

Self Help Services

helping people to help themselves



IMPACT AND RESEARCH REPORT 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout 2007, the extensive range of services that have been developed, co-ordinated and delivered by Self Help Services were evaluated as part of an in-depth research report for the organisation.

The aims of the research project were:

- To analyse the impact of Self Help Services on service users' mental health
- To determine the different positive outcomes of Self Help Services' drop-in groups
- To analyse whether self-help groups directly combat the risk factor 'isolation in experiences of mental health'
- To identify unique differences in outcomes between drop-in groups and structured groups
- To identify the positive outcome effects of complementary therapy services provided by Self Help Services
- To demonstrate how the structure and processes in operation in Self Help Services are integral to the overall effectiveness of service delivery

Why undertake this project?

There are very few research studies undertaken into the outcomes/benefits of attending self-help groups in particular, but also outcomes relating to the undertaking of self-help initiatives in the wider context. Furthermore, drop-in self-help groups are notoriously more difficult to evaluate, indeed previous research carried out into self-help groups has very much focused on structured support groups operating with a clear start and end date and with a fixed membership. It was felt that given the current political climate, where self-help groups and self-management are now terms widely spoken about within the statutory sector arena of mental health, a report of this nature would be welcomed whilst also being quite timely.

Similarly, it was important to the staff and volunteer team of Self Help Services to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the services provided in both a qualitative and quantitative manner, and in doing so, highlight that those with personal experience of managing a mental health problem can, and do, provide high quality, accessible mental health services. Given that the world of mental health service provision is becoming an increasingly more competitive environment in which to operate, the project also provided Self Help Services with a welcome opportunity to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its services to a wide range of stakeholders including mental health commissioners and other funding bodies.

Support for the project

Lloyds TSB Foundation kindly funded the position of Assistant Services Co-ordinator who undertook this research project throughout 2006 and into 2007.

At the time this report was written, Self Help Services operated:

17 user-led drop-in support groups

4 structured (course-style) support groups

4 complementary therapy services

A guided self-help clinic offering brief interventions underpinned by the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

A computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (cCBT) service

KEY FINDINGS

drop-in self help groups

Drop-in groups were evaluated via feedback received from focus groups held with group attendees, alongside analysis of qualitative questionnaires which were completed by all group attendees during a two month period.

As one service user of the Chorlton Anxiety Group stated: "attending the group makes me feel that I am not on my own", whilst another service user of the Manchester Social Phobia Group stated: "I used to be a regular visitor to the A & E psychiatric nurses – I don't feel the need to use this service as much because I have the group instead".

A focus group participant said of the Zion Depression Group: "that's the thing, the facilitators tell you about services that you wouldn't necessarily have heard about otherwise, and that's a really positive thing about this group. I think one of the other most powerful things in this group is the sharing and exchanging of coping strategies and getting tips off each other".

Other trends reported by participants of anxiety self-help drop-in groups included:

- Gaining a better understanding of their problem/condition
- Learning tools and techniques which aided self-management of their problem/condition

Trends reported by participants of depression self-help drop-in groups included:

- Being able to meet others experiencing similar feelings/emotions
- Being able to express feelings

Other interesting points to note concerning drop-in groups:

Whilst it is often thought that self-help groups and self-help initiatives in general are undertaken in the main by women, analysis of our data showed that our drop-in groups were in fact attended more by men than women, this being particularly true of the anxiety support groups. Similarly, 26% of service users of Self Help Services' drop-in groups are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds – highlighting that the services provided are accessible to all sections of the community.

Primary outcomes cited by service users accessing Self Help Services' drop-in groups included:

"Enabled me to meet others experiencing similar feelings/emotions"

"Breaks down isolation/enables me to establish a support network"

"Enables me to learn tools and techniques to deal with my problem/condition"

"Enables me to express my feelings"

Secondary outcomes included:

Building of confidence

Reduction of symptom severity and reduction of intake of psychiatric medication

Increased uptake of social activities/increased social inclusion

Uptake of paid or voluntary employment

Uptake of educational opportunities

structured support groups

Structured groups were evaluated by asking all clients to complete a standardised clinical outcome measure scale (MYMOP) before accessing a structured support group and after completing the group. Additionally, all group attendees completed a qualitative evaluation form.

Primary themes highlighted from quantitative and qualitative analysis of Self Help Services' structured support groups included:

- The ability to meet others experiencing similar feelings/emotions
- The ability to learn tools and techniques to deal with a problem/condition

Secondary themes included:

- Building of confidence
- Gaining a better understanding of a condition/problem
- Reduction of symptom severity and reduction of intake of psychiatric medication

Self Help Services was responsible for running 4 structured support groups over the timeframe of the research project: social skills group, anger management group, social phobia structured group and a self-esteem and assertiveness group.

Interestingly, in addition to participants reporting a marked reduction in their initial presenting problem severity (with clinical significance in problem severity being demonstrated in all groups), the overall proportion of service users from non-white ethnic groups was 34% compared to the official national proportion within the population of 7.9%.

complementary therapy services

Complementary Therapy Services were evaluated by asking all clients to complete a standardised clinical outcome measure scale (MYMOP) before accessing a complementary therapy and upon completion of the therapy. Additionally, all individuals accessing a complementary therapy service completed a qualitative evaluation form.

