



## **Diverse Perspectives on Mental Health**

*Lessons for Practitioners*

**Narrator:**

*Could service users' expertise be harnessed to develop better services for users of the future?*

**Terry:**

I think people who've survived mental distress and been through the system or need to be involved at all levels of planning mental health services but also in actually providing them as well.

**Narrator:**

*Terry*

**Terry:**

That involvement needs to be real and it's quite a subtle thing really. I think there's, the government's now demanding everyone has involvement and so everyone's doing something so that they can tick the box, but actually I think a lot of it is missing the point really, it's sticking to the letter of the law, but actually the spirit of what, what involvement's meant to be delivering, I, I just don't think it is really because to really involve people you have to see them as individuals and, and find out where they can most contribute um and find that place for them really.

**Andrea:**

Things are becoming better bit-by-bit in, within mental health services

**Narrator:**

*Andrea*

**Andrea:**

and I suppose for me personally I'm really pleased that I've been invited to sit on a steering committee for early intervention in first psychosis, um, which I believe targets families of people with mental health difficulties for the first time. It just shows that things are being addressed earlier and not you know the old cliché 'prevention is better than cure' so I'm pleased that that's happening.

**Chris:**

Another thing is that services could involve people who have experienced mental distress

**Narrator:**

*Chris*

**Chris:**

in other words some sort of peer support or peer counselling, um so that someone starting to worry about their mental health could talk to someone else who has been through a similar experience. That would be, I think, an excellent idea.

**Miranda:**

I think it would really help in professionals' training if they were actually put in contact with current and past service users,

**Narrator:**

*Miranda*

**Miranda:**

and to listen one-on-one to their experiences um and their angers and their positive thoughts on the mental health system, and what things have helped them and what things haven't. Because I've never been a setting where I've sat down with psychiatrists and been able to tell them honestly about the way I'm, like I've been treated because they just look at me like a mad woman, when I'm saying I don't like the way you're speaking to me or something like that.

**Chris:**

I think if um people who've experienced mental distress, survivors, um, there was a training programme available for those people or provided by the NHS, so that survivors would go on a short training programme that would give them listening skills so that they could then provide um peer support. Um, I wouldn't say counselling exactly because to be a counsellor you need lots of qualifications but the training programme if that incorporated basic listening skills so that then, those people could then go on to provide peer support sessions for other people who may be experiencing mental distress.

**Narrator:**

*So what lessons do the Orphans believe the professionals themselves can learn from the experience of service users?*

**Miranda:**

I've never been treated as my own person with my own experiences and my own story. I've always been treated as 'somebody who's got depression'. Like all the other people who have depression. I must have the same symptoms and I must do the same things; I must wake up at this certain time. A lot of the time also I've never even been given a diagnosis. I've for example spotted it on the doctor's computer later on, spotted that they've, classed me as having obsessive compulsive disorder and it's been a complete shock to me because I've never actually been told in that room. You're always kept in the dark about how the psychiatrists are actually seeing your problem.

**Terry:**

I think the key thing is that practitioners need to learn, and some of them know already, is that everyone is an individual and that everyone's history is different, everyone's crisis will be different, everyone's situation is unique and and I think that's what we need to end up with a mental health system that really does treat everyone as if they're an individual.

**Chris:**

I think it would be really beneficial if there was support services available people experiencing mental distress could access before things got to crisis stage, but if you're not at crisis point but you're recognising some symptoms are happening where you could maybe do with some sort of support, apart from talking to friends, the only option really is to go to your doctor as far as I know and if you don't happen to get on with your GP that's not looking good if you're thinking 'I'm a bit worried about the ways things are going. I'm not in a crisis but I know I have been before. It would be nice to get some sort of support whether it's counselling, whether its medication, whether its other forms, um, complimentary therapies or whatever it is'. Easy to access is the key. Where you're not confronted by lots of red tape, millions of forms to fill in, and you have to go and see your GP anyway.

**Miranda:**

I think it would help a lot of the time if service users felt like the professionals were actually listening to them as um an individual and unique case, rather than assuming things about them and telling things about other people who've been given the same label. Because in my experience I've often been told 'oh yeah, a lot of people who have been suffering from xyz condition have the same feelings as you'.

**Chris:**

think an example of where things haven't been done well by the professional services is where someone is brought into a hospital in a time of crisis and locked up with other people experiencing different crises at the same time, so if someone's very low energy or depressed

they don't really want to be in a room full of people being hyper. Um, I'm not sure what the answer is to that but um obviously smaller environments with less people in one, one space would be beneficial.

**Miranda:**

Professionals could learn from service users by maybe reading their poetry or listening to the music that they're writing or the paintings that they're doing without any pre-judged ideas about them, might help them appreciate individual's experiences more.

**Terry:**

I think one of the key problems in the mental health system today is compulsory treatment because I think it, it's damaging and it leads to more mental health problems. It makes people frightened to want to use mental health services so they stay away. They don't get the help they need. I think we need to differentiate between the part of the mental health system that is there to help and heal people and the criminal justice system, which deals with people who might break the law. I think they, we need them to be two different systems rather than trying to do it all within psychiatry.

**Miranda:**

I think people should be given the choice to be involved more in their care, asked what they need and asked what they want to talk about and asked how they think their experiences have affected them instead of someone sat there telling you 'so in your past this experience with your mother has affected you in this way'. You should be asked more rather than told and the things that you should be told is what is being written about you and what diagnosis you've been given and also any side effects of medication because in the past I've been given medications that have totally adversely affected me and I've not been warned at all.

**Terry:**

On the positive side I, I think that the movement towards genuine recovery based treatments is very helpful and the more that people are involved in developing and delivering er those systems I think the better it will be, the more genuine choice there is about treatments.

**Andrea:**

I think the lessons that mental health practitioners could learn from survivors, service users, is to listen and work with us, it's not a 'us and them' scenario: It's not a battle or a war even though at times it can feel like it, but for people to work together and to listen from both sides as well for their changeover of ideas and views and better communication at all times. Sometimes we don't feel that maybe our views are taken on board but if there's nobody there in the first place will they ever hear anything? Will anything change? And change does take a long time. People don't like change. It is unsettling for anyone um but I believe that if there are more service users stroke survivor voices around I believe that more notice will be taken. People are needed to raise awareness and to help things be better for people in the future.