



Service Users Newsletter

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Being a Mental health carer

There are around 788,000 carers in Scotland, with at least 44,000 being young carers under the 18. Indeed 4 in 10 carers are men. Carers may provide unpaid care for a family member, friend or neighbour. They may also have a job or be a parent. The type of care that is provided and how much is required varies according to the individual. The person may require help with household tasks, personal care, shopping, cooking, budgeting, giving medication or help with correspondence. They may live with you or in their own home. Life can become extremely stressful coping with all the challenges that carers face in looking after someone with a mental health problem. This is made worse if the patient is depressed or is psychotic or is simply having a hard day. None the less people that do it find it an extremely rewarding experience.

Unfortunately anxiety and depression are often common in carers as they find it increasingly difficult to cope with providing adequate care along with all their other commitments in their lives.

Carers often worry if they are doing their best for the person they care for and can lose self-esteem and confidence in themselves. They may no longer have the time to enjoy hobbies and leisure and socialise with friends and family. If you are struggling to cope your first point of contact should be your GP. You will gain access to possible treatments for any mental health issues you may have. This may include medication or free talking treatments. You have the option of a private therapist, Check the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy for information and to register online. Visit www.bacp.co.uk



It is important to care for your physical health so try and exercise and take time to relax which will greatly improve your mood. There are many options, including walking (costing nothing) joining the gym, or Yoga and meditation classes. Ask your GP about referral to a local gym or advice on healthy eating plans. It is vital that as a carer you have access to all the information that you need regarding the health issues of who you are caring for, how their illness affects them and what support may be required. This will allow you to become more confident in yourself and your role. You have the right to a carers assessment where it will establish exactly what services may help you. Ask social services. You may be entitled to certain benefits such as carers allowance (the main benefit for carers in the UK), kinship carers allowance, housing and council tax benefits or help with fuel costs. The person that you care for may also be entitled to certain benefits including SDS support where a budget is created and it is established what the funds would pay for, for example personal care (including any equipment or technology that maintains independence), respite or leisure. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is for people with a long term disability and helps with the cost of daily living and reduced mobility. For benefits advice contact your local Advice shop. In West Lothian contact 01506 775 626.

As a carer you need to ensure that the care you provide is both safe and effective and that you aim for the person you care for to be as independent as possible and have a good daily routine. You may be able to offer advice and create weekly budgets. Patients should be consulted about the issues that affect them and any care plans in place need to be reviewed regularly. It is so important to be organised, it will make your life much easier, i.e. any upcoming appointments, shopping lists or daily tasks. You need to be prepared for an emergency and have a crisis plan where everything is kept in one place, such as contact details and any medication prescribed. This may also include setting out what will happen if the patient becomes unwell and can no longer communicate their wishes regarding their own care and treatment. This document is called an Advance statement. They may also nominate a named person who they would like to be consulted if they become unwell. These issues need to be discussed with family and any support workers involved in patient care. It may include practical issues such as who will pay the bills, look after any pets etc.

By going online you can access all the information that you need and find out about local services that may help you such as sharing your story online in a forum or accessing websites such as mind, Rethink mental illness and NHS websites for knowledge and support. So what is available locally?

Carers of West Lothian aims to improve the quality of life for unpaid carers. They focus on early intervention and prevention. A range of services are provided which includes access to advice and information, training and support, and how to manage your own health more effectively through courses, activities and classes run by the

organisation. There is a counselling service run by fully qualified staff (or in training) and volunteers. People need to be referred and will be put on a waiting list. The service is free.

You may be able to access funding for short breaks and advice on benefits and support to obtain Power of Attorney if necessary.

Additional services include home visits, hospital based support and support groups. Support is now provided in secondary schools in West Lothian with a young carers champion in every local school. Young carers have the opportunity to meet other carers like them and take part in fun activities, outings and arts and crafts. Young people need to be referred by a parent, teacher or social worker. A waiting list operates. You will meet someone at an agreed location with yourself and your family. Carer of West Lothian provides a range of publications.

You can register as a carer on the website and receive the information for carer's handbook. Visit www.carers-westlothian.com You can share experiences on Facebook and twitter and read the quarterly newsletter.

It is important that you are realistic regarding the help that you provide and to know your limitations. Hopefully caring for someone will be extremely rewarding and satisfying and you will continue to learn valuable knowledge and skills.

