



**OUR NEEDS:
A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE MSP'S, COUNCILLORS
AND OFFICIALS**

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WHAT IS HUG?

HUG stands for the Highland Users Group, which is a network of people who use, or have used, mental health services in the Highlands.

At present, HUG has 342 members and 13 branches across the Highlands. HUG has been in existence now for 10 years.

HUG wants people with mental health problems to live without discrimination and to be equal partners in their communities. They should be respected for their diversity and who they are.

We should:

- Be proud of who we are
- Be valued
- Not be feared
- Live lives free from harassment
- Live the lives we choose
- Be accepted by friends and loved ones
- Not be ashamed of what we have experienced

We hope to achieve this by:

- Speaking out about the services we need and the lives we want to lead.
- Educating the public, professionals and young people about our lives and experiences.

Between them, members of HUG have experience of nearly all the mental health services in the Highlands.

HUG's aims are as follows:

- To be the voice of people in Highland who have experienced mental health problems.
- To promote the interests of people in Highland who use or have used mental health services.
- To eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- To promote equality of opportunity for people with mental health problems irrespective of creed, sexuality, gender, race or disability.
- To improve understanding about the lives of people with a mental health problem.
- To participate in the planning development and management of services for users at a local, Highland and national level.
- To identify gaps in services and to campaign to have them filled.
- To find ways of improving the lives, services and treatments of people with mental health problems.
- To share information and news on mental health issues among mental health service user groups and interested parties.
- To increase knowledge about resources, treatments and rights for users.
- To promote cooperation between agencies concerned with mental health.

INTRODUCTION

HUG constantly strives to educate anyone, who can make any sort of difference, about the services and changes in our lives that we believe could help us.

Over the last ten years of our existence we have produced a series of reports (full list available from the HUG office) on the issues that are important to our members. These have often resulted in real changes in services and attitudes.

We are fortunate that HUG has built up a reputation across the Highlands, nationally and internationally for our work in promoting the views of people with a mental illness. We are represented and welcomed on the great majority of local and regional groups charged with planning mental health services and continue to meet with officials to pass on our views.

Our work in challenging stigma is also widely acclaimed. The 'Stopping Stigma, Raising Awareness' project was funded by the Scottish Executive as a local exemplar project, quoted as an example of good practice and last December was a mental health finalist for the 2006 Community Care Awards.

Every few years we pause to take a broader look at our lives and the help we get in our local areas. In this way we can make a regular statement about the key changes we would like to see and have something to compare this with as time goes on.

Our last general report on the key issues we face locally was produced in 2002 ('Current Issues in Mental Health in the Highlands').

This current report was produced by meeting our members in 12 of our 13 branches and involved 70 people who were mainly members of HUG. We discussed key questions about what we need and what we want people to know. The results of this are outlined in the following pages.

This report contains a great deal of information which may benefit from dipping into and out of. We think that it will act as an important reference document for those that represent us and those that help develop and provide the services that help us.

We think that this report provides an important snapshot into those things that are important in our lives. The views were compiled from meetings that were held in drop in centres, training and guidance units, New Craigs hospital and people's houses.

We think that this report will be of particular interest to our MSP's and Councillors in the run up to the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May 2007. As we all know 1 in 4 of the population will be affected by mental ill health at some point in their lives which means that almost everyone is affected either directly or indirectly. We believe that our elected officials can play a key role in pressing for the sorts of services that we know could make a key difference to all of our lives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Anyone who experiences mental illness will know at first hand how painful it can be and how hard it is to come out the other side of it. In fact it is so awful that many of us die as a direct result of it and many of us live lives that are blighted and damaged for years to come. However when we become ill it is not just poor health we experience but a host of other things.

What we need and want is treatment when we need it. This may be emergency treatment within the hour, instead of at the end of the weekend, or therapies within the month rather than two years down the line. We want to have local places to go to when we can no longer cope with our situation and hospital when they are no longer safe for us. We also want to continue to have places to go to and socialise in when we cannot stand staring at the walls of our room any longer.

We want to be able to do things (being active and having things to do can change everything), we want to be able to contribute because often we feel that we are seen by others as having little value and for those of us that are up to it, we want to be able to work - and not just in the lowest paid seasonal jobs. For those of us that can't work we want to have an income that allows us to live a reasonable life and we want to be free of the hugely stressful and time-consuming benefits forms that we have to fill in.

Treatments for illness are being developed all the time and we want to be sure that our helpers are trained in the latest therapies and to be sure that we can get them. The Community Mental Health Teams can deliver much needed and greatly appreciated services but we need to be sure that they are not so overstretched that we can't get the help we need.

