

Mental Health as a Community Issue

by Margaret Fleming

Introduction

The Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Services have been recognised nationally as a service of excellence winning two prestigious National Awards, the Health Service Innovation Award 2005 and the Taoiseach's Award for Public Service Excellence in 2006.

Health Services Innovation Award 2005

Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Service is a rural community-based service which lies on the border of Northern Ireland. It serves a total population of just over 118,000 and covers an area of just over 3,000 sq.km.

The purpose of the Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Service is to provide an integrated, comprehensive, high quality, recovery orientated, individualised system of care and supports which meets the needs of people. The values and principles of the service are:

- Centrality of service users' needs and rights
- Delivery of individual effective treatment packages in the setting of home, family and community
- Responsiveness
- Empowerment
- Participation
- Partnership
- Citizenship.

The values and principles of the service are underpinned by the national policy document 'Quality and Fairness, A health System for You 2001', the Mental Health Commission publication 'Quality in Mental Health, Your Views 2005' and the National Policy document, 'Vision for Change 2006'. The Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Service has a long history of commitment to research and evidence-based practice which informs service developments.

Research by Shepherd (1994) suggested that service-users place greater emphasis on the social and practical aspects of life in the community. The provision of services to facilitate recovery requires more than a healthcare system. It requires a coordinated, interdependent whole systems approach, which includes multi-sectoral collaborative alliances.

Pickin *et al* (2002) identified a number of best practice approaches that enable partnership working between community and statutory organisations. One approach identified was 'whole systems working'. The Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Service moved from a closed systems approach to an open systems approach to transform the philosophy into a reality to meet the needs of service-users.

Wherever a group of people exist, a system exists. The medical model is a closed system. The flaw of the bio-medical model is that it does not include the service-user and his/her attributes as a person. It is based on dualistic thinking; that is, the right way and the wrong way. This dualistic thinking has created the expert (professional) and the patient. Closed systems are not collaborative as they do not interact with the wider context. They are set and predetermined and service-users are seen in terms of their diagnosis rather than as individuals and become passive recipients of care.

The open system approach, on the other hand, takes into account the individual, relationships, family, friends, community, culture and society. It is based on multiple discourses and the equality of each voice. It does away with

the concept that there is one way of knowing and embraces the concept that there are multiple ways of knowing. It focuses on the whole person and places greater emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual. It is collaborative and autonomous but remains connected. It promotes independence, personal growth and achievement of personal potential. It sees the service user as the expert, where they become, an active participant.

The Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Service views mental health as a community issue and works in partnership and collaboration with the local community in promoting, developing and establishing social capital. McCulloch (2001) suggests that people with low social capital have an increased risk of having mental health difficulties. Research by Cooper *et al* (1999) also recognises that living conditions and socio-economic status are strong predictors of mental ill health. Therefore, the importance of building bridges within the community to develop an ecological approach and promote and facilitate recovery is a core principle.

The Cavan & Monaghan community-based model has at its foundation housing, work, education, income and other basic elements of citizenship, rights to equality of opportunity, economic security, justice, respect, freedom of speech, freedom of choice, the right to be an individual and the right to self determination. The focus of the service is person centred, needs led, family supporting, recovery oriented, clinically competent and flexible and working in collaborative partnership with the local community. Recovery involves full membership of a community

and that equates to citizenship. The service embraces the belief that people with mental health difficulties are, foremost, citizens with rights.

Research by Miller, Duncan and Hubble (1997) identified relationships as accounting for 30% of recovery; relationships based on mutual trust, respect, dignity and understanding. Franz Anton Messmer (1734-1815) believed that healing becomes impossible in the absence of rapport. They also identified 40% of recovery can be achieved by tapping into the person's own world and incorporates resources from that world, such as family, friends and community. Their research also confirms the importance of hope and expectation in recovery and accounts for 15%.

Watzlawick (1986) suggests that the key to instilling hope is the attitude the "professional" assumes. This involves working with service users with the attitude that they are capable and possess the strengths and resources necessary to solve their problems. This in turn creates a context of empowerment for service users. Empowerment emphasises rights, abilities, strengths, resources, rather than inabilities, weaknesses, deficits etc. In attempting to understand the process of empowerment, we took empowerment and viewed it from a circular perspective and coined the phrase the "reciprocal process of empowerment".



Members of the Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Services with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern



Whole Life Study Tour Group visiting services in Monaghan

Taking empowerment from this circular perspective demonstrates the participatory nature of the process. This is a poem by a young woman, following her contact with the service.

Homebase

*There is a time, in someone's life
Where life seems just a doubt,
There is no need to carry on
And love is not about.
There are people out there,
Though they're always in the few,
Who use their gifts
of tender love,*

To cure their patients fears.

*They always treat you with respect,
That's what they're there to do,
They ease our troubles there and then,
Onto that endless queue.
They send out vibes of comfort,
On every angle known,
Consideration always granted,
They banish our souls of woe.*

*They never mess with our emotions,
No, they never do,
Just put them in their places,
Now then, as good as new.*

*So if you are uncomfortable,
Or stressed because of life,
Homebase will be there for you
To sort your troubles out.
Thank You Homebase.*

Taoiseach's Award

The Cavan & Monaghan Mental Health Services have been honoured to host a number of NIMHE study tours from different services across England and have gained a wealth of knowledge and friendships through this partnership. Above are some study tour participants in Monaghan.

Margaret Fleming,
Clinical Co-ordinator
Community Mental Health
Team, Cavan/Monaghan
www.imhcn.org