

“ I have gone to my present Church for 10 years and have met a lot of people including children. They are the best thing ever - funny, lively, enthusiastic and sometimes naughty. We pull faces, play games and after the service when the biscuits come out we're there. Children see no difference between me and anyone else. ”

“ With children I am secure and my imagination comes out. Sometimes we don't realise how much little things help to heal us and make us whole. ”

“ I often visit a family and the children tell me they love me, give me hugs, kisses, models and pictures. I feel totally accepted by them and their parents have no problem with my illness and let me care for them. ”

What next?

The Opening Minds group wants to hear from you about particular issues, challenges, stories, and training and resource needs. For example, what help do you need in your church relating to mental health?

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Developing the Church's understanding and support of those with mental health needs and learning difficulties, and their carers.

Joining together in the Transforming Mission of God

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Opening Minds is a new group recently drawn together to help coordinate the diocese's response to mental health issues. This group is made up of a mixture of ordained and lay people, health professionals and service users. The aim is for the strategy group to be made up of 50 per cent users in due course.

These stories are offered as a way of connecting and stimulating responses. In due course it is hoped Opening Minds representatives can visit deanery synods to explore ministry and mental health further.

For good mental health, look after your spiritual health

For many years, since my teens, I experienced episodes of depression. The pattern was similar: push myself too far – “crumble” – seek medical help – feel better for a while, then repeat the cycle. Medical help often involved taking antidepressants, prescribed by my GP, for a few months. There were a couple of times though that this was not enough and I was referred for more specialist psychiatric treatment.

It is over four years ago now that I was forced to reassess my tried and tested way of dealing with life. I pushed myself – I crumbled – I sought medical advice – and spent the next few months recovering from a serious

adverse drug reaction. This experience was my wake-up call, leading me to seek God's guidance in living a healthier life. The key for me has been to nurture my spiritual health. When stress threatens to overwhelm me I have slowly learned that I can stop this by taking time out and asking God to help relieve the burden.



The Department of Health (2011) say there is “no health without mental health”, and promoting positive mental health is an important strategy in addressing our mental health needs. For me personally, it is my daily dose of spiritual “medicine” that keeps me well.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust” (Psalm 91:1-2)

Yvette's friend contacted the Vicarage to say that Yvette was full of demons and needed help. After a 3 way conversation with Yvette, her friend and myself, it was established that Yvette was under treatment from Mental Health professionals for many reasons. Also that Yvette attended a church who said that she was demonised and she needed to attend church six weeks running so that she could receive an exorcism course. I agreed to meet Yvette, we talked, we prayed, I was partial to some very intimate and private details about an appalling childhood (to which Yvette had normalised), and we discussed the books she



was reading at the time, most of which were on demons. Yvette always said she felt better after travelling into Nottingham to her normal church she attended a local one for a while. At the same time she was still being treated by professionals for her mental ill health. In the course of meeting with her for prayer, Yvette also met with the Priest-in-Charge and myself, where she agreed to go through her Baptism Promises i.e. to reject the world and the devil etc. Yvette said that she felt much better after this, she also began to pick up voluntary work in

the community and met with people locally.

This was about a year ago; I now meet with Yvette once a month for chat and prayer, with Yvette still travelling to Nottingham to Church. Her psychotic episodes and depression are still being treated, but the Vicar and I pray for her regularly, speak on the phone with Yvette in between meetings and encourage her to read positive books around the love and saving Grace of God. This is just a précis of the relationship with Yvette but gives you a glimpse of positive yet gentle work.

I work in mental health and a patient once remarked that those with mental health problems are often not mentioned in the prayers in Church. Are we sometimes more embarrassed about mental illness than they are? We had a Churchgoer in my Church who was very

open about her mental illness. One Saturday she took a big overdose and was in intensive care, but it took a lot of persuasion to make sure we all prayed for her that day, though her husband agreed that this is what she would want. I am pleased to say that she is now doing very well.

