

5. Comments and Conclusions

Although the mapping will have highlighted perhaps only a fraction of the mental health awareness training being delivered in the region, it is clear that a considerable amount of activity is taking place.

Much of the training being offered under the heading of mental health awareness appears however to have a main focus on mental ill-health. Although most courses do address mental health and the promotion of mental well-being, it seems that on balance this is a relatively minor component, the most part of the training often being concerned with raising awareness of mental health problems and how they can be managed. This suggests that a need exists in localities across the region for such awareness raising, which undoubtedly has an important part to play in mental health promotion with regard to reducing stigma and discrimination and promoting early intervention. The national guidance provided by Making it Possible certainly encourages education which reduces stigma and promotes positive and accepting attitudes.

Arguably, this also suggests however that there remains some confusion around the meaning of mental health and/or a reticence to use the terminology associated with mental illness to describe training courses due to the stigma attached. This reticence is understandable from trainers who will be aware that stigma may prove an obstacle to recruiting participants, who may be much more willing to attend a course on mental health than on mental illness. It is also understandable from people working in a health and social care service context in which the term mental health is frequently used to denote mental illness, and who are therefore simply using terminology in the accepted, and in a consistent way. It is not possible to identify whether confused language continues beyond the title of courses and into their content. From the information provided on course content, it seems that there is generally a clear distinction being made between mental health and mental illness, and an effort to achieve a clear understanding of mental health and well-being, as well as mental ill-health. However, given the fact that public understanding of mental health is low and the dissemination of clear public mental health messages is a high priority for action, a lack of clarity around the meaning of mental health and well-being would give some cause for concern.

A number of courses include, or focus particularly on, recovery, an ethos which has a great deal in common with that of mental health promotion and which in practice would share similar approaches and outcomes. Recovery training for instance might look at the ways in which an individual can maintain wellness, drawing on practical tools such as WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plans). However, although recovery training shares some content with mental health and mental health promotion training, it does not address the same target population, recovery training by definition having a focus on the mental health and

well-being of people experiencing mental health problems, rather than that of the whole population.

With regard to coverage of public mental health messages, the proformas suggested that most courses were encompassing these. Although the positive steps for good mental health advocated in Making it Possible were not consistently noted, key points from them were common to many of the courses mapped. However, it did not seem that there was an entirely consistent perspective on the nature of public mental health messages. This was particularly evident through the common reference to people experiencing mental health problems as the population of focus, suggesting a perspective more of self-management and recovery than of mental health promotion and education for the whole population.

It is encouraging that some training is going beyond mental health awareness to look at skills development and action to create communities supportive of people achieving good mental health. This capacity-building approach is in line with the guidance provided by Making it Possible, for social marketing for mental health to strengthen people's knowledge, skills and capacity to achieve well-being and to create an environment in which good mental health is attainable. The Changes Well-being Workshops and Mental Health Supporters' Course are examples of such training. The STEPS programme, though lacking an explicit mental health focus, would also fall into this category, being concerned with psychological skills development for improved quality of life. It would be beneficial to look to the evaluation of these courses, combined with emerging social marketing guidance for mental health promotion, for learning to inform the development of new training courses and programmes.

In conclusion, it appears there is considerable scope to build mental well-being – mental health in the positive sense of the term – more strongly and more explicitly into mental health awareness training. A clear lead is provided by Making it Possible in how to do this, by providing simple public mental health messages set in a context of the social model of mental health. The courses developed and delivered by Standard One Leads in the region could offer practical models of how such messages can be effectively incorporated into mental health awareness training, and some best practice principles for ensuring such training addresses good mental health and its promotion. There may be value in exploring the development and accreditation of a training package based on these best practice principles, to assist localities in delivering comprehensive and effective mental health awareness programmes.

6. Recommendations

Based on the information supplied and obtained for the mapping exercise, the following recommendations are proposed for the development of mental health awareness training in the region

- Courses incorporate consistent messages about the action individuals can take to protect their mental health, as per the positive steps outlined in Making it Possible.
- Courses provide an opportunity to consider the use of language in relation to mental health and to explore and clarify the meanings attached.
- Course providers review their use of language in course descriptions and content in order to promote clear and consistent understandings of mental health and mental ill-health.
- Wherever possible, courses include skills development, address the determinants of mental health and support the creation of mentally healthy environments, to enable people to achieve mental well-being.
- Course providers draw on the evaluation of social marketing approaches and emerging social marketing guidance in the development of new training programmes and courses.
- At a regional level, an information sharing system is established, through which training courses and programmes can be effectively publicised and disseminated across mental health promotion networks in the West Midlands.
- The good practice principles for mental health awareness training (contained in appendix 4) based on the core content used by Standard One Leads, are considered when courses are being developed or reviewed.