

CHERRY TREE NURSERY



PROPOSAL

Who?

1 Mental illness in the UK

Every ninety-four minutes someone in the UK kills themselves, meaning that one percent of all deaths in this country are through suicide. Depression is responsible for three-quarters of all suicides and thirty-one million prescriptions for anti-depressants were issued in the UK last year. In any year, at least one in four of the population experiences a mental health problem, yet fewer than four in ten employers consider taking on someone who has a history of mental illness, and one in three people seeking help for a mental illness are turned away.

2 Mental illness in the world

Citizens of western English-speaking nations are more than twice as likely to suffer a mental illness as those from mainland Western Europe. In 2007, 25% of English speakers: Americans, British, Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians, experienced a mental illness compared with 11.5% of Germans, Italians, French, Belgians, Spaniards and Dutch. Developing nations like Nigeria and China have a profoundly lower prevalence of mental illness. Studies show that the incidence of mental illness in the UK doubled between 1980 and 2000. The country with the highest rate of mental illness in the world is the United States with 26.4% in 2007. (These figures are all from the World Health Organisation). The reader can draw their own conclusions, but it seems to be true that, as Boris Cyrulnik said, 'The richer a society becomes, the more unhappy its people'.

3 Mental Illness in Bournemouth

The incidence of schizophrenia in Bournemouth is substantially higher than in the rest of the South West region, being nearly three times the regional rate. The suicide rate in Bournemouth is also much higher than the regional and national average. A total of 1,350 patients were registered with Bournemouth GPs as having a severe and enduring mental illness last year but surveys show that only 60% of adults attending GP surgeries with symptoms of mental illness are detected. Bournemouth has the third highest number of residents in receipt of incapacity benefit, through having a mental health problem, of any area in the country.

4 What is a mental illness?

Mental illnesses are some of the least understood conditions in society even though the World Health Organisation now rates mental illness as the most debilitating of all conditions, ahead of heart disease and cancer, and estimates the economic and social cost of mental illness in England alone, as £77 billion in 2003. Mental health problems can take many forms. Illnesses like schizophrenia and related conditions can severely interfere with an individual's ability to perform everyday tasks and activities; they may become confused and withdrawn, perhaps hearing and seeing things that other people cannot. Other people experience mood disorders, such as bi-polar disorder in which

moods can vary from hyperactive manic episodes to periods of great depression. There has been a great increase recently in cases of depression which can profoundly lower a person's mood, leaving them unmotivated and exhausted. Depression is often linked to anxiety; a constant and unrealistic worry, which can lead to panic attacks, which are unexpected bouts of intense terror. Other illnesses lead to obsessions or phobias, which can be unbearable or paralysing.

5 What having a mental illness means

Frequently, experiencing a mental illness results in a complete breakdown of the person's personality and in their work, home and family life. People describe 'looking into a black hole'. There are very strong links between mental health problems and homelessness and there are also a very large number of people in prison with mental health problems. Many of the mentally ill become unemployed, lonely, isolated and without any sense of meaning or purpose in their lives. They cannot function normally, losing the ability to concentrate, to focus, to make decisions or actions, to take any responsibility for themselves, or to perform any of the normal actions of daily life. They lack self-esteem, dignity or any reason for living.

Why?

6 Implications of Community Care in Bournemouth

In the 1980s, it became government policy to close many of the large psychiatric hospitals and for the ex-residents to move to live in the 'community'. While living in the institutions, many of these people had been usefully occupied in growing their own food in the hospital grounds, or making furniture in the hospital workshops. A group of professionals, who had been working with the mentally in a voluntary capacity, became very concerned about the implications of this profound change on the people involved, especially as they believed there was no 'community' for them to move into. They came together and commissioned a survey to see which aspect of their lives people most wished to change, which resulted in an identification of the great need for meaningful occupation to restore purpose and meaning to people's existence.

How?

7 The result: Cherry Tree Nursery

The best way to fulfil this great need for sheltered work seemed to be to use the therapeutic nature of horticulture to create a safe haven in a supportive and restorative environment. A registered charity, the Sheltered Work Opportunities Project, was set up in February 1990 and, due to the generosity of Bournemouth Borough Council, a 4.5-acre site was leased. Here a commercial garden plant nursery was set up growing perennials, climbers, shrubs, grasses, bamboos, ferns, herbs, conifers, and trees for sale to the horticultural trade and to the general public. People who have experienced a mental health problem can work at the nursery in a wide variety of roles for as long as they wish and need. The aim is to provide a happy and relaxed family-like community and to assist people to move forward in all aspects of their lives, while feeling safe, needed, cared for and respected.

For many people being part of something worthwhile results in an increase in self-esteem, motivation, and a sense of dignity. Hospital admissions are greatly reduced, and less involvement from healthcare and social services is required.

