Viewpoint has supported

Race Equality In Mental Health

Two years into the Government's 'Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care' five year programme and what progress has been made? Dennis Edwards and Christiana Ashare of Viewpoint attended a two day conference in February held by the Department of Health to find out.

Over three hundred delegates from this country and overseas, including representatives from Jewish, Chinese, Asian, Black, Traveller and Maori communities attended. The conference offered an invaluable opportunity to share experiences and learn about the latest developments in policy, practice and research.

Recognise diversity in mental health services was the overriding message from the conference. Service users want service providers to have a greater understanding of their ethnic background including their cultural and spiritual beliefs.

The way forward is for stronger links to be formed between local Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) groups and service providers and a greater promotion of mental health issues in culturally sensitive ways. Many local groups have strong links between themselves but the voice of service users is not being heard at the top of



From l to r: Dr Vorst, New Zealand, Dorothy Francis, Dept of Health, Christiana Ashare, Viewpoint, Matoroa Mar, New Zealand, Julie Jaye Charles, Equalities National Council the organisations with the power to fund and make decisions about mental health services. This is a concern of Julie Jaye Charles who is working on BME policies at the Department of Health with the aim of securing a stronger voice for BME service users. She has agreed to visit Viewpoint to work with local service users in Hertfordshire.

A sad outcome of the financial cutbacks in the health economy is that the funding of many BME groups across the county is being reduced.

However, on a positive note, the NHS is introducing Community Development Workers whose role is to promote a greater understanding of the needs of BME groups. By December, there will be ten in

place across Hertfordshire.

The role of Viewpoint is expanding and by April we will have more resources in place to reach out to people from groups who find it particularly difficult to have their views heard. We look forward to developing stronger links with the BME community.

Outreach minibus arrives!



Helping service users to get to meetings around Hertfordshire will be a lot easier now we have a new Renault Master minibus. It seats 14 people including two dedicated seats for wheelchair users and a powered lift for easy access.

We have funding to train and support service user drivers to obtain the Hertfordshire County Council certificate to drive a minibus. The bus is also available for hire by organisations supporting service users and carers.

For further details, please contact Dennis Edwards or Tracy Kinsella on 01707 328014.

CUTS CONTINUE

Health Select Committee Report



A Committee of MPs has slammed the Government in a report published December 2006 on the way the NHS deficits have been handled.

“Soft targets such as mental health and public health services have also suffered as has funding for voluntary organisations. We believe this to be unacceptable.”

In response, the Government denied that any area was hit

‘disproportionately’ and that mental health has seen ‘unprecedented investment’ over the past few years. However, service users and carers in Hertfordshire have a different view and expressed this in a 4,000 signature petition which was presented last year when Hertfordshire Partnership Trust (HPT) was forced to absorb a 5% cut in funding. This financial year, 2007-2008, does not seem to be much better.

£3.1 million cuts decision

In January 2007, at a meeting held by the Joint Commissioning Partnership Board (JCPB), cuts to adult mental health services worth £3.1 million were agreed in order to help reduce the financial deficits of other trusts within Hertfordshire. Although the JCPB is powerless to decide on the amount of money given to mental health, it is responsible for how the budget is distributed.

Unfortunately, a briefing meeting organised by the Joint Commissioning Team a week beforehand had to be cancelled as a result of storm damage to the venue. This would have been a good opportunity to hear about the proposed changes and for service users to express their views.

In any event, Viewpoint voiced the concerns of service users in a letter to the JCPB.

“...It is with great disappointment that mental health finds itself

in this position again, despite the protestations from our members, which were passed all the way up to the Minister for Mental Health. The Health Select Committee confirmed their views and found the NHS guilty of using mental health as a ‘soft target’ for funding and Hertfordshire was singled out as an example of how NOT to implement recovery plans.

We would urge the JCPB to ensure that the anger and betrayal felt by our members is passed onto the relevant organisations at the highest level. Although it is acknowledged that the JCPB does not have control over the level of budgeting allocated to it, there is a clear responsibility to pass on the user (and carer) views and feelings.”

This submission was not addressed in the meeting and we have raised our concerns about the consideration of service users’ views.

