



Rethink Carers Lancashire

Newsletter
September 2016

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Anyone for Quidditch?



No wonder our group does so well – Debbie our Treasurer, part of our Defence against the Dark Arts, here practising her Woollongong Shimmy on Queerditch Marsh. **More importantly**, to raise funds for the group, Debbie will be doing 'Stoptober', so if anyone would like to sponsor her, please let us know. You can promise a one-off sum, or so much (as little as 10p) for every day she stays away from the G and Ts. What a sacrifice!

Next Meeting Wednesday October 12, Chorley Fire Station

Full day meeting, with lunch* in the Training Centre canteen.

10 am start for what promises to be a fascinating morning with clinical psychologists Tony Roach and James Kelly. Tony will talk about how psychological services are provided in Lancashire, and how Lancashire Care is implementing national initiatives. James will present the 'compassion focused model', which emphasises a non-blaming approach to better understand how people's emotional states interact to influence each other. It won't be possible for them to discuss individual cases, but if you have a *general* question about psychological therapy please send it in beforehand if you can.

After our usual delicious lunch, we'll have a **short AGM**, with hopefully a useful discussion about expanding what our group does, and at about 2.15 a visit from Steven Howells, solicitor, to explain how to resolve the worries we all have about wills and inheritance. You may feel this wouldn't apply in your case, so obviously there would be no need to stay, but there may well be things you weren't aware of.

***Lunch Menu** will be home-made soup/ beef lasagne or cheese, onion and spinach pie with wholemeal seeded pastry, plus the usual jackets, baguettes, salads or sandwiches, and for afters home-made biscuits, fresh fruit, yoghurt.

BOOKING FOR THIS MEETING ESSENTIAL, WITH YOUR LUNCH CHOICES, BY TUESDAY OCTOBER 4.

We usually try to collect food for the food bank at our meetings.

And don't forget that we can usually arrange lifts or pay travel expenses for anyone coming more than 20 miles or in particular hardship.

Lunch very reasonably priced, but we can help if it's still too much for you



Our meeting in September welcomed two members of the Care Quality Commission team inspecting Lancashire Care NHS Trust's mental health services, both in-patient and community. The team was surprised to see so many carers, and took detailed notes about what was described by many of those present as the unsatisfactory nature of the care provided, especially with regard to Section 117 aftercare, absence or inadequacy of care plans,

and risky discharge processes. Our members were impressively restrained – given the seriousness of the impact on their relative - in their comments, and the few who had had a good experience emphasised this.

This inspection is a follow-up to the one a year ago, and will be made public in about 4 months' time. Watch this space!

We're still contacting senior managers to challenge the Trust about its carer policies. We felt to do this at the same time as the CQC inspection would be counter-productive, but will keep you posted as to progress now the inspection is over.

Disturbing development vis-à-vis carer assessment records

We have been told that standard practice in some Lancashire community mental health teams is to record the carer assessment within the record of the cared-for person. This is emphatically a breach of the Data Protection Act, very frustrating in the context of how often this Act is used by some professionals to block legitimate carer involvement in care. If you've had a carer assessment, please ask where it's been recorded and let us know. Lancashire County Council has the legal responsibility for carer assessments, and we shall be taking this up with their commissioner for carer services.

**Time to think
about winter
fuel bills**



For winter 2016 to 2017, you or the person you care for, could get **£140 off your electricity bill** through the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The money isn't paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill between October and April. The discount won't affect Cold Weather Payment or Winter Fuel Payments. Phone your electricity supplier to find if you're eligible and for an application form, which has to be returned by February 28 2017 (although it's better to do this earlier) or contact the **Warm Home Discount Scheme** **0345 603 9439** www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

The DWP call handler – no wonder we find it so difficult!

(Extracts from a Guardian series which aims to give a voice to the staff behind the public services that are hit by mounting cuts and rising demand, and so often denigrated by the press, politicians and public.)

