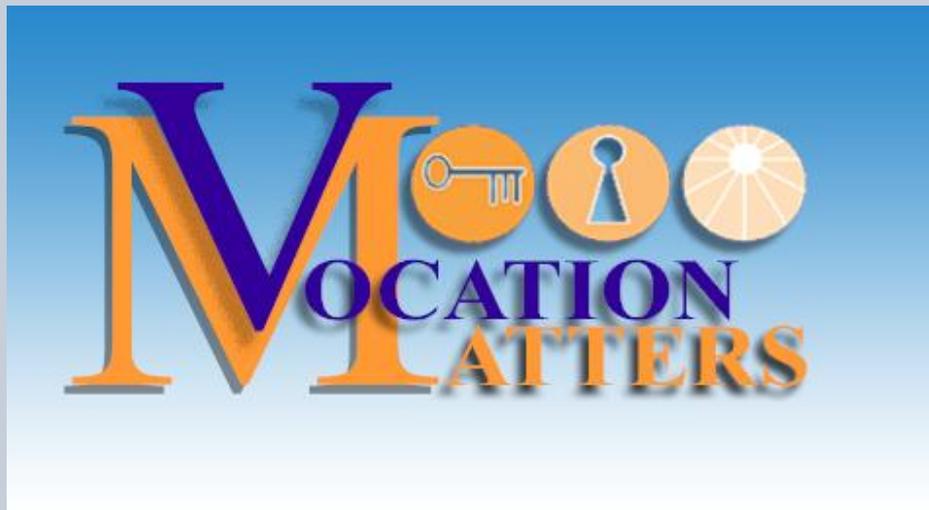


# VOCATION MATTERS REVIEW & 2012 REPORT



## Introduction

Vocation Matters is an award winning service user managed project which is integrated into the Psychosis Clinical Academic Group in Lambeth. The project has four paid staff that facilitate in-depth time unlimited vocational information and support, so that service users can achieve their own personal goals. Since 2006 we have worked closely with 686 service users. It has evolved through developing its own evidence based practice and is committed to recovery focused practice, wellbeing and social inclusion. A service user volunteer has also built and currently manages the website; [www.vocationmatters.org.uk](http://www.vocationmatters.org.uk). A number of previous Annual Reports can be viewed on this website in the Useful Reading section.

In this report we will look at the project's history and achievements. We also highlight significant progress and challenges. We will then provide headlines for 2012.

### Timeline:

- **In 2003 a service user started the project in a voluntary capacity for 18 months whilst completing a Millennium Awards Leadership Programme at the Kings Fund**
- **November 2005- a post was created within South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust- Vocational Officer**
- **February 2006 -Clinical Governance Award winner in the Choice Category**
- **2007- NHS Alliance- Presidents Award**
- **December 2008- Creation of a second post- Vocational & Social Inclusion Officer**
- **Spring 2009 the project moved to a dedicated Vocational Resource Centre.**
- **In November 2010 we recruited a third post- Education & Grants Officer**
- **November 2011- Successfully applied to Maudsley Charity for a Learner Fund and a Peer Education Support post. (Education Counts)**
- **October 2012- Recruitment of a Peer Education Support Officer**
- **December 2012 Education Counts @ Vocation Matters project begins**

## What has changed?

A range of key themes and developments have emerged:

### Referrals

Initially, the majority of referrals were self referrals. As we were based within the Effra Resource Centre many of the service users attended that centre. Since the project located to a dedicated Vocational Resource Centre referral patterns have significantly changed and now a large amount of referrals are from a wide range of multidisciplinary team members, such as: Occupational Therapists, Social Workers and Vocational Workers. The remainder are self-referrals.

### Referral Profiles

Referrals have consistently come from all clinical teams and geographical areas within the Borough. The one noticeable change has been the number of inpatients we assist- this is now 11%. An equally large amount of referrals have been for individuals who have been discharged as an inpatient in the 12 weeks prior to contact with us. Considering that in-reach into the ward environment is not a part of our role these numbers are significant.

### Attendance

In our 2007 report 38% of people had more than one appointment for vocational information and support. In 2012 the figure is 87%. This highlights how the project has grown and our ability to support service users effectively have been enhanced by a larger team and skill set. It also clearly shows that longer term support is required and highly valued.

### Ethnicity

Throughout the history of the project data have shown that two thirds referred to the project were from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. The most noticeable change has been the number of individuals from African backgrounds. In 2006 the figure was 10% and in 2012 it is 20%. This bears some correlation to an increase in the African population within the Borough. In the 2011 census there has been an increase in the African population since 2001 of 14.1%. However, the percentage of individuals we support is significantly higher than the overall African population which is now 11.6% of Lambeth's residents. This shows there is a substantial and possibly unmet need for this section of the community. Many of these individuals have arrived relatively recently to the UK, mostly via the asylum process after leaving their home country in often traumatic circumstances.

### Information & Support Requests

Whilst the types of requests for information and support relating to employment, volunteering and welfare have remained similar during this period, the requests for support with education and courses have grown

significantly. This can be partly explained by the general economic malaise, meaning that qualifications are more and more important, hence a greater desire for this support from service users. It may also be due to the simple fact that we now have a team member with specific skills in education hence the increased uptake of specific education support.

