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## Improving services for learners with mental health difficulties

### News Issue 13

### Mental Wellbeing and Lifelong Learning for Older People seminar

Welcome to the latest edition of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)/ NIACE/Inclusion Institute Mental Health Partnership Programme's newsletter.

This edition includes regular features, such as details of regional learning events for our networks and contact details for regional project officers. Inside, you'll also find news about projects that are contributing to the delivery of the LSC's national mental health strategy, *The Way Forward (2009)*. These projects explore improving access to learning and skills for different groups of people who experience mental health difficulties, and a study looking at the transport barriers people can face in getting to learning.

For more information about the Partnership Programme visit our new web pages on the NIACE website:

[www.niace.org.uk/mentalhealth](http://www.niace.org.uk/mentalhealth)

This seminar was organised by NIACE, Foresight in the Government Office for Science and the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 2009. It was held to discuss issues concerning older people in relation to mental wellbeing and lifelong learning. Key stakeholders were invited to participate and discuss the challenges of demographic change.

For further details please see the following reports:

["Mental health and wellbeing and Lifelong Learning for Older People"](#) Briefing Sheet  
([www.niace.org.uk/services/information-services/briefing-sheets](http://www.niace.org.uk/services/information-services/briefing-sheets))

[Enhancing informal learning in care settings for older people.](#)  
(<http://shop.niace.org.uk/learning-care-settings-interim-report.html>).

[Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing](#)  
The aim - to advise the Government on how to achieve the best possible mental development and mental wellbeing for everyone in the UK.  
([www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/Mental%20Capital/ProjectOutputs.asp](http://www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/Mental%20Capital/ProjectOutputs.asp))

['New Horizons'](#) a new strategy that will promote good mental health and well-being.  
([www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/Recentstories/DH\\_097701](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/Recentstories/DH_097701))

In partnership with: the **Inclusion Institute** and

## Reading for Pleasure

In recent years there has been a lot of interest in how reading can help people maintain their mental health and well-being. Initiatives like Books on Prescription and Bibliotherapy have developed expertise in using self-help books and health information to support learners who experience mental health difficulties. There is also increasing evidence that reading for pleasure can have a positive impact on well-being and, as a result, NIACE is developing an approach for learner led reading groups.

The project involves running 8 reading groups with a range of organisations, from NHS services to voluntary sector groups, using Quick Reads which are short, accessible books by best-selling authors. The project is aiming to find out whether taking part in this kind of learner led group has a positive impact on people's confidence and well-being.

The groups are currently running across the country, and we will be reporting on the results of the project at the end of March 2010. We will also be producing a free, downloadable resource for other organisations that would like to run similar groups. It will be available from April 2010 on [www.readingforpleasure.org.uk](http://www.readingforpleasure.org.uk).

Rachel Davies  
NIACE



## Travel to learning

*'I was housebound and isolated before I started here. I wouldn't talk. You wouldn't believe it now! I went on a personal development course. Before that I couldn't go on buses, I was thinking 'People are looking at me'. But the course brings you out so you can actually do stuff. When we went out and about we went out on the bus in the group so it was like a protective bubble. So it's brought me out to think, 'yeah, I can use the bus'. And when I start getting stressed now I have breathing techniques which help me.'*

This is just a small part of Josh's story, and just one of the uplifting stories NIACE researchers uncovered when they undertook an investigation into travel to learning for people with mental health difficulties. If people can travel, that is a major step towards including them; if they can't travel, they are excluded.

Barriers to travel are widespread and it needs a concerted effort from everyone to overcome them. Some of the challenges for people with mental health difficulties are the same as those facing other disabled people but they also face different ones which induce reactions like panic and anxiety.

The full report will be available in February 2010.

David Ewens  
NIACE

**Working Well - Staff wellbeing in the post-16 education and training sector. This resource pack, which is free to download, promotes the positive mental health of people working in the post-16 education and training sector.**

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/working-well.html>

## Engaging black and minority ethnic groups in learning

'[Race into Learning](#)' is part of a wider partnership programme to improve services for learners with mental health difficulties. The project explores the barriers faced by people from black and minority ethnic communities who experience mental health difficulties in accessing, progressing and achieving in learning, and the support available to them. As a result of the findings there will be guidance produced for frontline practitioners.

The guidance, available in March 2010, will contain examples of effective practice discovered as a result of desk research and focus groups.

In the meantime here's a sneak preview of what we have learned so far about what works:

### **Culture and religion**

Treat people as individuals; while there are shared cultures and beliefs within groups (and it is helpful to know something about these) there will inevitably be differences in how individuals choose to express /present themselves.

### **Learning**

The service user's needs, aspirations and interests should inform any course of action. Provide information about possible options of both formal and informal learning.

### **Support**

As well as providing general support, providers need to make reasonable adjustments and also offer support on cultural/religious issues and managing health and well being.

[www.niace.org.uk/current-work/race-into-learning](http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/race-into-learning)

Ama Dixon  
NIACE

## Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning



**NIACE** has recently produced the 2010 version of the **Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning**.

Some of you may be familiar with this resource - we have been publishing it since 2007. The 2010 version has been expanded, updated and refreshed.

The Really Useful Book... is an A5, 128 side, spiral bound booklet for people experiencing mental health difficulties who are not in employment or education but would like to move forwards in their lives.

It contains:

- blank diary pages for January - December 2010;
- information and advice about looking after health and wellbeing, taking up learning, volunteering and working, money management and budgeting and job hunting; and
- interactive activities to help people think positively, identify their skills, set goals for the future and reach those goals.

It is designed to be a holistic, supportive and motivating resource to help people move forward in their lives in a positive way. Opportunely, it complements the government's new agenda on improving mental wellbeing and supporting people experiencing mental health difficulties to get into work.

Would the Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning be of use to you or the people you work with?

**View sample pages and order copies at:**  
<http://shop.niace.org.uk/ruble2010pack.html>

## Mental Health web pages



[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

Have you visited the **NIACE web pages** lately? The Mental Health section of the website has just been revamped and it is well worth a visit.

The Mental Health area of work promotes access to, and success in, learning and skills for people who experience mental health difficulties. Primarily we seek to do this through the Mental Health Partnership Programme with the (LSC) and the Inclusion Institute at ISCRI (International School of Communities, Rights and Inclusion).

We have three over-arching strands of work:

- getting into learning;
- addressing the needs of particular groups of learners;
- improving learning and skills provision.

There are activities and numerous projects that address particular aspects of the mental health strategy, which can be found via this link:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/area/mental-health#section2>

## Regional Project Officers Mental Health

### Contact details and remaining Network Meeting dates for 2009/10.

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**12th March—** Premier Inn, Old Trafford,  
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