The cuts agreed this year are less drastic than before but will still have a significant effect on service provision. For example, an in-patient ward at the Lister Hospital is going to be closed in October. Unfortunately, these cuts are considered not to be ‘significant variations’ and there is therefore no need to consult the public like last year.

For more information about the Government’s Response see web address: <http://tinyurl.com/387vda>

UNHAPPY ABOUT THE CUTS?

Write to :

- Your local MP
- Anne Walker, Chief Executive, East and North Herts and West Herts Primary Care Trusts, Charter House, Parkway, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6JL **Tel: 01707 390855**
- Neil McKay, Chief Executive, East of England Strategic Health Authority, Victoria House, Capital Park, Fulbourn, Cambridge, CB21 5XB **Tel: 01223 597529**

VIEWPOINT SURVEY

Have your services have significantly changed over the past year? Have things improved or have they deteriorated? We will shortly be sending out a questionnaire to monitor the changes and how they have affected service users.

Helen joins the team!



Viewpoint welcomes Helen O'Sullivan who says:

“Firstly, I would like to say I feel very privileged to be part

of the Viewpoint team and working with service users.

My new role as User Trainer Project Worker will involve encouraging service users to sign up for the forthcoming eight week ‘Presentation Skills’ training course. This course teaches confidence skills enabling people to share their experience of mental ill health with staff from voluntary and statutory agencies. I will be involved in delivering some of the sessions on the training course and supporting the participants during and after

their training. I will also support the members of the existing training group and provide opportunities for personal self-development and further training.

Currently, the Training Group is responding to the training needs of the police, statutory and voluntary organisations and Nursing and Joint Training Departments at the University of Hertfordshire. The Group is also very keen to develop and deliver its own courses, in particular, training aimed at employers to challenge stigma and discrimination and mental health awareness training for GPs. Due to the incredible

courage, level of commitment, knowledge and personal experience of the members of the Group, I feel very optimistic that this will become a reality.

My hope for the future is that the Training Group will continue to go from strength to strength and become a key resource for people seeking a greater understanding of what it feels like to experience mental illness.

If you would like to become involved in training, please call me on **01707 328068**. Further details of opportunities available are advertised on page 6.”

Foundation Status of Herts Partnership Trust: Get involved to influence services!

Herts Partnership Trust (HPT) is the main provider of mental health and learning disability services in Hertfordshire and it is going to become a Foundation Trust. This means it will be more accountable to its local community rather than central government. It will have a board of governors who will be voted in by members of the Trust. Representatives of the public as well as staff can become members. This is a great opportunity for service users and carers to influence services at the highest level.

Two members of the Viewpoint Committee are standing for election as Governors. **The voting period is 28th February to 15th March.** You need to have already signed up as a member of the Trust to vote this time round. However, you can still become a member, receive information, attend meetings and have a say about your services.

Dennis Edwards, manager of Viewpoint, has been invited onto the Board as a governor representing Viewpoint so mental health service users' views will be represented in this way as well.

Service users as governors! Use your vote!

Andy Smith



Andy Smith is 42 and has spent almost half his life as a service user. Now on the way to recovery, he has used services in the past at Napsbury,

Shrodells, The Causeway, Horseshoe Lodge, Watford General, St Albans

General, Henry Smith House and Northwick Day Centre. At various times he has attended Mind groups in Watford, Bushey, Borehamwood and Dacorum. He also has contact with the central London-based Mind organisation. Since 1998, he has volunteered exclusively in the mental health area and joined the Viewpoint Committee in 2006.

Chris Munt



I am 44 years old, a proud father of two daughters and I live in Stevenage.

For the past twelve years I have been using mental health services of a

primary, acute and secondary nature.

Before becoming unwell I had been a social worker for a number of years and in a variety of settings.

If I am successful and am elected to the board of governors I will endeavour to use my experience of both delivering and using services to bring about meaningful and positive outcomes relating to the lives of service users.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Viewpoint as, in part, they have given me the opportunities and encouragement to undertake this challenging responsibility. I joined its Committee as Co-Chair in 2006.

