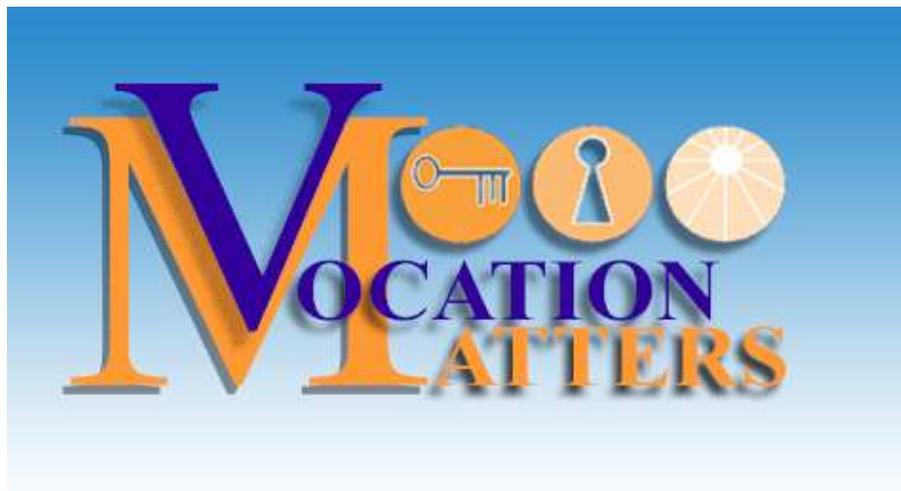


Vocation Matters Report 2009



Shaun Williams
Vocational Information Project Manager
Lambeth Adult Mental Health Services
South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

**The National Institute
For Mental Health in England describes
recovery as:**

***‘Something that people experience
as they become empowered to achieve
fulfilling, meaningful lives and both contribute
and belong to their communities.’***

Introduction & Context:

Vocation Matters is a service user led project providing in- depth vocational information and support for service users, carers and professionals within Lambeth. Since it's inception as a voluntary run project in 2004 it has grown and adapted according to the needs of service users. A huge step forward has been created by moving into a Vocational Resource Centre in Stockwell which houses a number of other Vocational projects from the statutory and third sector. Similarly the recruitment of an Vocational & Social Inclusion Officer in December 2008 has increased the capacity and expertise within the project.

In a recent government report: Working our way to better mental health: a framework for action (December 2009) two of the headline aims were:

Challenging mental health stigma and the prevailing culture of low expectations by, and towards, people who have mental health conditions

Promoting the five steps to promote mental health, well-being and resilience, based on the principles of:

“Connect with people; Be active; Be curious; Learn; Give”

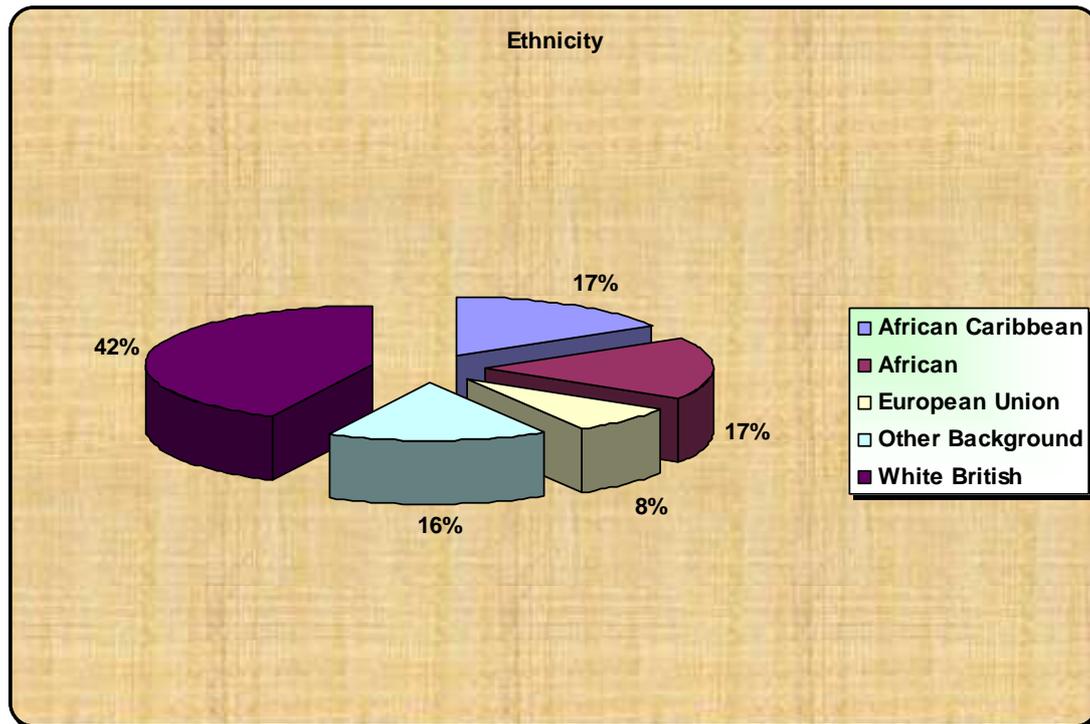
We actively work in this way and encourage service users to engage with these five steps. For most these five steps play a large part in their vocational and social recovery. At all times we challenge any low expectations of employers / training establishments, and those that the service user may have.