## **Welfare**

The most noticeable issue related to welfare income is how difficult it has become for many service users to claim the welfare benefits that they are entitled to. As with many people with complex health needs, numerous service users are being found 'fit for work' when assessed for Employment & Support Allowance. This is causing much distress as it requires specialist support to appeal- something that can take twelve months due to the back log in the appeals system. Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit are also stopped until an appeals procedure is in place.

Other changes to Local Housing Allowances including caps and age related restrictions are making housing and the cost of it a very real area of concern, something that will only increase as welfare reforms bite.

## **Website**

The website has been significantly improved and streamlined. It is still managed by a service user on a voluntary basis and we get reports that it is an excellent tool for information and support for service users, carers and health professionals

## **What have we learnt?**

### **Introduction**

Having front line contact with service users on a day-to-day basis means that we are in a position to gain real insight into what works for service users and what the key struggles are. We highlight the main points below;

### **Trauma**

One thing that has remained constant is that the majority of females have experienced significant life trauma including all forms of abuse, and that this has a significant and often detrimental effect upon their mental well-being. Likewise, a significant number of males we support have also suffered from traumatic life circumstances e.g. extreme violence.

### **Effective Working Relationships**

The singularly most important thing we have learnt is that building effective working relationships increases trust. It therefore enables individuals to feel safe and move forward at a pace that suits them. Within a trusting and co-productive relationship we find that people are able to identify their own needs and take action to address them.

## **Interventions**

We have learnt that we need a flexible approach when addressing vocational needs. Time limited interventions only work for a very small minority. We therefore work closely with the individual to ensure that they meet their own personal goals in a time frame that suits them. As in life vocational achievements are not necessarily 'timetabled' and can often take longer than expected. To 'pull the rug' from under someone would often be deleterious to their health and well being let alone future vocational outcomes.

## **Accessible Vocational Resource**

Being in a Vocational Resource Centre that contains a range of projects enhances accessibility and effective communication. Sharing information and resources between projects enhances knowledge and therefore opportunities. Having expertise in a one-stop shop is an efficient and valuable resource.

## **Digital Divide**

According to 21stchallenges.org 70% of people in social housing are not online, and 38% of people not online are unemployed. We have found that many service users lack internet access at home which is a vital tool for every day communication and resource. The provision of computer access within the centre is therefore of paramount importance. We find that this lack of access is problematic- at least two people we support are currently on courses but do not have vital computer access at home causing immeasurable difficulties. We try to allow space here and we are working on ways of improving computer access in the Vocational Resource Centre so that all service users can bridge the digital divide.

## **Mapping & Resources**

Having an accurate and detailed knowledge base of what opportunities exist for service users is vital. This requires constant research and updating as new projects and opportunities spring up all the time. Vice versa significant numbers of third sector providers have closed. We have found that building close professional relationships does have significant benefits for service users accessing projects as we hear about new projects at an early stage and are fully included in these. Examples are; Goldsmiths, Stockwell Community Resource Centre, High Trees, Hillcroft College, City Lit and Photo Fusion.

## **Access to Mainstream Opportunities**

The majority of service users want vocational options that are in mainstream settings. It is a rarity when anyone asks about training or education in a specific mental health / disability setting. A number of individuals have previously accessed such projects and have frequently stated that, they were not challenging enough for them, or that they did not feel as if they were 'going anywhere'.

## **Finance for Courses**

It is vital that service users increase their qualifications and knowledge in order to compete on the open jobs market. We have found that many courses, especially vocational ones are often costly and difficult to access. The situation will become even more complex from September 2013 where Level 3 courses for learners aged over 24 will not attract government funding.

Therefore, individuals who wish to take such courses may need to take out a student loan. The provision of grant funding has significantly helped plug this gap. Where possible, we will ensure that funding is readily available for such courses in the future hence our own Learner Fund courtesy of the Maudsley Charity.

