

What is Evolving Minds

What is Evolving Minds? by Rufus May, June 07

Evolving Minds is a public meeting which meets monthly at the Stubbing Wharf pub, Hebden Bridge, and at Tree-house Peace cafe in Bradford to discuss different approaches to mental health problems.

This includes social, spiritual and personal approaches. We recognise that there is no one best way of understanding this subject. We hold the belief that each person has a wisdom and expertise about their own experiences and what is likely to be real and or helpful for them, and that this wisdom needs to be valued and respected.

The aim of Evolving Minds is therefore to create a public space where different understandings and initiatives can be shared. In this way Evolving Minds hopes to generate an increased level of acceptance and understanding of experiences of distress and confusion (and creative ways to deal with this) in the wider communities we live in. Evolving Minds is also interested in addressing social justice and human rights issues in relation to mental health problems. 'Evolving Minds' the name comes from a film of the same name that looks at different ways of dealing with psychosis (to view see www.undercurrents.org).

We encourage everyone who attends to contribute to decision making about both the content of the meeting and the way it is organised.

The Roots of Evolving Minds

Evolving Minds Meetings began in April 2004. It came about after a public showing of the film Evolving Minds at the Trades club in Hebden Bridge in November 2003. The film Evolving Minds directed by Mel Gunasena similarly looked at alternative approaches to dealing with psychosis. Over 70 people turned up to see the film and take part in the discussion, discussants included Mel Gunasena herself and there was a lot of interest in taking the issues the film raised further.

What has Evolving Minds achieved so far?

The Evolving Minds meetings have covered a range of topics including - Personal accounts of recovery; Forum theatre as a way of dealing with oppression; Guided Meditation; 'Communicationz Promotin Recovery', a Manchester based grass roots self help and media group; How to survive living in a mad world; Binaural beat Technology (a self help strategy that uses stereophonic sound to change mood); Spiritual healing; Ways of reclaiming language of self; Co-counselling; Discussion of the ideas of R.D. Laing; Creativity and mental health. Meetings have also looked at Self esteem eastern and western perspectives; How to live with Suicidal thoughts; 5 Rhythms Dance and wellbeing; How does war affect us emotionally; Homeopathy and Herbal Medicine. We also hosted a performance theatre piece which charted one person's psycho spiritual journey.

Side effects of Evolving Minds

The meeting is open to anyone and everyone and encourages public debate and dialogue. The public nature of E.M. means that it has quite a good local profile. Posters highlighting each meeting are put up around the local town helping to raise awareness both of the meeting and the issues it looks at. For example one poster read 'How sane is it to be well-adapted to a sick society?' Such slogans and sound bites help to raise the profile of subjects and perspectives that are generally not given a voice. In addition E.M. has had several positive stories in the local newspaper.

There are a lot of people who have described how coming to E.M. has increased their understanding of unusual experiences and distress and given them confidence to act positively around this subject. A series of drama work-shops have developed alongside the EM meetings, using 'Theatre of the Oppressed' Techniques developed by Augustus Boal. The drama work-shops have looked at issues to do with identity and ways to challenge experiences of oppression.

The networking that Evolving Minds (E.M.) has enabled is impossible to quantify. As well as attracting lots of local people the meetings have included people from Hartlepool, Leeds, Bradford, London, Burnley, Huddersfield, Blackburn and Oldham. E.M. has supported the promotion of other mental health related events and activism. This includes a Hebden Bridge Arts festival event called 'Madness and Culture' and events organised by the Bradford's University's Centre for Citizenship and Community Mental health. E.M. has now been set up in Bradford and has organised regular meetings and a Mad Arts Festival. The Bradford Evolving Minds has also established a web-site www.evolving-minds.co.uk.

The Coming off psychiatric medication Support group

This is another project that came from EM. It is a weekly support group for anyone wishing to reduce their psychiatric medication and think about other ways to manage their thoughts and feelings. A web-site has also been established: www.comingoff.com

Campaigning against the oppressive use of force in the mental health system.

A group from E.M. took part in the Kissit demonstration in London in February 14th, 2005. EM successfully helped organise a follow-up demonstration in Manchester on 14th of July at 1pm in Piccadilly Gardens. Go to www.kissit.org for more details. This demonstration was against the oppressive use of force in the mental health system. In the three days preceding this demonstration a bedpush took place from Bradford to Manchester. Known as 'The Great Escape Bed Push' a psychiatric bed was pushed 6 miles by 19 pyjama clad protesters dressed in pyjamas. The Great Escape started from Cygnet private secure psychiatric hospital in South Bradford and went via Halifax across the Pennines to Manchester Piccadilly on the 12th, 13th and 14th of July. 'On the run' from an oppressive mental health system we were chased by a giant syringe! We proclaimed that 'Psychiatry is off its trolley!'; By taking part in these demonstrations we were identifying ourselves as conscientious objectors to the unnecessary use of force that currently occurs in psychiatric hospitals and services. We were covered by 6 local papers and 2 regional papers national radio (Law in Action, Radio 4) and a BBC3 hour long documentary due to be broadcasted in the Autumn of 2005. We also achieved a good response from the public during the bed-push. We have since completed two more bedpushes go to www.bedpush.com to find out more.

Side Effects of Evolving Minds inside Psychiatry

It is likely that relationships formed at Evolving Minds and the ideas generated have led to quite a few innovative developments within mental health services. For example, Two members of the Evolving Minds meeting Adam Jhugroo and Rufus May have begun working together in a Bradford Psychiatric hospital with several initiatives that aim to promote recovery, self help and user-involvement.

One such initiative is a 'Road to Recovery' group. The group is a place for service users who are in hospital to share experiences and offer each other support. Subjects covered nominated by the group are 'Spirituality', 'Reclaiming Power in your Life' and 'Rights during Hospital admission', 'The Interview with the psychiatrist' (where group members get to interview a psychiatrist in a reverse ward round). For more information contact info@evolving-minds.co.uk