For more information about HPT becoming a Foundation Trust, contact: Tony Broughton, HPT Head Office, 99 Waverley Rd, St Albans, Herts, AL3 5TL Tel: 01727 897791 Email: tony.broughton@hpt.nhs.uk

VIEWPOINT AWARDS

Viewpoint celebrated groups, individuals, services and initiatives in Hertfordshire which have supported service users in a meaningful way at the launch of its first Awards Ceremony in November 2006.

The Winners!



Len Goff giving the award for innovation to I Can't Believe We're Not Better Theatre Company

Voluntary Organisations

Most supportive service:

Mind in Dacorum

Innovation:

I Can't Believe We're Not Better Theatre Company

Training or employment:

Guideposts Trust Watford

Statutory Organisations

Most supportive service:

Shrodells Day Services (WATS)

Innovation:

Jubilee News, Community Support Team, Letchworth

Training or employment:

East Herts, Ware, Community Support Service

Individual Award for Outstanding Contribution

Joint winners:

Brenda Harley – Rethink, Ware

Julie Attree – Mind in Dacorum

Special Award for Inspiration

M Jones – Mental Health Trainer

Congratulations to all!

Crisis Teams

If you're having a crisis and don't want to go into hospital, your local Crisis and Assessment Treatment (CAT) team can help you to recover at home. Members of the team will come out to you, either at home or at A&E, and assess whether you need to be admitted to hospital. They work 24 hours a day, seven days a week so they are always available and aim to get to you within an hour of being called. If you are not admitted they can visit you several times a day for all the time it needs until you feel well enough to be supported by your usual care workers.

Two of our members have found the CAT team particularly helpful over recent months.

‘I had been in hospital over Christmas and I didn't want to go back in. I hadn't used the CAT team before and I found them very helpful and supportive. It also helped that I already knew a couple of them who used to work on the ward and had transferred to the CAT team. Two members of staff came round every evening at about 6.00pm which was at a time that suited all of us. They always rang up beforehand to make sure I was in. They chatted and asked if I had any problems and whether I was taking my medication. My CPN had arranged for

them to come round over the 8 days while my consultant was away. They made all the difference and kept me out of hospital.’

Carol

‘I had a blip last New Year's Eve and was taken to A&E by paramedics. The CAT team came out to me and assessed that I wasn't ill enough to be admitted to hospital. They came to see me the next day and the following week they phoned and visited me on a daily basis. As a result, I got well enough to go back to my support worker. I think the CAT team in Watford is ace!’

Christine Harris

Defeating my demons and confronting my Goliaths



I am proud of my association with Viewpoint. It was the vehicle which gave me the courage to challenge my demons and confront my Goliaths. In other words, Viewpoint gave me the courage to bring out the hidden past inside my head, to be more self aware and to not be ashamed about myself.

For about 35 years, I was afraid to talk about my past life to others for fear of ridicule and humiliation. Times are changing and peoples' attitudes are becoming more liber-

al. But, from 1971 onwards until quite recently, to mention that you had suffered with a mental illness or were currently suffering from one would have excluded somebody from being employed or being accepted socially within the community in which we live.

So personally for me, it was better to bury my past to the back of my mind and pretend that the problem had happened to somebody else. I have been employed as a mental health worker for 21 years and have gained a reputation for being professional that is respected by both service users and other professionals.

Having been on the journey and back myself, having suffered the trauma and confusion inside my head, having been victimised, humiliated, made to accept humble pie and feel guilty and inadequate around people, I truly do empathise with the feelings and experiences of the service users I work with.

It has been a difficult road to tread over the last 21 years,

especially if somebody said, 'you do not really understand what I am going through'. I empathised but did not disclose about my past experiences.

This changed in 2005 when I attended an 8 week 'Presentation Skills' course run by Viewpoint. This gave me the confidence to be open about my mental illness and to become a trainer. I now talk about my experiences on mental health awareness courses held by the University of Hertfordshire for health and social care staff.

Between 1964 -1971 I was diagnosed with schizophrenia and had three long residential stays in the old style institutional mental hospitals. My days would be spent in the art room painting, doing pottery and writing poetry. Other times I would spend hours rocking backwards and forwards in a chair or pacing up and down the long corridors. Treatment in those days was endless electric shock treatment, insulin induced comas and medication.

