Mental Health Education Project

The Carers NSW Mental Health Education Project was established to inform of the risks associated with untreated serious mental illness. It is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health. The resultant education package was aimed at carers and families, people with a lived experience of mental illness (consumers), Family and Carer Mental Health (F&CMH) program agencies, and other non-government service providers.

Literature and consultations conducted with carers, mental health professionals and service providers assisted Julie Millard, the Project Officer and the Project Steering Committee to advise on a logo, develop workshop materials, pilot the HEaRT workshops across NSW and now evaluate the project.

The need for an education package arose from Recommendation 5 of the NSW Government’s Final Response Tracking Tragedy (2008) report, specifically to: “develop and implement a communication strategy that ensures that family members and carers are properly informed of the risks of untreated mental illness.”

Research by SANE Australia (2010)2 calculates the lifetime risk of someone with a psychotic illness causing serious harm to another person at 0.005%. People living with mental illness are much more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators. However there is a small but significant association between certain types of mental illness and severe violence that might lead to homicide: 5% of homicides are committed by people with schizophrenia, and drug and alcohol abuse is found in 60% of homicides.3 On the rare occasion when someone living with a mental illness does harm another person, it is almost always their carer or a close family member.

2 SANE Australia 2010 SANE Factsheet 5: mental illness and violence www.sane.org

Hope Education and Training Tools (HEaRT) for Mental Wellness Workshops

Carers NSW developed relevant materials to run pilot workshops across NSW. Julie Millard facilitated the pilot HEaRT workshops from February to March 2013. Six workshop locations in urban, regional and rural areas were selected for their diversity, their unique issues and to provide equity of access.

The six locations were: Coffs Harbour, Moruya, Wagga Wagga, Redfern, Parramatta, Broken Hill. Three workshops were offered in each location. The workshops were: Carers and Families; Consumers; and Service Providers. The workshops provided an opportunity for networking, whilst recognising that individuals can wear many hats. The workshops each ran for three hours and were interactive, providing exercises for discussion and a Participants Guide that contained a wealth of information and resources.

Over 200 individuals participated in the workshops, with 92% of participants agreeing they had improved their knowledge of the risks of untreated serious mental illness, management and support strategies.

Some of the feedback given was:

- The newspaper ad prompted me to register as I have members of my family who have mental illness.
- Today I have come away with a better understanding of mental health. Thank you.
- I found the part of signs and triggers for myself the most helpful.
- I found it informative and interesting. It is a subject that we all need to learn about as Carers.
- Very helpful and reassuring that Rural M.H. [mental health] gains this quality support and education.
- For a three hour presentation it was packed with a wealth of knowledge and insight.
- Thanks “the participant guide” was the best I’ve ever seen.
- Thanks, interesting, I liked the acute care plan and questions about wellness, also “what do you want to do?” question for my son.
- Enjoyed the interactive exercises. Very handy resource with extensive reference list.
- Informative!!! Very good!!! Empowering!!!

Evaluation

This pilot project is currently being evaluated by Carers NSW, with the project to be completed by June 2013. A report from Carers NSW will be produced for the NSW Ministry of Health.

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