We all suffer, to some extent, from the effects of stigma which arises from our society and from the actions of some ill informed and misguided members within that society. We want to be sure that work is done to stop the debilitating effects of prejudice and ignorance and want to reach a position where we never have to feel any shame for having the illnesses we do. We also want the general population, especially young people, to have much more knowledge of mental illness and mental health than they do now and to know that they also have access to help if they need it and know how to get that help.

The work our friends and relatives do to support us as informal carers can be vital but we worry that they do not get enough assistance and recognition for this.

We worry about the resources allocated to mental health services, for example how is the total national spend on mental health worked out when compared to physical health services, and is the spend on mental health services in Highland sufficient to meet our needs? Our impression is that NHS Highland and the Highland Council spend less than the national average and then, within Highland how is the spend worked out equitably across the different Highland areas?

Lastly, the voluntary sector is experiencing cuts along with statutory services. Some of the projects that are dear to our hearts are the drop-in centres and outreach services which can provide a lifeline and which unfortunately still struggle for funds. Then there is our own work in challenging stigma (which will hopefully one day achieve true cultural changes). Our 'Stopping Stigma: Raising Awareness' project is in dire need of financial stability in order to continue to do the nationally acclaimed work that it has been doing over the last seven years. At present its future looks very bleak.

So we want help with our health, friends to meet and socialise with, an adequate income, things to do, the opportunity to work and places to go to when desperate. A break and a holiday would be good on occasion. We don't want to be discriminated against or looked down upon and we would like the services (which many of us have great praise for) to continue without having to constantly worry about their funding, staffing or their future. While some of us do have the opportunity to do and receive many of these things, too many of us feel that

we don't get this and that is what we would like our elected officials and service planners and providers to change.

It may be useful to compare some of the themes that emerge in the following pages with the document "Delivering for Mental Health" Scottish Executive December 2006. Many of its principles reflect the views of our members and the work that we do in HUG. Many of its themes such as Crisis services, work with young people, help for people in prison, promoting equality and social inclusion, access to talking therapies, making links across services, dealing with addiction problems and so on also appear in the document.

What we are asking for is described in great detail over the following pages but closer examination of the themes and priorities that we have will reveal that our wishes are really quite reasonable and simple. They are not just about mental health but about the way we live our lives and the way we are treated. As such the people that can make a difference to our lives are not just the health services but a host of other agencies and people including our families, friends and neighbours.

ISSUES AREA BY AREA

CAITHNESS

What we want people to know about us and help achieve for us:

- First of all remember that we are people just like everyone else.
- We feel that it is really important that young people have an education in mental health and mental illness. This should be especially around what mental illness is like (considering how many people are directly affected by it). There should be a range of educational materials for young people about mental illness and this education should become a compulsory part of the curriculum. It would also be good if they could be educated on the sorts of things that help us all stay mentally healthy.
- We are worried about the drugs that are available for people in the early stages of dementia. We are aware that dementia can be a horrific illness and are concerned that the restriction on medications in England will be followed in Scotland.
- We believe that a number of professions have a pressing need for mental health awareness training, especially the Police and staff in general hospitals.
- We also think prison staff need more awareness of mental illness and worry that people with a mental illness are there inappropriately and that prisoners with a mental illness may be harassed by other prisoners.
- We need a clear idea of what treatments do and don't work.
- We need to be sure that the approach towards people with a mental illness is tolerant and accepting rather than coercive.
- We are concerned about the resources allocated to mental illness and believe that historically they haven't had comparable importance to physical conditions.
- We find the drop-in-centres that we use really helpful. They are wonderful places but we worry about the continuity of their funding.
- We want the work of the voluntary sector to be respected and for this respect to be matched financially.
- We need more support for the unpaid carers who help us with our illness.
- We want the profile of mental illness and mental health services to be increased.
- We want to be sure that there is equity of funding across the Highlands.
- When we are in crisis and maybe need medication urgently we need this to be recognised. It is still hard to get help and support out of hours and sometimes we worry that professionals do not understand our distress and how much it damages us.
- We wish to be treated with respect.
- We would like help to stay mentally healthy.
- We need to have access to help when we need it, especially at weekends, and it is important that the system we use is simple and easy to understand.
- We need all services to work together and we want to have continuity and consistency in our treatment.
- We want to have an adequate income and real opportunities to get back to work.
- We want to be sure that there are facilities for older people with mental illness as our needs can change with age.

What services are important for us:

- The Drop-in Centres - The Haven and Stepping Stones.
- Talking therapies.
- Medication.

What we need for the future:

- Services that are accessible for the elderly.
- More Community Psychiatric Nurses and local services.
- More work to challenge stigma.
- Less reliance on locums for services.
- Help from people who know us.
- After hours services, and outreach to help those who are isolated.
- Help for carers.
- Help in crisis whenever that crisis is.

