

The Crisis Project Workbook

A resource pack for service users and survivors on setting up innovative mental health crisis projects

The Crisis Project Workbook

Guidance on setting up innovative mental health crisis projects led by service users and survivors



This workbook has been produced as part of The Mental Health Foundation's work on issues relating to the mental health of adults of working age. This programme is entitled *Strategies for Living*, and aims to promote and encourage the development of user/survivor empowerment through research, evaluation and information gathering. It seeks to influence a wider audience – of frontline workers, professionals, researchers, policy makers and service users – of the value and significance of 'expertise by experience' and of evidence gained through user-led research and initiatives. Everyone involved in the programme has some experience of mental distress and/or using mental health services.

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Preface

From 1997 to 2000, I was the facilitator of the learning sets which were designed to support the seven projects receiving funding from the Mental Health Foundation Crisis Service Development Programme (referred to throughout the workbook as the Crisis Programme or the Programme).

A learning set is a group set up to enable action-based training and shared learning for innovative services where there are no established training courses. I visited each project for a day every couple of months; meeting with those involved to discuss how things were going and to work out how to improve their practice. Each of these groups was known as a local learning set. Most members of each local learning set were directly involved in the project, as management committee members, staff or volunteers. Keen supporters of their projects who did not have any other formal involvement sometimes joined them.

We also had a national learning set made up of two representatives from each project, which met every couple of months.

Most of the crisis service projects were set up by small, service user/survivor-led organisations. We often found ourselves paying as much attention to the successful working of these organisations as we did to the crisis projects themselves. We also learned about some of the challenges for larger, more established organisations as they set up projects that did not fit with their usual ways of doing things.

This workbook is my attempt to share what we discovered through the learning sets and as the projects progressed. It is to let you know what we wish we had known before we started. However, the Crisis Project Workbook is not a set of instructions, as this would be neither possible nor desirable. Instead, my intention is to use the lessons learned by these projects to help you think about yours.

With their emphasis on listening, peer support, cultural sensitivity, recovery and service user/survivor-led solutions, the projects of the Mental Health Foundation Crisis Service Development Programme represent a significant part of the future of mental health services. I hope that this workbook will assist you to also become part of this future.

Jim Read

Jim Read is a former mental patient who has been a writer, trainer and consultant on mental health issues since 1983.

Foreword

My interest in crisis services comes from my personal experience of being admitted to acute wards in 1972. In the early 1980s I began to meet other service users and we shared our vision of alternatives to hospital, where people experiencing a crisis for the first time, or caught in the revolving door of repeated admissions to unsatisfactory services, might find the support they needed. In the 90s I was on the advisory committee for the Drayton Park and Highbury Grove crisis houses in Islington, and began my PhD looking into users' experiences of crisis and treatment.

My role with the Mental Health Foundation Crisis Service Development Programme began in 1996 when I joined the steering group, and I later became programme manager in 1999. This workbook distills the experiences all those who participated in the Crisis Programme and were involved in years of hard and often frustrating work, battling to realise their vision of user-friendly, non-medical alternatives to hospital for people in crisis.

I know how difficult this process was for many of those involved, and that the learning sets run by Jim Read were an important source of mutual support, information sharing and laughter that re-energised people and helped them stay on track. At the end of the Crisis Programme the services were, all but one, operational and successful, giving good services to people in crisis and an inspiration to many who hope to set up similar services in their areas.

It is vital that the lessons learned from this programme as outlined in this workbook are available to others wanting establish crisis services, so that some of the pitfalls experienced by these pioneering projects can be avoided and more alternative projects can be helped to get off the ground.

The projects which formed the Crisis Programme have shown that voluntary sector alternatives do work, and that service users can be centrally involved in running them. I hope the lessons of these projects can provide the basis for a much larger national programme supporting many more similar initiatives. The networking provided by the learning sets has been a vital part of their survival and success. This should always be a part of any similar national programme.

Services that work well for people in crisis can be provided; they need to be small, humane, people-centred and empowering. They need to allow the possibility that former users of services can offer help to others as volunteers, trainers, crisis workers, committee members and holders of the vision of recovery for others.

While it is not possible that voluntary sector projects can provide services for everyone in a crisis, they can show the way to a variety of different approaches. They model accessibility, minimal formality, the awareness of users' need to be heard and the need for services that feel safe and welcoming for women, black, gay and lesbian people.

I also hope to see statutory services take on the message that collaboration with voluntary services works, and can create a mutual learning network that enhances and revives local service provision.

I want to pay tribute to the many current and former service users and mental health workers who have worked so hard to realise the dream that inspired this programme, particularly those who volunteered their time. Even those who were paid have generally worked way beyond the call of duty. I hope that they feel the success of the projects has been some reward for all they have done. I recommend them, as well as this workbook, as invaluable sources of practical knowledge and experience for others trying to do the same thing.

Jan Wallcraft

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Special thanks to Jan Wallcraft for support, encouragement and feedback throughout, and to Peter Campbell for his support.

This report is dedicated to the memory of Margaret Greenlees, a valued and popular member of GLOSS and the national learning set who died in December 2001.

