



# **SUPPORTING PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

**Action points for people who use services  
and for people who provide services**

# About this project and this set of action points

## About the project

This set of action points arose out of a small research project.

The research project was a partnership between the Dumbarton and District Mental Health Forum and Outside the Box Development Support. The project ran from summer 2005 to early 2006. We wanted to find out what helped people like us keep well. We also wanted to look at what services – health and social care services and ordinary community resources that everyone uses – can do to help people be well and support people in their recovery from a mental health problem.

The research project was funded by the Scottish Executive National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, as part of its Small Research Projects Initiative. The full report and a summary have been published through the Scottish Executive.

We want to thank the Scottish Executive for funding the initial research. We also want to thank all the people who took part in the discussions and the people who contributed their ideas and comments on the emerging findings.

After the research was complete, we looked at how people could use the ideas we had heard to improve the way community services support people's mental health and well-being.

Anne Connor of Outside the Box talked over the points people had raised and the approach we had used with other people. She gathered their suggestions about what could help people incorporate these ideas into the services that are provided now and inform plans for future services. From this, she developed this set of action points.

This booklet has the main findings from the research. At each section there is a description of what people told us and suggested action points to help you have your own discussion about what these ideas can mean for you and the people you know, and how your ideas can get put into practice.

Outside the Box is developing a resource pack to help people build these ideas into peer support and into the community services in their area.

## How you can use these action points

The initial research looked at what people who had mental health problems and older people found kept them well. But we think the ideas and practical suggestions here may also be useful to other people.

There are action points for:

- ⦿ people who use services
- ⦿ friends and family
- ⦿ staff who provide services
- ⦿ people who are involved in planning future services.

We would very much like to hear what happens when you look at what helps people in your area keep well and how you adapt services to help support people's mental health and well-being.

# What does being well mean?

We met with people who have mental health problems and are members of mental health groups or networks. We also met with people using community services – in each case daytime activities – which did not have a specific focus on mental health and well-being. They were an older people's group and another group of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic health problems who were mostly older people.

These are the themes in what people told us about what being well means to them.

- ⦿ Consistency and predictability
- ⦿ Confidence and self-esteem
- ⦿ Feeling well
- ⦿ Having opportunities and being able to take these up
- ⦿ How other people perceive you
- ⦿ Living well with symptoms
- ⦿ Good relationships with other people
- ⦿ Enjoying what is around you.

An important aspect of all the points which people raised was the person feeling in control of what was happening to them.

*“Being well is being able to plan to do things. If mornings are still bad, at least I know I’ll be ok in the afternoon.”*

*“Building on strengths and coping with weaknesses”*

*“Having energy”*

*“Being healthy – physical health as well as mental health”*

*“Feeling happy”*

*“Do what I enjoy”*

*“Not letting other people bother me, not letting the stigma make me unwell”*

*“Having coping mechanisms”*

*“Being able to give peer support”*

*“Having healthy relationships that work both ways”*

*“Having a laugh, having fun”*

*“We enjoyed talking about what being well means to us. It is something that we’ve never thought about before.”*

## Action points

### For people who have mental health problems or other disabilities

- ⦿ Have a discussion with other people you know about what being well means to you.
  - Do the points that we have listed here seem similar to your experiences?
  - It might help to have several discussions about what being well means, as you may find you need some time to reflect on your own and other people's ideas.
- ⦿ Individual people can look for opportunities to talk about being well with other people, such as friends or relatives.
- ⦿ Drop-in groups or peer support networks can have a conversation about being well.

### For people who are family or friends

- ⦿ Encourage the people you know to talk about what being well means to them.
- ⦿ Have you ever thought about what being well means for you? – Your health and well-being are important too.
- ⦿ Talk about this to some of the people you trust.
- ⦿ Use the ideas in the rest of this booklet to help you look after your well-being.

### For people who provide support or other services

- ⦿ Encourage the people you know to talk about what being well means to them.
- ⦿ Have you ever thought about what being well means for you? Are there aspects which are likely to apply to anyone? Are these things part of the lives of the people you support?

# What keeps people well?

These are the themes in what people told us about what keeps them well.

- ⊙ People
- ⊙ Hobbies and activities
- ⊙ Looking after yourself
- ⊙ Health and social care services
- ⊙ How services are delivered – attitudes and values.

