

# Social Responsibility in the London District

Summer 2014

## Special points of interest:

- **Autumn Synod Workshops:**  
*Pastoral Responses to Mental Health & Differently Able*
- **Healthy Living Sunday 19th October 2014**  
remember to put it in the autumn plan—resources soon to follow

## Mental Illness

More than you think...

**W**ith as many as **1 in 4** adults experiencing a mental illness of some kind in any given year and over **1 in 10** young people suffering from a diagnosable mental illness, mental health is no small matter.

Despite mental illnesses being so common, many people feel ostracized and stay silent about their health due to fears of stigmatism and shame.

In this issue of the bulletin you'll find:

- Personal testimonies of first-hand experiences with mental health issues;
- An emotional account of two church's different ways of welcoming people with mental health problems;
- A passionate plea for more awareness of mental health in youth;
- The story of mental health and music project *Band for Life*;
- A full page of resources for further information.

## Accept, Include, Rejoice

Revd. Karen Bell shows two contrasting approaches of how churches treat people with mental health issues

**D**erek and Brenda both have moderate learning impairments and mental ill-health. They have been married for a number of years and have one daughter, Emily who also has a moderate learning impairment, was born with a cleft palate and shows signs of mental ill-health.

Whilst the family rely on social assistance, Derek has held down a full time job his whole life to help provide for his family.

Derek, Brenda and Emily are faithful Christians and regularly attend the local Methodist Church. However, the family are socially 'awkward'. They often misread well-meant com-

ments for criticism. They easily take offense at people and verbalise their frustrations loudly. Emily has been known to shout out in the middle of a service. Their personal hygiene is not good, further isolating them in society.

The church congregation try to make conversation with the family but their erratic mood swings irritate members who feel that Derek and Brenda should appreciate the kindness being shown to them. Emily's vocal outbursts during the worship services are frowned upon. After all there should be a certain sense of reverence and decorum during a church service. Everyone else understands this – why can't Emily? The family's personal hygiene further

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## Accept, Include, Rejoice continued

alienates them from the rest of the congregation as people are reticent of getting too close!

The family are therefore, often found sitting by themselves at the back of the church. Church members make polite conversation with them before and after the service but never offer to help them practically for fear of being 'used' by the family. Derek, Brenda and Emily are never asked to participate in worship (although they can all read) and are not asked to take part in the practical life of the church. Although they are Christians they are not seen to have any skills to offer the rest of the church family and as a result their God given gifts and talents are left unexplored. They are very much on the fringe of the church family.

Let's contrast this with Mark and Ruth's experience. Mark also has a moderate learning disability and mental ill-health. He is socially 'awkward' and finds conversation with others difficult. He is a committed Christian and attends church every week. He finds time keeping difficult so often arrives late for the service, when he gets to church he always announces his arrival to the congregation even when the service has started.

The congregation understand that Mark has special needs and accepts him as he is. When he announces his arrival he is greeted with smiles and a friendly welcome. He is on occasions invited to read simple Bible readings and regularly sings in the choir (which he enjoys). He helps put the chairs away after the service and offers to do the washing up. His particular gift is in giving a thank you card to the preacher each week. He participates fully in the church services and his comments are often insightful and moving. Ruth is a member at the same church and has a mental illness. Although her health is fragile she is gently welcomed into the fellowship and the congregation includes her by inviting her to help serve coffee after the service and they patiently listen even when she isn't making a lot of sense.

This congregation has committed to accepting people

as they are and valuing the gifts they bring even if they are different to the 'norm'. Mark and Ruth are given space to explore their gifts and are encouraged to use them even if it's as simple as doing the washing up or putting away the chairs. As a result Mark and Ruth's relationship with God is growing and the church congregation has received a great blessing from their simple faith and their insightful comments amongst the church congregation. Mark and Ruth are an integral part of the church community.

As the body of Christ we need to learn how to accept people as they are. Not all people will react in a socially acceptable way but they are still loved by God and therefore should be welcomed into the body of Christ. As a church we are called not only to be polite to each other but to help each other grow in our relationship with God. People with mental illness and learning disabilities may need extra help in discerning what their God given gifts are and then need to be given the space to explore using those gifts even if they appear awkward to others.

So next time someone 'different' comes to church don't frown upon them if they call out in the service. Rejoice that they are expressing their love for God in that way. Allow them to be whoever they are. Listen with patience, gently and consistently help them discern their gifts and then have the courage to let them minister to your congregation even if it is not the way you usually do it.

*Revd. Karen Bell—District Disability Advisor*

### **Laura says:**

*"We often have reasons for getting depressed. But when we perform or rehearse it cheers us up!"*

**@ Band for Life**

# Jesus cared—and so should we!

Tamara Wray encourages the Church to focus on Mental Health

According to the charity [Young-Minds](#), as many as 1 in 10 children and young people aged 5-16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder - that is around three children in every class. Between 1 in 12 and 1 in 15 children and young people deliberately self-harm. Nearly **80,000** children and young people suffer from severe depression. The number of young people aged 15-16 with depression nearly doubled between the 1980s and the 2000s. These are statistics that we simply *cannot ignore*.