In 1971, I walked away from the mental health services and took the risk of confronting my own mental health problems in order to develop a new life. It was a hard life to follow. Change is not always easy and my quest to overcome the demons inside my head could not have happened without keeping to my plan.

I found a church which socialised through out the week, not just on Sunday. They were aware of my mental health problem and supported me emotionally and by loving guidance. I put God as a greater power in my life above the thoughts and feelings inside my head.

I chose education as a way to keep my mind occupied with knowledge and study. Lastly, I kept a check on how I was doing by supervising myself internally. I learned to trust others again and not be afraid. I have good days and bad days but I have many more good days than bad days.

Len Goff

Direct Payments

Any recovery story will have many strands to it. In this piece I will concentrate upon Direct Payments. I fully appreciate that without the support of friends and family and my gifted surgeon, my health could be so poor that no amount of money would compensate.

My Direct Payments involvement stemmed from reading the social work pages of "The Guardian". Here I found an article about a Huddersfield-based group of disabled people who were organizing their own care with financial assistance from the local council. This was relevant to me as I had a hip injury which was restricting my movement and compounding my mental health issues. I am a bi-polar - this is manic-depression in old money for any reader without a clinical background. The major way in which this combination of disabilities restricted me was that willpower and motivation were required to complete even the simplest task. As an independent-minded (to say the least?) person I was immediately attracted to Direct Payments whilst viewing the complexities of the employment legislation aspects with some concern.

The second stage of my involvement was to learn as much as possible about Direct Payments, mainly using the internet. I discussed my idea with my social worker who, in a bold move, arranged for me to attend a staff training day. At the training day I met the mental health lead for Herts Partnership Trust and the county lead; a good day's work. This training was key. It showed

me for the first time that Direct Payments could be used in a purely mental health setting. Armed with the knowledge that this subject would not lose its relevance for me upon my hip being fixed, I continued trying to master the intricacies within.

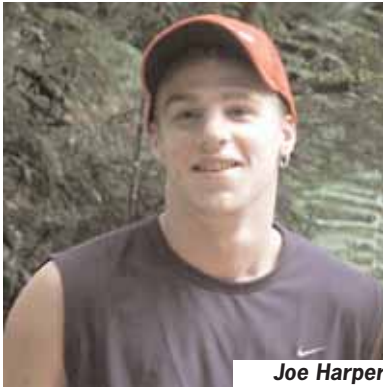
Just in case you are unfamiliar with Direct Payments, I will explain. If you are receiving social care it is possible to get money to either help you domestically by employing a carer or to use to arrange your own activities. If a person is employed all the red tape of employment legislation must be adhered to. In the simpler model all that is required is that receipts are kept so that everything is legal and above board. There are restrictions upon how the money can be spent; no drugs, no booze, no wine, no weekly shopping, no consumer goods among others.

It is not standard practice to spend almost two years studying Direct Payments before applying. The paperwork is very simple and the last I heard was that county can turn an application into a monthly supply of cheques in a short time. I have been receiving payments for just short of six months now. I find that I even enjoy the administration of the money spent. I use the money to work on my fitness and for the occasional night out.

My personal experience of Direct Payments is that it works. It has provided me with the means to take up new interests as well as being an interest in itself. Dr. Samuel Johnson said if you are tired of London you are tired of life: I will never tire of Direct Payments.

