

Royal Edinburgh Hospital Patients Council

Annual General Meeting

The Hive, Monday 28 November 2016

NOTES

28 people attended the meeting.

Apologies were received from Stephen, Eileen, Dianna, Katie.

Guest Speaker

We were delighted to welcome Chris Young, the driving force behind Walk a Mile in My Shoes, who told us about his experiences walking in stages round the UK with no money, relying on the hospitality of the people he meets and telling his story to raise awareness of mental health stigma. After his symptoms attracted a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, Chris was disabled out of social work. Psychotherapy helped him and he worked out that he liked walking, talking and challenging stigma, so he decided to walk around the edge of the UK because many people with a mental health diagnosis feel they are on the edge of society.

Chris started the walk in April 2011 from the Cramond Brig Inn. At the end of the Forth Road Bridge, he told his story to a woman who then gave him £10 for food. When he went to buy a meal, another woman paid for it. Another woman invited him to stay in her house, having put a message on Facebook announcing that “kilted Chris” was staying with her – this effectively worked as a reference that he was a safe house guest! And so it has continued, showing that people with mental health (or without) are not scary – people have been kind to him every day. His Unique Selling Point (that he’s actually harmless but, with a diagnosis of BPD, in programmes like CSI or Criminal Minds “it’s usually me that did it”) helps to break down stigma. The worst thing that’s happened has been comments such as “You’re crazy” or “You don’t look like one” but Chris doesn’t take offence because he sees language as a red herring. For example, the Metropolitan Police use the most politically correct language in the universe, but black people are five times more likely to be stopped by police in London. It’s more important to measure people’s attitudes than their language. Chris loves people and finds that, if you approach people expecting them to be nice, they will be nice.

In one of his rare negative experiences, Chris contracted Lyme Disease and at first, the symptoms were attributed to his mental health condition, but fortunately someone diagnosed him correctly so he received the right treatment early enough. Chris has now reached North Wales on his walk and has received kindness from people in Scotland, England and Wales. He will resume the walk in March.

To reach more people, Chris contacted See Me and “Walk a Mile” was born, getting people together to share social space and get to know each other and see each other as people – service users, professionals, carers, members of the public – in a stress-free environment. 16 events have been held so far, involving over 1000 people, and stories have also been shared on the internet. Walk a Mile is now a charity with 8 trustees, reaching out to England and Wales too. Chris will be joined by Chris Hoy at a Walk a Mile at Murrayfield on Thursday 1st December.

Chris still has mental health issues, losing about a third of his time to disassociation, but he loves what he does and hopes it shows how it's possible to work with people with mental health conditions.

Notes of Annual General Meeting on 30 November 2015

These were accepted.

Annual Report and Financial Report

Simon told the meeting that the management committee set three priorities for 2017 – social media, human rights and Stories of Changing Lives III. We have achieved them all – improved presence on Facebook and Twitter, revamped website, human rights training and debates, funding for Stories III development worker, Katherine McMahon, who will start work in January. He asked for suggestions for priorities for 2018.

Election of Members of Management Committee

Martin McAlpine, Albert Nicolson, Stephen Polockus, Alison Robertson and Patricia Whalley were re-elected. One new nominee, Stephen Muirhead, was also elected. Two vacancies remain for service user members.

Date of first meeting of new Management Committee – 5 December 2016

AOCB

Jo Scott from the Verandah Club and boutique told the meeting that they will not be accommodated in the hospital in Phase 1 or Phase 2, but might be in Phase 3. She would appreciate any support if people feel the Verandah Club should be reprovided. Patricia suggested that we could ask patients on the wards for their views.