

A Spiritual Response In A Day Centre Setting

Jill Stevenson

A holistic model of care, of body, mind and spirit is at the centre of the new Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, which is now responsible for the Croylands Mental Health Day Centre in Ely, Cambridgeshire. This model was adopted following extensive consultation with service users and staff.

Our clients experience a range of problems: extreme anxiety, depression, bi-polar disorders, schizophrenia and related illnesses, and attend from six months to two years.

During seven years as Project Worker at the centre, I have been supported by my manager and team, consisting of professionals from both the NHS and Social Services, in the development of stimulating and supportive groups for clients with enduring mental health problems. Responding to the needs of our clients, I have been running 'Odyssey Groups' which are focused on the 'big' questions of meaning, purpose and reality - the spiritual questions. These are the questions most urgently asked and most rarely responded to.

The response of those who are enabled to examine these questions and discover aspects of reality that enlighten their experiences has been positive and profound. One CPN writes: 'I have been amazed by the change in the people I key-work who have been fortunate enough to attend.... these clients have had a new dimension to their world opened up for them and are enthusiastic, verbal and positive about the subject matter and its application to their inner being'.

These groups, and the provision of training to facilitate them and develop understanding of their subject matter, have received support from our Mental Health Service Chaplain, who sees in them a major step forward in the provision of holistic care.

Mental illness leads to fragmentation, isolation and a loss of a sense of self. Within a safe setting, people feel free to question old assumptions and limiting beliefs, and a growing awareness leads to reconnection. A new framework can be discovered which provides a basis for healing and change. A wider exploration of spirituality, involving meaning and purpose, can enable people to free themselves from inappropriate fear and guilt, which is sometimes associated with negative religious experiences.

Odyssey groups developed within a service jointly funded by the NHS and Social Services, providing both clinical and social care. The therapeutic value of addressing all aspects of a client's being is made clear by the new perspective discovered which enables client and psychiatric staff to move forward in harmony.

Psychiatric workers and clients alike ask the spiritual questions. We all need a framework to understand and live within reality. The old frameworks have largely been dismantled and the need is growing stronger to examine with honesty and clarity our beliefs and our paradigms, to find a new and more harmonious way of relating to our environment.

It is logical to find this need expressed most strongly within the Psychiatric services, where the topics of life and death are so insistent. It is both exciting and infinitely rewarding to be involved in responding to this need.

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