EAST SUTHERLAND

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We're not useless. Respect us, listen to us and don't see us as stupid.
- Bullying of children in High Schools because they have mental health problems should not be accepted in any way.
- We need to continue to challenge stigma and need to work with young people and also adults. This education needs to include ways of coping with mental illness.
- We need the value of good mental health to be accepted by everyone.
- Act to stop the harassment of people with a mental illness and make sure that it is not the victim that suffers when it is challenged.
- We need increased opportunities to help us get work locally.
- We need some form of sanctuary for people in crisis.
- We need to be sure that young people with severe problems do not have to travel to Dundee for in-patient treatment.
- We want more local services rather than having to travel to New Craigs Hospital.
- We need further expansion of the Community Mental Health Team and for it to be able to help us even when staff are absent.
- We need to be sure that people who attend the Training and Guidance Unit (TAG) or drop-in-centre have the ability to get there - transport can be a big issue.
- We need to be sure that our carers also have help; they can also become users if they are not supported.
- We need to have access to family rooms in New Craigs Hospital.
- We worry that the new facilities for mothers with severe post natal depression are too far away and too disconnected from family connections.
- We need more investment in services that may prevent mental illness.
- We need places for us to go to and to relax in - attractive places in attractive areas that allow us to recharge.

What services are important to us:

- The TAG Unit is really important to us but we need to be able to do something equally valuable when we leave the unit.
- The help we get from Community Psychiatric Nurses is very important.
- Young people's mental health services are important but underdeveloped.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy can be very helpful.
- HUG is important to us.

What we need for the future:

- Stop stigma.
- Increase the resources for the TAG unit and make time spent at it open ended.
- Encourage social firms and opportunities for employment.
- Opportunities to increase the social element in our lives and to increase our confidence.
- More opportunities to do voluntary work.
- Access to services at any time and on any day.
- Increased services for children with mental health problems.
- Ensure that HUG has funding - especially for its anti stigma work.

EAST ROSS

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- It is sometimes difficult to get admitted to New Craigs when we believe we need it.
- We need expanded community services to help prevent the need for admission to New Craigs.
- We worry about the pressure community services can be placed under.
- We would like increased ease of access to Community Psychiatric Nurses, Social Workers and Doctors.
- We need early intervention to decrease the escalation of crisis.
- We worry about the burden carers are placed under when we are in crisis and we worry that if we have carers they are seen as the main source of support, almost as a replacement for services.
- If we live alone we can be very isolated.
- We sometimes behave bizarrely which can worry those we are close to.
- We need improved access to GP's outside office hours.
- We would like a helpline specifically for people with a mental illness, staffed by people with expertise in mental health, and access to our files.
- In crisis we would prefer to be seen by people who know us.
- When in crisis we need support straight away instead of waiting till morning.
- We need a safe house, or if we can't have access to that then access to local beds.
- We can just need some time out when overly stressed.
- We need access to respite. It doesn't always have to be medically based - a holiday or a change of scenery can be just as good.
- We need better access to information for both users and carers.
- We would like to see better links between services, including between the Community Mental Health Team and the Voluntary Sector.
- Campanas Cottage Drop-in Centre is very important. It is central to some people's support and it should be expanded rather than face cutbacks.
- Some of us don't want our family viewed as our carers.
- Having continuity of care is very important.

What services are important to us:

- The Phoenix Day Hospital is very important, but could benefit from having a social side to it too.
- TAG is good but we need to have easy access to such schemes and a bigger variety of courses for people to do.
- Campanas Cottage is very useful especially when it opened in the evening - some of us can be very isolated in the evening and at night time.
- The Community Mental Health Team can be excellent but we worry that it may be overstretched and we worry about the increasing demands that the rising addiction rates may cause.
- Planned admissions to New Craigs can be very helpful.
- Having a key contact in the mental health team is very good.

What we need for the future:

- Access to help out-of-hours.
- Better communication between care providers.
- More social opportunities.
- More training in technology as a treatment and also as a form of communication.
- Challenging stigma is very important.
- We need more mental health awareness raising in schools and youth cafes.
- We need more support for young people with a mental illness.
- We need mental health awareness training for the police especially for when the deal with us in crisis.
- We need improved access to talking therapies.

MID ROSS

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We need more help for people with a mental illness, including assistance with housing.
- More flexible workplaces for those who can't cope with work, and a more flexible benefits system and acknowledgement that many of us need benefits long term.
- We want to acknowledge that many of us get very valuable help already.
- We need to find a way of not feeling guilty about getting help when so many other people also need it but may not get it.
- We need to find ways in which we can contribute to society.
- We have found the Community Mental Health Team to be very helpful.
- We need our own view about what we experience respected.
- We need help to come to terms with what we have gone through and with our diagnosis and greater access to talking treatments.
- We need to stop stigma with more funding for 'see me' and local anti stigma work.
- We need more resources put into mental health, and secure funding for the drop in service.
- We need to change attitudes.
- We need to stop harassment by other patients in hospital and to make sure that people realise that men can feel unsafe or vulnerable too and that they can feel that they are taken advantage of by others. This does not mean that the harasser needs punished but it does mean that all patients need to feel safe in hospital.