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Introduction

The Crisis Project Workbook is for anyone who is interested in setting up innovative mental health crisis services led by service users and survivors. It is based on the experience of seven voluntary sector projects that were part of the Mental Health Foundation Adult Crisis Service Development Programme, which ran from 1997-2002. As part of its Adult Crisis programme, the Mental Health Foundation funded seven community-based crisis services in England: two residential services, two safe houses and three telephone helplines. Although the Foundation's pilot crisis services were all based in the UK, the lessons learnt from these projects are relevant across the UK and more widely. Further information about the Foundation's adult crisis programme can be found in its report *Being There in a Crisis*, published in 2002.

This workbook highlights key issues to be aware of when establishing a crisis service and suggests some of the ways they can be tackled. It is intended as a practical tool to help you with your work. It uses several methods of presenting ideas and information to help you to develop your project.

- Examples of experiences of the seven Mental Health Foundation-funded crisis projects to demonstrate the many issues that need to be considered when setting up a crisis project.
- Checklists to assist you to identify what you have achieved and what still needs to be done.
- Group exercises and Handouts to stimulate thinking and debate on key issues and to assist decision-making. There are notes with each group exercise on how it should be run. However, the materials in this workbook can be used in many ways and exercises can be adapted to fit the needs of your group. Timings have generally not been included because most of the exercises are very participatory and therefore the amount of time you need to give them is dependent upon the size of the group but even with a large group (e.g. more than 10 people) none of the exercises should take more than an one and a half hours.

This workbook is designed to be used rather than be read from cover to cover, for example, by a group of people wanting to set up a crisis project, using it in a series of meetings, to clarify their ideas and steer their way through the inevitable challenges that arise. In this way a group working together can use the workbook as a resource pack. However some sections of the workbook require an independent facilitator to assist the group through exercises and decision making (please see Appendix 3 for details of how to run a successful meeting). A lead person may also be required to ensure the workbook is used most productively. This could be the chair of your group.

The names of useful organisations and publications are mentioned throughout the report. Details of these, along with other sources of support, are given in Appendix 5.

This workbook also provides information that will be of use to anyone with an interest in service user/survivor involvement or service user/survivor-led organisations. It provides information on issues such as service users/survivors and professionals working together and building the confidence of service users/survivors on management committees.

Note on language

The terms 'service user' and 'survivor' have different meanings and are preferred by different people. To be inclusive, the term service user/survivor has been used. The exceptions are:

- when writing about a particular project (the term used by that project is used)
- extracts from material written by others (the author's original term is used)
- when referring specifically to people who are clients of, or using a service.

(For a discussion about the terms 'service user' and 'survivor' see page 9.)

About the crisis projects

Each project is summarised briefly below. Appendix 1 summarises the practical details of each service. Contact details of the Crisis Programme services can be found in Appendix 2.

Asian Mental Health Helpline

This project is managed by Rethink and is the sister project of a Rethink English language helpline. It covers Kent, East Sussex, Brighton and the London Borough of Bexley. The helpline is staffed by volunteers with a paid co-ordinator. Languages spoken are Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. Other languages can be offered. The helpline opens two evenings and two afternoons a week. It is open to people with mental health problems, carers and professionals, and offers both support and information.

GLOSS Group Crisis Line

This telephone helpline was run by the user-led group, GLOSS, in Glossop, Derbyshire to provide out of hours (evenings and weekends) telephone support for local users of mental health services. The helpline was staffed entirely by volunteers, managed by service users. It closed after 17 months because insufficient use was being made of the service.

WAND Telephone Support Line

This telephone helpline is run by Working Advocacy in North Devon (WAND) is a user-led organisation. It aims to provide support for people across Devon who have a mental health issue – from service users who may have severe and enduring mental health problems, to carers, friends and professionals.

The helpline offers listening and support, information and help to make choices and decisions. The service is managed by the WAND user group and operates 8pm to midnight Friday to Monday.

Anam Cara

Anam Cara (Celtic for 'soul friend') is a crisis house run by CHANGE, a small charity dedicated to providing crisis services that offer real alternatives to acute hospital inpatient admission in Birmingham. The crisis house started on different premises, where it was known as Skallagrigg House, in 1997. All staff have experienced mental health crises themselves, use a model of recovery and make use of complementary therapies.

Residents can stay up to three weeks. The service is staffed from 9am to 8pm on weekdays, and for four hours on Saturdays. Staff are on call for four hours on Sundays. A variety of self-help groups meet at Anam Cara and include current and former residents.

Dial House

Dial House is a crisis house run by the Leeds Survivor Led Crisis Service, open during the evening on weekends. It aims to offer a supportive place for people in crisis and to help people make choices about the kind of support that will help them the most. The Connect Helpline is part of the same service and operates every evening.

The Nile Centre

The Nile Centre was opened in 1997 to provide an alternative to hospital admission for African and Caribbean adults living in the London Borough of Hackney who experience a mental health crisis. It offers crisis response and outreach, short-stay accommodation (up to three weeks), and counselling and complementary therapies. The project is run by the Kush Housing Association.

The Safe Haven

The Safe Haven, Corby is a support service for anyone who is going through a difficult time, emotionally. It offers a safe and friendly environment and supportive company for anyone in distress, at times when other services are closed. It is open from 6pm-2am, Tuesday to Sunday. The Safe Haven is run by a user organisation, User Support Service.



The Mental Health Foundation is the UK's leading charity working to promote mental well-being and the rights and needs of people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities. We aim to improve people's lives, reduce stigma and discrimination and to encourage better understanding. We undertake and support research and encourage improvements to local services. We provide information to the public and people working in relevant fields. We aim to maximise knowledge, skill and resources by working with service users, government and service providers.

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