Quantitative Data:

103 service users received individualized information and support. This is a 13.5% increase on 2008 figures. 66% were seen two or more times. This is a 28% increase on 2007 figures showing how important it is to allow the correct amount of time for an individual to explore suitable vocational options. This also ensures sustainable outcomes are met.

A further ten individuals failed to attend appointments after referral. These individuals have not been included in the figures above. However, this means that the DNA rate for the project is 9.00 % which compares very favorably with for example; 23 % DNA rate recorded in: Occupational Therapy: Employment, Training and Education – Final Report (Bertram, 2009). The evidence suggests that some service users prefer to engage and explore vocational options in a non clinical setting.

Males = 59 57.00 % Females = 44 43.00 %



Other Background includes Norwegian, Canadian, Turkish, Traveller and Dual Heritage

Referrals:

Thirty one professionals have referred individuals this year from a wide range of disciplines most notably Occupational Therapists. One thing to note is that the health professionals like the simple referral process;

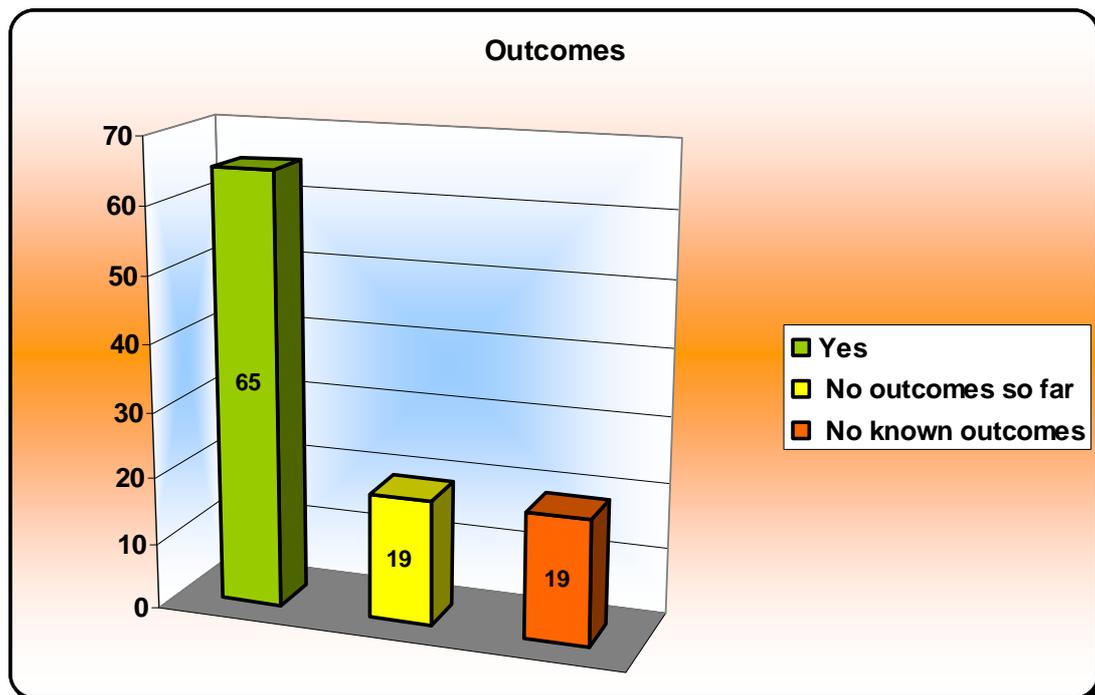
'The referral process is very informal and easy, and makes the service very accessible for the service user and referrer'