What services are important to us:

- The drop-in service in Dingwall is excellent and should be provided every day. For some people, accessing it is crucial. It can represent the only time that they get out in the week.
- The Community Mental Health Team can provide very valuable support ranging from the assistance provided by support workers to the assistance provided by social workers.

What we need for the future:

- We need continuity and ideally increased funding for the drop-in service in Dingwall and Alness.
- We need more activities and opportunities to do things together.
- We need to eliminate stigma.
- We need more help for families and education for some families as their ignorance can result in very negative attitudes towards us.
- We need access to respite care which can be very good and which can prevent more serious problems developing.
- Ideally we would have access to safe houses.
- We need more mental health awareness training (especially for the Police as sometimes they are understanding but at other times they don't know how to react to us when in crisis).

NEW CRAIGS HOSPITAL

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- Understand our lives and what we go through.
- Provide services that we can access quickly seven days a week and respond to crisis quickly.
- Respond sensitively to our views on what we know we need.
- Explain our conditions and treatment clearly.
- Give us more time when we want to speak to professionals and listen to us carefully and find out what is not being said as well as what we are ready to say.
- Give new skills to all levels of staff - support workers can be great but they could be even better with more training.
- Reduce waiting times for treatments, especially talking treatments.
- Give us access to help-lines staffed by professionals who are knowledgeable about mental illness.
- When we are unwell it is important that we can speak to people who know us already.
- It is unpleasant getting through to an answer phone when unwell.
- Access to therapies such as anger management would be good.
- We would like help in dealing with difficult emotions and conditions such as paranoia and phobias.
- Help us to see our illness in new ways and respect these views.
- Give us access to a range of complementary therapies such as yoga or tai chi and more access to physical activity to boost our mental health. Make the connection between mind, body and spirit.
- Encourage cultural diversity and the things people from a range of cultures and backgrounds can offer each other.
- Make mental health services as accessible as possible to people from different cultures and ensure information is clear and easy to understand and culturally sensitive.
- Asylum seekers and refugees may be vulnerable to mental health problems and may need more help.
- Improve the quality of the food in the hospital.
- Help people to regain the skills to look after themselves.

What services are important to us:

- The psychiatric services at Braeside (in particular the psychiatrist).
- The Patients Council at New Craigs, and Bruar Ward.
- The gym in New Craigs.
- Complementary therapies provided by the Physiotherapy Department at New Craigs, even though the service is not widely known about.
- HUG.

What we need for the future:

- Improve community services. Too many people still feel too isolated and divorced from real help.
- Train staff at ground level in skills such as counselling and complementary therapies.
- Make positive mental health something we all try to achieve and which we are all responsible for.
- Continue to challenge stigma –especially with local work in the Highlands.
- Help people deliver mental health services from their hearts.
- Help people understand mental health problems through mental health awareness programmes and training.

INVERNESS

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We would like an understanding of how the resources are allocated across the country to mental health services. Is the present allocation a historical accident or based on evidence of need?
- We believe that we need more resources allocated to mental health facilities.
- How does the Council decide on its spend on mental health services.
- We would like to see continuity of funding for all mental health services.
- We would especially like to see the Voluntary Sector given security and continuity in its funding.
- Drop-in-centres need more money rather than less. Cutbacks are having a detrimental on some services and we worry that if they struggle their clients will struggle even more.
- Some activities in Bruce Gardens Resource Centre now have to be paid for. The increased cost (for instance to go horse riding) means people don't engage in some activities now.
- Make care about care, not about money.
- People receiving care from Social Work Services may have a financial assessment. This can feel invasive and threatening. Giving permission for personal finances to be looked at feels like a breach of privacy.
- We don't think people going into residential accommodation because of the effects of illness should have to pay for this.
- In some residential homes there is little to do, there is little privacy and some staff seem to lack motivation. In contrast other homes can be of a very high quality. We would encourage more unannounced inspection visits.
- We would like to see benefits rise - a small change can make a big difference.
- We would like to see a reduction in the waiting list for psychological services.
- We would like to know what assistance a person may expect to get in the meantime if they have to wait for some months for treatment.
- It would be good to train a variety of workers in talking treatments and therapies such as dialectical behaviour therapy.
- It would be good to know what complementary therapies work and for these to be available at low cost.
- We think that there should be mental health awareness training for doctors.
- We worry that some GP's don't have enough skills when dealing with people with a mental illness.
- We are sometimes made to feel as though we are fraudulent when mistakes are made with our benefits.
- We need to have opportunities to contribute and allowed to do voluntary work without being seen as fit for work.
- Some of us get small tokens of recompense for our work in speaking out. We resent the fact that this token payment is then taken off our benefits.
- We worry that the pressures to deal with the Mental Health Act means that some people who are seen as less needy now get less help.
- We would like more assistance for people who self-harm and those that are seen as having personality disorders.
- We need to be sure that services develop that reflect the rural nature of the Highlands.
- We would like to see an indication of how mental health issues will be addressed in the political parties' manifestos.
- We would like to know how politicians personally believe that mental health could be improved and what they are already doing.

