

Stockport's Inter-Faith Network

Notes from Meeting Wednesday 24th February 2010

Faith, Spirituality and Mental Wellbeing

Summary

Introduction

Statistics from the Mental Health Foundation

Faith, Spirituality and Recovery from mental distress

Nick Dixon: Stockport's Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services

The Mental Health Service is taking a more holistic approach to mental distress and is using the 'Recovery' approach, encouraging people to play an active role in their own recovery. Recovery means a state of mental wellbeing, even while living with a mental illness. The Health Service acknowledges the need for a spiritual and/or faith aspect to recovery from mental distress. Spirituality a significant part of any faith, but is not exclusively limited to religion.

How Faith Groups can support and sometimes hinder those experiencing depression

Richard Wickison, Chief Executive, Stockport MIND

MIND supports a number of faith groups to provide support groups for people experiencing depression. Misunderstandings about depression within faith groups can sometimes create a barrier to people who need support. Richard explains a Christian perspective on depression using an illustration from the Bible's Old Testament.

An Islamic and Community Perspective on Mental Health

Nadeem Ahmed, Trustee of Heaton Muslims Community Trust

Using the '5 steps to wellbeing' developed by the New Economic Foundation (nef), Nadeem illustrates an Islamic perspective on each step

Thursday at One – an example of a faith based support service

Rev Phil Winn, Chair of the Network and Chaplain at Stepping Hill Hospital.

Brief summary about the group, which is based within Stockport Baptist Church - how it was set up and what it does to support people suffering from mental distress.

Discussion

A summary of the dilemmas and problems that people have encountered when trying to support people suffering from mental distress and a list of resources

Any Other Business

1. SACRE (Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education)
Nadeem Ahmed answered the appeal for a Muslim representative
2. Standing on the Shoulders event March 2010

Introduction

According to the Mental Health Foundation (www.mentalhealth.org.uk) mental health problems are found in people of all ages, regions, countries and societies:

Statistics on mental health

- 1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year
- Mixed anxiety & depression is the most common mental disorder in Britain
- Women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health problem than men
- About 10% of children have a mental health problem at any one time
- Depression affects 1 in 5 older people living in the community and 2 in 5 living in care homes
- British men are three times as likely as British women to die by suicide
- The UK has one of the highest rates of self harm in Europe, at 400 per 100,000 population
- Only one in 10 prisoners has no mental disorder

In view of these statistics, there is a changing attitude towards mental health issues. Mental wellbeing is seen to be distinct from mental illness, people with or without diagnosed mental illness can have either good or poor mental health or be somewhere on that continuum.

Our speakers gave several short talks, followed by an opportunity for discussion and questions:

Faith, Spirituality and Recovery from Mental Distress

Nick Dixon, Joint Commissioning Manager for Mental Health Services

Nick spoke about the 'Recovery' approach to helping people who are suffering from mental distress, and the significance of spirituality in that recovery process. This is a summary of the main points of Nick's talk. A copy of his powerpoint presentation is available on request or you can download it from www.stockportinterfaith.org.uk

The Mental Health Service nationally has been taking a more holistic approach to promote positive mental health. There will always be a need for a clinical approach to services for people with serious mental health conditions. Medication and the support of psychologists or psychiatrists will always be needed by a proportion of people suffering from mental distress – this may be needed over a short or long term. However, there is an acknowledgement that people suffering from mental distress can be supported to reach a place where they are not powerless to contribute to their own recovery. As a result, the Recovery approach is being adopted by mental health services.

The Mental Health Service in Stockport will adopt the Recovery approach as its guiding philosophy, ensuring that the services and interventions people will receive will maximise their chances of growth beyond the limitations imposed by the illness and minimise those which maintain dependence.

Recovery in mental health terms does not necessarily mean the same as recovery from a physical condition. Instead, it means:

- a journey to a better and more satisfying place, with purpose and meaning to life rather than simply treating symptoms
- the restoration of a person to a place of mental wellbeing, which means a person can live a fulfilled life with or without a mental health disorder
- a focus on goals and aspirations, strengths and hope in contrast to a focus on illness, problems and deficits
- positive risk taking rather than risk averse practice.