This morning I spoke to a cancer patient, a woman with kidney failure, and a young man who had just lost the mother of his children. Each of them thought I was trying to help them. I wasn't really though, because helping them would take longer than 23 minutes. Twenty-three minutes is how long it should take me to help you make a benefit claim, according to my bosses. I work in a Department for Work and Pensions contact centre and take calls from people who are at their lowest point.

These are people who need my help to navigate the complex claims system so that they can get a meagre payout. They're often vulnerable and desperate by the time they reach me. My job is to fill in a new claim form for employment and support allowance based on the information people give me and then send that form off to the benefit centre where the claim is processed. There's no measure of how good a service we provide or whether or not people are able to make a successful claim

The headset beeps and I launch into my scripted greeting. The caller wants to tell me about her recent cancer diagnosis, what type it is, what the treatment will be, the reasons her employer has given for not offering sick pay. But I don't have time to listen to her story. "I'm afraid we need to stick to yes or no answers" I say, and I feel horrible because this poor woman wants to tell someone about this huge awful thing that's happening to her, she wants a friendly listener to make her feel reassured that she will at least get financial help.

But for me, the only thing that's really important is how long each call takes. We are measured on our average handling time (known as AHT) and if this slips beyond 23 minutes per call we face performance management, which is code for "you'll get in trouble". This involves anything from stern words and increased micro-management from your line manager right up to written warnings and dismissal. In the DWP's modern-day version of a sweatshop, we staff are singularly ill-equipped to actually offer any help or support. I have had absolutely no training in how sickness benefits work. I don't know what happens when I send a claim to be processed, so I can't answer any questions about what will happen next or when somebody will get a payment. Quality checking is done but it's about whether we are reading every word of the script, there is no measure of how good a service we provide or whether or not people are able to make a successful claim with our help.

The woman with cancer has answered all of my scripted questions and I am reading her a list of instructions about what to do next. I doubt she is taking it all in; at this point she's been listening to me for 45 minutes. I've already failed to hit the AHT target; she has children and it takes a long time to input all their names and dates of birth, plus she took ages to find her tax credits award notice to read me the figures. I decide I will take an extra couple of minutes to explain to her the importance of sending in fit notes signed by her doctor on a regular basis. This isn't in my script despite being absolutely key information and a major stumbling block for many new claimants. If the call is listened to by my line manager this will be flagged up as an area where I'm missing time targets, as will the three minutes earlier in the call where I let her cry quietly down the phone because her life is imploding and she's frightened of what the future will bring and this is all too much for her. A more motivated call-handler would have got her back on track quickly, today I am not that person.

I feel like crying too after this call, because I know I have failed this woman in so many ways. No time for me to cry though, there is no break between calls, the headset beeps again immediately and this time it's a woman with kidney failure. I'm failing her too, and afterwards I will fail the bereaved young father, and this afternoon there will be more and more people I fail to help.

If you're struggling with a benefits claim, don't forget we have some essential Rethink help documents, and you can contact the Rethink Advice and Information Service (details on Page 4) for expert advice. This service has brought some major successes for some of our members. Also, the number for Welfare Rights for Lancashire is 0300 123 6739, so make sure that you or the person you care for is receiving everything you're entitled to. People in our area are now being 'migrated' from DLA to PIP; don't try to complete the forms without all the information possible.

