

# Editorial

By Peter Bates

Over the past six years, Bob Grove has provided clear leadership for the editorial group of *A Life in the Day* and established the journal as a valuable resource for mental health services. As he passes on the editor's red pen, I want to begin by recording my thanks to Bob for his consistent encouragement and expertise.

As the new editor, I began by reviewing the contents of the journal so far. To date, there has been a strong focus upon employment (I found 96 papers), but many other aspects of life have been covered too. For example, there were nineteen papers on education, seven that could broadly be described as about artistic or cultural topics and three on volunteering. Sports and spirituality were addressed by one paper each.

I guess that this is fairly representative of the way in which mental health services have developed over recent years. A lot of projects have been developed that have the clear and definite purpose of supporting people to obtain employment, while other aspects of life tend to be given less attention. Of course, employment is a vitally important theme, and, despite 96 articles and all the work that is represented by them, there is still much to do. I am delighted to have three articles in this issue that address the employment theme.

## Employment

Firstly, Pete Fenwick describes the development of a logbook that service users have created and used to navigate their way towards paid work. This has increased people's sense of personal control and highlighted much of the knowledge and many of the skills that are needed to survive the job searching, finding and keeping process.

The second item is a short note from Patience Seebohm about the government's interest in the impact of the National Minimum Wage, disability and sheltered workshops. People involved in vocational rehabilitation settings need to pay careful attention to the impact of the minimum wage legislation on their payment arrangements.

Thirdly, Steven Rowland has written about his own experience and the support that he has received from the Shaw Trust. Such accounts remind us that employment matters and that getting it is hard. Steven's story also shows that a narrow focus that attends to a single issue, whether jobs or drugs, housing or hospitals, is unlikely to succeed and that a wide range of supports have to be woven together to create success.

## Volunteering

I could find only three previous articles on the subject of volunteering, so I was very pleased to receive a paper from Sherry Clark that describes a survey of volunteers who have used mental health services. Volunteering is one of those topics where we have to lay aside our assumptions and listen carefully to participants. It is self evident

that volunteering can be a bad experience for some people and the lack of remuneration makes it unattractive to others, but there are many thousands of people in the UK who value the opportunity to contribute to their communities. Volunteering can develop work-related skills and also offer a chance to engage with others and link with a purpose that is beyond the mental health system. Sherry's survey shows that a high proportion of those who undertake volunteering find it has significant benefits in their life.

### **Education**

As was mentioned above, *A Life in the Day* has focused upon educational opportunities in many previous issues of the journal. This time, Kathryn James reviews the available evidence about the link between mental health and learning, and makes brief reference to two 'prescriptions for learning' projects. These projects offer educational guidance to people with mental health issues in a primary care setting in a political environment which is attempting to shift attention towards a 'primary-care led NHS'. Indeed, there is such interest in this approach that we can envisage the growth of 'employment on prescription', volunteering on prescription and 'art on prescription' schemes that will sit alongside 'exercise on prescription' and 'education on prescription'.

### **Arts.**

Tracey Austin is a trustee of Core Arts and has, until recently, been a member of the editorial board of *A Life in the Day*. In this issue she tries to capture the vibrancy of this voluntary sector project and searches for some of the reasons for its success. As always with the best projects, the things that really make this place attractive are somewhat elusive. It leads me to digress for a moment and muse on the role of leadership. The NHS Leadership Centre and the School of Social Entrepreneurs are just two expressions of the current enthusiasm about leadership, and both risk misunderstanding. The former might be seen as reflecting the notion that leadership can be trained into people, and the latter that leadership rests entirely on individual pioneers. Both ideas have a grain of truth in them, but true leadership is something more than trainable skills or solo individuals. Somehow we have to incorporate the wisdom from these perspectives and then stretch beyond them for the subtle and complex elements that turn an average place into a remarkable place – like Core Arts.

A second aspect of Core Arts has been its success in providing a service to African Caribbean people. To date, *A Life in the Day* has had some success in presenting materials from Europe and further afield, but there has been comparatively little representation of Black and minority ethnic perspectives on mental health and daytime opportunities. Perhaps some readers would like to become authors over the next few months and redress the balance!

### **Exercise**

The final two papers look at sport and exercise opportunities. From one perspective the football group that is running in Nottingham is similar to many other groups up and down the country, but it has two factors that make it unusual and worthy of its column inches in this issue. Firstly, the group has a clear inter-agency dimension and

shows how talk of collaboration can be followed through to yield enhanced opportunities for individuals. Secondly, there is a clear pathway from specialist mental health activities into ordinary community opportunities alongside other citizens. For many services, specialist provision is like a room with one door – you can get in, but it leads nowhere. The football group is less like a room and more like a corridor – you can get in and then it leads somewhere else.

Finally, Adam Pozner's network page provides a brief description of three further exercise-based projects as well as some recent publications on employment.

I hope that, over the next couple of years, *A Life in the Day* will be able to represent a diverse range of aspects of community living. Throughout, we will need the authenticity that comes from hearing the voice of people who have lived through crisis and resolution, who have experienced support and its absence, and who have designed and built a future.