This has meant a shift in attitude. People need to take positive risks in order to grow as a person, not get hidden away in a risk-free day centre, being medicated to maintain them, stable but unfulfilled. Taking the recovery approach in providing mental health services means there have been changes:

- Seeing the person and what matters to them is a vitally important part of recovery
- Staff are not just 'experts', but instead take the role of a life coach/ motivator who can give the encouragement people need to take steps for themselves
- People need to see that they can contribute significantly to their community, to work, to family life even when suffering from and learning to manage a disorder on a day-to-day basis.

Statistics show that 1 in 4 people will suffer from some element of mental distress at some point in their lives. Positive mental wellbeing and the prevention of serious mental illness is, therefore, a key to the new holistic approach. The Health Service cannot provide all this alone – they need to partner with faith groups, housing providers, voluntary support organisations, the arts and others. Stockport's Wellbeing Centre was set up in 2006 – it was one of the first of its kind in the country to be established to look at improving wellbeing instead of just treating mental illness.

The significance of Spirituality in recovery

The Health Service is acknowledging the need for a spiritual and/or faith aspect to recovery from mental distress. Spirituality a significant part of any faith, but is not exclusively limited to religion. It can also be described as:

- A journey giving meaning to life
- A way of understanding the world and your place in it
- Belief in a higher being
- A feeling of belonging or connectedness
- A quest for wholeness and hope
- A core part of identity
- A sense of there being more to life than material things

Spirituality can be expressed in a number of ways including religious practices, spiritual communities, living by certain values, rituals, creative activities, finding it in nature, self awareness activities and voluntary work.

Spirituality can be a very positive force, which gives strength and improves wellbeing, provides a way of coping and supporting your own resilience, improves self control, self esteem and confidence and gives sense, meaning and purpose to life. However, spirituality can sometimes also be negative, for instance if it leads someone to strive after unattainable standards of virtue or if a person has a crisis of faith.

Useful Weblinks

- National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum
- <http://mhspirituality.org.uk/default.html>
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists' Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group- www.rcpsych.ac.uk/spirit
- The Multi-Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy- www.mfghc.com
- www.happinssite.com

How Faith Groups can support and sometimes hinder those experiencing depression

Richard Wickison, Chief Executive, Stockport MIND

Richard's talk explored a Christian perspective on mental distress, particularly depression, looking both at the common misunderstandings that can hinder recovery and the positive examples of Christian principles in practice to support people in recovery.

MIND supports a number of activities run by churches:

- 'Thursday at One' at Stockport Baptist Church – the church approached MIND to support what they wanted to do to offer a service to people both within and outside the church who were suffering from mental distress.
- 'Start the Week' – a support group held at Tiviot Dale Methodist Church on Monday mornings
- St Cuthbert's in Cheadle fortnightly support group.

Some wrong assumptions are often made:

1. if you're in a church, everything will be or should be fine
2. that being in despair means turning your back on God – although sometimes depression is caused by a loss of faith.

If you have a physical illness there will usually be people around you to support you, but if you are depressed, it's more likely that no one will be around you. There are exceptions, but people are often sidelined if they have a mental health problem. Some vicars don't understand. This is not so much to do with religion but to do with the culture we live in.

The traditional Government attitude in the past has been that mental illness is dangerous and therefore people suffering from mental health problems should be kept out of the community. This reflects on the attitude within communities and this attitude pervades into church communities. As a result, people often have to search until they find somewhere to accept them. There are two assumptions often made in churches which can hinder the recovery of people suffering from mental distress:

- a. Christians shouldn't suffer from depression but have faith instead.
- b. Being depressed and having faith are opposite to each other.

Stockport MIND has been invited to give talks in churches to counteract these assumptions.