## **2012 Headlines**

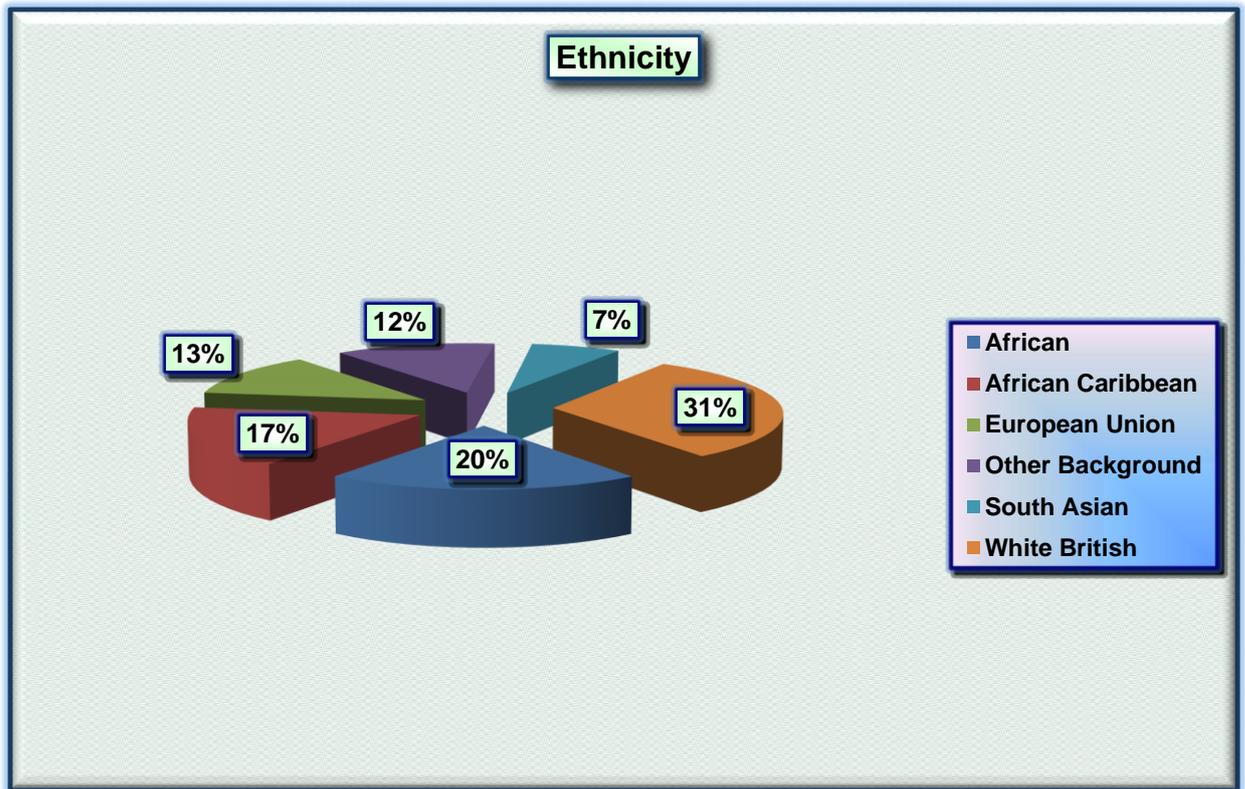
A wide range of individuals with all types of mental health diagnoses, including forensic histories and levels of need have accessed vocational information and support. During this year we had to close new referrals for a period of 3.5 months. This was due to large demands and a team member going on maternity leave. We had no extra cover for this post, hence having to close because of capacity issues. Considering the time of closure we have facilitated support for 6% more people than during 2011

## **Demographic Statistics**

Male = 62  
Female= 52

We worked with 114 Service Users- aged: 20-67. However, three quarters are aged: 32-52.

The numbers who were referred via health professionals, but who did not attend this year = 16 or 12% (not included in above figures). This is often for a variety of reasons- poor physical health, going into hospital, being sectioned, leaving the borough or inappropriate referral. Experience shows us that many will ask for support when the time is right.



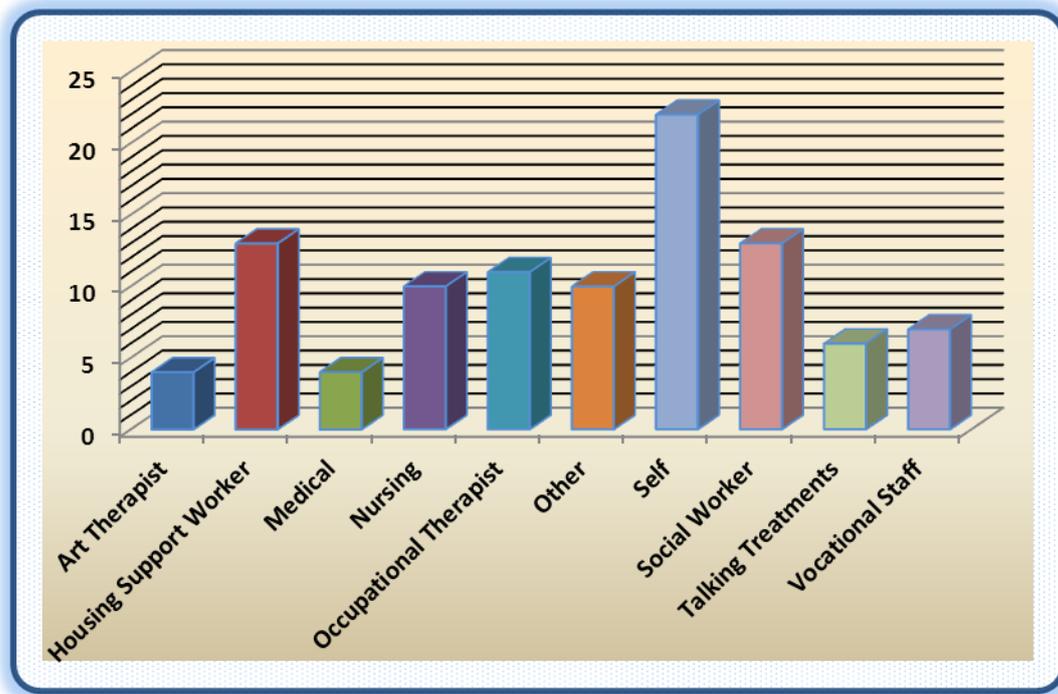
*African* includes: Algerian, Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, French Guinean, Ghanaian, Ivorian, Nigerian, Sierra Leonean, Sudanese, and Tanzanian,

*European Union* includes: Dutch, French, Greek, Irish, Polish, Portuguese, Sicilian, and Spanish

*Other background* includes: Brazilian, Chilean, Chinese, Colombian, Dual Heritage, Hungarian, Turkish, and Venezuelan,

**Referrer Profiles & Source**

Referrals have come from a mix of health professionals within South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, and other sources. The referrals have been evenly spread across Community Mental Health teams with a significant number coming from supported housing, inpatients and the Vocational Resource Centre. A large number of referrals this year have been self-referrals, although the majority of individuals will have heard about our project from a health professional.