People also talked about how many of these things are bound up with the relationships with people. One person talked about a friend who encouraged him to come walking with him – the fresh air, the exercise, the time out to think and the relationship all help keep him well.

*“Friends who have stuck by me through the years”*

*“The man at the corner shop who always smiles”*

*“Feeling that you are making a contribution”*

*“Social activities and hobbies”*

*“Making space to think, to be quiet”*

*“Knowing what is ‘normal’ for me”*

*“Using coping strategies”*

*“People who see you as a whole person”*

*“A good GP who asks you questions”*

## Action points

### For people with mental health problems or other disabilities

- ⊙ Describe what keeps you well.
  - You can do this with friends, with a worker or someone else you trust.
  - Do the points we have listed seem similar to your experiences?
- ⊙ Encourage friends to talk about what keeps them well.
- ⊙ List out the activities that you find helpful.
  - You can use the ones we have listed as a starting point.
  - Try to describe what it is about these activities that is helpful. Is it the activity itself? The people who are there? Where or when it happens? A nice relaxing atmosphere? Being stretched a bit?
- ⊙ List out ways that friends could help you, or you could help them.
  - Can you offer each other peer support in keeping well?
- ⊙ Explain to other people such as support staff what you want them to do to help you to keep well.

- You can use this list as a starting point.
- You can suggest that people in the project have a discussion session along the lines of the ones we did.

### For people who are family or friends

- ⊙ Encourage the people you know to talk about what helps keep them well.
- ⊙ Work together to identify ways you can help people keep in touch with the people and activities that help them to stay or become well.
  - Would some help with transport be useful?
  - Is it good to have encouragement beforehand and someone to talk to afterwards about how something went?
  - Would it help to have company at the start of something? – ‘We’ll both go to the art class, or gym, or whatever.’

### For people who provide support or other services

- ⊙ Encourage the people you know to talk about what helps keep them well.
  - Have some general discussions about this.

- Build it in to the more formal plans for individual people, such as care plans.
- ◎ Look at how you create opportunities for people to get the types of support that keep them well, such as having friendships with more people or getting the confidence to try hobbies.
  - Make this part of any review or evaluation you do of the service.
  - Do a short survey of service users around this – use the approach we used, or ask a few service users and staff to ask people about what could be useful.
- ◎ Identify ways you can use your professional skills and experience to help people overcome barriers to keeping well.
  - Can you help someone manage their symptoms or plan how they will do an activity, so they can take part in activities that are important to them?
  - How do you support people to look after their physical and their mental health and well-being?
- ◎ Look at how your service links to other local services – supporting people in particular situations and mainstream services that are used by everyone – and links into wider initiatives around promoting social inclusion in your area.
  - Get one of the team to be the link person for a particular service or range of activities – spread the work between you, so it is manageable.
  - Link into any more general training that is happening.
  - Ask your manager for some training and advice on this for the staff team.
- ◎ Look at how you can work with the people who use your service to make sure that the service has an ethos which promotes well-being.

# What keeps people being not well?

These are the themes in what people have told us about what keeps them unwell.

- ⊙ Lack of choices and lack of control
- ⊙ Poor quality services
- ⊙ Other people
- ⊙ Isolation
- ⊙ People's social circumstances and impact of policies.

*"Having solutions imposed on you"*

*"Services that offer you all or nothing"*

*"Services that create dependency"*

*"Family – their attitudes, lack of acceptance and knowledge about my illness and about mental illness generally"*

*"The isolation keeps me unwell – no friends or family to help me move on"*

*"Long nights in an empty home"*

*"Not knowing what is going to happen about my benefits if I get better is enough to set me back"*

*"Where I live – graffiti, harassment, looking out onto walls"*

## Action points

The people who took part in our research project knew that the discussion with us was in confidence. They raised points where the situation could become better if other people changed their behaviour or their attitudes. We realise that people will often find it difficult to raise these points directly with the people concerned.

You might find it useful to use the points raised here to help you start a dialogue between people who have been unwell and who need support, and the people who could help.

### For people with mental health problems or with other disabilities

- ⊙ Describe what keeps you being unwell.
  - You can do this with friends, with a worker or someone else you trust.
  - Do the points we have listed seem similar to your experiences?
  - Are there things you can do, or ask other people to do, which could make these situations better?