Living with Anxiety



Anxiety is something that we all experience at certain points in our lives such as taking a driving test or sitting an exam. It allows us to perform at our best. It is therefore normal to experience the symptoms associated with anxiety at these crucial times. When it becomes a problem is if it happens for no apparent reason and is affecting our ability to live our lives, such as holding down a job or enjoying leisure time with others. People often suffer in silence and don't open up about what they are going through but it is a mental

health problem which *can* be treated and managed the same as any other health problem. Anxiety does not discriminate, it can affect anyone, both young and old. Everyone's experience of anxiety is different and will cope in their own particular way. It is certain however that learning more about anxiety can really help you live a better life and manage your symptoms more effectively.

Anxiety has a whole range of both physical and psychological effects. You may experience only one or perhaps many of these symptoms at any particular time. The physiological symptoms originate in the release of adrenalin in the body which prepares you to flee from danger. These are the short term effects of anxiety. Your heart rate will increase rapidly as BP rises, you breathing will quicken, you may feel dizzy or shaky and you will sweat more. The blood supply to your digestive system will be reduced causing nausea and sickness and you may urinate more frequently. This is all part of the fight or flight reflex but if it happens when you are going about your daily life it is extremely unhelpful. It can become a severe condition which is very distressing for the sufferer. A person may become agitated for a prolonged period of time after the effects of adrenalin pass. Other long term effects affect your ability to fight off infection due to a weakened immune system and damage to the heart or kidneys due to a chronic increase in blood pressure. You are therefore more likely to suffer a stroke. People with anxiety are much more likely also to have depression.

Severe anxiety can lead to panic attacks which are very unpleasant for the sufferer. What is the worst thing about them is that often they are out of the blue with no apparent trigger so they can really impact on your life. Common effects include feeling you are having a heart attack due to a much increased heart rate and chest pain, feeling faint and legs that feel like jelly. They usually only last for a short time, i.e. 5-20 minutes. Attacks may only happen once or they may occur much more frequently and are really distressing as you are not in control.



Psychological effects commonly involve thinking negatively about yourself and your life such as thinking I am not normal, everyone is talking about me and watching me and want to hurt me. People are following me. You may feel you're going "mad" or think that you have a brain tumour. You may experience a feeling of being detached from what is going on around you and feel the need to escape. By facing up to and understanding your feelings you may be able to break the vicious cycle of anxiety.

There are many factors that may make you more likely to experience anxiety. One theory is that you may have inherited an increased susceptibility from your parents. You may have a relative with a similar problem. You may have had a traumatic experience happening in childhood or more recently your current circumstances may be relevant. There are several things that you can do yourself to lessen your symptoms, such as avoiding caffeine, sugar, sleeping well, eat well, avoiding drugs, alcohol and smoking. Anxiety can also be caused by certain medications.

There are many types of anxiety disorders which include Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Phobias, Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) and Post traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). OCD involves obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. Often it develops in early adulthood. Uncontrollable thoughts or urges produce the anxiety. Sufferers feel it is necessary to repeat tasks over and over to reduce this anxiety. This may for example involve checking if taps have been turned off or that the door has been locked. With Phobias there is a specific trigger for the anxiety, common triggers are a fear of spiders, heights, crowds or flying. Of course phobias therefore are very common. GAD is a long-term condition and symptoms will be experienced most days. There is no specific trigger but there will be a range of issues which may cause the anxiety. PTSD may occur after a stressful event such as war, serious accident, violent death or rape. Sufferers often experience flashbacks and intense anxiety.

There are many ways in which anxiety can be controlled. The first point of contact will be to speak to your GP if you are feeling depressed or struggling with anxiety. You can initially complete a Mood questionnaire on the NHS choices website which will indicate if you are having problems and will recommend resources. Visit www.nhs.uk The most common treatments provided by your GP will be talking treatments and medication. Concerning medication, anti-depressants are usually prescribed for particular types of anxiety that involve panic or obsessions. There are different types of antidepressants that can be used such as SSRIs which are usually tried first. Patients are closely monitored as the medication may increase anxiety levels. If unsuitable for use tricyclic antidepressants are routinely used. Medication may produce side effects and take several weeks to have an effect for patients. Your GP should explain any risks. For an increased heart rate and palpitations often with associated chest pain Beta blockers may be used and can be very effective. Tranquillisers and sleeping pills are used as a temporary measure as they can result in dependency. Low dosages will also be used. There is also the possibility of

withdrawals and side effects such as reduced concentration and feeling sluggish. Long term use may cause panic attacks.