In previous reports it has been noted that between 10% and 23% of referrals have attended the Effra Resource Centre. Since the project has moved from the Effra centre the number of referrals from Effra staff has been zero. The number of referrals from Amardeep- also based once weekly at the Effra centre as also stopped hence the lack of individuals from the South Asian

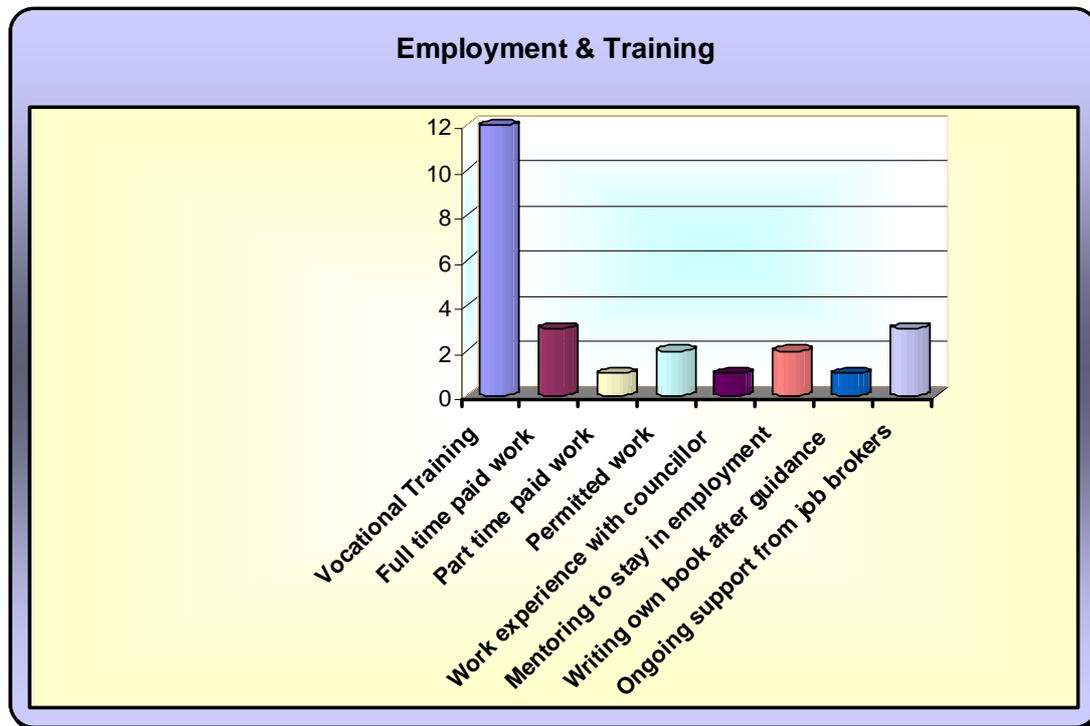
community. Considering that the referral is seen to be very simple this is somewhat surprising.

