

# Sevenoaks & Area Mental Health Awareness Group

## - SAMHAG

Sevenoaks and Area Mental Health Awareness Group has been working in South West Kent since 1992. The group covers Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, Edenbridge, Westerham and surrounding rural areas.

The group aims to reduce the stigma and discrimination which surrounds people with mental health problems, and to break down barriers and challenge misconceptions about mental health held by the general public. We do this by providing workshops in mental health awareness which emphasise the importance of mental health for all.

Our workshop presentations are made to local organisations such as Housing Associations, Citizens Advice Bureaux, various Volunteer Groups, Kent Police, and Primary Care Trust Staff. They can also be made available to other organisations including private firms. The sessions involve a mixture of

- providing factual information
- getting participants involved by means

of practical small group exercises

- having talks from group members about their personal experiences of mental ill health, or of caring for someone with mental health problems.

We have found that the personal stories generally have a profound impact on our audiences, and we believe that this is one of the best ways to reduce and break down the stigma and discrimination which surround mental health issues.

Our emphasis is on promoting good mental health for all and encouraging participants to look after themselves and others, rather than just concentrating on descriptions of various mental illnesses and conditions.

The group also runs a series of meetings for its own members. These are friendly and supportive in nature, and range from very informal “getting to know you” meetings, to slightly more formal sessions to think about and plan our approach to future workshops. We have in the past run

sessions covering subjects such as presentation skills, looking after ourselves, self esteem and assertiveness. Group members are welcome to attend these meetings without participating in all activities if they so choose.

There are many possible roles within the Group. As well as needing people to be part of the team of workshop presenters, we need help with administration, preparing information packs and generally supporting the Group and its members. We welcome anyone who has a genuine interest in mental health issues and wishes to contribute to the reduction of stigma and discrimination.

The group has presented its work at the first national conference on “Reducing Stigma and Discrimination: What Works?”. This event was held in Birmingham and was organised jointly by the mental health charity Rethink and the Institute of Psychiatry. We were very pleased to learn that our work is at the forefront of good practice nationally in mental health promotion work.

If you are interested in joining the group, or attending a workshop to find out more about what we do, please get in touch.

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## Who are our members?

Group members come from all walks of life and sections of society, and include:

- People with personal experience of mental health problems
- Volunteers
- Carers
- Voluntary sector workers
- Health workers
- Police
- Social workers
- Mental health specialists

## How often do we meet?

We have quarterly meetings during which we review the past activities of the Group and plan future work. In between, we have monthly members' meetings or informal training sessions. There are also planning meetings for specific workshops, and the workshops themselves, which take place once or twice a month.

## When and where do we meet?

Quarterly meetings are held on Tuesday mornings at the Glen Dunlop Centre in Sevenoaks. Members meetings may be held at any time from Monday to Friday, in the morning or afternoon. We often hold these meetings at the Carers First premises

in Tonbridge High Street.

Workshops usually last three hours during normal working hours, and take place at the premises of the client's organisation.

## Does the Group pay its members?

As a voluntary sector group, our funds are severely restricted. The Group employs a part time Co-ordinator, and receives help from the Health Promotion Department of South West Kent Primary Care Trust.

Group members who are unwaged can be paid travel expenses for attending Group meetings and Workshops. Members who help in Workshops as part of the presentation team can in addition be paid £6.00 per hour if they are unwaged.

## Links to local groups

SAMHAG developed from a project involving local Mental Health Forums and Sevenoaks Area Mind. We are based at the Sevenoaks Area Mind premises (Glen Dunlop Centre) and retain close and valuable links with staff and members there.

## What do I do next?

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact the Group Co-ordinator Phil Kessel on 01732 459558



# Sevenoaks & Area Mental Health Awareness Group

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