The main positive outcomes and findings for service users of Self Help Services' complementary therapy services included:

- Being more self-aware
- Gaining a better understanding of a condition/problem
- Reduction of the main symptoms of a condition/problem

A service user of the Indian Head Massager service said: "I love the approach – it is superb, warm and welcoming – it reduces my anxiety" whilst a user of the acupuncture service said: "It has increased my confidence immeasurably".

The Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile tool (MYMOP) was used to assess client's symptoms before commencing a complementary therapy service and at the end of accessing a service. The summary of these scores is shown below:

Complementary Therapy Service	Total MYMOP Before	Mean MYMOP Score Before	Total MYMOP After	Mean MYMOP After
Acupuncture	17.55	4.51	9.32	2.39
Indian Head Massage	4.6	4.4	1.97	1.88

All service users reported clinically significant changes in the overall severity of their initial presenting symptoms following a complementary therapy service. Again, interestingly the overall proportion of service users from non-white ethnic groups accessing Self Help Services' complementary therapy services was 46% compared to the office national proportion within the population of 7.9%.

The Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile tool (MYMOP) was used to assess client's symptoms before commencing a structured course and upon completion of a course. The summary of these scores is shown below:

Structured Self Help Group	Total MYMOP Before	Mean MYMOP Before	Total MYMOP After	Mean MYMOP After
Social Skills	4.6	4.4	1.97	1.88
Anger Management	14.05	3.72	5.9	1.81
Social Phobia	17.44	4.58	8.67	2.43
Self-esteem & Assertiveness	16.54	4.19	9.63	2.44

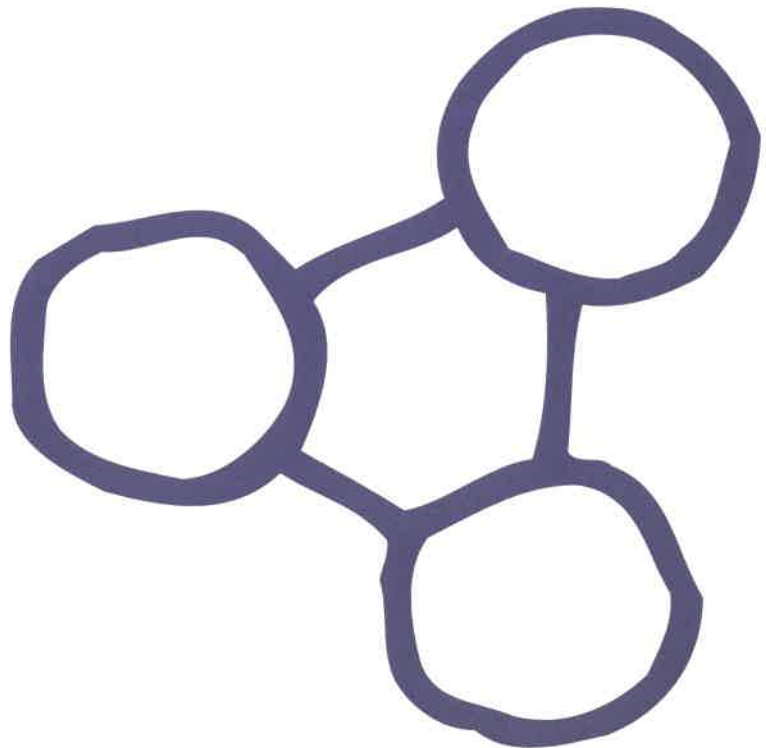
CONCLUSION

This small scale, year long research project identified the numerous benefits of attending self-help initiatives such as self-help groups and structured support groups. Clearly individuals who have accessed Self Help Services' self-help groups (both drop in and structured groups) report feeling less isolated as a result of attending a group – therefore it can be concluded that self-help groups have a direct impact on the risk factor 'isolation in experiences of mental health'. This is particularly true of the drop-in self-help groups which largely operate in a less structured fashion; allowing participants to share coping strategies, facilitating the formation of informal networks of support. Structured groups by comparison appear to equip participants with life skills and techniques – promoting the better management of mental health conditions. This was also true of the anxiety groups where discussions concerning coping strategies amongst group members are commonplace.

Complementary therapy services (whose clinical outcomes are often questioned by those working within traditional medicine) compare very favourably with other self-help initiatives and services provided by Self Help Services with large decreases in symptom severity being reported by service users.

In conclusion it is most heartening to be able to demonstrate the positive impact that the range of services delivered by Self Help Services have on service users' mental health and well being. Indeed our services are provided in a holistic manner with staff and volunteers always being mindful of the need to provide accessible, non stigmatizing, high quality services. It is also most encouraging to see that all the services provided by Self Help Services are being accessed by a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Self Help Services would like to express its thanks to the service users, volunteers and staff who gave so freely of their time whilst participating in this research, and to the Lloyds TSB Foundation for their support of the post of Assistant Services Co-ordinator, without whose input, this project would not have been undertaken.



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