Andy Smith

Taking Charge – an insight into Emotional Freedom Technique



Joe Harper

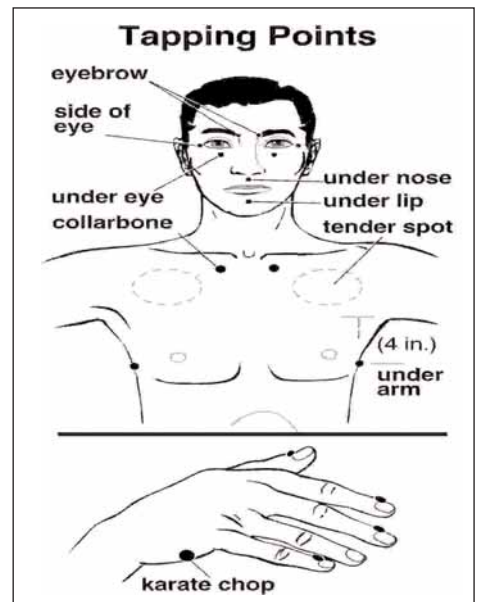
When it comes to controlling anxiety, one of our Viewpoint trainers has a secret weapon. Guided by a member of Herts Partnership Trust (HPT), Joe has learnt to use Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) to reduce his anxiety by 'tapping' areas on his body in a certain way. EFT is one of a family of methods of bringing about rapid, deep, and gentle relief of anxiety and distress by tapping in special ways on one's own body. They are easily learned by clients as a powerful and versatile procedure for self-help and management of emotion and anxiety. These strategies can also be used in sophisticated ways by trained therapists to enable profound alleviation of the pain of traumas and other painful experiences, even ones which took place many years ago and have continued to cause problems in the

person's life.

It seems to be the case that emotional distress is stored in the body as well as in the mind and the brain. By activating the body at the same time as the mind/brain, these old repetitive patterns of pain are released. There is no necessity to dwell in any kind of reliving or talking about painful events. Physical discomfort can also be reduced. These methods have been around for over twenty five years and are now used by thousands of clinicians and clients worldwide. The more complex method is called Thought Field Therapy and EFT is a popular and simpler derivative. People increasingly have heard of these 'tapping methods', through television, newspapers, magazines and word of mouth. They are becoming very popular. There is quite a lot of research demonstrating the effect of tapping methods, including studies of brain scan changes before and after, and a huge audit in South America, involving thousands of patients over a 14 year period in 11 different clinics, showed very positive results.

EFT and related methods are not an alternative to psychological therapies based on cognitive-behavioral principles but are an additional component to be included, which seems greatly to enhance the speed and efficacy of the work.

The details about EFT have been provided by Dr Phil Mollon. More information on EFT can be found at www.emofree.com - but remember this is only one of a number of related methods.



What do think about EFT?

Both Joe and Dr Mollon would be interested to hear your views.

Do you think therapies such as Emotional Freedom Techniques and Thought Field Therapy should be available within HPT and other NHS services?

Have you experienced any of these 'tapping methods' and, if so, what was your experience?

Please contact Simon at Viewpoint on **01707 328014**.

My Experience of Electro-Convulsive Therapy

A few years ago, I experienced yet another bout of anxiety and depression, which lasted for 2 years, with no improvement from all the medication I had been taking. I was desperate to get my life back to the way it was before or, should I say, try and get my concentration and functioning back.

I approached my consultant to ask if I could have Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) as I felt there was no improvement in my mental health. I was then referred to another consultant who agreed to me having this treatment.

I had read a little about ECT and researched it via NHS Direct and spoke to a number of my support people. I heard very conflicting views but nothing could stop me – my mind was made up. I felt this was my last chance to help me recover.

I suppose I expected this procedure to happen in a general hospital but the treatment happened in a small section of my local psychiatric hospital. I had eight

treatments out of the ten which I was supposed to receive. During my treatment, I was transported from a respite home to the hospital. I remember sitting in a waiting room with another gentlemen prior to me on one occasion. We did meet on another occasion but no words were ever spoken.

The room was very clinical and I remember my consultant, a member of staff from the ward and the anaesthetist being present. I was told what would happen and prayed from there on. It is a very painless procedure. I was given a general anaesthetic and everything was over in a few minutes.

Unfortunately, after my treatment it was felt that I had gone a little high and this resulted in me spending a number of months in hospital. But I had no regrets about having it. I felt I was like a car, which needed a 'jump start'. I had been so ill that I had lost a lot of my memory but it started to come back and I began to function again. I am so grateful that this was given to me and,

hopefully, if I became unwell again this option could be used.

ECT is a controversial subject and it may not be right for everyone. However, for me it was the best thing that could have been offered and happened to me.

If you would like to talk to me about my experience, you are welcome to call the Viewpoint office on **01707 328014** and they will put you in touch with me. If you want to find out more about the process of ECT, speak to the staff involved in your care.

