Tackling Mental Health Issues in a Multi-Faith Context

4th Essex, Mind and Spirit Conference!

Wednesday 24th April 2013
Chelmsford Cathedral

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I was certainly inspired, not only by the surroundings of Chelmsford Cathedral but also by the energy and vibrancy created at the event by the delegates from a rich variety of backgrounds. We were brought together by a mutual interest and belief in the importance that Faith can play in helping many people recover from mental health problems. The day was a great opportunity to hear the different perspectives of the speakers on important topics like stigma, engagement, and recovery; supplemented with some lively and interesting breakout groups which allowed us to explore these themes even further. The event also offered great opportunities to network and meet with other delegates and organisers. I was also immensely proud to see so many of our staff present at this wonderful event in Essex, organised by the Essex Mind and Spirit Network. I feel incredibly fortunate that in my role as an equality and diversity lead for South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT) I can see first-hand the difference that faith can bring to people's lives. It is therefore not surprising that a growing number of studies also emphasise the importance of spiritual beliefs and the value of support from Faith communities for people with mental health problems. At SEPT, our aim has been to ensure we recognise the importance of Faith, both in the context of recovery, and also in recognising Faith as a protected characteristic (as defined by the Equality Act 2010). For us this journey has also been about our learning through active listening to cultural and Faith perspectives and as part of this we have organised several faith and mental well-being conferences in Bedfordshire. I was therefore grateful to hear the perspectives of people at the event organised by the Essex Mind and Spirit Network. As the day progressed, I became more convinced than ever that, whatever our background or Faith, what unites us all is caring and compassion focused on supporting people to overcome mental health problems. I would like to thank Essex Mind and Spirit for all of their hard work in putting this wonderful event together and all of us at SEPT look forward to working together to make life better for people with mental health problems now, and in the future.

This conference followed one held at Chelmsford Cathedral in April 2009 called 'Resources for the Journey', which looked at recovery and particularly what is going on across Essex in training professional and faith groups and in fostering local initiatives to bring together service users faith representatives and professional mental health staff to provide holistic support. Proposals made by the 2009 conference included strengthening the Cluster Group work of Essex Mind and Spirit and encouraging mental health awareness training and the relationship with faith based issues or local communities and mental health professionals. The subject of the conference in April 2013 – ‘Tackling Mental Health Issues in a Multi Faith Context’ arose directly out of feedback from the last conference with delegates responding to a more local, Essex based focus suggesting an important and neglected area was the contribution and experience of different faith groups in Essex and centred around the relationship between spirituality, belief and mental health issues.

The two primary aims of this conference were:

*To identify some ways in which different faith groups and religious communities can positively engage with and contribute to an understanding of mental health and its recovery;

*To explore how such an understanding and positive contribution can interact with voluntary and statutory services and be a valued partner in the task to tackle mental health issues.
PROGRAMME FOR ESSEX MIND AND SPIRIT COUNTY CONFERENCE
CHELMSFORD CATHEDRAL
WEDNESDAY 24TH APRIL 2013

Tackling Mental Health in a Multi Faith Context

09:00 Registration and refreshments
09:40 Welcome from the Mayor of Chelmsford, Councillor Christopher Kingsley
09:45 Welcome and Introduction: Setting the Scene: Steve Porter, Associate Director, Social Care and Partnerships, SEPT
09:55 Keynote speaker: Sue Baker, Director of ‘Time to Change’
10:25 Time for questions
10:40 EMS ‘snapshot’ of the work in Essex (Sidra Naeem)
11:10 Refreshments
11:30 Workshops: A choice of:
   Mental Health in Schools (Sidra Naeem)
   Mental Health in the Workplace (Raza Ahmed)
   Mental Health in BME Communities (Hari Sewell)
   Does spirituality help with mental health (Paul Walker)
   Mental health and stigma (Sarah Linzey)
   Where to go with mental health? (Anthony King)

12:15 Lunch and time to explore ‘bazaar’ of agencies/organisations displays
13:15 Keynote speaker: Hari Sewell, Director, HS Consultancy
13:45 Time for questions
14:00 A service user’s perspective (Mark Dale)
14:15 Workshops (as before)
15:00 Comfort break
15:10 Taking something back: conclusions and action from Workshop facilitators for a plenary panel
16:15 Close

STALLS/DISPLAYS PRESENT DURING THE DAY

1. Essex, Mind & Spirit
2. NEPFT
3. SEPT
4. Suffolk Mind
5. Mid-Essex Mind
6. Rethink
7. Women Together
8. EMAN (Essex Multicultural Activities Network)
9. Brentwood Community Print
10. Telostraining (Training Consultancy for Health & Social Care)
Over 135 delegates gathered at the cathedral on a bright, sunny day and we were pleased that such a wide cross section of different faiths and mental health professionals, service users and the voluntary and statutory sector were in attendance.