What services are important to us:

- Cairdeas Cottage Drop-in Centre is a lifeline for many people. Without it many people would be extremely isolated. It gives people a great deal. Just knowing it is there can be a huge help to people. It provides a social outlet and also cheap meals for those who cannot afford much or make meals themselves.

- The Community Mental Health Team with their Social Workers and Community Psychiatric Nurses are really good and are greatly valued despite being overstretched.
- Psychological services are very good and yet under a lot of pressure.
- The support we get from support workers in voluntary organisations such as those using Supporting People funding is very good.
- Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance are good benefits that can make a huge difference.
- HUG is one of the more essential organisations. It makes huge changes and benefits considerably more people than its membership. As a side product it helps people develop confidence and social networks.
- The Training and Guidance Unit is respected and valued and yet has an uncertain future.
- The Befriending Service has a very good reputation.
- Admission to hospital when in crisis can have very positive results.
- When people move on to services such as Braeside Day Hospital after discharge from hospital this can be very good.
- When we see Community Psychiatric Nurses and Support Workers as often as we feel we need to, this can really help
- Advocacy Highland is a wonderful organisation for people who need support to have their views heard.

What we need for the future:

- Decrease the waiting list for Psychological Services.
- Early intervention and accurate and early diagnosis.
- Help to cope with the impact of the diagnosis.
- Long-term security of funding for all mental health services.
- Security for HUG, both its advocacy and anti stigma work.
- More money for drop-in centres - they can be a lifeline.
- More outreach workers to go out to where people are.
- More choice of Community Psychiatric Nurses in rural areas and clinics by Community Psychiatric Nurses in GP surgeries.
- Safe houses for crisis.
- Stepping stones to bridge the gap between hospital and the community.
- Help to combat our own internalised stigma.
- Increased awareness and education about mental illness with an approach that recognises that people are not often deliberately malicious but are often very ignorant.
- More positive media reporting about mental illness.
- More awareness about how and where to go for help.
- Make the mental health system accessible and easy for people to 'trust'.
- More preventative work.
- More help for people with addictions.
- Help when we need it without delays.
- Better access to talking treatments in hospital and in the community.
- More Community Psychiatric Nurses and Support Workers would really help.

NAIRNSHIRE

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- More alternatives to hospital and more support in the community.
- More Community Psychiatric Nurses.
- We do already get a lot of very good support.
- If there are moves to reduce hospital admissions then we need to be sure that there are sufficient resources to support us in the community, such as Community Psychiatric Nurses and Occupational Therapists.
- We need more things to do and occupy us.
- We need more home visits as we can be very isolated - many of us live alone.
- We need more monitoring of medication and information about our medication.
- Some of us have things to do every day and a great deal of support but we worry about those that don't have this.
- We need to keep the services offered by the Gardeners Cottage and need a suitable replacement for the building.
- It would be good to have a drop-in-service to use whenever we need it.
- We need more things to do at weekends and access to services at the weekends.
- We need opportunities to work, to do voluntary work and to contribute.
- We need a crisis response out-of-hours.
- Local beds could be good but only as a temporary measure. When we are ill it is better to be with people with expertise and to be amongst people with similar problems.
- We need help to re-train and learn new skills.
- We need help with technologies such as the computer or the internet.
- We need to know that all facilities have disabled access.
- We worry that there is not enough expertise to help people who have physical disabilities as well as mental health problems.
- Support workers could sometimes benefit from more education about different conditions.
- We need to be sure we are seen as humans not statistics.

What services are important to us:

- The Occupational Therapists and Community Psychiatric Nurses are brilliant and keep us from needing hospital.
- In crisis we often get help quickly when our carers phone for help.
- The Community Mental Health Team has good links and connections within and out of it. They treat us as people and put us at our ease.
- The Richmond Fellowship Support Workers are really good and can pick up on when we are getting ill.
- Going out to lunch and on trips is good too.
- The Gardeners Cottage is great and is a good early warning system - staff and clients pick up on when we are getting ill.
- We find services in Nairn to be better than Inverness. It is easier to see a Psychiatrist when we need to and she is also really good.
- We all know each other and support each other. This is very good.
- We think we will soon be getting the use of a minibus for trips. This is good as transport can be a real difficulty for us.