## Interventions

- Initial meetings & Engagement
- Career Information
- Career Support- CV assistance, job search and applications
- Career Counselling- including job retention support
- Education Information & Support
- Volunteering Information & Support
- Welfare Information & Support
- Grant Funding Information & Support
- Advocacy
- Referrer Engagement
- Social Inclusion

## **Welfare Income of Service Users**

- 82% are classed as inactive, and in receipt of Employment & Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Income Support.
- 60 % are in receipt of a disability benefit such as Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance (they could also be in receipt of inactive benefits or Jobseekers Allowance.)
- 4% are classed as Jobseekers and are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance
- 4.5% are employed (they may also receive disability benefits)
- 4.5% do not receive any welfare income due to their personal / financial situation

From April 2013 onwards a plethora of welfare changes are due to come into force. Many of these changes will adversely affect some of the most vulnerable in society, including service users whom we support. Please see Appendix 1 for information about these forthcoming changes.

## **Project Outcomes**

Often 'outcomes' are seen to be the most important part of any intervention, regardless of how brief or long lasting they are. Whilst it is excellent news that service users often achieve multiple outcomes as result of information and support- it is also vital to realise that the outcome is just one element of the journey, and that far more will have been learnt from the process- including building confidence, self esteem and knowledge.

In 2012, 62% of service users have recorded a wide range of outcomes, including paid employment, education & training and volunteering. We have experienced slightly fewer welfare outcomes this year because we have simply been unable to assist many individual's who required support with Employment and Support Allowance applications and appeals. In these cases we have referred individuals to Every Pound Counts or other advice agencies because of the support levels required and the complexity of the process. There also appears to be greater knowledge and support in Community Mental Health teams regarding welfare, possibly as a result of migration over to ESA and all the difficulties encountered with this benefit

Highlights of outcomes for the year as below:

### **Paid Employment:**

The main focus for many when initially attending Vocation Matters is for help with education, volunteering and welfare. However, we do provide in- depth support with job applications, interview skills and confidence building. Considering the general economic malaise, there were 13 paid employment

outcomes this year. What these outcomes cannot show is the journey the service users have made to this point and the level of determination required.

- **Crisis Peer Support- Certitude**
- **Administration- University of Central London**
- **Visual Associate- GAP**
- **Youth Work- Princes Trust**
- **Sales Assistant- Anthrapologie**
- **General Maintenance Assistant- Lambeth Accord**
- **Domestic Assistant- (permitted work)- Carpet Cleaning Care**
- **Pilates Instructor- self employed**
- **Retail Assistant- Marks & Spencer's**
- **Health & Wellbeing Trainee- Certitude**
- **Activities Provider- Lambeth Mencap**
- **College Administration- London College of Fashion**
- **Education Support- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust**

### **Grant Awards**

The amount of funds awarded this year was £6413.25. This is an increase on figures for 2011 of £2478.49. A majority of this funding comes from Goldsmiths Grants administered by Lambeth Social Services. Whilst this is a relatively small amount of money it will make a big difference to all of the individuals who have been awarded funding this year. All of the courses are in main stream settings and a number are vocational courses that will significantly increase employment prospects. A small number of the awards were for social inclusion purposes, which we will often address in order to ensure vocational outcomes are achievable. The list of grants awarded for the year follows:

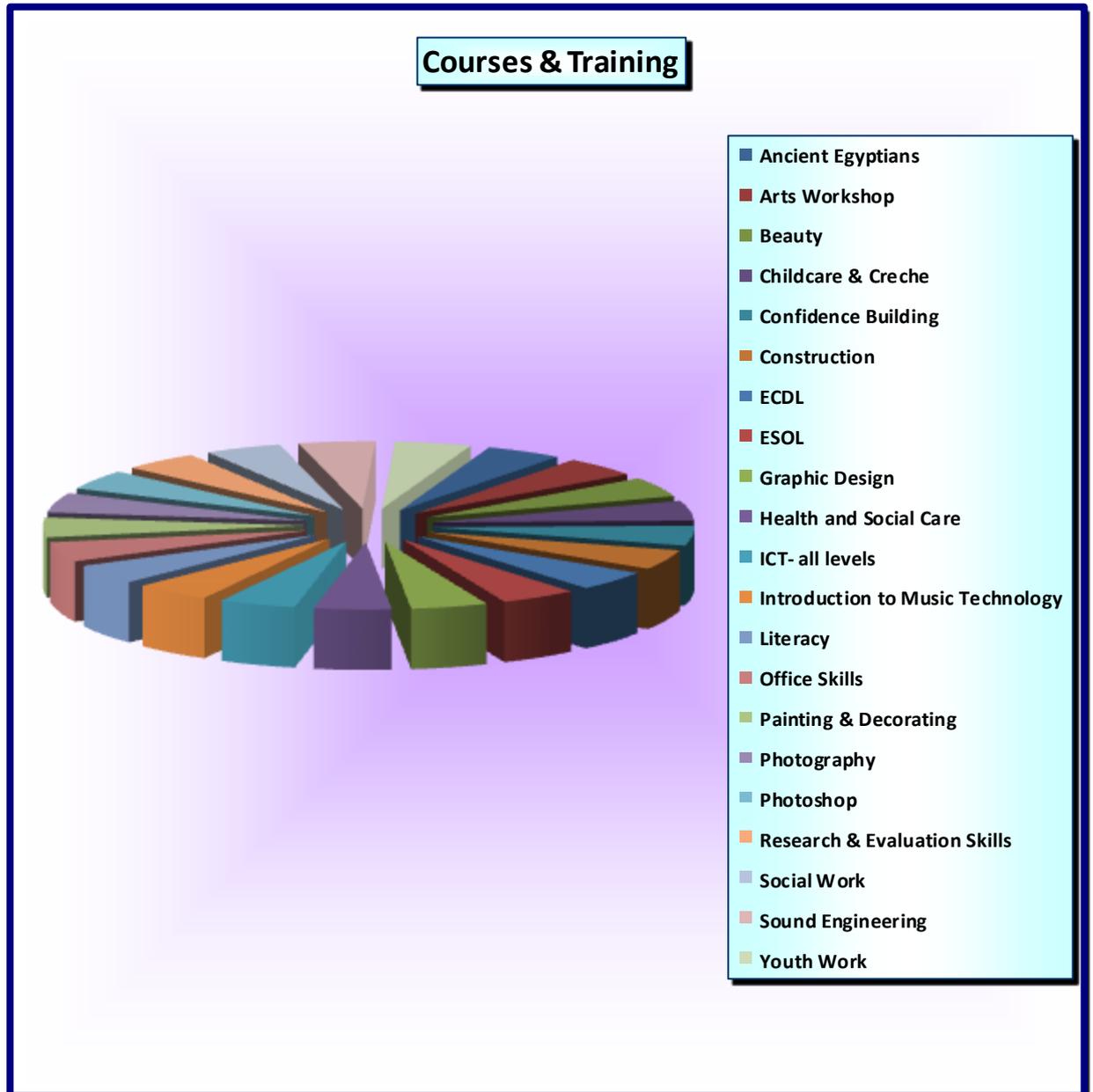
- **Photography- Photojournalism, Fashion & Sports Action- City Lit- £277**
- **Electrical Inspection and Testing- Lambeth College - £300**
- **Internet connection- Distance Learning MBA - Leicester University - £300**
- **PAT Testing & Secure Industry Authority (SIA)- ADC Security & Alpha Training - £300**
- **Sculpture- Developing practise & mixed levels + essential clothing- Morley College- £570.76**
- **Level 3 Fitness Instruction- DCB Fun & Fitness OCR - £300**
- **Advanced Bushcraft course + essential clothing- Woodland Way- £728.59**
- **Electrical Inspection & Testing course- Lambeth College - £300**
- **Developing Ideas- Morley College - £122**
- **Register of Exercise Professionals inc Insurance- Body Control Pilates- £222**
- **First Aid Certificate- Red Cross First Aid Training- £80**
- **Introduction to Visual Merchandising- Fashion Retail Academy - £300**
- **Approaches to Study- Birkbeck University - £208**
- **Mosaic Workshop- Morley College- £160**
- **C&G Level 3- Service Inspection & Testing of electrical equipment- Power Assessment & Training- Carshalton College- £295**
- **French 1C language course- Morley College - £131**
- **Four Football Coaching courses- London Football Association - £282.50**
- **MIDAS training (Accessible vehicles) LaSCot / Wallace School of Transport - £244**
- **Real Health Programme, one years membership- Greenwich Leisure**

**Ltd / London borough of Lambeth - £122**

- **Exploring Sculpture, Beginners & Intermediate- Morley College - £288**
- **Interior Design Diploma - International Correspondence Ltd - £300**
- **Acting level 1- Morley College- £89**
- **HTML & CSS Level 1- Morley College- £64**
- **level 2 Football Coaching qualification- Middlesex County Football Association - £70**
- **Preparing to run your own business & essential travel costs- PRIME- £105.20**
- **Sociology Module- Birkbeck University - £160**

## Other courses and training

Service users engaged in the following:

