



Mental Health Awareness Guide: How to get started

Becoming appointed

Mental health awareness guides (MHAGs) are appointed by their local clergy and parochial church council (PCC), to whom they are accountable. This enables the church leadership to affirm and be involved in raising mental health awareness in the church community, which is vital to the success of the role.

Getting going

This is based on the experience of the first MHAGs, who have tended to go through a similar process.

1. Use the three key documents, (roles and responsibilities document, description of MHAGs, which includes the core values, and the church checklist to think about your role.
2. Meet with the clergy to discuss your role and to develop preliminary ideas. Share with them the three key documents.
3. Arrange to meet with the PCC. You may need to book ahead. Circulate the three key documents in advance.
4. Aim to produce a draft action plan as a result of the PCC meeting. You may already have some ideas to suggest.
5. Use the action plan to set the goals for the first year. Remember to keep them simple and realistic and to involve others in helping you.

Informing the church of your role

1. Arrange to give a notice or even better to ask the clergy to introduce you in the role. Some MHAGs have been publically commissioned for the role.
2. Communicate in writing to reach all the church. This may be a short article in the church newsletter or email distribution. There is a written sheet that can be adapted for use in your church.
3. Jot down any comments, both positive and negative, that are made about mental health in the notebook we will give you and think how they could be used. A positive story could result in a testimony and a negative one could be tactfully challenged and suggest an issue to be tackled in the next action plan.

Simple suggestions

- Have someone tell their story in church. This is the most effective of changing people's attitudes and may encourage others to feel it is safe to share their experience. The stories can come from carers too. (See the MHAGs How to share a story (testimony) sheet)
- Make sure that mental health gets mentioned in intercessions. When people pray for the health service suggest mental health is specifically mentioned.
- Ask the clergy if there can be a mental health Sunday. You may want to have some materials for this.
- Use the resources produced by Time for Change to end mental health discrimination.

A year on

1. Review your action plan with the PCC. What has been done and is there any indication of the impact it has made? What needs to be done next? Some actions may take more than a year to complete
2. Present a report to the church annual meeting in verbally or in writing. This helps to raise the issue in people's minds and allows for more people to comment on the proposed action plan for the following year.
3. Feedback to other MHAGs so we can learn from one another.
4. Pat yourself on the back!