

The Living with Psychiatric Medication
group report
Experiences on holding an exhibition at the Asylum!
Conference
Held at Manchester Metropolitan University
12th of September 2008

About the Living with Psychiatric Medication Group

The group meet to talk about and act on issues to do with psychiatric medication.

We've been going for 2 years and have achieved many things through-out this time.

We have had many speakers come and talk to us (psychiatrists, pharmacists, CPN's, solicitors to name but a few!) who feel that they get as much out of the meetings as we do.

We have participated in many exciting projects including speaking at conferences, helping set up another group in Nottingham and giving our feedback on a group potentially being set up on a psychiatric ward.

The conference.

We had been asked by the Asylum! network to exhibit our amnesty work. Asylum! are a network promoting democratic and critical psychiatry and psychology, bringing together organisations, activists, campaigners and academics working for radical challenge and change in mental health.

After a very early start (most of us were up by 5am!) we arrived in Manchester and set up the Drug-company advertising amnesty exhibition. Our group was represented on the day by Viv Addey, Kryisia Rommonow, Kalpesh Popat , Grant Paton, Izzy Malik, Paul Green and Alison Smith.



About the Drug Company Advertising Amnesty

This is one of our most recent projects which we have participated in alongside Brightsparks- an arts based mental health initiative. We sent out collection boxes through out the Trust and collected as many items as we could (mugs, pens, post-it notes) that had psychiatric drug company advertising on them.



We used the collected items for inspiration during art and poetry workshops alongside Brightsparks- a Leicester art based mental health initiative. The items were then transformed into pieces of art designed to stimulate discussion about how this kind of advertising makes us feel and what it might mean.



Why did we do this? Well, we wanted to take action following the refusal of several drug

company representatives to come and speak with us about their role. The drug companies felt that coming to speak to the group directly would contravene policies intended to protect 'patient groups' from direct promotion. We wondered what protected us from the adverts displayed on the mugs, pens, post-it notes, clocks, stationary etc that we see every time we saw our GP/Consultant or spent any time on a ward and why this is more acceptable than having a conversation. We wanted to challenge and open up a critical dialogue about drug company advertising. We wanted to highlight the drug representatives interest in selling drugs. We also wanted to explore the relationship the Trust has with drug company advertising.



What we as individuals got out of attending the conference

This was the first time all of us had held an exhibition and we felt we learned a lot of skills such as

Our confidence was increased by being there

We all learnt to overcome obstacles, really enjoyed our time there and felt proud to have been able to do it.

What we as a group got out of attending the conference

The group were able to network with a wide variety of people from around the world who came to view our exhibition and talk to us. We have made links with people and groups that we intend to keep in touch with. We got a lot of support from people who felt that the work we have done as a group was very important and who urged us to carry on.

We spent a lot of time listening to others and have gained a lot from other peoples experiences.

We were able to get critical feedback about how we present and how we can make future conferences better through completed evaluation forms, comments and by talking to people. For example we have learnt that in our eagerness to have people give us feedback and see what they thought of our work we did not always give them the space and privacy to write comments down.

We were able to listen to some of the speakers who were at the conference (Peter Beresford and Paul Cawley) which we found furthered our knowledge and understading.

We all very proud that all of our effort and planning paid off and we felt this was a positive experience for us all.

We were able to over come many obstacles such as the long journey and we learnt a lot about how we could better support each other (for example ensure that we all know when we can take a break).



What we can give back from attending the conference

We inspired other people to set up similar groups and to hold an amnesty in themselves; promoting critical thinking and positive action. We believe this has been empowering for other groups and individuals.

People were very enthusiastic about our work and felt that they would take a lot away from visiting our exhibition in terms of inspiration and ideas.

We have been invited to write an article for Asylum! magazine which will be

empowering for us as a group and will help to spread our work to a wide audience.

We have been able to work in partnership with Brighspark and we feel this joint working has forged important links and relationships.

We were able to represent and promote Leicester and had many people say that they now thought of Leicester's services as progressive and inspirational.

Following our exhibition we have had more invitations to exhibit our work (in Leicester and Nottingham). We have also been asked to talk about our experiences at a training session for second year clinical psychology trainees. We feel that these events help us to increase our skills as individuals, as a group and also offer something very important back to our community and the mental health system.



Some of the feedback from our exhibition

“Keep going with it”

“What a great idea! As a mental health nurse I think every town should have an amnesty!”

“

A very dynamic, welcoming, passionate group.

Keep up the good work”

“Superb. Direct action that is both fun and makes a strong political statement about the influence of the pharmaceutical industry”

“I thought this kind of action wasn't happening any more”

“Brilliant- we have banned all such materials on early psychosis in Lincolnshire”

“Brilliant, inspirational. Don't stop!”

“Keep on meeting and banging on doors!”

“refreshing, inspiring, witty and clever!”

“Great, inspiring, thought provoking exhibition- the issues of medication and drug companies needs to be made widely open.

Leicester is lucky to have you- keep up the good work!”

“Great- would be good to see some of these mugs being given to doctors to sit on their desks!”

“Fantastic exhibition.

You should be at all mental health conferences...including mainstream ones to shake them up. Thanks