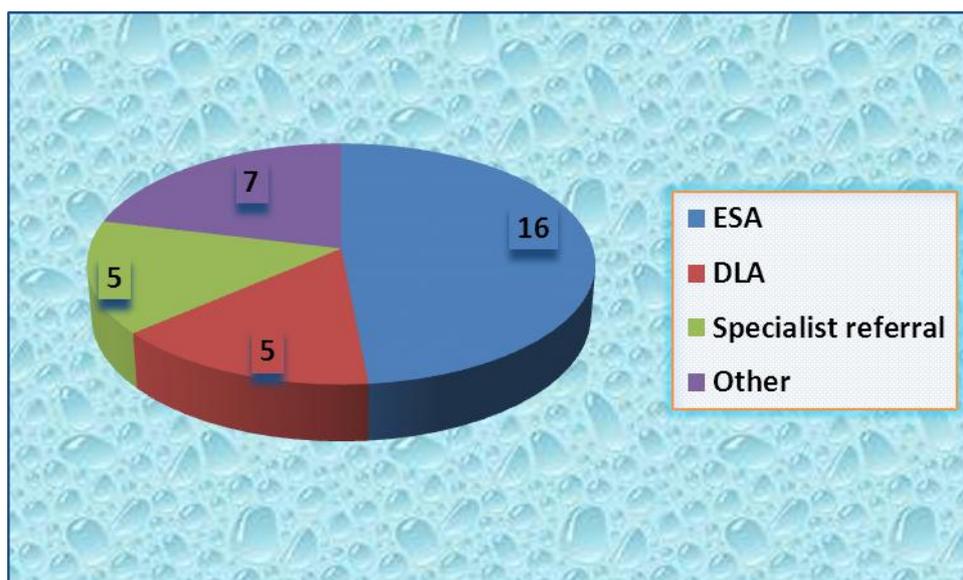


## Volunteering

For many service users one of the first steps on their recovery to a more socially inclusive life is to engage in volunteering. This can help build up confidence and improve self esteem. It can also provide references and provide some structure to the day. The vast majority of volunteering opportunities we assist service users with are in mainstream settings- 14 this year. The types of roles that individuals have taken part in this year are:

Theatre Production, Gardening, Play work, Teaching Support, Red Cross Homecare, Receptionist, Arts, Youth Work, Peer Support, University Support, Mental Health- Mind, Fashion & Textile Museum, Pilates Instruction, Cleaning

## Welfare



The outcomes relating to welfare this year have been less than previous years, however 33 is significant. The added welfare income for a small number of individuals this annum was £12,030.20. This is from new DLA claims and re-assessed applications, plus one back payment of ESA after appeal.

Below, Rob has described his experience of supporting service users with ESA forms, and how the process is often traumatising, humiliating and deeply upsetting for many.

*In 2012, I assisted 9 people with the 'Limited Capability for Work' questionnaire, otherwise known as ESA50. It is a long repetitive and sometimes confusing form which is part of the assessment phase for those claiming Employment and Support Allowance.*

*As far as I can tell, the DWP are issuing these more and more frequently – even to those who only recently went through the hellish assessment phase. One man I assisted was filling out the form for the second time this year. The DWP want to assess his capability for work again. His problems include:*

- *Diabetes which has caused him to blackout, fall and injure his neck, head and knee.*
- *His knee is currently in a brace.*
- *He spent some time in a coma because of necrotizing pancreatitis which was a particularly unpleasant experience.*
- *He has dental issues meaning he struggles to eat, and also bowel and gastro problems.*
- *This has led to continence problems.*
- *He also has severe depression and post traumatic problems.*

*This man has a strong background of work, and a clear workable entrepreneurial idea for the future, which he has the intelligence and drive to pull off. This drive is severely challenged by the issues mentioned above. He needs a chance to get well, gather himself and be supported to self-sufficiency. He doesn't need the same hassles and questions which led to him facing an ESA tribunal last year.*

*One woman I am supporting filled out the ESA50 form without any assistance. She did so in a spirit of openness and honesty, echoing the hopes of the man I mentioned above – hoping that she may be able to get back in to meaningful work, with support. She is battling severe depression, but was found fit for work. She chose to appeal against this decision and I encouraged her to get support from a Benefits Adviser at the Every Pound Counts project, run from Lambeth Council. He was so over-run with clients needing assistance that he was too busy to attend the ESA tribunal with her (he was scheduled to be present at another tribunal at the same time).*

*After a briefing with the adviser we decided I would attend with her. We attended the Tribunal Service in Sutton, and she was faced with a solicitor and a doctor. The doctor asked several questions about public transport. He was very keen; it seemed to me, to find out just how many buses this woman takes on a weekly basis. I managed to steer the friendlier and more communicative solicitor round to some issues around depression and anxiety. Additionally I mentioned that the woman has osteoporosis, a condition very unlikely to improve as this woman is in her early sixties. The solicitor laughed warmly and congratulated my client on her youthful appearance. Was this a good thing, I wondered? Had I alerted them to a worrying physical health problem for a woman her age, or were they now about to penalise her for looking well?*

*As we walked the short distance back to the station I tried to reassure my client. It was a tough job. The whole day, and the weeks leading to it, had been a very stressful ordeal. I knew that if they found against her, her only real option would be to re-apply for ESA and start the long, confusing process all over again.*

*A few days later she received notification that her appeal was successful and the tribunal was placing her in the ESA Work Related Activity Group. For someone with her support needs this would seem like a good outcome. However, the letter notified her that she would be re-assessed again ... in six months' time.*

*-Robin Harrison*

## **Evaluation**

We frequently send out evaluation forms to service users who have received information and support from the project in order to gain insight into the satisfaction levels and suggestions of any improvements we can make. The following are responses to questions from the evaluation forms:

1. *Did you find the appointment and information given adequately met your needs?*

Yes = 100%

2. *Since attending the service do you feel that your mental health, physical health and social wellbeing have improved?*

Yes = 90% No = 5% Not sure = 5%

3. *Do you feel that you are less likely to require mental health treatment than before?*

