



Opening Minds Mental Health Awareness Guides (MHAGs): Role and Responsibilities

Introduction

Opening Minds, the Diocesan mental health strategy group, has responded to the need to improve mental health awareness in our church communities by developing mental health awareness guides (MHAGs). Opening Minds will be responsible for the project development, training and support of the MHAGs.

Role of MHAG

The aim is to ensure that churches are welcoming, supportive and involve people when they have mental health challenges and their carers. This requires all church members to understand mental health and for any issues of stigma or discrimination to be sensitively addressed. The MHAG will work with the church leadership to ensure that this is the case. In time the role may include consideration of the needs of those in the wider community.

The role of MHAG does not include individual pastoral care, counselling and prayer ministry.

Further background information can be found in the Mental Health Awareness Guide information sheet (appendix 1).

To fulfill the role the MHAG should:

- Attend training events for MHAGs
- Attend meetings of MHAGs to learn from each other and to help to develop the role of MHAGs across the diocese
- Ideally to be part of an email network to exchange ideas.
- Be aware of their own limits and to be able to manage any unreasonable expectations and demands of others

- Be aware of their own personal safety and that of people when experiencing mental health challenges. They should know who to turn to for advice regarding safeguarding and vulnerable adults.
- Have an understanding of the issues of confidentiality and should apply them.

Skills required of MHAG

They need to be a committed church member.

To be effective the person must have an interest in mental health and may have lived experience of mental health issues themselves or as a carer. They need to be able to work well with the church leadership in order to bring about change and so must have the support of and be accountable to the clergy and PCC.

They need to have skills in working with others. So they should be approachable, encouraging, to be able to both listen and to communicate clearly and to offer practical advice.

Responsibilities

1. In discussion with others, to identify ways of improving mental health awareness and support, primarily within the church community. This includes worship leaders and, where they exist, the welcome, pastoral care and prayer ministry teams
2. Provide a report at least annually and report to the annual parochial church meeting
3. Meeting regularly with the church leaders to agree an action plan and to make sure it is implemented, and progress evaluated.
4. To ensure that basic information is available for signposting to other services.
5. Offer, or involve others in providing training to the church.
6. To identify issues for discussion with other MHAGs and Opening Minds.

Churches may take a different approach within this common framework.