Outcomes:

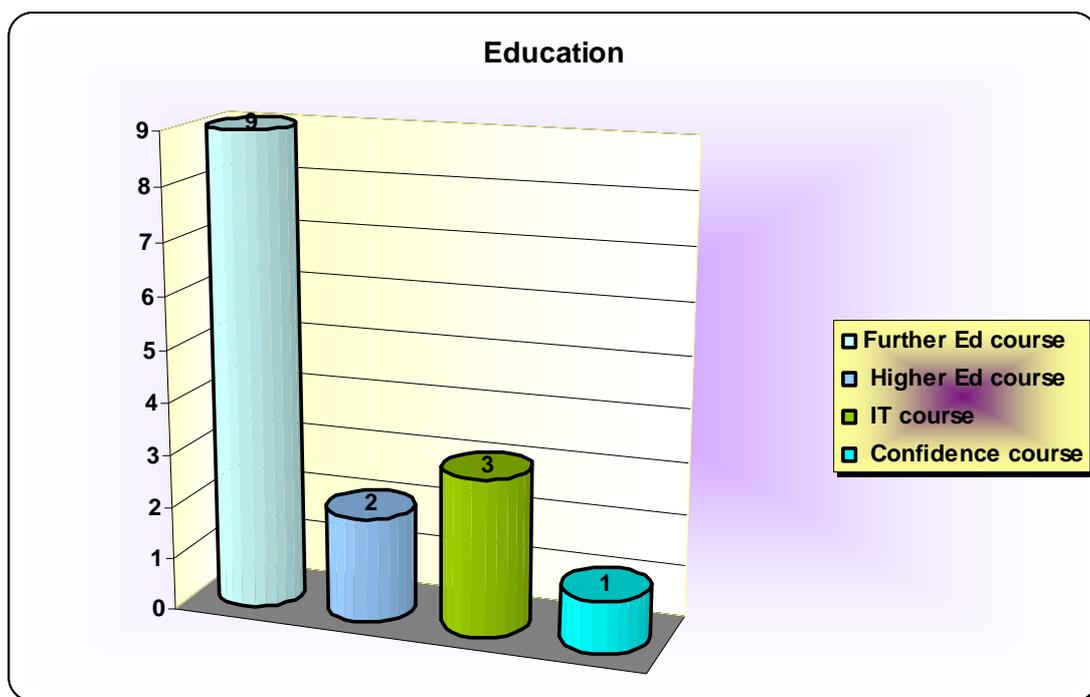
Outcomes are recorded once hard outcomes are evidential. For example, a simple referral to a provider or information relating to welfare will not be classed as an outcome. Only once there is hard evidence of an outcome that is likely to have a substantial and beneficial effect upon an individual is this recorded.



Specific Outcomes:

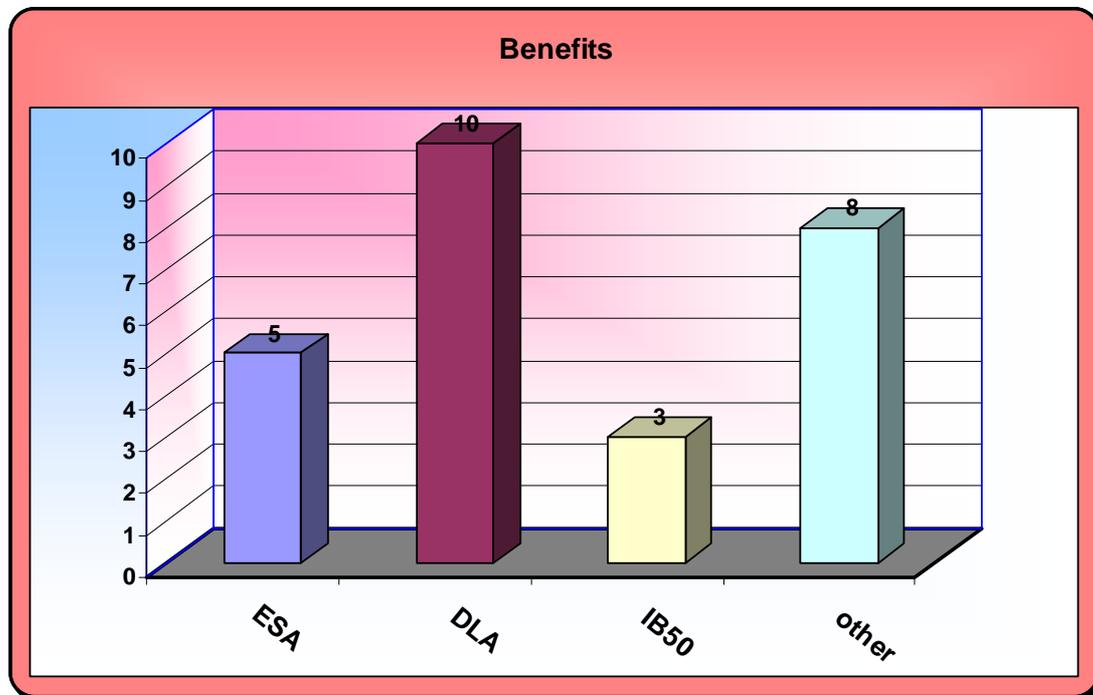


(Vocational training in this instance is main stream training likely to lead to a recognized qualification and therefore paid employment such as electrical installation and joinery, it is not within a mental health or disability specific project)



Benefits:

The following service users were supported with a range of welfare benefits claims and other related issues such as capability for work assessments.



Volunteering:

15 individuals have found voluntary placements in a variety of settings mostly within the charitable sector that involve a wide variety of roles e.g. Age Concern, Fairtrade, Water Aid, South Bank University / Lambeth PCT and Trinity Hospice.

Other Outcomes:

There have been 18 other outcomes which highlight the complex nature of service user needs. These include; housing related issues, immigration, grant funding, drug treatment, debt, alternative therapies to relieve pain and accessible transport.

Evaluation of outcomes:

The consistently high rate of outcomes achieved by service users reflects the personalized and effective nature of the service. By specializing in information and support throughout a wide range of vocational possibilities we achieve very high satisfaction levels for both service users and professionals.

Qualitative Responses:

From service users:

'You are very helpful. I got a job in the future hotel as a room assistant and I look forward to starting in the New Year and hope to be helpful in my new role'

'He also followed this up by sending me loads of information, which I found very useful and informative' I feel more optimistic about the future'

'Sensitive approach appreciated'

'A successful outcome (DLA claim) improved standard of living'

'Nothing unhelpful, the time attention and expertise very useful, I've got enough to live on!'

'The staff were kind, conscientious and understanding of my situation. They have been extremely helpful at every turn'

'The service has helped me get out of isolation and eased my feelings of alienation. The feedback I get through volunteer work has been invaluable for my self esteem'

'More staff of similarly high calibre would be good so more people could benefit from the service'

'having not worked for many years, I am now doing voluntary work once a week, which has increased my self – confidence to such a degree that finding paid employment no longer seems such a frightening or daunting prospect. This is a significant change for which I feel grateful to the service'

'They also follow –up which is very helpful and makes you feel like “a valuable person” ‘

'It is a life- survival project for users who have embarked on the goal to be in sustainable employment'

'It helped me to navigate the vast range of opportunities open to me, and steer me in the right directions to find what I was looking for, without all the stress, and hassle it might have caused me. Everything was totally positive and went at my pace, friendly and approachable and the atmosphere was totally warm and welcoming'

'I got a job very good nice one am happy with services'

'My life is also easier too get on with'

'I have found voluntary work'

'Yes working with very good team in Lambeth Accord. Everything so far has been excellent and I can't ask for more, many thanks'

'You adjusted your helping according to what I could + couldn't cope with. You understood me + empathized. At no point did you patronize me, but instead treated me with respect.'

'My stress levels (crippling anxiety) and depression both reduced. My DLA claim was accepted, further reducing the above to more 'manageable' levels and resolving practical issues (finances etc)'

'I was able to go through my IELTS course, also to have access to charities information that I didn't know before, and I definitely think the difference is very clear for me'

'Just to say well done! And to appreciate deeply with humility what a great job the staff in achieving for people'

'Good service, good back up from hospital & helps recovery'

From health professionals:

'The project is extremely useful for clients with moderate to severe mental health problems and enables them to improve level of functioning occupationally and socially.'

