



The voice of hope

Issue 7: Intro to volunteering

www.accept-mht.com

Awarded for creating better communities

John Hall
Hope Community Church

It was a great privilege to receive, on behalf of the rest of the ACCEPT team, the " Better Communities Award."

Mental health support is not always given the attention that it deserves so we were really thankful to the Leicestershire County Council and

" I had often wondered, as a Christian, what role I could play in the community. I now know I have found it. "

other members of the awards committee for their generous recognition of our work.

Being a part of a team of Group Development Workers for ACCEPT gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction.

Essentially, I am a part of a group of people with



On behalf of ACCEPT, volunteer John Hall (right) receives a cheque from Ernie White, Leicestershire County Council, for £6,000 towards training and the development of Friendship Groups in Leicestershire.

similar problems meeting once a week at a venue of their choice to interact socially together. We chat, joke, discuss current affairs, sometimes share problems and most certainly laugh. That my involvement can make such a difference is humbling, as it often seems that I am receiving back far more than I am giving to the group.

When I became involved some 3 ½ years ago I could never have believed that such a simple formula could help people so much. I have had the great privilege of seeing friendships made, problems shared and true camaraderie formed. I believe their group is something they look forward to coming to and as for me I had often wondered, as a Christian, what role I could play in the community. I now know I have found it.

ACCEPT is an evolving Christian based charity whose vision is to bring hope to people experiencing mental health problems. Working in partnership with mental health service providers and churches, our mission is to raise awareness, challenge stigma and facilitate support networks.

***** Community Innovation ** AWARD WINNER ** Better Communities *****

The Value of Volunteers

Michelle White

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

As an Occupational Therapist within an Adult Community Mental Health Team, one of my roles is working in partnership with ACCEPT in relation to Friendship Groups. These groups provide the opportunity for people to build a social network by meeting on a weekly basis in a community setting. Isolated individuals are referred to the group by the NHS and other mental health service providers.



Training Workshops

Avril Martin

Sapcote Methodist Church

As a volunteer with ACCEPT, I attend workshops which are held on a regular basis. These provide training for volunteers, where various aspects of mental health and associated issues are examined. It also provides an opportunity for volunteers to meet and discuss the differences and / or similarities of our individual groups.

Whilst the agenda of each workshop is carefully structured, it is always relaxed and informal.

Information is presented in lively, interesting ways which makes it easy to understand and remember.

Any concerns volunteers may have can be addressed and professional help is always available. These workshops are an invaluable resource.

Volunteers from local churches play a vital role in helping the groups to develop and progress. The volunteers are CRB checked, well trained and are professional at all times. They provide both practical and emotional support to group members, whether it be listening or informing members of social activities taking place at their church or local community services. Group members report that they feel the volunteer is a valuable member and very much part of the group.

I provide bi-monthly one to one supervision for the volunteers, which allows them to discuss any possible concerns they may have. Very often the time is spent discussing and exploring the group's progress and development. As a health care professional I have found the volunteers to provide an excellent and much valued service, giving up their time in a selfless manner.

