



# Lasting Impressions

## A LINK report about the making of 'First Impressions?'



December 2011

## **Background**

In 2010 North Tyneside Local Involvement Network (LINK) investigated the views of young people about local health services. The report looked at the issues young people faced when accessing mainstream health services and the treatment of young people by health professionals. One of the recommendations of the report was to explore issues for young people around mental health.

Following on from this recommendation, in early 2011 North Tyneside LINK approached a local drama worker (with nursing experience), Lou Ross, about supporting LINK to create a small drama film for young people by young people about breaking down some of the barriers around mental health.

Initially we asked a local pupil referral unit to be involved in the project but, unfortunately due to building work to the school, though they were keen to be involved, they felt they could not participate. North Tyneside LINK then learnt of a local young carers group which were well established and met fortnightly.

The LINK development worker and drama worker approached the group by showing them the work done previously by young people and extolling the virtues of becoming involved in the project. They played on the theme of the 'Dragon's Den' television programme—the young people having to decide whether they would support the idea of the project put before them.

## **How we did it**

The young people agreed to take part and Lou and the development worker created a workshop programme which would highlight some of the issues around mental health for young people.

## **Session 1**

Session 1 looked at what we mean by the term 'stigma', with the young people naming marginalised groups in society. From this point we went on to discuss how people with mental health difficulties can become marginalised by mainstream society due to stigma. This led to talking about who has a mental health difficulty. The group learnt that 1 in 4 people in the UK have a mental health difficulty and that it cuts across all areas of society. We looked at famous people who have announced they have mental health difficulties, such as Kerry Katona and Stephen Fry.

From this we discussed the role of the media and the reporting of mental health and the so called 'outing' of famous people. We looked at press cuttings and reporting in the tabloids and in the broadsheets, local and national coverage. By analysing the reporting we then discussed the words the media and society use when talking about mental health difficulties and the slang we all use in every day life such as, 'nutter' and 'psycho'. We debated the appropriateness of these terms and how the very language we use can stigmatise people.

The group then looked at how mental illness is perceived; for example 'everyone is dangerous', 'you are weak if you have a mental health problem'. We then discussed whether these were accurate descriptors and acceptable.

## **Session 2**

Session 2 was taken up by working through the ideas of the previous session into dramatic scenes. The group focused on three vignettes to depict some of the issues raised: attitudes; stigma; casual language and isolation. The young people then decided who would take what role and we storyboarded the scenes.

## **Session 3**

Session 3 was a full day's acting and filming of the scenes worked up previously. The young people took to acting and adlibbing fantastically, working to a very tight deadline. The group decided to use the metaphor of the bag to represent mental health and the

'baggage' we all carry around; the concept of the book linked the scenes and carried the messages that the film wanted conveyed. The book also included quotes from famous people about mental health. They decided the dvd should be called 'First impressions?'

Following on from the narrative of the film a series of interviews were conducted with the young people, asking what they had learnt about mental health and what they had gained from the project. These interviews were filmed and served as self-evaluation of the project.

## **Session 4**

After editing the film Lou and LINK's Development Worker went back to the Young Carers' Group to show the film and to make sure they were happy the way they were portrayed.

### **First impressions? - the dvd**

For presentation purposes and to use the dvd as a teaching aid a 4 page booklet accompanied the dvd. The booklet contains background to the project, the quotes used in the film and sources of support for young people with mental health problems.

The cover and the disc itself used a still image from the film.

### **The launch**

The film was launched in front of an invited audience of young people, family and friends as well as professionals working in the field of young people or mental health.

Yvonne Collins from the charity YoungMinds, spoke about her work in the North East and alongside Claire Easton, Carers Centre manager, presented mini-Oscar statuettes to the young people involved in the film.

A short fun quiz about mental health and popular culture let the audience chat amongst themselves as well as the chance to win a LINK cotton bag!

Copies of the First impressions? dvd were distributed to attendees.

## **What happens now?**

First impressions? dvd is available free to anyone working in the field of mental health or with young people. The dvd is to be distributed to schools following the commissioning of an accompanying lesson plan.

An evaluation of the overall product will be undertaken when the dvd is ordered through LINK to monitor use of the film and its effectiveness as a training aid or talking point.

North Tyneside LINK hopes to continue to work with the young carers group in North Tyneside in the future.

## **What people have said**

“I thought the film was excellent. I particularly liked the idea that we all have baggage. It made me think that some of the roles (e.g. the employer) adds even more baggage to someone’s baggage. I also liked the emphasis on treating people as who they are and not a label. The belief in this came over in the interviews. It is very important that through the dvd other young people can have such attitudes discussed.”

**Dave Miller, North Tyneside PCT**

“Thanks, I thought the night went really well – thanks to all the staff and for involving young carers.”

**Claire Easton, Centre Manager  
North Tyneside Carers’ Centre**

“I did enjoy it and think the dvd will be a useful tool for both mental health and child branch lecturers – and I will share it with them.”

**Julia Charlton Lecturer, University of Northumbria**

“Liked the video and does look a good end product”

**Andrew Holman, Mental Capacity Act Advisor  
Department of Health**

“Thanks for the DVD it looks interesting.”

**Dr. Toby Brandon, Reader, University of Northumbria**

North Tyneside LINK would like to thank the young people, Eva Savickaite, Lou Ross, Yvonne Collins and Sophie Woods from Young Minds, Carers' Centre North Tyneside and Bruce Robertson from YMCA North Tyneside.



Some of the young people receiving their Oscars at the launch of  
First Impressions?  
14 November 2011

For a copy of the 'First impressions?' dvd and facilitator's  
notes contact Alison Chalmers on 0191 643 2623 or email  
[link@voda.org.uk](mailto:link@voda.org.uk)



**North Tyneside Local Involvement Network**

The Shiremoor Centre, Earsdon Road

Shiremoor NE27 0HJ

Telephone: 0191 643 2623

Email: [link@voda.org.uk](mailto:link@voda.org.uk)

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