



Respect Costs Nothing – Aroha Ki Te Tangata

Simple Tips on Promoting, Protecting and Improving the lives of people in Christchurch who Experience Mental Illness

What we can do to create an inclusive city

1. **How can we ensure our own organisation's policies and programmes have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of those with mental illness?** (*Healthy Christchurch Protocol 6*):

For our employees – An appropriate job benefits everyone's mental health

- Look beyond the labels. Anyone can be affected by mental illness; a diagnosis is no indicator of people's skills and abilities.
- Be familiar with the Human Rights Act; discrimination is prohibited on the grounds of disability, including mental illness.
- Remember that people who have been mentally unwell have often lost a great deal of self-confidence. They may underestimate their abilities and need reminding of them.
- Ask individuals about any assistance they might need.
- Provide a good induction including contacts in the organisation to go to when help is needed. Consider a mentoring or buddying system
- Ensure regular supervision and feedback on performance and needs.
- Everybody makes mistakes. Automatically attributing errors / issues to mental illness is unfair.
- The whole workplace will benefit from reduced stress. Look at what might be stress provoking practices, e.g. light, noise, technology, office layout.
- Make use of flexible work practices to get the best out of all staff.
- Seek input from people with mental illness to help change the organisational culture, where necessary.
- If more help is needed, there are many organisations that can offer additional support to people in the workplace with experience of mental illness.*

For our customers or clients

- A friendly, welcoming manner can be very reassuring to someone with a mental illness, e.g. if they are sitting, sit also.
- Ask individuals what they need.
- Ensure your organisation is free of all violence and intimidation, e.g. sexual harassment, racism, bullying etc
- Think about your reception area – what does it communicate to clients? Barriers can be very intimidating and suggest mistrust

*See www.mentalhealth.org.nz or www.cph.co.nz for more information

2. As individuals we can make a difference outside our organisations:

- Use respectful language – what would we be happy to hear ourselves?
- Ask ‘how would I want to be treated?’
- Mental illness is common. Whether or not we realise it, we will already know people who experience it.
- Avoid making assumptions about the impact of another person’s diagnosis, everybody is different and has different needs and strengths.
- Even if people seem different, we can take a chance to get to know them, e.g. say ‘hello’ or be open to sitting beside them.
- ‘Labels are a mask life wears’ – being taken in by, or perpetuating stereotypes can limit our friendships and experiences.
- Celebrate difference ‘Mad, so what?’ Many people have made significant contributions despite, or even because of, their illness. Do you know who they are? Find out more about it.
- Learn more about mental illness – talk to people about their experience.
- Talk openly about mental illness – it is common and you may liberate others to feel comfortable talking about it too.
- Complain about unbalanced media reporting and television imagery around mental illness.

3. Healthy Christchurch signatories are creating a healthy city which values and includes all its citizens – some ‘city-oriented’ suggestions:

- Try to be inclusive and where necessary, act to counter all forms of discrimination.
- Support means of spiritual expression. Value people’s search for meaning, purpose and a spiritual framework in their lives. There is an important correlation with mental wellbeing.
- Encourage physically active lifestyles, healthy eating, access to the outdoors Physical activity has been shown to reduce depression.
- Support initiatives to reduce of access to addictive substances and activities encouraging addiction (e.g. gambling) and that help those impacted by them.
- Encourage peaceful relationships, e.g. on the sports field, in homes, in public forums, at schools, workplaces, clubs and in public places.
- Welcome the organisations and facilities that support people with experience of mental illness, especially when they are in our neighbourhood.
- Isolation and poverty are ‘the big factors’ associated with mental illness. How is the city working to reduce these? E.g.
 - a. Does our public policy encourage social equity?
 - b. How does urban / suburban design encourage social contact?
 - c. How does the city support its youngest members? Good early life experiences can be a protective factor in challenges to mental wellbeing.
 - d. How available are opportunities for life-long learning? Learning not only enhances people’s skills, but also improves a person’s confidence in contributing to the community around them. How accessible is learning for people having difficulties with their mental wellbeing?
 - e. How available is access to green open spaces?

If this list seems daunting, remember everything we do counts! Every interaction with those we meet can help build or diminish the mental well being of everyone involved.