Individual & Peer Group Supervision

Judy McKeown
Living Rock Church, Stoney Stanton

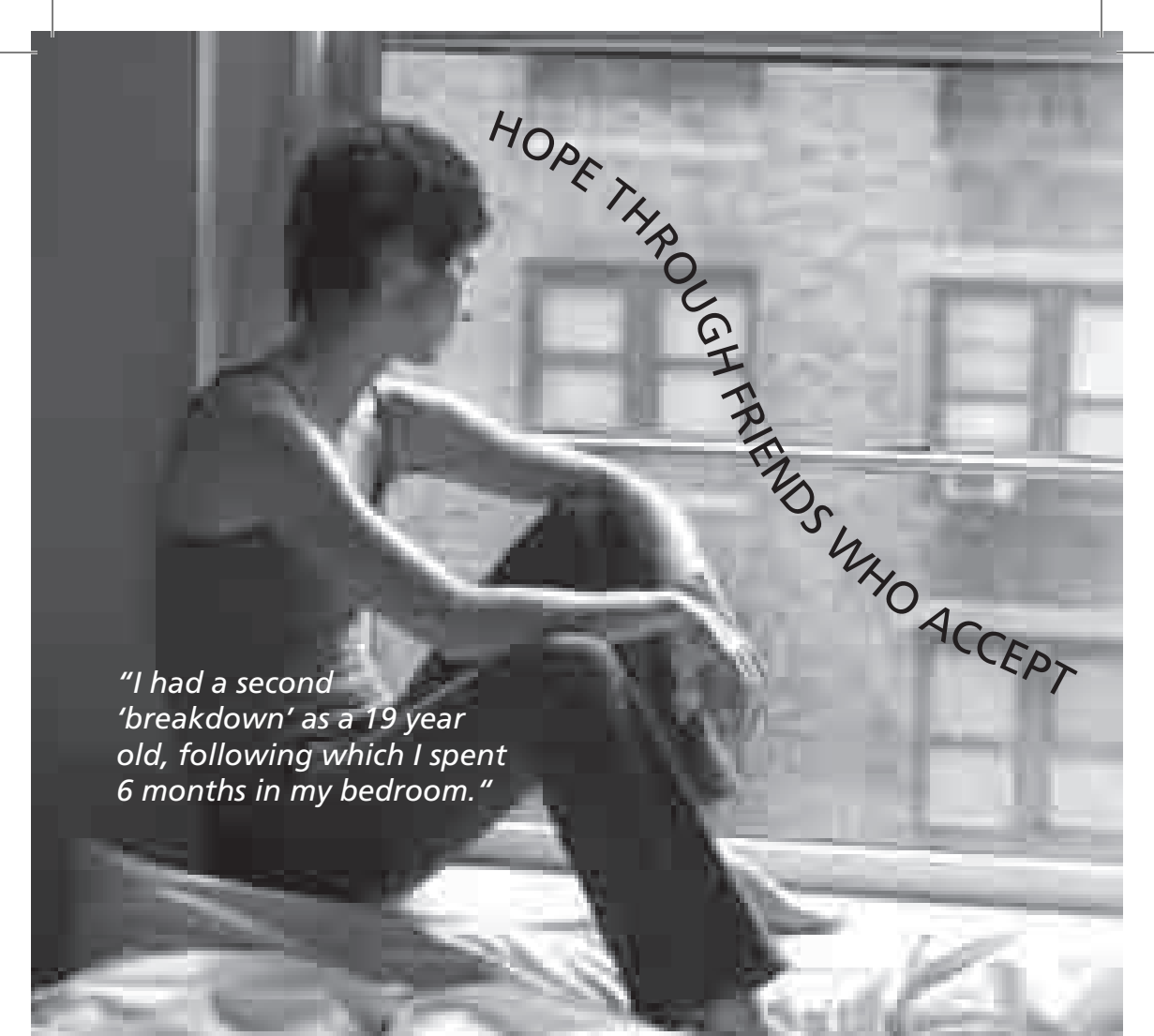
After attending an ACCEPT Conference I was so thrilled that there was on-going help for people with mental health issues and I had no hesitation in volunteering to oversee a Friendship Group. Within this role I have received constant support both from Aidan (ACCEPT) and Paul (NHS), who provides individual supervision.

Workshops and regular Peer Group Supervision have also been invaluable. Here, we meet with other Friendship Group Development Workers to discuss ideas for groups, mental health issues and the effects they have on people's lives. Sharing issues together we learn from one another as to how to help our groups to develop. Support is always available to whatever needs I have, which is of great help to me regarding my Friendship Group.

supporting one another...

...to transform isolation

...to transform isolation



HOPE THROUGH FRIENDS WHO ACCEPT

"I had a second 'breakdown' as a 19 year old, following which I spent 6 months in my bedroom."