'Very useful would be the poorer without it'

'I appreciate the help your service has offered and will inform the team of the difference your service has made to this man's life'

'Both members of staff are always helpful and whenever possible stop to give an immediate response if this is required'

'I like the flexible approach offered by the service and the 'no pressure' approach which means that it often fills a gap between Jobcentre plus advisors and staff within the mental health services. It also feels that the staff from the service are concerned with listening to the service-user and thinking about their individual needs rather than ticking target boxes. '

'I've had prompt responses each time I've had to make contact with the service'

'I have only had good experiences with the project so well done and keep up the good work!'

'Service users give very positive feedback.'

'Very person-centred service. The new location is good, clients seemed to appreciate it.'

'Always very quick response to referrals and also when asked for information, has also been very helpful and informative'

'I think it's a great service, highly thought of within our team and this is due to the good reputation that has been built up by the staff of offering quick, helpful, accessible, service that listens to service users and goes the extra mile to try to support them'

Other responses:

'That it has been a useful experience and that they have liked the people that they had contact with and felt listened to.'

Feedback from service user to health professional

'Yes – positive and empowering'

Feedback from service user to supported housing professional

'The feedback that I've had is that the experience was very positive. They felt listened to and felt that their needs were taken into consideration. There was a prompt outcome and feedback from your service and the overall experience was very beneficial'

Feedback from service user to health professional

Case Study:

A 51 year old male referred by his Occupational Therapist from the South West CMHT in February. He was living in temporary B&B accommodation, after spending 6 months under section following a psychotic episode.

Becoming unwell caused him to lose a job that he had held for four years. Furthermore he was homeless, having been evicted due to accruing substantial rent arrears whilst gambling. He was socially isolated and had a tendency to withdraw during periods of stress. Prior to admission he did not feel able to seek help or advice which caused his difficulties to escalate.

When he first met the Vocation Matters team he said that he had previously worked as a mechanic. However, he told us would prefer to do something now using his brain as opposed to his hands.

He said that he was lacking in communication skills which had held him back, and he had found it difficult to find out about his options in terms of volunteering or courses. His last education was at school.

As a result of accessing the project on a number of occasions he is now involved in a number of vocational options all of which have improved his confidence, skills and self esteem.

These are the outcomes from supporting this individual:

- Permitted Work with Carpet Cleaning Care - earning above the minimum wage for the hours worked.**
- Moving Forward Confidence and Communication course, over 12 weeks.**
- Skills for Life courses at Morley College three times per week to improve his literacy and numeracy skills**
- A successful Disability Living Allowance application, which significantly increased his income and helped him re-establish his independence. It has also enabled him to maintain stability and attend his weekly commitments.**

The priority for him now is to find suitable accommodation so he can be more independent and build his life once again. He has expressed an interest in finding out about training to work in health and social care. He plans to access the Vocation Matters service in the future to look in to further training options and ultimately get back to paid work.

Challenges:

- Most service users recognize that the economic recession has made it far more difficult to obtain paid employment. The number of paid employment outcomes for the year clearly reflects this, therefore most service users have concentrated on skills improvement via vocational training, volunteering or education. Organizations such as START jobs that have readily assisted service users in the past with jobs in the hospitality sector have reported virtually no vacancies this year which further highlights the difficulties encountered.
- The cost of courses or vocational training has been a barrier to many. Although many institutions do offer concessionary fees for people on benefits, this is usually for a limited number of courses. Even then the concessionary costs can be too much for an individual struggling on benefits. Differing rules for varying benefits can also add to the complexity. A number of vocational training courses that do not receive Learning Skills Council funding also do not offer concessions. All Colleges have Learning Support funds, but in our experience they are not releasing funds to help pay for college fees – instead they seem to only be available for books and equipment- meaningless if you cannot afford to take part in the course. Asylum seekers often encounter further barriers unless the full cost of the course is paid for. Applying for grants is very time consuming and complex requiring considerable knowledge and expertise.
- During this year many service users have had to claim Employment & Support Allowance – this new benefit replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support for new claimants from 2008. Many are being found as capable of work- even if they have recently been in hospital on a section. Throughout the assessment phase lasting 13 weeks most individuals are having payments stopped, delayed or payments are irregular. This is causing a great deal of distress for people. For example a single parent with 3 children had her ESA stopped 4 days before Christmas. It took a number of phone calls, navigating an inflexible system to get them to make a payment before the holidays. If a person lacks a doctor's certificate for as little as one day, payments are stopped- service users find it difficult to get appointments with GP's to get medical certificates and stress levels are incredibly high. We will need to monitor closely how this will affect existing IB / IS claimants when they are moved onto ESA, as this may create a considerable amount of distress. In order to do this we will have to work in close collaboration with welfare advice providers such as Every Pound Counts. Access to this resource has been invaluable and without their expert advice providing welfare information would be extremely difficult if not impossible.