Yes = 33% No = 43% Not sure = 24%

The following quotes are clear evidence that our truly person centred approach is valued. We enable individuals to empower themselves by ensuring they are well supported and socially included. They are therefore better equipped to achieve sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

*'Before I attended the service I was isolated in my home for a long time. Now I have become more outgoing than before'*

*'I found it really helped me as the staff are very kind and have helped me quite a lot. I think they are very efficient at what they do. What I got was very good as to what I needed'*

*'For a long time I envied people that could do what I found impossible, and then (now) I met myself and my dream has come true and now I can join them in my studies and really get along better because I am no longer outside looking in, but rather I am at last on the inside.'*

*'In regard to benefit issues, the information that was given to me enabled me to get the result that I needed. Thanks guys for your support.'*

*'If I am honest the care and respect that was given was great. At this point I am happy with what was provided'*

*'I am a volunteer youth worker now. I was barely going outside before I started attending Vocation Matters. I am hoping to get a job in this area eventually. So it has helped me a lot'*

*'The service offered to me by Vocation Matters has met my many difficult mental health issues. In particular I would like to thank my assigned mentor who has shown me compassion, understanding, patience and tolerance towards my erratic, unstable state of mind on occasions, and is still willing to work with me, when most everyone else run a mile from me. Leaving me isolated and in the most 'dark of places'*

## New Developments

### Education Counts @ Vocation Matters

We successfully applied to the Maudsley Charity for a three year project called *Education Counts @ Vocation Matters*. The project will assist 150 service users over three years by providing:

- In-depth time unlimited information and support with courses / training
- A 'Learner Fund' to assist with the cost of course fees- a total of 90k over three years

The project aims are to address:

- Low levels of educational achievement and qualifications
- The prohibitive cost of courses and training
- Low levels of employment due to a lack of qualifications.

Another element of this project is recruiting a Peer Support worker to provide extra support for individuals applying to this fund. In October we recruited a Peer Education Support Officer. I understand that we have set a precedent for the recruitment of Peer Support workers within SLaM as this was the first time during recruitment that the person specification for a post had *essential* criteria that:

*The individual has personal experience of using mental health services*

When the Peer Education Support Officer post was advertised, four individuals who have received support from the project applied. It is pleasing to think that they believed in the ethos of the project enough to then apply for the post. Manju will play a vital role in Education Counts, and will champion the cause of Peer roles within mental health provision. Her account is below:

#### **Journey**

*Today glancing in my work diary, I am looking forward to my 5<sup>th</sup> meeting with a wonderfully warm G.*

*The helping relationship has introduced me to the value that a deeply interested presence brings to each of our journeys and the human skilfulness with which to be with others no matter what the activity.*

*As my anxiety clears little by little I am able to enjoy the very ordinary experience of being there for others and greatly look forward to the learning and challenges of Peer Education Support role.*

*Arriving at this point; being employed; a staff member at Vocation Matters has truly been transforming with starts of a newfound confidence a self-belief where previous there was little. Still, there is a long road ahead but also*

*pleased to be much further from where I started.*

*As someone who has used Vocation Matters services, I have strong appreciation for the dedicated staff and their tireless efforts in helping each and every individual who enters through their doors. Being one such individual, the uniqueness of the service really connected to my set of difficulties: I received encouragement to test things out, had a space in which it was ok to be unsure, got help that was in my best interest, flexible, welcoming, with an open doors policy. In summary it was the generosity of time and care from Shaun and later Kate, which took me little further towards where I am now. Similarly, in my role I hope to work in the same vein, in addition to bringing lived understanding of struggles and day-to-day setbacks which block individual recovery*

*Like for many others, my on-going recovery process continues to symbolise rescuing of a present from a ravenous past. The period before, what could only be described as a jigsaw puzzle, with the pieces jumbled, broken or lost, generally mixed-up and without a template. My personal voyage in part has consisted of salvaging the pieces, repairing the damage and creating a new template with which to be.*

*My journey really started when I was first invited into a relationship by a counsellor; well it was her many, many invitations as a result of which I developed a quiet, hidden curiosity to see what would happen as I had nothing to lose. During this, vocation /employment seemed like a nightmare, I dreaded the day I would need to address this, lacking as I was in confidence, motivation, skills and energy.*

*From this point I have had the good fortune of having pockets of help and spaces of sanctuary to start healing in small steps. Throughout my ups and downs, education has been one constant that has continually renewed my beliefs, thoughts and outlook, it generated options - opened a new direction, career and interests. Having the opportunity to return to education, as an adult has been life changing; it has been another turning point in my recovery and allowed for feelings of hopefulness.*

*Now, as a Peer Education Support Officer, and in the spirit of VM team's keep-it-human-attitude, passion and enthusiasm I equally look forward to being alongside others on their voyage.*

*- Manju Rajput*

## **New Beginnings Course**

Vocation Matters hosted a second one day course for women in conjunction with Hillcroft College after a previous one day course in 2011 proved highly successful. Hillcroft specialises in education for females usually in a residential setting. We have built up a strong working relationship with them so they offered to provide this outreach course at the Vocational Resource Centre called, New Beginnings

The course aims:

- Identify achievements
- Identify hopes, dreams and personal goals
- Literacy and numeracy assessment
- Exploration of learning styles
- Information, advice & guidance including personalised assistance