The story of one of ACCEPT's Friendship Group Members

I am 37 years old, have been divorced for 10 years and am single with 2 boys, aged 11 and 12 years, who live with my mum. I began to experience mental health problems when I was 11 years old. Because the medical profession didn't accept that a child could suffer a "nervous breakdown" at such a young age, I was treated for epilepsy.

Seeing me deteriorate before her eyes, my Mum took me to a Neurologist, who knew I did not have epilepsy and took me off the medication. I then spent a week in hospital having numerous tests to find a name for the anxiety, panic attacks and low mood I was experiencing. None was found as all the tests came back normal. Therefore, the only prescription I had was to carry a paper bag at all times in case of hyperventilation! I was eventually discharged from the services at 16 years of age.

continues overleaf

Comments about Volunteers From Friendship Group Members

"Kind, considerate and caring lady, who always lends a listening ear."

"Someone I am pleased to know, who gives so much of himself to us all. He has a very caring nature which does not end when the meeting finishes. He is always just a phone call away so if any of us have worries or problems he will give up his time and does all he can to help. I think he is a very special person and I feel privileged to know him."

"Kind, generous and loving person, whose understanding and encouragement to all group members is of great importance. I can see the love of God shining through her and the things that she does with the group is beyond my expectation."

"Very kind, understanding, non-judgemental, generous and kind-hearted."

"A very kind and caring man, with lots of compassion and a big warm heart, which he brings to our group as well as understanding. He also brings us little funny stories and sayings, downloaded off the net, which shows that he's always thinking about us. He also keeps up with people outside group hours. We always miss him when he's not there."

"Very knowledgeable, understanding and open to talk to on a one to one basis as well as keen to keep the group running and intact."

"Very caring person, who makes you feel that you belong to the group, even though you have just joined it. You can talk seriously or you can have a laugh too, which I think is very important."



Whilst we all need our personal space, we were also made for relationship.

"It is not good to be alone."

Genesis 2 : 18

If you feel alone in your experience of poor mental health, it can help to talk with someone who you can trust.

HOPE THROUGH FRIENDS WHO ACCEPT

(continued from previous page)

I had a second "breakdown" as a 19 year old, following which I spent 6 months in my bedroom. Eventually I improved enough to attend a day centre, for about 2 years. I suffered from depression, both pre-natal and post-natal, when pregnant with my 2 sons and also following the death of my father.

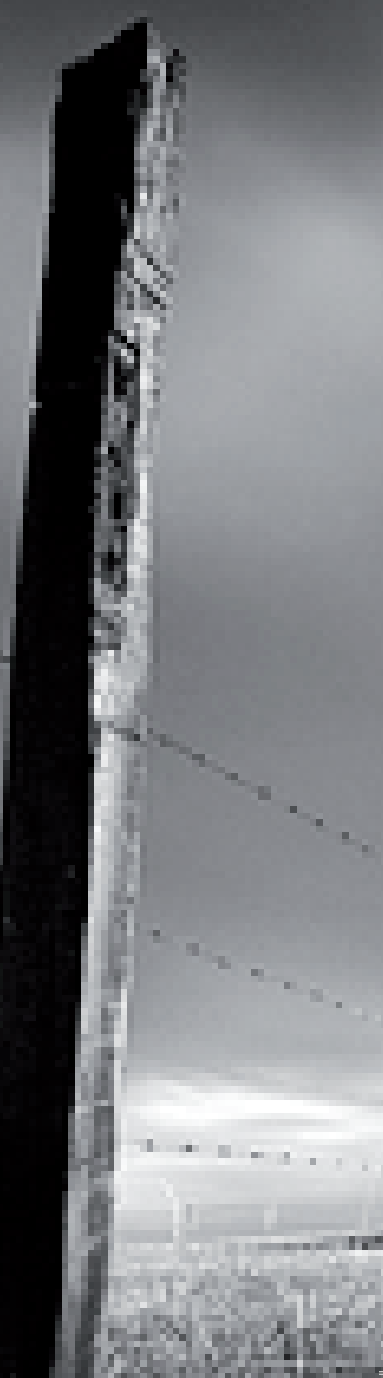
My third "breakdown" came when I was 32 years old and I was finally diagnosed with "bi-polar affective disorder" about a year ago. My last episode was the worst I have experienced and it has taken a few attempts at different tablet combinations to try and stabilise me. However, I'm now able to concentrate on overcoming agoraphobia which started when I was 11 years old and has worsened with age. I am pleased to say that I'm becoming a little more independent now and have begun driving again, which I love.