What we need for the future:

- Getting out on excursions and having holidays (some of us have these opportunities already).
- Having more activities to do, more opportunities to socialise and make friends.
- Having weekend cover for crisis.
- Having better access to College courses and opportunities to re-train.
- Somewhere to go and something to do at weekends.
- Having more hours available to us to go to the Gardeners Cottage.

BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We need simplified benefits forms - it can take hours to fill in one form.
- We need single sex wards in New Craigs Hospital - one person refused to be admitted recently because she didn't want to be on a mixed ward.
- We need a better income for people on benefits.
- We want the Richmond Fellowship's 'give me 5' campaign to succeed.
- We want services to be locally managed and to have control of their own finances, and plans for service development to be locally based.
- We need good links between different professions (especially when a crisis needs some co-ordination).
- We want a locally based Psychiatrist.
- We want reduced waiting lists to see a Psychologist and more local access to talking treatments.
- We want access to services when we need them.
- We would prefer not to go to Inverness for treatment.
- We want support to get back into employment using gradual steps but we don't want to be forced to work as this is not possible for some of us.
- We would like to do work that involves a social element and which benefits the community.
- We want a chance to contribute.
- We think people with a mental illness often have different needs compared to those with addictions.
- We need more support to have a good life. We would like to do more and have the opportunity to enjoy things and by doing this increase our confidence and abilities.
- We would like more support for 'Healthy Minds', where users help each other to get out and do things.
- We would like the idea of recovery to be promoted.
- We would like the chance to go on holiday.
- We would like respite when we need it.
- We would like work done on prevention.
- We would like intervention before we get into a crisis.
- Some of us wouldn't be able to use NHS 24 if we got into crisis.
- Some of us worry that the 'see me' campaign is too expensive for the effect it is having.
- We can need protected and looked after on occasion - sometimes it is too much for us to make decisions about our care.
- We can have a need for advocacy in some situations - ideally from someone that we know and trust.
- If we are not on Housing Benefit we may not be entitled to support from 'Supporting People' funds and this doesn't seem right to us as we still have a need for help.

What services are important to us:

- The drop in service is very important - it's like a pub without alcohol. It is a chance to socialise, it is stimulating, and there are structured activities and things to do.
- Support Workers can be very helpful and they are a good and informal source of support
- The Community Psychiatric Nurses are fantastic.

What we need for the future:

- Access to support for anyone who is isolated and alone.
- Access to services at weekends.
- Sufficient weekday services to reduce the need for out of hours services.
- More hours for the drop in service would be good.
- More activities and things to do and chances to meet people.
- We think the HUG awareness raising work is excellent and would like to see programmes to improve education and understanding that don't just concentrate on stigma and prejudice but do improve knowledge. We would especially like to see more focus on young people.

- More access to supported employment and local voluntary work.
- We need to reach out to find out the views of people who wouldn't go to a HUG meeting.
- We need to find easy ways of finding out information on mental health and services that can help us without having to go from place to place when unwell.

LOCHABER

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We want elected officials to represent us fairly, to talk to us openly and to hear our voice and to react to that voice.
- We don't want them to believe that because we have mental health problems we can't talk sense.
- If change is going to occur that affects us we should be asked about it and advised about it.
- We want them to come to visit our Drop-in Centre.
- We want them to understand our experience better.
- They need to know that there is no easy solution to mental illness. We need to find a way of showing how terribly traumatic mental illness is. It can be horrendous and completely change our lives.
- Make sure that services are not cut - we need both hospital and community services.
- Campaign for more resources for mental health.
- Listen to us.
- Support programmes that help empower us.
- Admit that no one has all the answers.
- Find out what works and ask us what works for us, and look at our whole lives not just our mental illness.
- Come out and meet us personally.
- Recognise that we are passionate about these issues.
- Many of us would find it hard to go to a politician's surgery, so instead come to us where we are comfortable.
- Recognise that mental health problems affect a huge number of people.
- Recognise that many people with mental health problems also have addictions.
- Look at more help for young people.
- Realise that prevention is better than cure.
- Recognise the help we can all offer each other.
- Help us all work together - users, Social Workers and the NHS so that we can develop a shared view and a joint cause.
- We need safe houses and safe houses for people with addictions.
- Recognise that no one individual can create change on their own. This area is everyone's responsibility and everyone's problem.
- We need more funding for the care we get in the community.
- We need the forms that the Benefits Agency and Council use to be simplified. They are so complicated and hard to fill in that when we are ill we ignore them and get into trouble and find ourselves feeling threatened by such agencies.
- We need a very quick response when people are discharged from New Craigs. The first week can be critical. Ideally people would be met straight away on their return.