The course was managed through group, pair and individual creative activities, designed to give the women a safe environment to explore themselves and their options, in an enjoyable and inclusive environment. The following are quotes from service users who attended the courses in 2012 and 2011;

*'It was rewarding and refreshing, and wasn't as structured as I'd feared'*

*'I did find the day worthwhile, thank you for all your help, I think it would be a good thing to do again as it gives people information about what Hillcroft stands for and takes away the apprehension you may normally feel if you were to go on a course and not fully know what to expect.'*

*'It was also lovely to meet other people in the same situation as myself. I did register for a couple of courses but have had to cancel due to my depression and not feeling up to it right now; I am going to re-book though.'*

*'I hope that you have many more days like this one, I came away feeling more positive about myself and for that I am thankful and look forward to when I am able to do one of the courses.'*

### **Community Learning Champions**

A further example of collaboration with education providers is that of City Lit, Centre for Adult Learning based in Camden, central London. In October we were approached by them because they had been funded by London borough of Lambeth to provide a number of courses, for example: Lifestyle Management, Personal Effectiveness, Introduction to Citizenship, Award in Fitness, and Customer Service. They are also funded to provide a course called Community Learning Champions and they were asking firstly for referrals and secondly for a base to provide this training.

The Community Learning Champions 12 week long course started at Beale House on the 15<sup>th</sup> November. Individuals who attend can earn time bank credits. The principle aims of this practical course are:

- To gain knowledge and experience that will develop your confidence and your skills
- Discovering how you learn yourself

- Finding out about learning styles and theories and how you can improve your life through learning.
- Developing a peer led activity that you will deliver to other service users.

## Conclusion

Since our Annual Reports began we have provided in-depth information and support for almost seven hundred service users- we have learnt how to work effectively with people. The written feedback from evaluation forms is evidence that service users value the project and most achieve their personal goals.

The shared benefits of being in a dedicated Vocational Resource Centre have increased the efficacy of the project, along with a skilled and diverse project team. We are aware that there will be plenty of challenges ahead for service users such as welfare reform and education cutbacks, and we will continue to facilitate quality vocational information and support during these challenging times.

## Recommendation

The project has grown from the determined efforts of a single volunteer and has been shaped by the wishes and needs of service users. Accordingly, we have expanded our teams skill set this year, to include a service user post. We now wish to have conversations about expanding further and integrate specific employment support into our way of working.

A highlight this year is the thirteen paid employment outcomes. A greater amount of employment outcomes can be achieved, if we could recruit two Employment Specialists. This would ensure that the Vocation Matters team can provide a comprehensive service that is responsive, flexible and person centred.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Maudsley Charity for granting us the funds in order to start the Education Counts project. I would also like to thank David Blazey for his encouragement and support with this application. All of the hard work

mentioned within this report by service users and the Vocation Matters team - Rob Harrison, Kate Reaney, Manju Rajput & Oliver Banister is dedicated to Barbara Kenna. She was the Administrator for Lambeth Vocational Services until she sadly passed away in February 2012. During her short time in post she worked in a person centred way, and greatly admired the work, and ethos of the Vocation Matters team. Barbara is greatly missed.

## Appendix 1:

### Social Fund;

Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living purposes will be abolished. The new local provision will be administered by the local borough council. The amount of funding has been cut so it is not possible to know as yet how this will affect applicants. However, it is likely that individuals who have applied for Crisis Loans on a regular basis in the past will be denied such support in the future.

### Council Tax;

As a direct result of government changes to Council Tax funding many people who have previously been liable to pay a small amount of Council tax will have to pay considerably more. Once again this is being administered locally and will be called Council Tax Support rather than Council Tax Benefit. It is too early to say exactly how service users will be affected. However, it is highly likely that the majority will have to pay larger contributions.

### Benefits Cap;

Total weekly benefits (jobseekers allowance, income support, employment support allowance, housing benefit, child benefit, carers allowance and later the new universal credit) will be limited to £500 a week for lone-parents/couples or £350 per week for single claimants. This benefits cap does not apply to households where someone is claiming working tax credits or getting disability living allowance. It will adversely affect people living in London due to the particularly high housing costs.

### Social Housing;

From April 2013 housing entitlements for working age people in the social sector will reflect family size. Whilst this is not likely to affect many of our service users there is a possibility of some stress related to this.

### Reform of Disability Living Allowance;

In June 2013 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be replaced by Personal Independence Payment (PIP). All new claimants from that date will claim PIP. In October 2013 all existing DLA claimants will gradually be reassessed. This process is envisaged to take until the spring of 2016. Paper claims won't be normally used; online claims will be the norm from spring 2014. The majority of people will have a face to face consultation as part of their claim. Indications are that PIP will be similar to ESA in that mental health needs are barely addressed in the form, making successful claims potentially far more difficult, and stressful.

### Universal Credit:

October 2013 Launch of Universal Credit which rolls most welfare income into one benefit. (Except PIP) Universal credit is an attempt to simplify the current benefit system in order to remove barriers to you getting and keeping work. There will be no Permitted Work in this credit. It is too early to work out whether this will mean less or more flexibility in earnings potential as it is very dependent upon numerous complex elements

For details of future welfare change please look at:

<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/forthcomingchanges.htm>