Richard used the story of Elijah from the first book of Kings in the Old Testament to illustrate a biblical Christian perspective on mental distress:

Elijah who had done wonderful work for God, ran away from Queen Jezebel's death threats. He was the only prophet left, as all the others had been put to death. Elijah was in despair and wanted to die. He was not just sad, but suicidal. There were a number of separate elements to Elijah's recovery. God helped him by:

- ♦ not telling him off for being depressed and having no faith
- ♦ allowing him to get out of the dangerous environment he'd been in
- ♦ sending an angel to bring him food and drink and keeping him safe so that he could sleep
- ♦ telling him to set out on a long walk of 40 days/40 nights
- ♦ rather than writing him off as a failure, reaffirming Elijah's role as His prophet and giving him more work to do – work that carried risks and dangers rather than being safe and stress-free

Many of the principles behind the new holistic services being offered do in fact mirror Elijah's recovery process although they were not developed with the story of Elijah in mind. The following principles are used by MIND services to help people suffering from mental distress:

- ♦ don't be judgmental
- ♦ support them to get out of a dangerous or bad environment if appropriate
- ♦ meet their physical needs

- ♦ encourage them to get involved in an activity (walking holiday for instance)
- ♦ help them look at their next steps and get them back to where they need to be so they can carry on with a fulfilled and meaningful life

An Islamic and Community Perspective on Mental Health **Nadeem Ahmed, Trustee of Heaton Muslims Community Trust**

Nadeem spoke about the '5 steps to wellbeing' and the role of the Heaton Muslims Community Trust. This is a summary of the main points of Nadeem's talk. A copy of his powerpoint presentation is available on request or you can download it from www.stockportinterfaith.org.uk

The Heaton Muslims Community Trust (HMCT) set up in 2003 to address community needs. They are a registered charity and now have their own building in Heaton Mersey. Their aim is to meet the needs of the wider community according to the Islamic principle that you are accountable to God for your life and as such have an obligation to the wider community as well as your family – the rights of your neighbour are so important that there is no distinction between Muslims and non Muslims in terms of caring for each other. The Quran acknowledges mental illness – it states that a person who is not mentally stable is not accountable for his deeds. It also states that the greatest cure is belief and that a love of God is central to recovery. Even the prophets all went through a mental state of sadness and distress but they did not stop, because they had a divine message, a greater purpose to serve.

The 5 steps to wellbeing

On 15th January, Elysabeth Williams from the PCT ran a session at HMCT about how people can play a part to support people with mental distress. She used the '5 steps to wellbeing' which were developed by the New Economic Foundation (nef) as '*a set of evidence-based actions to improve well-being, which individuals are encouraged to build into their daily lives*'. These steps were developed in 2008 from the work of over 400 scientists from across the world and are widely acknowledged as a reliable method of improving mental wellbeing. This model is very close to the principles of faith based organisations.

Figure 2.4: Behaviours that can work together to enhance wellbeing and mental capital



Based on a figure in nef (2008). Five ways to wellbeing: the evidence.

Taking each step in turn, Nadeem gave some illustrations from Islam on how to put the step into practice:

1. Connect

Connect with the people around you - with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. at home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the corner of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

The Quran states that no soul can take a burden larger than they can bear and that after every hardship there is ease. Part of the role of the HMCT as an Islamic faith community is to help ease people's burdens, putting this into practice.

If you are in a dangerous environment, use the support of those around you to get out of that environment and get help for others who feel trapped in that environment.

HMCT provides social networks for all, which is very important to mental wellbeing. Developing Inter-Faith links with local churches has been a key to this. As a mosque they are open to people with mental health problems but they have not had the resources to provide help or services.

Another key is to connect with God through prayer and reading the holy book

2. Be active

Go for a walk or a run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

It is important to look after yourself and be aware of your own needs. Exercise and nutrition are important. For instance the sayings of the prophet encourage people not to over eat – fill your stomach with 1/3 food, 1/3 water and leave it 1/3 empty. The festival of Ramadan can help control eating.

Keep yourself clean – it is essential in Islam to wash before prayer – when in difficulty pray more.

Statistically, women seem to be more at risk of stress and need to be aware they are more vulnerable so need to look after themselves well and prevent mental distress. Strokes, heart attacks and a number of illnesses can cause mental health issues such as depression and therefore people suffering from these conditions need to look after themselves.

3. Take notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the usual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Marvel at creation, take time to explore nature and the world around you.

4. Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Reading and understanding the holy book will help with spirituality – look for local support groups to study. Learning about God will help your faith and help you trust in God's mercy.

5. Give

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Do a good deed and feel happy - joining a social network can be key to this. Giving is part of the Islamic way of life, as it is with other faiths.

Now that they have a building for the use of the local community, HMCT can provide a venue but don't have the resources to answer all the questions – they want and need to work in partnership with others.

