

Housing Conference

Cuts

5th October 2011

Good morning. My perspective is a personal one from a HUG member who stays in a remote and rural area, where many would say is an idyllic place to live. But it can be hugely isolating and very lonely.

The rural element can add a particular dimension. When it comes to transport, there is one bus leaving at 9.30 going to the nearest town 25 miles away. Depression can make getting up for this almost impossible, and facing other passengers a nightmare. At least at the moment though, bus passes for those with disabilities and over 60 seem to have been reprieved from cuts. Travelling to appointments usually has to be by car, as does engaging in activities which may be therapeutic. This can be extremely expensive. Not everyone has access to a car. A small group in the community is trying to set up some support and drop-in for those with mental health issues, or are feeling lonely. Trying to get funding for this is difficult, but it may be one of the ways forward locally.

It seems to me that there are two particular groups of cuts causing concern, which can come under headings of services and benefits. Both of these have a huge effect on mental health and well-being. The uncertainty is causing massive anxiety, which can in itself be a significant issue.

Over the years there has been a significant reduction in hospital beds, and an increased investment in community services. But it seems that these two don't actually equate or balance. Hospital is not the place for everyone, but it can be vital at times. So it may be the support of the community

mental health team which is needed. However, already the Monday to Friday 9 – 5 functioning of my community mental health team is under pressure. There are times when it can only offer a service in the mornings. Staff who leave through retirement are not being replaced, including an OT and support worker. I fortunately have a CPN – but for how much longer? Other posts have titles beginning “acting temporary”...which lowers staff confidence, affects their work and this can be transmitted through to their clients/patients. So if there is already pressure on the existing community services what is the future going to hold? I don't know for certain what's happening so that makes it worse. The possible lack of support through it not being available increases my anxiety. Will that even lead to more difficulty in getting an appointment with my consultant?

For years we have recognised other gaps in services - we still don't have places of safety or safe houses, and as for crisis teams.....It seems that the police often are the agency which picks up the pieces, through their duty of care.

I am extremely fortunate in having a GP who gives me time to talk when I see him. But this makes me feel guilty; although I'm sure he knows how to prioritise his time.

It is all the talk of benefit cuts that strikes fear and anxiety. It is not helped by the stereotype that anyone on benefit must be a scrounger. This label can have a similar effect to that of having a mental illness, which despite all the recent work still carries a stigma. I can think of the months or perhaps even longer when I have been at home with depression and could not even contemplate or generate the motivation to find out about benefits which I'm sure now I would have been entitled to. Recently, I remember the surprise of my CPN that I was not receiving any DLA. I'm not sure that the effort and almost terror of completing an application in the first place is often appreciated. Those brown envelopes from the DWP are the

most dreadful post to receive. I can remember the form sitting on a chair and the difficulty in completing even the simple bits of information. Even posting the finished document was really scary. A couple of week's later more brown envelopes arrived. They needed to be opened – on this occasion with a positive result.

But how long will this continue? The speculation and speeches from politicians give such a bleak future.

Are the cuts going to affect funding for the CAB? What about those workers who support someone who through illness cannot go to the CAB on their own? These advocacy or support workers are hugely valued but a scarce commodity already. Are their jobs under threat? The voluntary sector does so much in already difficult times.

It has got to the stage when there are times when I do not want to watch the news. It is so depressing and painful. Then there are the times when I realise it matters to know the current situation.

As HUG members we support each other when possible. We still need to speak out and give our views from our unique position and first hand experiences.

Thank you.