The following quotations from volunteers at Cherry Tree illustrate how attending the nursery can enhance their quality of life:

'Thank you for giving me my life back'

'Cherry Tree Nursery has brought me back from the dead. It helps and supports me continuously every day, year in, year out. It gives me a reason for living, and something I keep looking forward to.'

'I was like a broken jigsaw puzzle when I came here, but I have slowly been put back together again by the amazing support from the staff and care from the other volunteers. Without Cherry Tree I wouldn't be alive today.'

'Cherry Tree nurtures broken people as much as it nurtures plants. I owe a great debt of gratitude to this little patch of paradise.'

'Cherry Tree has enabled me to live a satisfying, worthwhile, rewarding and enjoyable life'

'Cherry Tree helps people get well and keep well.'

PLANS AND THE FUTURE

1 The Charity

When the charity was set up in 1990 it was envisioned that fifteen people would need to attend on a weekly basis. In 2009 there are over 150 on Cherry Tree Nursery's books and a steadily growing waiting list due to the previously described growth in cases of mental illness. The costs of running such a specialist concern are enormous, and although renowned for its prudence and simplicity, the income from plant sales continues to cover less than half of the Nursery's running costs. It is recognised that the nursery will always rely heavily on donations in order to continue to function. Cherry Tree is now well-known and well supported by the local community, but provisions of funds for future needs remains both a worry and a priority.

2 The continuation of basic services:

Option A: Our Disability Rights Adviser

Many regular services are on offer to our volunteers, varying from literacy, numeracy, computer and horticultural classes, to visits from a Community Psychiatric Nurse. One of the most essential services we provide is purchased from the local Citizens' Advice Bureau. A specialist Welfare Benefits and Disability Rights Adviser attends twice weekly to hold an advice clinic and also completes back-up work at the Bureau. Topics covered by the advice service include such essential matters as housing and homelessness, debt, benefit entitlements, schemes to return to employment, access to prescriptions and dental treatment, assistance with mobility, and many other matters. It is quite clear that many of our volunteers are only able to survive in the community thanks to this service. It is therefore imperative we continue to provide it. The annual cost of this service is over £13,000 and our first proposal to you is that you secure the funding for this indispensable service for the next three years, at a cost of **£40,000**

3 Our plans and needs for the next 25 years

On 15 April 2010, Cherry Tree Nursery will reach its **Twentieth Birthday**. For its first twenty years it has been based in donated, second-hand portacabins which are now decrepit and crumbling and will certainly not remain usable for much longer. Our greatest wish is to be able to provide all our workers with a comfortable, practical and welcoming place to work in all weathers. We believe that the well-being of everyone would be most enhanced by replacing the current leaking structures with truly sustainable, low-cost, low-energy buildings built from locally sourced and benign materials. This fits in well with our belief in the healing value of the natural world in promoting mental well-being and recovery. We have been working with the Centre for Well-being and Quality of Life at Bournemouth University under the theme of Ecopsychology, exploring the links between the health of the human mind and the health of the living planet. Our new buildings will be entirely built from natural materials, which in itself has a restorative value for those who use them. We have secured the services of a local sustainable building consultancy firm who are helping us draw up a plan of naturally energy efficient and low impact buildings to fulfil our needs in the most appropriate way possible. We hope this plan will be put together over the winter months and that we will be able to launch our major fund-raising project, for this proposal, which is likely to be for an amount in excess of half a million pounds, on our twentieth birthday, 15 April 2010.

Option B: New volunteers' tearoom

Our new building proposal would be for a project phased over five years to minimise disruption to the nursery. The first priority is to replace the volunteers' tearoom, where they have rest and recreation during their well-earned tea and lunch breaks. The roof of this building leaks continually despite numerous repairs and the room is damp, cold and uncomfortable. It is no longer adequate for the needs of volunteers whose numbers continue to grow. You may wish to be involved in this most worthwhile of ventures, which might cost in the region of **£60,000**.

Option C: Education Centre

Cherry Tree Nursery has for many years operated a project involving local schools based on our theme of 'Caring for People, Caring for Plants'. We are very anxious to encourage understanding of mental health issues among children, together with an awareness of the natural world, the environment and the importance of trying to produce some of our own food. On average one teenager in the UK attempts suicide every twenty-two minutes. Between 2006 and 2009 there was a 70% increase in anxiety and depressive disorders among young people. The importance of preventive healthcare is paramount. We are in discussions with Bournemouth Borough Council as to whether they can provide a small piece of land close by to establish a Community Outreach Centre in the form of a thatched, straw-bale roundhouse as the base for this education project, accompanied by a community garden raising awareness of the connection between the natural world and mental well-being. The total cost might be in the region of **£100,000**, but the Round House could be a project in itself at a more reasonable figure.

This is only a draft proposal following our most inspiring meeting. If you could let us know if any aspect of this is of interest to you we would be delighted to supply more information.