Corrina Scott

If you would like to contribute articles on recovery, information, poetry and artwork/photographs contact Jacqui or Tracy on **01707 328014. If you would rather talk through your journey to recovery, we can write it up on your behalf.**

Recovery Based Services

Hertfordshire Partnership Trust is working towards providing recovery oriented services and will shortly be publishing a set of Recovery Principles which describe what the organisation means by recovery. The Service User Council will be asked to contribute to these principles and give its endorsement before they go to the Trust Board for final agreement.

A Recovery Steering Group has been established, which includes service user membership, to drive forward services that are recovery based and a recovery forum, again comprising service user membership, meets every couple of months to discuss developments and share good ideas and practice around recovery. A Recovery Booklet of personal recovery stories by service users is one idea that has been developed and is due to be published imminently. This has been developed in partnership with the Recovery Centre for Mental Health at the University of Hertfordshire.

It is well understood that the involvement of service users within mental health services is crucial to the effective development of services that really can help people to maintain fulfilling lives and to recover.

If anyone would like to find out more about how they can get more involved, or if you are interested in the recovery booklet, please contact Jo Burnham, HPT Service User and Carer Involvement Lead, on [01727 897761](tel:01727 897761) or joanne.burnham@hpt.nhs.uk

JOIN VIEWPOINT TRAINING GROUP!

Viewpoint supports a Training Group of service users who give presentations about their experiences of mental ill health on a variety of courses, some of which are run by the University of Hertfordshire for health professionals. We will be running a 'Presentation Skills' course of 8 sessions over 8 weeks in March for new members.

The University of Hertfordshire is currently looking for service user trainers who have experiences in the following areas:

- **Having an eating disorder**
- **Being a victim of domestic violence**
- **Surviving childhood sexual abuse**
- **Experiencing post natal depression**
- **Being a mother and coping with a serious or enduring mental illness**
- **Using drug and alcohol services**

If you would like to become a trainer and have the relevant experience, we can support you and offer you a place on our free 'Presentation Skills' course.

To find out more, please call Tracy on [01707 328014](tel:01707 328014) or Helen on [01707 328068](tel:01707 328068)

A new Group in Stevenage Town!



Photo by Mihai Eustatiu

NEW PATHWAYS is a support group open to all. The group welcomes all ages, both male and female. We offer a confidential and supportive space to talk and provide links to person centred counselling, assertiveness training and alternative therapies, including Reiki and Reflexology and also gardening opportunities.

The group started in January and meets alternate Wednesday evenings from 7.30pm – 9.30pm. There is a small charge of £2 for refreshments and a nominal charge of £5 for the alternative therapies.

Come along and help us to develop and grow!

Interested? Call the Viewpoint office on [01707 328014](tel:01707 328014) and we will put you in touch with Cynthia who runs the group.

HUG

Herts users and ex-users group

Substance misuse service user advocacy

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED!

New members are needed to promote and support user involvement in all aspects of care, treatment and service development affecting people with substance misuse and mental health difficulties.

If you would like to help HUG to expand and improve services, contact

Jimi of Hug Jamesgrieve@ntlworld.com

Or phone the Viewpoint office on [01707 328014](tel:01707 328014) for further contact details

HUG works in collaboration with a national user-led organisation, The Alliance, www.m-alliance.org.uk

'Dealing with mental illness' VIEWPOINT DVD!

Viewpoint has produced a DVD as a training tool for staff who want to gain an insight into mental illness from the perspective of those who use adult mental health services. It plays for 24 minutes and looks at:

- How it feels to experience mental illness
- What helps in the process of developing good mental health
- The way forward to improve mental health services

See the whole person and not just the diagnosis is the message.

If you would like more information about obtaining copies of the DVD, please contact Jacqui Deakin at Viewpoint on 01707 328014 or email jacqui@hertsviewpoint.co.uk



Introducing a networking website for service user controlled organisations...

As a member your group can offer services, share information, ask for advice, advertise events, swap experiences, network with other service user groups and much much more! Each group will decide what they want other people and organisations to see.

Join now at www.solnetwork.org.uk
 telephone: 0845 241 0383
 email: eamon@shapingourlives.org.uk

Shaping Our Lives
 National User Network
NETWORKING WEBSITE



Photo by Myles Davidson

Warm Front Grants

Do you own your own home or rent from a private landlord?