Talking treatments for anxiety involve counselling and psychotherapy. One of the most common recommended by GPs is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). It is a short course of therapy usually from 6-12 sessions which focuses on changing the way that we think and how to cope with your anxiety. This is offered as a face to face therapy or an online programme. It may be free on the NHS but in West Lothian at the moment there is a long waiting time for referral to face to face treatment. This therapy is recommended by the National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) and Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). There are many advantages to going online for therapies. These include; the service is available at any time; it is easy to access and use the technology; no waiting lists exist or travel required. It is also entirely confidential. Services available include Fearfighter – a self-help course offering 9 sessions, and leso digital health- involves instant messaging with a therapist. For further information on both courses visit

www.nhs.uk . Living life to the full (Llfff) is a practical course for low mood and stress. See www.llfff.com They are all based on CBT principles and aim to modify your thoughts and behaviour. Ask your GP - online therapies may be free on the NHS. You of course are able to consider paying for a course of treatment if it is not available for free in your area. There are often additional benefits such as specialist helpline support, free literature and other online resources that may also help you; for example this is the case with Anxiety UK. www.anxiety.uk.org.uk

To allow yourself to relax and reduce your anxiety there is much that you can do yourself such as living a healthy lifestyle and practicing relaxation exercises such as meditation. Your GP may be able to offer a gym membership to allow you to access exercise in your local area and proceed at a pace that is suitable for you. You have the added advantage of being able to meet other people and be part of your community. Exercise actually uses up adrenalin and produces muscle relaxation. Aerobic exercise is best; the release of serotonin can boost your mood. Both yoga and Pilates allow you to relax.

It is so important to have support not just professional support but from friends and family. You can get outside and have fun experiences, even if it just out for coffee or a nice local walk of which there are many in West Lothian. MHAP facilitates a support group, the Step Out Group which may help you as you meet other people with the same experiences as yourself. It takes place both in Whitburn and Carmondean. For more information contact MHAP.



Health & Wellbeing

LOTHIAN EDUCATION AND RECOVERY NETWORK (LEARN)

Free mental health, recovery & advocacy training



Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Location: St

John's Hospital, Livingston Fridays 1, 8, & 15 September 2017

0930 - 1630 (plus 1330 - 1630 on Friday 3 November)

WRAP is a programme of self-exploration that can help you take control of your own mental health and recovery. Our workshops are based on the model developed under copyright in the USA by Mary Ellen Copeland. The topics include: Your Wellness Tools, Early warning signs and crisis and post crisis plans.



To request a place on this course, please get in touch with Julie or Anne on learn@capsadvocacy.org or 07910 021 537. N.B. Your booking is not complete until we have confirmed your place. We'll do this about a fortnight before the course starts.

Recovery Conversations

As part of the Lothian Recovery plan, Learn has organised a series of sessions allowing people to talk about their journey to recovery. These will be held in the next few months across the Lothians.

It is a requirement that you have your own experience of issues relating to mental health. For further information about a session near you Email:

learn@capsadvocacy.org or telephone 07910 021 537 You can also check Facebook; www.facebook.com/lothianlearn/ and Twitter; <https://twitter.com/comelearnhere>

There is a possible plan to produce a report for NHS Lothian.

General Interest



Mental Health Services Experience Survey

As part of mental health redesign service users are being invited to complete a Questionnaire which has been designed by MHAP. The aim is to gather people's experiences of mental health services in West Lothian. Members of the Forum and Reps groups run by Advocacy

were also involved in producing the questionnaire.

Advice to service users is only to answer those questions that apply to them.

Examples of mental health services included in the questionnaire are A&E, Acute Care and Support Team (ACAST), Clozapine clinic, Community Outreach Team (COT), Day services, Hospital wards 1 & 17 and Psychiatrists at OPD5. Only services accessed in the past 2years are of interest for this survey.

The aim is to reach as many people as possible which will include patients at St. John's hospital, Pentland Court and those people that use day services. Assistance will be provided by MHAP in filling in the questionnaire if requested.

This is your opportunity to make a difference to the lives of those people affected by mental illness in your own communities and to develop local services that are of the highest standard for vulnerable individuals.