There is no evidence base of the number of people who have been helped but there are individuals / families they have been able to help

Thursday at One – an example of a faith based support service

Rev Phil Winn, Chair of the Network and Chaplain at Stepping Hill Hospital.

Before becoming hospital chaplain, Phil was the minister at Stockport Baptist Church when they set up 'Thursday at One' with the support of Stockport MIND. The group is open to anyone suffering from mental distress. People attending can learn to use different art techniques and produce very creative work, some of which is on display at the church. The use of art is a very positive way to support people through times of mental distress and recovery. The group is supported by volunteers from the church and from MIND.

Discussion

The discussion posed more questions than answers.

There is a need to understand mental illness and mental distress

- There are various stages of mental distress, such as depression. Sometimes the mind needs to have a chance to heal before the person can take part in their own recovery alongside the medication. In the case of clinical depression, you cannot help yourself out of it (if you could pull yourself together, you would!) This stage can take some time and can seem hopeless. However, engagement on a human level with a person in deep illness is very important, even if there seems to be no difference – a support network is vital to the person's recovery, especially when they start to come out of this stage of the illness. We don't need to be experts in mental health in order to support that person – just treat them as a human being.
- People suffering mild to moderate depression will respond to recovery techniques a lot faster than those in clinical depression
- First Aid Training is available - is it possible to have 'mental health training' too?
- The families of people suffering from mental distress also need support as well

What support is available to the people giving support?

- One of the reasons that people don't feel they can get involved with supporting those with mental distress is the fear that too much will be expected of them and not enough support will be there for them if they take on a caring role – Will they come to my house? Will they always be dependent on me? Will there ever be an end to the problem for this person?
- If you are supporting someone with mental health problems, where can you go for help without being met with barriers such as 'We can't talk to you because you don't have the person's permission to discuss their case'...

There is hope

- The OASIS café at Stepping Hill Hospital is a symbol of hope, because the people working there were once on the psychiatric wards and are now able to work at the café.
- Many faith groups have people in their communities who are or have been service users and who are able to support others suffering with mental distress
- Offer prayer
- Families of those suffering from mental distress often respond to offers of support both for the person with the illness and for themselves as a family

Resources

- The Church of England, the National Institute for Mental Health and Mentality have produced a pack called 'promoting mental health – a resource for spiritual and pastoral care' which can be downloaded from the Church of England Website: www.cofe.anglican.org/info/socialpublic/homeaffairs/mentalhealth/parishresource.pdf
- My Care My Choice website www.mycaremychoice.org.uk
- MIND Crisis Service www.stockportmind.org.uk or phone 0161 480 7393
- Interventions for Mental Health in Everyday Practice – produced in partnership with Stockport NHS, Manchester NHS and the University of Manchester. Elysabeth Williams from Stockport's Centre for Health Promotion has used this to provide training for HMCT and could use it to train other faith groups. Go to www.eoe.nhs.uk and type 'Interventions for Mental Health' in the search box. Contact details for Elysabeth are: phone 0161 426 5095 or email elysabeth.williams@stockport-pct.nhs.uk
- Stockport Recovery Network – made up of like minded people who want to improve holistic recovery as well as treatments for mental illness. www.stockportrecoverynetwork.org.uk
- National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum <http://mhspirituality.org.uk/default.html>
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists' Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group- www.rcpsych.ac.uk/spirit
- The Multi-Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy- www.mfghc.com
- www.happinssite.com

Any other Business

Education in Schools and SACRE

There was a discussion about faith education in schools and what is taught. The role of SACRE (Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education) was explained as Cath Eckersley and Marjorie Hendley are members. This committee reviews the agreed RE Syllabus and OFSTED are asking SACRE to extend their role to support schools more. Cath and Marjorie explained that the Stockport SACRE has no Jewish or Muslim representatives and would welcome new members. Nadeem Ahmed from Heaton Muslims Community Trust offered to be a member. Liz young will email him with contact details of Martin Obermuller who has responsibility within Stockport Council for supporting the SACRE.

Standing on the Shoulders event

The Quaker Meeting House on Cooper Street were to hold an event on Sunday 28th March from 1pm. As the notes probably would not be sent out in time to invite people, it was agreed that a separate invitation to the event would be emailed out to the Network.