

Northern Devon Networking Event – Mental Health

12th October 2012, held at Umberleigh Village Hall

The Northern Devon Networking Events are held about twice a year and bring together people from local government (elected members and officers), the voluntary sector and various public agencies.

Each person present has an opportunity to introduce themselves and their organisation and to speak about aspects of their work. People can then make further contacts over lunch for longer discussions. There are often also one or two presentations on a theme. The theme this time was Mental Health.

Many of the participants spoke about their own experiences of mental health and ill-health, including episodes of “breakdown”, post-traumatic stress, the loss of a close family member through suicide, severe mental illness, self-harm, depression and anxiety. For some of the participants these were live issues and were painful and emotional to speak about. It was humbling in the highest degree to hear people share their personal stories when they are more used to speaking about their work in helping others. It is a testament to the trust that already exists within the group that people felt able to share such things and show such vulnerability publicly. It is also testament to our changing climate that people are now more willing to speak about their experiences of their mental health without feeling that they will be stigmatised or looked down upon and that people are also more willing to listen openly and without judgement. It was perhaps also the first meeting I have attended (in many years of networking and partnership meetings) where the subject matter was so clearly not only happening to “people out there who need support” (when one may take a slightly external viewpoint) but happening to “us” – where those offering the services are in exactly the same boat as those who need them.

Nichola Glassbrook who is the mental health lead for Public Health Devon gave a presentation of some facts and figures pertaining to mental health in Devon. A copy of her presentation is available on our website [here](#). She was particularly interested in hearing about the work of the FCN/DYC Rural Plus programme on mental health awareness with young farmers and also our work on collating community activity information to help alleviate loneliness and social isolation. A follow up meeting will be arranged with her and Marisa Cockfield (interim chair of the Exeter Diocese Mental Health Round Table).

Various other contacts were made which will be helpful in following up our work on connecting the lonely and socially isolated in our communities with the various social activities we offer (see update for item 10b).

We were also alerted to the existence of the “Mental Health Challenge Pledge” for organisations and individuals which may be of interest to our churches. There is also an encouragement to “Make Every Contact Count” where any officer of DCC is given basic mental health awareness training so that whoever is in contact with someone who may be in need, then basic help and sign-posting can be offered.

A pack of all these resources and others will be made available on our website and included as a link from the meeting notes to the DCRF meeting on 29th October.

Rev'd Penny Dobbin

Secretary Devon Churches Rural Forum and lead for the Forum sub-group on Social and Economic issues.