

Mental Health News

Life Stories

The Mental Health News e-bulletin is a daily bulletin issued by the Mental Health Improvement Programme (MHIP) containing an item relating to a Mental Health issue, development or outcome in the North West.

The aim is to bring awareness to our stakeholders about service improvement and innovative projects underway in Mental Health across the North West, and to encourage you (the reader) to act as vehicle for ensuring that you or your organisation is engaged with the work where applicable.

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Life Story work involves gathering information about a person's past and future hopes. An illustrated Life Story has many advantages; for the older person it is a permanent record of the person's life views and wishes, which help them feel valued. It can promote self-esteem and help a person to retain and regain a sense of individuality and identity which can be communicated to care staff to promote dignity and respect. In respect of their carers; it can help to alleviate anxieties and concerns carers have when their relative goes into a formal care. Life Stories can help staff caring for an older person to know the person better, aid communication and tailor care to the person's needs.

The Oldham Life Story Project began in 2003 when carer, Ken Holt (now 85) wrote his wife's life story when she was admitted to residential care. Ken brought together Pennine Care Mental Health Trust, Oldham PCT, Oldham Social Care Services, Oldham Age Concern and the independent sector to develop a joint approach to the Life Story work, with the aim of improving the quality of care for older people. In particular to work towards Life Story work becoming integral to the care planning process for older people (and their carers) with, but not exclusively, dementia.

This project demonstrates the importance of listening to carers and the power of what can be achieved from bottom up ideas when people work together across the statutory and the voluntary sector. It's received awards from Pride of Oldham 2005, Overall Chairman's award Greater Manchester SHA April 2006 and National CSIP highly commended award 2006.

Within the wider community there is great fear and stigma about mental health and old age. Life Story work goes some way to promote a positive approach that can be taken with people with a dementia and increase respect for the person.

The DVD produced with Ken was the catalyst for the work behind the National Life Story Network. This is being established with support from the dementia strategy, dignity campaign and National Mental Health Development Unit ((NMH DU) and will be launched on 12th February 2010.

For more information view the website www.lifestorynetwork.org.uk

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