- ⊙ Have a discussion with people you know – for example in a drop-in or peer support network – about whether there things you can do to help each other. For example, how can you help when people are feeling lonely and isolated?
- ⊙ Explain to people who make policies how some of their policies have the effect of stopping people being as well as they can be, even though this was not what was intended.
  - Work with other user groups and people who are interested in mental health or related issues to raise these points – for example, through the service planning process.
  - Get together with people in your networks and write down some of the experiences that have been unhelpful and what could be different, so people can use these to explain what is needed.

### For friends and family

- ⊙ Encourage the people you know to explain what helps keep them being unwell.
- ⊙ Ask if there are things that you could do differently, for example to help them feel less hurt by the attitudes or actions of other people.

## For people who provide support or other services

- ⊙ Encourage the people who use your service to explain what keeps them being unwell, so that you can work with them to make changes.
  - Have a general discussion with people in the project – you can use the material in this booklet as a starting point.
  - Make sure that the care plans for individual people take account of the situations they want to avoid, including things that services need to stop doing.
- ⊙ Identify ways you can help prevent or minimise the unhelpful things that services do.
  - Explain to other services that although they did not intend this, some of the things they do are preventing people being well.
  - Have a discussion as a staff group about how you can stop doing things that your own service does which keep people unwell.
- ⊙ Work with the people who use your service to find ways to increase the choice and control that people have in their lives.

# What can services do to promote well-being?

People in the community groups and staff from various services made suggestions on what services – community-based and occasionally hospital-based – can do to help people to keep well and minimise the extent or consequences of being unwell. Many of these ideas are consistent with the good practice that is being encouraged through the Scottish Recovery Network and other parts of the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being.

These are the themes in what services can do to promote well-being.

- ⊙ Provide information, choice and involvement
- ⊙ Support people to participate in a wider range of activities
- ⊙ Have a focus on recovery and practical coping skills

- ⊙ Support peer support
- ⊙ Support people to look after themselves
- ⊙ Values and approach of services
- ⊙ Improve the quality of services
- ⊙ Type of services
- ⊙ How services are organised – strategic planning.

*“Learn about the coping skills that people have learned.”*

*“There is no point in having service users take part in training for staff and then disregarding what individuals say on a day-to-day basis.”*

*“Start with people’s interests – skills, activities.”*

*“Remember that many people have lost confidence and need a lot of encouragement to try things.”*

*“Help with the practicalities. Make an improvement to my quality of life.”*

*“Give people hope – tell them that living well is possible, help them to look forward.”*

*“Celebrate the positives – people’s skills, the friendships people make.”*

*“Services should remember that people can and do adapt – it is what human beings do.”*

*“Have good communication with each other and with the people who use the service.”*

*“Staff could begin by smiling.”*

*“Get better at diversity – become competent and sensitive around ethnicity, gender, age and sexuality.”*

**Remember that good days and bad days are part of being human.**

- ⊙ **Staff need to remember this for their patients or clients.**
- ⊙ **Staff need to remind people about that on the bad days.**
- ⊙ **Staff need to remember it for themselves.**

*“Shorter waiting lists for services, so you get the care you need when you need it and things don’t get worse.”*

*“Fewer pilots that suddenly stop – we want services that we can rely on.”*

*“Most of the things people have suggested don’t cost much money. They would probably even save money.”*

## **Ways services can help people look after themselves**

- ⊙ **Find out about diet and how this interacts with symptoms and well-being. Encourage people to follow this up.**
- ⊙ **Help people look at the combination of their medication, diet, complementary therapies, taking exercise, etc.**
- ⊙ **Support people to look at complementary therapies and what could be useful for them – practical ways of managing symptoms, helping the person feel in control and building self esteem.**
- ⊙ **Listen to women and give them information about the interaction of their condition or symptoms and medication with menstrual cycles and the menopause.**
- ⊙ **Take the physical health needs of people who have mental health problems seriously.**
- ⊙ **Take seriously the mental health and well-being of people who have physical health conditions or who are older.**

## **Features of services that keep people well**

These are the common features of the suggestions people made about the types of services that help people keep well.

- ⊙ **Practical responses to current situations, even if the long-term aim was to prevent these situations occurring.**
- ⊙ **Services which do not undermine the positive aspects of how people coped.**
- ⊙ **Early intervention to reduce the need for more services later or to minimise crises.**
- ⊙ **A strong user-input to the design, and sometimes the delivery, of the service.**
- ⊙ **Maintaining or building links with the community.**

## Getting into and out of services

People thought that services which were good at supporting people's well-being were

- ⊙ easy to get into
- ⊙ easy to get out of
- ⊙ easy to come back to.