The Mayor of Chelmsford, Councillor Christopher Kingsley opened the conference and immediately made an important connection between EMS, the Cathedral and Chelmsford’s new city status.

Steve Porter, SEPT’s Associate Director, Social Care and Partnerships set the tone of the day by stating that although there is still a lot of suspicion about the relationship between faith issues and the management of and recovery from mental ill health, the tide was definitely turning in favour of seeking to understand how faith and spirituality impacts on a range of mental health issues and that that was the task of today’s conference. It was encouraging for the delegates to hear that SEPT itself is taking a lead in this area.
The first keynote speaker, Sue Baker, Director of Time to Change which is run by two partners, MIND and Rethink Mental Illness and funded by the Department of Health and Comic Relief, briefed delegates both about the prevalence and scale of mental health problems and their onset in this country and also the stigma and discrimination including faith, belief and religious affiliation discrimination sufferers experience and Sue usefully linked some of those facts and figures to the workshop areas soon to be explored in the conference. She also showed two film clips as part of Time to Change’s national media campaign, concerning stigma in schools and in the workplace.

However, she reported that in many areas, the percentage of people reporting discrimination between 2008 and 2011 had dropped – religious discrimination falling from 10.1% to 4.3% and outlined some projects with which Time to Change were engaged which helped to contribute to this general downward trend, one of which was working with faith groups to address stigma. Two Time to Change grant funded projects are the New View Project based in Leeds where, working with black majority churches, black volunteers will be supported who have directly experienced mental health problems and a partnership between MIND in Tower Hamlets and Newham and the East London Mosque and the University of East London Student Union to find out how people from the diverse faith communities of these two London boroughs think and feel about mental health.

Sue encouraged faith groups more to work in partnership with others and said more training within the Church was needed and more support offered for congregation members to speak more openly about their lived experience. She said there was much hope for the future: many faith communities seemed ready to develop more interest in exploring ‘common values’ shared by many different faith communities and there was evidence religious leaders especially from black led churches were starting to talk more openly about faith & mental health issues. After there were time for questions from the floor & judging by the interest generated, the time was too short!

Sidra Naeem gave a ‘snapshot’ of her work as convenor of the BME Group in Brentwood and Women Together in Basildon, which are also two of EMS’ ‘cluster groups’. Sidra gave a comprehensive picture of many of the activities undertaken by the group and provided a thoroughly practical example of what could be achieved when people from minority, isolated communities and different faith and cultural backgrounds are brought together in a spirit of friendship and with common aims and values.
Following some refreshments, delegates went to their first set of workshops dotted around the cathedral, to explore with their facilitators the areas outlined on page 3 of this report.

Workshop on Mental Health in Schools
By Sidra Naem

Workshop on Mental Health in the Workplace
By Raza Ahmed

The Conference broke for a delicious lunch served in the cathedral by Rizwana Siddiqui and her team from EMAN (Ethnic Multicultural Activities Network) based in Chelmsford and a chance to explore some of the stalls and displays set up round the cathedral and to go for a group conference photo outside the cathedral.
The afternoon keynote speaker was Hari Sewell, founder and Director of HS Consultancy and a former executive director of health and social care in the NHS. Hari continued and developed the focus on stigma and discrimination in mental health introduced by Sue Baker, relating it directly to the NHS care they receive. He pointed out that statistically people from BME communities are admitted more frequently under sections of the Mental Health Act and are placed in seclusion more frequently. They have less utilisation of talking therapies, they are prescribed higher doses of medication and are generally more dissatisfied with the care they receive. This has a knock on effect for faiths and spiritual beliefs, because for many culture and religion may be interchangeable and religion is interwoven into daily life. This can lead to ‘multiple discriminations’ and ‘cumulative and compound inequalities’, often between people of different faiths. He called for ‘shared explanatory models’ between the ‘supernatural’ and the ‘biological’, not least because faith in BME groups can be an asset strengthening a sense of belonging and community, and offer a ‘legitimised paradigm for understanding and interpreting’ their mental health problems’. With the proviso that we all need to be aware of stereotyping and to seek to learn about people’s faith and to build a positive relationship with them, he argued that tackling mental health problems must be done in a multi faith context.