What services are important to us:

- The Glengarry Drop-in Centre is very important and we wish that more people knew about it. People should feel happy to go to it before their problems get too much.
- The emergency services such as doctors and Accident & Emergency, although they can't always deal with all of our problems.
- New Craigs Hospital.
- The help we offer each other.
- The Community Mental Health Team is very very good. They are fantastic and we have all the praise in the world for them but they can sometimes be too stretched.

What we need for the future:

- More access to self help groups.
- Access to help in crisis.
- Access to a hostel for people with addiction problems.
- Opportunities to work, to volunteer and to contribute.
- Safe houses.
- Continued support for the Drop-in Centre.

- More support for the Community Mental Health Team and access to mental health services 7 days a week.
- Increased awareness and education about mental illness and improve awareness about mental health problems among young people.
- Education about the dangers of addiction.
- Decrease stigma.
- Learn from our mistakes - we all make them

SKYE AND LOCHALSH

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- Lots and lots of people have mental health problems.
- We worry that we don't get equal services compared to more populated areas.
- Some of us have been told that because we live in remote places we shouldn't expect as much to be done for our mental health. We resent this.
- We need more awareness raising for people who make decisions (such as politicians) about our lives.
- Some of us are labelled and told what to do. We may have little control over our lives and how we live them and we do not like this.
- We get confusing messages. We may be told there is little prospect of getting well but be compelled to take medication.
- Some of us are seen more like criminals than people with an illness.
- Some of us don't have an adequate income and find the benefits we get insufficient.
- We have little opportunity to work and the jobs that are available are sometimes not those that we would like to do.
- There needs to be more access to talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy.
- Light therapy might be useful for some people with Seasonal Affective Disorder.
- We find it hard to deal with the indignity of forcible treatment.
- Stigma is a huge issue. When you have turned from a well known and well liked person into someone with schizophrenia, who no one ever buys a drink for and no one ever accepts a drink from, then the mental and spiritual burden can be overwhelming.
- We worry that mental illness is seen as less important than physical illness.
- We need to improve the food at New Craigs Hospital.
- Visitors to New Craigs often have to seek out attention rather than being welcomed when they arrive and we would like this to change.
- We want more funding for mental health services.
- We want more funding for HUG and other voluntary organisations.
- We want the anti stigma work to continue and increase. If it stops soon all the good work will stop.
- We can find the benefits system oppressive. We worry about changes to Incapacity Benefit and find the forms we have to fill in intimidating.
- We want more mental health awareness training especially for general medical staff.
- We want increased awareness of cultural differences and the need to respect these. Some of our helpers are from different backgrounds which means that we can find communication difficult.
- We need services to reach out to people from ethnic minorities who we understand may have difficulty in accessing mental health services.
- Some GP's are excellent but others don't really accept mental illness.
- Psychological services are very important but we don't have enough of them.
- We need access to locally based self help groups.

What services are important to us:

- The Drop-in service at Am Fasgadh offers a friendly non judgemental sanctuary. The staff make it safe, it gets people out who wouldn't normally leave their houses, it has good relationships with other services and is independent which is important.
- The TAG Unit which helps with training to get back to work is very good. It is friendly and increases confidence, stops isolation and allows people to develop at their own pace and fosters mutual support.
- Touchwood (a social firm) is very good as it gives training and real work. We also welcome the possible development of a new social firm in Lochalsh.
- The Community Mental Health Team is very important but we feel that it is understaffed.

What we need for the future:

- Increased resources and more staff.
- Continue to challenge stigma.

- Outreach to users who can't get to services.
- Better transport to access services and make ordinary life easier.
- Continuity of funding for Am Fasgadh Drop-in Centre.
- Increased access to talking therapies.
- Access to alternative treatments with minimal expense.
- Access to things to do.
- Access to a safe house seven days a week.