Schizophrenia Awareness Week: Rethink is working hard to prepare for Schizophrenia Awareness Week, which runs from 3-9 October. This year's theme is Supported Housing – how important it is to provide proper housing support for people with mental illness, and what can happen if that support fails. We've created a powerful short film with prominent mental health campaigner Alistair Campbell, who has recently become one of our newest ambassadors. That will be live on our website on 3 October, alongside case studies from people using our services, and the media team will be approaching radio, TV and press to cover the issues we'll be raising. We believe everyone should be able to live in a safe and secure home. But the government's proposal to introduce a cap on Housing Benefit in supported housing could risk the health and recovery of many people with a severe mental illness. It would restrict access to vital support when people need it most. This Schizophrenia Awareness Week Rethink Mental Illness will be drawing attention to the 1 in 5 people diagnosed with a severe mental illness who rely on supported housing to help them as they move towards living independently. It can be an essential service for people who are seeking to move from a hospital into the community and supports people's mental health as well as their housing needs. In the most severe cases, people can need support for 24 hours a day. A Place to Call Home is our new campaign calling on the government to protect safe, calling on the government to protect safe, secure housing for people affected by severe mental illness. During Schizophrenia Awareness Week, we are asking Ministers to remove the threat of any 'one size fits all' cap to Housing Benefit for those living in supported housing. We need a fair, robust and long-term housing deal that meets individuals' needs. If services are withdrawn, or become too expensive, the consequences could be devastating. Poor housing with no support will worsen mental health, may force people to move away from their local health services and community networks, and the proposals risk pushing people into debt and homelessness. According to the National Housing Federation, some people could lose up to £68 per week towards their rent and many services could become financially unviable. But there is a real chance for change. Supported housing is currently under review, and there is a clear opportunity to influence the changes. More than a thousand people have already emailed their MP in support of the campaign. If you would like to join us to take action, please visit the campaign page www.rethink.org/placetocallhome and write to your MP today.

August was another good month **for media coverage of Rethink Mental Illness' work**. There were a total of 624 mentions of Rethink Mental Illness. This comment from our Media Manager Nia Charpentier on the story about **debt worries putting students at higher risk of depression**, was published in 298 publications including The Daily Mail: "Problems with mental health and money often go hand in hand, with studies showing that one in four people with a mental health problem also has debts, and one in two adults with debts also have a mental health problem. The transition to university can be a challenging time on so many levels. Everything is new, you're away from your friends and family, you have deadlines, and you're perhaps budgeting for the first time on a small amount of money. If it seems like it's all getting too much, it's important to remember that there is support available; for example, through Rethink Mental Illness's advice and information service. Director of External Affairs Brian Dow's comment on a story about **hundreds of deaths of sectioned patients going unrecorded**, was published in 342 publications including The Daily Telegraph: "These figures are alarming, especially if there is a risk that deaths have not been thoroughly investigated. If incidents are not being appropriately referred and examined, then lessons can't be learnt about how to avoid further tragedies in the future. We owe it to people detained under the Mental Health Act and their families to ensure this. We want to see a robust, independent and transparent system for investigating deaths in mental health settings, so no more families are left without answers. Rethink Mental Illness was included for signposting in several articles, including in the Sunday Mirror, about **Alastair Campbell and his brother, Donald**, who had schizophrenia and recently died.

Since our last update the Advice Team have reviewed and **updated factsheets** on: • Complaints About Court • Confidentiality and Information Sharing - For Carers, Friends and Family • Options For Dealing With Debt • Suicidal feelings - how to cope • Supporting Someone With A Mental Illness • Universal Credit • What Happens At The Police Station • Benzodiazepines • Welfare Benefits and Mental Illness. You can download **factsheets for free** from rethink.org/factsheets or ask us for a hard copy.

The Rethink Advice and Information Service can be contacted by phone weekdays 9.30 am to 4 pm **0300 5000 927** Or email advice@rethink.org (Alternatively, the Group Coordinator can make inquiries on your behalf; the response would also have to go via the Coordinator)

JOIN RETHINK MENTAL ILLNESS Membership of our local Lancashire group is free, but we'd like everyone to join the national organisation, as this gives Rethink more weight for its campaigning as well as access to your opinions and knowledge. In return you get the quarterly information-packed magazine, access to a special bit of the website, and free conferences (including in November our National Members Day which this year is in Birmingham). Look at the website or phone 0121 522 7007

There is now a cheaper membership for people who can do everything online – fewer perks but the same information. If you're already a member, you'll be informed about the alternative at renewal time.

ONE COMMENT WE HEAR FREQUENTLY NOW IS THAT RETHINK IS THE BEST SOURCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS INFORMATION AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO CARERS IN LANCASHIRE. One way to show your appreciation of this is to join the national organisation.

Leading the way to a better quality of life for everyone affected by severe mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0300 5000 927 Email info@rethink.org

Visit www.rethink.org Please join us today www.rethink.org/join Follow us online www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity www.twitter.com/rethink

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