All information given is entirely confidential and you will never be identified in any reports.

Support

Health in Mind

Health in Mind is a well-established organisation. It was set up in 1982 and was known as the Edinburgh Association for Mental Health (EAMH). It has now expanded and works in the Borders, Mid and East Lothian and Edinburgh. It provides a wide range of services for people who experience mental health issues or who are recovering from a mental illness. It provides advice, support and information. I have included the main services offered and for completion I have included details of how to access services if you live in any of the designated areas which run these services. On the website you will find a more detailed description of services available which service users will find useful.

Befriending

The popular re: discover befriending service relies on volunteers providing one to one support with the aim being to build confidence and self-esteem, combat isolation by creating more opportunities for social contact and encouraging the service user to take part in leisure pursuits. People with a mental health problem that feel they may benefit from this service can visit the website for more information and apply at

www.health-in-mind.org.uk

If you would like to apply to join the Befriending team as a volunteer you will also find information on the website.

Counselling services.

There is a range of counselling services available. These include short Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), emotional support and specialist trauma counselling. There is a counselling line for victims of childhood trauma. Counselling allows a person to open up about their own thoughts and feelings in a safe caring environment. It offers exploring ways in which you can manage your life better and build your confidence. One-to-one sessions are offered, usually on a weekly basis. See the website for details of available services. Another related service provides practical support for victims of trauma.



Information Resource Centre

The resource centre is based in Edinburgh at Shandwick place. It makes it simple and easy to access any information you need concerning staying well. Staff provide both a warm and friendly environment. A range of resources are offered; there is an extensive library of books, including self-help books and CDs and free use of the internet to find what you are looking for. As well as going online you have the option of attending the centre in person or via Email: information@health-in-mind.org.uk. There is also an information line, tel 0131 243 0106. You can also book appointments.

Information held within the resource centre is also available online. For services in West Lothian visit www.westspace.org.uk You can also find information through Facebook & Twitter.

Health in mind also hold monthly information afternoons on topics relevant to mental health. Previous topics include Panic attacks and mood and food. Follow the link on the website for details.

Services for the elderly

These include Loops Community Navigator – These projects enable older people from South West Edinburgh to access support and find out information on what is

available locally for them. Stations may be held in your local PO, GP surgery or library.

If you are interested get in touch, contact details are on the website. To find out further online information concerning this service follow the link on the website. A Senses of Me – This service offers peer support for dementia sufferers and their carers.

Equal Access

This service provides support for people from Black & minority ethnic communities who have become isolated or stressed.

Recently Health in mind has contacted advocacy regarding running services for people with mental health problems within the West Lothian area. They have requested that MHAP offer suggestions. This process is ongoing.

Useful contacts

Advice shop

Telephone: 01506 775 626
Website: www.westlothian.gov.uk

Anxiety UK

Telephone: Infoline 08444 775 774
Website: www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Email: support@anxietyuk.org.uk

Carers of West Lothian

Telephone: 01506 448 000
Website: www.carers-westlothian.com
Email: office@carers-westlothian.com

Health in Mind

Telephone: 0131 225 8508
Website: www.health-in-mind.org.uk
Email: contactus@health-in-mind.org.uk

Living Life To The Full

Website: www.llttf.com
Email: enquiries@livinglifetothefull.com

Mind

Telephone: Infoline 0300 123 33 93
Website: www.mind.org.uk
Email: info@mind.org.uk

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk

Rethink Mental Illness

Telephone: 0121 522 7007
Website: www.rethink.org
Email: info@rethink.org

Samaritans

Telephone: free 116 123
Website: www.samaritans.org
Email: jo@samaritans.org

LEARN

Telephone: 07910 021 537
Website: www.capsadvocacy.org
Email: learn@capsadvocacy.org

If you have any ideas you think would be of interest for future newsletters or if you just need to ask any questions please phone or e mail advocacy. The help will be very much appreciated! Thanks.

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admin@mhap.org.uk *Mental Health Advocacy Project (West Lothian) is a Scottish incorporated Charitable Organisation Charity No. SC01 1560*

This newsletter was produced by Claire. I am a service user with a severe and enduring mental health problem. I currently am a volunteer with the Advocacy project in Broxburn and produce this newsletter for them. I am also a member of the reps group and service users forum that advocacy runs. I am also a member of their Management Committee.