After questions from the floor Mark Dale, Chair of Basildon Disability Forum gave a service users perspective on the subject. Once again the keynote speaker was complimented perfectly, as Mark testified from his own experience as a sufferer from mental ill health the tension in the system between a biological and supernatural approach to care, between health and well-being. He commented, upon starting treatment, he wanted to find spiritual ‘space’ and support, but no one even mentioned it or offered it to him. He appealed for a more holistic approach to patient–clients and the need to take a person’s faith and spiritual issues into account when starting to make them well.

After a second set of workshops, the conference came together for a final plenary session to hear statements reflecting their discussions from each of the workshop leaders and questions suggesting possible ways forward from the conference, ably assisted by four members who formed a discussion panel. Myles Cook, a service user, Hari Sewell, Marcel Vigo from MIND and Time to Change and Councillor Ann Naylor from Essex County council. Rev’d Canon Ivor Moody then brought the conference to a close with a round of thanks for all those who had worked so hard to make the day successful and enjoyable.
**Mental health in BME Communities:**
The term BME covers a massively heterogeneous group. Care needs to be taken to provide personalised responses.
Importance of faith group support.
*How might health professionals (especially GP’s) be trained and developed to work effectively with the complexity of peoples identities and to see faith as an asset? Arising from this event how might we build on the learning and insights to achieve better support together?*

**Mental health in the Workplace:**
There is a need for more education in the workplace to combat stigma and a reluctance to talk. If society/government changes its attitude to mental health issues it will help to change the culture and climate of the organisation.
There is a need for peer support, both from managers and fellow employees. Service users could have a training role in HR departments. Services within the mental health system need to be available beyond a ‘9 to 5’ culture.
*How can we make it easy for people to speak about these issues at work? How can we raise awareness of medication for mental health in the workplace?*

**Mental Health in Schools:**
A particular problem in secondary schools, especially with bullying and racism, especially cyber-bullying. Seems like there are less people to turn to than in primary schools, where there is often a buddy system. Again, if communities/societies can be encouraged to change, this would have a knock on effect in schools.
*How can these issues be addressed at a primary school level rather than secondary?*

**Does Spirituality help with Mental Health?:**
Spirituality and good mental health intertwined. Training of Clinicians (with an appropriate vocabulary) paramount.
Giving time to service users
Faith Groups have expertise which they can offer and importance of voluntary work/gifts to the mental health community and they need to embed ‘Time to Change’.
Importance of training, both at a student curriculum level and in communities, and through religious education. End of life care is also important.
*Why isn’t spirituality recognised fully as being part of a holistic approach in mental health care utilizing fully the care plans and recognising the spiritual needs of each individual?*

**Mental Health and Stigma:**
Need to change language/vocabulary used around mental health.
Media key in speaking a positive message and they need to be partnered. Use of social media as well. Also, a need for positive role models. Educational Needs departments in schools important.
*How do you challenge negative reporting of mental health in the press? How can we introduce mental health and awareness to teaching degrees, so they can refer as required in good time?*

**Where to go with Mental Health?:**
Anthony King gave a summary of MIND and some of its work as a result of being a good destination for those looking where to go for help:
Support for GP’s, so that the right information can be discriminated.
International events like World Mental Health Day.
Meetings with faith/religious leaders; work and training with businesses, support for teaching staff, working with the army, especially in work with soldiers suffering post-traumatic stress.
*Work with service providers to meet service user’s needs*
EVENT FEEDBACK SURVEY EVALUATION

There were 41 evaluation forms completed with the following results:-

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<th>Very Satisfied</th>
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What went well?
The main strengths of the event included the food and organization of the event. A majority of attendees mentioned the diversity and multi-faith interaction to be a very positive experience for them with excellent networking opportunities. Many people commented on the excellent venue, environment, speakers and workshops content. Several delegates enjoyed the stalls and displays.

Would have been better if:-
A wide majority of people commented that there were no parts of the conference that were not enjoyable.
The main negative comments were concerns with the acoustics during the workshops located in the central part of the cathedral or where workshops were based within close proximity of each other.
Some delegates also highlighted that there were insufficient drinks during the course of the afternoon.
A few attendees hoped for a shorter plenary session including an earlier conference closing time.
There is an expectation, rightly, that in a post conference report like this, the organisation who staged that conference will draw out ideas and recommendations from it and use them as a basis for an ongoing plan of action.

It will be no different here; but first, it is pleasing and exciting to report that some of the delegates *themselves* were so inspired by what they heard and saw in the cathedral on April 24th 2013, that they individually have pledged in their responses and feedback about the conference to carry forward the work of awareness raising and education about faith, stigma and discrimination issues in mental health. Here are the things some of them have written:

“I learned about the role of governors and how service users can help shape policy. I talked to a lady who expressed a need for a drop in place to feel safe, and this made me think maybe I could help create such a place”

“I would like to run a similar conference in Hertfordshire”

“I want to set up a women’s group at my local church in Saffron Walden”

The mental health in schools workshop has led me to a path I would never have thought to take. I am looking into a career working with children and mental health now. A new career move after many years of depression”

I was inspired by learning about the printing company that employs people with mental health problems”

“I will be doing more talks on mental health in schools at different organisations as well as at my workplace”

“It was a really great conference. Alhumdullilah. Thanks.”