## Approaches to ending a client's contact with a service

Unhelpful approach – how not to do it	Positive approach – good features to include
Staff decide when contact ends – they discharge you	Person decides to end the contact, or the decision is made by staff and the person together
It is at a fixed date, no matter whether you are ready, or it happens suddenly	You are encouraged from an early stage to look at other options, and know that you will move on at some point
It feels like rejection	The closing isn't sudden – planning for it happens over a while
The door is closed – you can't go back	You can come back
	From the outset, the service is a bridge or a step on to life afterwards, and the bridge goes in both directions

## Action points

### For people who have mental health problems or other disabilities

- ⊙ Be part of a discussion in your area about what helps people to look after themselves, and what types of services can support this.
  - Get this onto the agenda of the local users' network.
  - Start with the services you use, if this is comfortable for you.
- ⊙ Look at the ways you can work with other people in similar circumstances to explain all the activities that you would like to try or go back to, so services can understand this better.
- ⊙ Identify ways you can share your practical coping hints and tips with other people in similar circumstance on a peer support basis.
- ⊙ Work with other people who use services to identify what you can do to teach these practical ways of coping to staff who work in services, so they can expand their skills and knowledge and give better support to people.
  - Develop some material you can use as part of staff training.

- Start with the services you know are interested in this.
- Offer this to staff in mainstream services that everyone uses, such as the library or the leisure centre or cinema, as well as to support services for particular groups of people.

### For friends and family

- ⊙ Look at how you can share your experiences with other families and friends of people who are unwell or using services, so they feel confident and supported and can be better able to support the people they care about.

### For people who work in services

- ⊙ Identify the ways you can respond to the points raised by people through this discussion paper to look at what your service can do.
  - What can you do immediately?
  - What will take a bit more time, but you can start on now?
  - How are you going to work with the people who use your service to plan for these changes and make them happen?
- ⊙ What can you do to help the people you support to have as much choice and control as possible in the services you provide?

- ⊙ Get together with the people who use your service and think about the ways you can work with staff in mainstream community services to help make these welcoming and accessible.
  - Can you offer some training or information?
  - Can you link this to the work of the local recovery network, if there is one in your area?
- ⊙ Identify how your service will encourage people to find their own coping strategies and skills, so it isn't left to chance.
- ⊙ Work together with people who use services to identify ways for peer support and services to complement each other.
- ⊙ Describe the values of your service, or look at them again to see how they refer to keeping people well.
  - What are the values of your service?
  - How are these reflected in what you do? Would someone from outside be able to describe the values from observing what happens?
- ⊙ How can you and the people who use your service work together to explain what responses could promote well-being and recovery, so the people who plan services can learn from your joint experience?

**Remember that people who use services can be**

- ⊙ **part of identifying the problem**
- ⊙ **part of identifying the solution and**
- ⊙ **part of making the solution happen.**

**People who manage or commission services**

- ⊙ Agree how your planning group will find out about the full range of activities that the people who use services or are the people you want to support would find helpful. This should include all types of activities, not just those provided through services for a particular group of people.
- ⊙ Encourage discussions about the types of services that can keep people well and minimise crises or the need for more services in the longer-term.
  - Make these part of the way you review the range of services that are provided.
  - Make this a flexible discussion to open up ideas and possibilities, rather than consult on a narrow range of options.

⊙ Look at the ways people who use services are part of the planning, design and delivery of services.

● Does this include people's ideas about mainstream services as well as about services which are only for people in particular circumstances?

● What opportunities are there for people to raise the issues that are important to them around keeping well?

● How do you work with people who use services when assessing the impact of existing services?

⊙ Build in a focus on recovery and keeping well into the overall plans for services in this organisation or area.

● Make the values part of how you assess existing services and plan for new ones.

● Identify the ways the services you provide or commission encourage staff to look after their own well-being.

***“Encourage me to manage my illness, not emphasise all the time that my illness controls me.”***

***“Think about ‘us’, not ‘them and us’”***

***“The strategy must link with the implementation. It’s what happens to real people that matters.”***

## More information



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Outside the Box can point you to other useful sources of information about the mental health and well-being of older people, and about ways for people to influence what happens in their local area.

Local recovery networks are being developed in many parts of Scotland. They can be contacted through Outside the Box.



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