

## **Sutton Mental Health Foundation**

### **Summary**

SMHF is a local charity working with people with direct experience of mental distress and treatment, often over very many years. We provide drop-in facilities, an advice service, training in recovery and peer support and mutual support groups for people who hear voices. We are seeking support to further develop our peer support programme, which we believe is unique to the UK but builds on many years of experience in America. We also undertake development work, seeking to encourage and enable the people for whom mental health services are made available to play as full a part as possible in the design, provision and future development of mental health services.

Our drop-in and advice services are funded by the London Borough of Sutton and our development and peer support work by Sutton and Merton PCT and by various charitable foundations.

One of our long term objectives is to enable people with direct experience of mental distress to become major providers of the services that they themselves need. Several years ago we started to provide training – both for our staff and for those who use our services - in recovery, in mutual support for people who hear voices and in peer support. Training, supporting and employing people as peer support workers (PSWs) are central to this strand of our work and our training programme has now been formally accredited. For the last twelve months the people we have trained have been applying their skills by providing peer support to patients on the local acute psychiatric ward, by running groups for people who hear voices and by providing a user-run drop-in on Sundays. We have received funding from the Department of Health to set up a social enterprise to manage these services.

Looking to the future, we would like to set up a peer support centre run by people with direct experience of mental distress and eventually to establish a safe house providing support at times when the only alternative is hospital admission. These projects will depend on sustainable funding arrangements for training and supporting peer support workers and on building up a sufficiently large group of people with the right experience and training.

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## **Sutton Mental Health Foundation - frequently asked questions**

### **Who are we?**

Sutton Mental Health Foundation was set up in 1987. It is an independent registered charity and a company limited by guarantee operating only in the London Borough of Sutton.

### **What do we do and who do we seek to help?**

We work together with people who have experienced mental distress to overcome barriers to their involvement in society and to enable them to enjoy fully the lives they wish to lead.

In practice this means:

- Running a drop-in centre funded by the local authority. At present this operates on six days a week
- Providing an advice service at the drop-in (also funded by the local authority) dealing with benefits and other matters
- Employing a community development worker funded by the PCT to encourage and support the participation of people who use mental health services in the planning, delivery and evaluation of these services
- Working with ethnic minority groups (especially the gipsy and traveller community) to increase their engagement with mental health services
- Providing training in recovery and peer support and facilitating mutual support groups for people who hear voices
- Running a peer support service on the local acute psychiatric ward
- Supporting a user-run Sunday drop-in
- Participating in the Borough's Mental Health Partnership Board and providing the Chair for its Mental Health Forum

### **How do we ensure protection of vulnerable people**

We subscribe to the Borough's policy on the treatment of vulnerable adults and train our staff accordingly. We work closely with the Borough's Adult Protection services. All our staff members are CRB checked.

### **What are we doing to encourage the people who use services to participate in their planning and development**

We already have in place a development worker who works with ethnic minority communities to encourage them to participate in identifying and making provision for mental health needs. She also facilitates the work of the Patients' Council on Jasper Ward at Sutton Hospital. We are advertising for another worker who will concentrate on equipping people who use mental health services to play a full

part in planning, developing and reviewing the performance of the services provided for them, especially within the framework of the Sutton Partnership.

### **Our future plans**

Our work so far has shown that people who have direct experience of mental distress and who are still receiving treatment and living on benefit can take control of their own recovery and help each other to shape the lives that they wish to live. This can produce several benefits:

- People who work together gain support and encouragement from each other - they are no longer alone
- People who have made progress in their own recovery are an inspiration to others - they offer living proof that things can get better
- People who know that the person who is listening to them also experiences mental distress and has had similar experiences of treatment find it much easier to talk about what they are going through and to engage with others
- People providing peer support, facilitating a group or undertaking some other work in which they are drawing on their own experiences of distress and treatment feel valued and gain in self-belief
- Payment for permitted supported work gives people some additional income and can be a path towards regular employment

People who use our services have shown that they are able to:

- Work on their own recovery
- Support other people
- Take responsibility for running a service (the Sunday drop-in)
- Represent us to others who are interested in our work
- Respond to the challenge of learning to train others

We want to build on this by:

- Maintaining and expanding our peer support work at the hospital and our groups for people who hear voices, using PCT and other funding
- Working with the local floating support service to introduce more people to recovery training at a stage in their experience when it can have most effect (they have some funding to support this)
- Running further workshops on specific areas of experience (eg paranoia)
- Training more trainers
- Equipping the people who use our services to run their own user-led safe house as an alternative to hospital treatment for people in crisis (the subject of a separate funding application)

This will involve several funding streams, including:

- The Borough, which will continue to support our drop-in and advice services (though these will change in response to the personalisation agenda) (£110,000 in 2009/10)

- The PCT, which supports our development work and has agreed to fund our work in the hospital until at least March 2010. We have also been promised £2500 for a feasibility study for a safe house (£117,500 in total)
- Lloyds TSB Foundation, which has promised £12,000 to support training and provide facilities for the user-run drop-in in 2009-10
- Additional funding from other charitable foundations for the development of new work and for the enhancement of our premises at Belmont.