

The Depression Puzzle

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PUZZLING PUBLIC TAKEOVER OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTRE!

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People with a lived experience of depression took over the Mood Disorders Centre at the University of Exeter. Jo WELSMAN, The instigator of this bold event, enticingly named the “Depression Puzzle”, insisted that “The public need to know what really goes on in here...some of this research is just so exciting and ground breaking. We want everyone to know where to go to find out the latest information about depression and developing therapies. We believe that events like this which are run by lay people for lay people are the way to encourage more people to engage with research and hopefully get involved in research themselves”.

PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

So what were the essentials?

Essential 1: A dedicated, committed organising committee!

- Three key committee members with lived experience of depression
- Two academic partners
- Clear responsibilities
- 6 months of planning



Essential 2: Adequate funding!

- A grant of £3000 from the University Public Engagement Fund.
- Payment for organisers
- Payment for external speakers.
- Most important! Lunch and refreshments on the day!

Essential 3: Getting people to come!

- University webpages
- Press release to local newspapers
- Interview with local BBC Radio
- Free “What’s On” websites



Bristol and Somerset Sunday Independent

Essential 4: Creating a varied Programme!

- Interactive workshop about making sense of health stories in the media
- “Ask the expert”: A chance to quiz a panel of experts, including lived experience representative, pharmacist, psychiatrist, psychologist, and GP
- “Market place” a place for information sharing with local organisations, university academics, and activities.
- Involvement in research – joint presentations from lay members and academics about how lived experience can enrich research studies

Essential 5: Creating a welcoming space

- Plenty of people to offer a welcome, advice and directions
- Colourful displays with information to take away.
- Create a relaxed, informal environment where people feel able to share experiences
- Opportunities to engage and provide feedback

But what did the public think?



The Feedback Wall

“It was exciting to attend an event that combines perspectives on depression from people with personal experience, clinicians, and researchers. This is really unusual in my experience.”

“Wonderful, relaxed atmosphere”

“a rare opportunity to converse with many of the Researchers from the University”

“...wonderful to come somewhere where depression is spoken about openly and you know that everyone understands the experience you have been through”



“Really nice atmosphere of safety, learning and networking.”

“Equally important and valuable was hearing from people who live with depression and how their involvement with research projects like the Lived Experience Group has significantly changed their lives”.

Depression puzzle heralded as success!

The venue was filled to capacity with up to 100 people enjoying the event. Five people asked to join the Lived Experience Group which provides a public voice in the research and other work of the Mood Disorders Centre. The organisers were delighted... “We have shown that lay people can organise, fund and facilitate an open day which introduces members of the public to health services research in an accessible way. We hope that our Lived Experience Group and other lay groups will run this sort of event in the future”



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