- Another welfare issue that has been highlighted is overpayment of Disability Living Allowance when a service user is an inpatient. Two people accessing the service are currently repaying benefit which was paid to them whilst they were hospitalized. The DWP are quite clear that people in hospital care are not entitled to DLA after 28 days. The DWP say that the person in receipt of the benefit should be responsible for letting them know they are in hospital, even if they are held on a section. It is unclear who within the care team should be responsible for notifying the DWP – and there seems to be no recourse even when pointing out to the DWP that repayments may create hardship and stress for a vulnerable person.

Priorities for the year ahead:

1. We met with the Development Manager at the National Women's Residential College earlier in 2009. www.hillcroft.ac.uk They would like to offer some outreach courses for our service users at the Vocational Resource Centre. We will work consistently with them over the coming months to ensure this valuable piece of work happens.
2. In order to assist users with course fees which we have identified above as a major challenge, we recently applied to Awards for All (National Lottery) for a grant. The bid was unsuccessful so we need to look at future funding options to ensure users can access courses and training where prohibitive costs are involved.
3. We have a new volunteer working on the website. Over the coming months the site will be completely re-vamped and will be more logical and easier to navigate. www.vocationmatters.org.uk
4. We need to take into account welfare / health changes that may affect service users over the coming months and ensure they are understood as below;
 - From spring 2010 a new medical 'fit note' replaces the current 'sick note'. This note will provide advice on staying in work and workplace adjustments.
 - The housing benefit and council tax benefit earnings limit for those undertaking permitted work who are on contributory Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance, will be the same as for those on income-related Employment Support Allowance, i.e. earn up to £92 per week without it affecting housing & council tax benefit.

www.disabilityalliance.org/forthcoming.htm

Conclusion:

The feedback and outcomes once again point to the project doing well in terms of the scale and range of outcomes achieved. Quotes from professionals highlight how the project works in a non-judgmental way 'A human approach.' Whilst many projects assisting users with vocational needs insist on using assessment forms and profiling we deliberately avoid this and work in partnership with the individual. An assessment form can act as a barrier giving out a signal of a 'them' and 'us' culture which we do not advocate. Working in this person centred and holistic way also allows us to see the bigger picture.

'Another thing that struck me was the interest in clients' general social environment, where they lived and what it was like for them'
Health professional

'One client felt that staff appeared 'like normal people', not like mental health services.'

Feedback from service user to professional

A problem that we have encountered this year has been one of capacity. Because we are assisting many individuals over a longer period than previous and receiving more referrals we have had to block out new referrals for two months during the year. In light of this fact we do need to look at a way of funding a part time worker.

Recommendations:

1. The Vocation Matters project remains located in the Vocational Resource Centre in Lambeth where good practice can be shared between the various vocational and social inclusion teams.
2. A proposal is drafted that explores funding for an additional worker specializing in education, vocational training and grant funding (3 days per week).

Shaun Williams
Vocational Information Project Manager
Lambeth Adult Mental Health Services
South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Tel: 020 3228 6818

shaun.williams@slam.nhs.uk www.vocationmatters.org.uk

Acknowledgments:

Many thanks to Rob Harrison for his input into this report, and his consistently high standard of working practice throughout the year that has enabled the

outcomes to be substantial and sustainable. Thanks also to Mark Bertram for encouragement and developmental support with the project.