Throughout the 26 years of experiencing mental health problems I have lost all my friends at each "breakdown" as they didn't seem to be able to cope with me not getting well quickly. Depression can make you become insular and non communicative, whilst anxiety can lead to not wanting to leave the house. Associated physical problems such as tiredness, lack of motivation, side effects from medication and inability to socialise, all contribute to isolation and loneliness.

"this group to me has been a lifeline and the best thing I've ever attended."

After each period of being unwell, I've had to make new friends. I stopped trusting anyone, learned to hide aspects of myself and wouldn't tell others about my mental health problems. I was scared that they wouldn't accept me for who I was; that the pre-conceptions and prejudices would override any impression I'd made. Hiding a big part of me felt wrong, as I'm not ashamed of my mental health problems. I was however frightened of the isolation and rejection it tends to generate.

With each depression, each loss of friends, something dies within me. I've tried to define what it is but can only describe it as a loss of faith in others who are unable to see through the stereotypes. This has, however, strengthened me and made me no longer hide my true self. I felt as though I'd been abandoned and judged by nearly everyone I met. Only my Mum, children, brother and sister-in-law, uncle and aunt have remained constant in my life.



I sometimes wish that the world could see me through my childrens' eyes. My boys live with my Mum and know all about the bi-polar and agoraphobia yet when they look at me they just see their Mum. This complete and utter acceptance for all of me fills my heart with love, pride and hope; they won't buy into the stereotypes and preconceptions when older.

As I'd lost all my friends again when I had my last breakdown, I was referred to one of ACCEPT's Friendship Groups. I was excited, nervous and sceptical at the same time. After the initial induction course my scepticism was proved unfounded as this group to me has been a lifeline and the best thing I've ever attended. The concept of mental health sufferers meeting once a week to support each other is pure genius; it actually works and has surpassed all my expectations.

I've been attending my group for over 3 years now and am extremely committed; attending every week, even if I feel low or am having a bad day, I know that I'm going to be surrounded by friends who understand how I'm feeling and I don't have to pretend, justify or explain myself. I know that I will always leave the group feeling better than when I went in and that is priceless.

We meet on a Thursday at a local pub and are what we appear to be; a group of friends meeting for a drink, chat and laugh. We talk and laugh about anything and everything and rarely talk about our mental health; unless we're comparing Psychiatrists! One thing we always do is laugh - that is priceless.

I have made 3 really good friends through ACCEPT, who I see outside the group. That has been truly wonderful, as I know they have accepted me and like me for who I really am; something I never expected to happen at all. ACCEPT is the one thing that has given me freedom from being alone.

I'd like to finish by saying a few thank you's. Firstly to Aidan, for creating the ACCEPT group, to John for being the best Group Development Worker ever and to the group for allowing me to meet my best friend. Last but definitely not least, I'd like to thank my Mum because if it weren't for her continuous help, support and love I wouldn't be here today.

"I know that I will always leave the group feeling better than when I went in and that is priceless."



Transforming isolation through

partnership with ACCEPT
partnership with ACCEPT

We want our supporters to play a big part in transforming isolation
for more people through Friendship Groups

The best way you can help us to continue to bring

The voice of hope

is becoming an ACCEPT PARTNER by making a standing
order of at least £5/month

PLEASE JOIN US AND HELP US TO DO MORE!
Please see inside flyer for further details

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loving wife, mum & grandma



Hope Community
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Better Communities
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"Bringing hope through friendship "

