

## **Health Matters Project**

### **Mental Health and Bibliotherapy.**

Manchester people experience the highest rates of mental ill health than anywhere else in the country. Stress, anxiety, depression, panic and phobias are some of the most commonly experienced problems. These issues can have a huge impact on people's lives, affecting their ability to maintain employment, relationships, social networks and family life. However, there is a limit to how much mental health services and GP's can deliver, and to how much their services are appropriate and accessible for everyone. It is recognised that the more options people have available to help themselves, the more empowered they feel to face and overcome difficulties and recover better. One element that is important is the availability of quality information on mental health that is easily accessible.

The partnership between Manchester Libraries Health Matters project, and partners including Manchester Public Health Development Service (MPHDS) has provided a valuable opportunity for collaboration. MPHDS has offered input and advice on selecting appropriate resources for the collection. It was recognised early on, that a significant proportion of the collection should include resources about mental health.

Workers with a remit for promoting mental health and wellbeing across the city (based locally within North, Central and South Manchester) have liaised with Primary Care Mental Health Services and the Health Matters Project to advise on appropriate resources and promotion of the collection. Each Primary Care Mental Health Team has been asked to develop a list of self help resources that they would 'recommend' to the patients supported through their services, based on their specialist knowledge of issues prevalent in their area, and knowledge of resources they consider of quality. Interestingly this list is different for each area, highlighting the distinct differences between localities.

The Health Matters Project has invested in these resources and made the three selections available in every branch library according to area. For example the list chosen by the Central team is only available in the libraries located in the area they cover.

Now the collections are in place, the Mental Health Promotion Workers in each area, have had designed and printed A5 postcards promoting the mental health collection and the 'recommended titles' list. The postcards utilise Health Matters branding but include information specifically about mental health. The inclusion of the list of books with a series of tick boxes, means that Mental Health Practitioners based in Primary Care Mental Health Services can 'recommend' a title to patients, which they can then borrow from their public library. A generic postcard which promotes the mental health collection has also been produced which can be circulated widely across a range of settings. The aim is to target those people who aren't in touch with mental health services and perhaps are reluctant to approach anybody for help with a mental health issue. Mental health problems still have associated, a stigma which can prevent people accessing the help they need, and traditional health services aren't necessarily the first choice for everybody. This makes public libraries a fantastic

setting in which to make information on mental health available. They are accessible physically (there is a library within one square mile of every household) and emotionally (they are non-stigmatised, welcoming and approachable) for individuals.

Now the collections are in place we look forward to monitoring their impact and to support the libraries to develop the notion of 'bibliotherapy' further.

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