And this from Audrey Clark, Director of Brentwood Community Print, who produced those fantastic conference packs:

“I had this sudden overwhelming feeling of pride that this had been produced by our team at Brentwood Community Print.....This type of activity requiring a level of concentration, helps a person focus away from their problems and to the job at hand and once finished instills a sense of personal achievement and reward. These are some of the activities we provide that help to build confidence and self- esteem in a person who may have been in isolation for some time before attending Brentwood Community Print.”
Following the conference and gauging the replies and recommendations received as a result of what took place, the Steering Group of EMS pledge to work on the following:

1) Carrying on the theme of the conference, ‘Tackling Mental Health Issues in a Multi Faith Context’, to undertake a mapping project of what faith does for/towards mental health projects in Essex, and the level of cooperation and interaction experienced;

2) More locally, through the current EMS Cluster Groups, to map local initiatives/services/groups that might offer help to sufferers of mental ill health;

3) To work more closely with Time to Change, NEPFT, SEPT and MIND both in the pursuit of the above and to progress the work of EMS;

4) To be more proactive with the press and media, seeking to contribute to a more positive reporting on mental health issues and recovery;

5) To assist where possible with the setting up of new local groups to do with spiritual care, awareness raising and support for mental health issues and service users, as well as strengthening and expanding the work and membership of the existing Cluster Groups;

6) To work towards the staging of another conference, concentrating on the relationship between spirituality and a specific mental health issue. Suggestions are dementia, depression, schizophrenia or mental health in Eastern European communities;

7) That EMS establish a website, and utilise social media to network more effectively and to promote their activities.....DONE!! This post conference report now boasts a website and Twitter and Facebook capability and addresses, thanks to Mark Dale!

The conference would not have been possible without a grant awarded by Awards for All, and the encouragement and support of all our sponsors:

Essex Mind and Spirit
Women Together
EMAN
West Ham United Football Club
Basildon Disability Forum
Praxis Proactive Solutions Ltd
Time to Change
Translating and Interpreting Service
SEPT
NEPFT
Essex County Council
Chelmsford City Council
Basildon Council
We are also grateful to the Conference Steering group for the months of planning and preparation for the conference:
The Rev’d Canon Ivor Moody
Mike Waddington
Sidra Naeem
Bill Coomber
Mark Dale
Karen Latham

The Steering Group would like to thank all those who took part in any way in the conference – the speakers, service users, chair, organisers, workshop leaders and volunteers – who combined to make the event such a success. Thank you to Rizwana Siddiqui and her team from EMAN for providing an excellent lunch and to Chelmsford Cathedral for providing an inspiring and friendly venue and in particular Michael Rivers and the Vergers Team for getting the cathedral ready and for so much help on the day, for Julie Brown and Amanda Wright for all their administrative and IT support and Philippa Penkett and her team for the refreshments. Also thanks to those kind enough to leave donations on the day. £50.25 was donated.

Ivor Moody (Chair, Essex Mind and Spirit, May 2013)

**County Steering Group**

Mid Essex Cluster Group: Rev’d Karen Best  
West Essex Cluster group: Rev’d Paul Walker  
North East Essex Cluster Group: Rev’d Mark Thompson  
South East Essex Cluster Group: Safia Hussain  
Muslim representative, Brentwood BME group, secretary: Sidra Naeem  
Buddhist representative: Peter Goble  
Jewish representative: Jack de Metz  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Brentwood: Phil Butcher  
Mid-Essex and Central Essex Mind: Sarah Linzey/Antony King  
Service User representative: Mark Dale  
Voluntary Sector representative: Keith Page  
NEPFT: Susan Iskander  
Treasurer: Jan Hutchinson  
Chair: Rev’d Ivor Moody

**Keep in Touch!**

Please help us to continue the Essex Mind & Spirit initiative by keeping the Steering Group informed of appropriate developments – preferably by joining your nearest Cluster Group

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**Brentwood Black and Minority Ethnic Group**
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The Essex, Mind & Spirit raffle will be drawn in July, and prizes include two tickets to a West Ham game and a T-shirt signed by the West Ham team players. Please contact essex.mindandspirit@yahoo.com if you want tickets (£1 for a strip of 5!) Winners will be notified.