If so, you may be eligible for a grant of up to £2,700 to improve your energy efficiency, for example for insulation!

Council/housing association tenants are not eligible.

You need to be on any of the following benefits to apply:

- Working Tax Credit with disability element (income less than £15,460)
- Disability Living Allowance
- Child Tax Credit (income less than £15,460)
- Housing Benefit & Disability Premium
- Income Support & Disability Premium
- Council Tax & Disability Premium
- War Disablement Pension & Constant Attendance Allowance or Mobility Supplement
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit & Constant Attendance Allowance
- Attendance Allowance

Householders who a) are over 60 or b) have a child under 16 or c) are pregnant and have a maternity certificate and are on any of the following benefits can also apply:

- Income support
- Council Tax benefit
- Housing benefit
- Job Seeker's Allowance (income based)
- Pension Credit

Call 0800 3166001 or visit eagagroup.com/grants/warmfront/qualify.htm

Thanks to Alan H for supplying this information.

ARE YOU A CURRENT OR PAST USER OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN HERTFORDSHIRE?

Would you like to help improve mental health services in the county? Then Viewpoint would like to hear from you.

- ❖ Viewpoint exists to empower and support people who use or have used mental health services to be part of the decision making process. We do this by bringing together interested groups and individuals to get involved in the development, provision and monitoring of mental health services.
- ❖ We work with local user groups across the county to ensure users can take part equally, wherever they live in Hertfordshire.
- ❖ We offer support, training and travel expenses to Viewpoint meetings.

To join Viewpoint, please fill out the slip on the back page and return to us

Viewpoint is a registered charity number 1105423

Peter Vealey on Poetic Justice



Are there any common themes in your poetry?

Yes, the state and the pain of our world. I have a problem with our lack of humanity. I've always been very sensitive. I'm a humanitarian, green socialist. A lot of my poems are tongue-in-cheek, as I look at the attitudes of people to one another. I hope my poems challenge stigma. I write a lot about loss, social exclusion, relationships, love and learning from experiences. The poems I've submitted to Viewpoint have mainly been about nature and gardening. I think that people tend to create their own personality in their gardens.

Does your poetry differ according to your mental health?

Poetry has been a wonderful release for me as well as listening to music. My poetry is a running diary for me and gives me personal confidence. I think depression is a learning process. I do have to have a certain amount of angst to write. I don't tend to write when I'm really happy. I feel that I need to have a balance about my poetry and my life. John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens to you while you're making other plans."

How do you go about 'writing' the poem?

A poem is definitely a moment in time. I don't really believe in re-working a poem. I have been to creative writing classes but they can make you go down a certain road. This has value but it makes you feel you haven't got the process yourself innately. A poem came to me in the middle of the night because of a science programme I'd watched on telly about astronomy. I called it 'The Demotion of Pluto'. I'm not very organised and I'll write poems anywhere at any time when they come. I once wrote 5 poems in a telephone box sheltering from heavy rain.

Have you had poems published?

I had my best period in the 90's and was published in 'Wire' magazine amongst a few others. However, I was unwell at the time. I do feel a pressure to be published and recognised for my talent and have to struggle with this internal pressure. Selling poems shouldn't be a mark of success. I will be submitting my poetry to other organisations this year and I've also gone online at www.poemhunter.com

Peter Vealey was talking to Tracy Kinsella

Perfect Age of Mind



Photo by Katie Crabb

When is your perfect age of mind?
When your core of days is as
Ripe as a sun kissed apple.
Looking back is filled with pitfalls.
Back then or there,
There were confrontations of control
and ego,

Among idyllic settings.
Photos of splendid happiness!
Bad haircut days though amidst
The lookalike paradise.
When was your perfect age of mind?
When your core of days was as
Ripe as a sun kissed apple.
A date, an hour,
A passing moment
You could never hold on to
Secure.
Like sand slipping through
Hands, gripping too late.
In a perfect age of mind.
The quest is over,
Long live the king of fools!

P.C.Vealey

Spelling Chequer

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.
Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait a weigh.
As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite
Its rare lea ever wrong.
Eye have run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect awl the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.
A contribution found on the internet
by Bob Houlston

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