*You don't have to be an expert to talk about mental health.*

[Time-to-change.org.uk](http://Time-to-change.org.uk)

This is not an issue that can easily be swept underneath the carpet. The children and young people at [3Generate](#) have expressed a longing to be educated within mental health, with one delegate saying that they “would like our church to have better awareness of mental health issues”.

It is no longer acceptable that the average person cannot differentiate between Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorder, and that we use the terms ‘mad’ or ‘crazy’ interchangeably with ‘mentally ill’. It is no longer acceptable that we attribute blame to those with the misfortune to experience poor mental health. We must tackle society’s misinformed perceptions, which remain counterproductive, as the ignorance and stigma attached to mental disorders prevents people from seeking help. Furthermore, illnesses are perpetuated due to an omnipresent public ignorance.

## ***Mildred says:***

*“I used to be a semi-professional singer, but adverse conditions on my pathway dictated that I had to abandon my professional singing career. Over the years, I went through a very dark period of depression, anxiety and feeling suicidal. The singing group at church has given me hope for the future, and a chance to carry on where I left off. The people here are fantastic and it’s like one big happy family. I feel so happy and my mood is elated”*

**@ Band for life**

This is an issue that needs to be addressed and normalised within society. And where better place to start than within the Church

*Tamara Wray—Youth President  
2013/14*

# Band for Life

Sarah Wilson, musician and qualified Music Therapist, reveals some of the best bits about supporting people with mental health issues in *Band For Life*

**B**and for Life is an innovative project based on the therapeutic effects of music run by Tower Hamlets Methodist Circuit at Bow Road Methodist church, in the heart of the East End of London. The project is based on the belief that music brings people together; regardless of age, health, background, social situation, gender and ethnicity. We strive to create a culture of welcoming and openness through playing and sharing music together. It originated as a singing group under a local mental health charity, then in October 2012 the Tower Hamlets circuit took it over and today it's a growing musical community.

The project is open to all members of the local community, particularly welcoming those experiencing mental health problems and who are socially isolated. Our ethos is that everyone has mental health; for some of us it means we have good days and bad days, or we experience periods in our lives when traumatic events make coping more difficult. For others, it means every day is lived with symptoms and issues that are challenging, experiences of discrimination and stigmatism because of our situation or struggles with nasty side effects from medication. Sometimes people are unable to attend for a period of time, but they are always held in mind and can return seamlessly into the sessions when ready.

At Band for Life, we aim to both understand and support people's issues,

whilst focusing on what people can do and achieve. We don't differentiate, and we ask people to tell us what they want us to know about

themselves, we don't demand diagnosis or medical history. All age groups are welcome; the current age range is from 40 – 75, with a core of 15 people using the project regularly so far, with a slightly higher ratio of men to women.

The core of the project is a weekly drop in band session, with regular performance events throughout the year. Other ventures are growing from these, including working with local care homes to provide regular musical entertainment for their clients living with dementia; affordable piano lessons; and a potential recording project. We have held 2 very successful lunch clubs this year so far, at which all the members of the project performed. About 40 people attended, sharing a meal and music together.

At some point in the future, we hope to fund some work with young people.

*Sarah Wilson—Project Leader*



For more information, or if you would be interested in joining or donating, please visit

[www.band-for-life.com](http://www.band-for-life.com)

Band for Life are available to perform! If you would like them to come play at your event then please contact Sarah Wilson at [bandforlifeproject@gmail.com](mailto:bandforlifeproject@gmail.com) for more information.

## Social Responsibility Commission

London District of the Methodist Church

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### *Our vision:*

*“Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ throughout Greater London and the surrounding areas*

*and improving the well-being of people and their communities*

*by engaging pastorally and prophetically with the communities in which our churches are located and with the wider region.”*

## Resources

**Telephone Numbers:** for advice and enquiries:

Non vital help—**111**

Samaritans—**0845 790 9090**

### Websites @:

[Rethink Mental Illness](#)—for general information, support and advice - including help with understanding a diagnosis and support for carers.

[Mind](#)— providing support and advice to empower people suffering with mental health problems.

### Resources:

[Life in the Dark](#)—an insightful blog post of a young Christian’s struggle with mental health issues. Including her top 5 Dos and Don’ts of how to help.

[Speak Out Magazine](#)—digital magazines produced by *Time to Change* raising awareness of different aspects of mental health.

[Top Tip cards](#)—useful cards on how to stay in good mental health at work, speak effectively with others who suffer with mental health issues and conversation starter ideas.

[Imagine Your Goals](#)—a guide on how to set up an inclusive football club to support people with mental health issues in your community. With many applicable lessons for other projects.

[Worship](#)—including specially selected prayers, Bible verses, poems, hymns and sermon suggestions.

[Training](#)—If you would like further training, why not make use of some of the schemes that *Mind* offer.

### Research & Reports:

[Children & Young People](#)—insights into the impact of mental health stigma on young people.

[Right Here](#)—a how to guide on promoting mental health wellbeing in your youth group.

## You don't have to be an expert to talk about mental health.



**Talk, but listen too:** simply being there will mean a lot.



**Keep in touch:** meet up, phone, email or text.



**Don't just talk about mental health:** chat about everyday things as well.



**Remind them you care:** small things can make a big difference.



**Be patient:** ups and downs can happen.

**Find out more about mental health and how to be there for someone at [time-to-change.org.uk](http://time-to-change.org.uk)**