WESTER ROSS (GAIRLOCH AREA)

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- Politicians often make decisions about us but people with a mental illness can struggle to come and say what they need. Ideally they should come to us and find out our views.
- Get more information about mental illness and how it affects us.
- Read the information provided by HUG.
- Some of us are very isolated and see few people so politicians may not understand the reality of our lives.
- We can be worried about officials or people who seem to have power. This can make personal contact very hard.
- When we start to get ill it can be very hard to ask for help.
- We can help each other.
- Find out what it is like for carers.
- We can benefit from early intervention.
- Prevention is very important.
- We need people to be more open about mental illness in society.
- We need to improve the way people who work in mental health are viewed.
- We need to change attitudes to people with a mental illness and to promote success stories.
- We need better opportunities to help us work yet feel free not to work if we can't work.
- We need opportunities to be more active in different ways and given encouragement to do things.
- We need better attitudes from employers to people who have a mental illness.
- When we are faced with tribunals about benefits make the members more knowledgeable about mental illness.
- Have more user members on Mental Health Tribunals.
- Create a good balance that recognises our need for freedom and the risk we may pose, especially to ourselves.
- Recognise when services are doing a good job.
- Stop sensational media reporting about mental illness.
- Do more to promote sections 26 and 27 of the Mental Health Act.
- Improve our social opportunities.

What services are important to us:

- The NSF Outreach Service which is vital. It has built up networks, it is a fantastic service, it has built up connections and relationships that have taken years to develop and has given us opportunities to meet together and to go places etc.
- The Community Mental Health Team is very good and is also helpful for carers.
- The GP Surgery in Gairloch is a godsend and is much better than it used to be as the staff have really got to grips with mental illness. They really make a difference.
- The Community Car Scheme is very good.

What we need for the future:

- We are very happy with what we have and life is much better than in the past.
- We need to keep what we have got.
- Benefits are adequate but a small addition to our income can make a big difference.
- We need acceptance of what we are and what we can do.
- Stability in our lives is worth more than money.
- Uncertainty about the future can be very stressful.
- We need help when we know we need it.
- We need to challenge stigma and need to concentrate on work with young people.

WESTER ROSS (NORTH AREA)

What we want people to know about us and to achieve for us:

- We know where the parliament is and we have bus passes!
- Filling out the forms for Housing Benefit is awful - they are like encyclopaedias. We need help with filling in benefits forms. Sometimes we get help and it is very good but not always.
- It can be hard for people who are homeless to get benefits as they need evidence of addresses and birth certificates that can be hard to provide.
- It can be hard for people who are homeless to get work - i.e. no address therefore no job.
- Regarding the Scottish Executive document: 'Delivering for Mental Health'. How will the various commitments be achieved and what resources will be allocated to make it possible?
- How can services improve and develop when they are already overstretched?
- We need access to better public transport which is not always scheduled around the times of ferry sailings. Many of us rely on friends and neighbours to get around.
- The journey to New Craigs and back can take 6 hours.
- There is a huge amount of travelling to get to services - e.g. for the Men's Group to meet can mean a journey of 200 miles.
- The use of I.T may help – using emails, message boards and the web could be really good but it requires resources and training.
- We don't know who the local MSP is.
- Why is Wester Ross so poorly resourced for mental health compared to the rest of the Mid Highland Community Health Partnership?
- We need access to someone to talk to when we need to.
- We can get very isolated and weekends can be very hard to get through.
- We need access to help-lines. The Samaritans can be good but sometimes lack understanding of mental illness and are therefore unhelpful.
- We need improved access to affordable housing.
- Employment is a great difficulty as jobs are low paid and seasonal. It would be good to have more opportunities to re-train and get back to work for those who are up to it.
- Work can be very satisfying and lifts our spirits but some of us can't deal with work - the social element can get us wound up and upset.
- Some of us have experienced harassment from fellow workers because of our illness.
- Stigma is still a big issue. If we don't look normal or appear normal we can really 'cop it'.
- We need support to help us do what we are good at.
- Many of us have few friends and are not in relationships. This can be hard to deal with.
- We would like Parliament to adopt the "giveme5" campaign being run by the Richmond Fellowship.
- We have a need to have things to do that are meaningful and which help us avoid the temptation to spend our time in the pub.
- It would be good to have access to a local TAG Unit.
- We don't always want professionals seeing us at home – it can take some time for us to build up the trust this requires.

What services are important to us:

- The Support Workers are really important. They provide activity and support and someone to talk to. They can seem like good supportive friends.
- The Community Psychiatric Nurses are wonderful.
- The Social Worker from the Mental Health Team is very very good and very effective.
- NSF Outreach can be good too, especially as they are an independent alternative to statutory services which some people are suspicious of.

What we need for the future:

- Better access to transport.
- A local Training and Guidance Unit.
- Funding and training to use the internet and other I.T. forms.
- Increased awareness of mental health and illness for everyone, but especially among young people.
- More work to decrease stigma and stop the taboos.
- Access to services at the weekends, especially when in distress.
- Access to ways of promoting peer support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to all the members of HUG, and other mental health service users, who contributed to this report.

Please feel free to photocopy this report. The report can be supplied in large print or on tape.

However if you use this report or quote from it or use it to inform your practice or planning please tell us about this first. This helps us know what is being done on our behalf and helps us inform our members of the effect their voice is having.

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