What *works* in East Lothian?

East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian, Jobcentre Plus, and third sector partners have been looking at how services can support people with mental health issues to access volunteering, education and employment. CAPS have been gathering the views of people on what they think the gaps are and what needs to be done.

Volunteering

Employment

Education

CAPS

independent
advocacy

CAPS
independent advocacy

What is *CAPS*?

CAPS is an **independent advocacy organisation** for people who **have used mental health services** or identify with having mental health issues.

CAPS **works with people** as individuals or as members of a group to **set their own agenda**, to find a **stronger voice**, **to get their point across**, and **influence decisions** which affect their lives.

CAPS provides individual and collective advocacy in **Midlothian and East Lothian**. CAPS also have several **Lothian-wide** experience-led projects.

Individual Advocacy is about working **alongside a person** to help them **express their views** and have more **influence** over **decisions** being made about their lives.

Collective Advocacy is about **groups** of individuals with a **common cause** who come together to **raise awareness**, **campaign** and **influence** service planning and provision.

CAPS is an **Independent Advocacy** organisation.
This means that it:
- Puts the people who use advocacy first
- Is accountable
- Is as free as it can be from conflicts of interest
- Is accessible

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Contents

Background….

East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian and 3rd sector partners established a steering group in late 2014 to look at services and opportunities for people with mental health issues to access volunteering, education and employment.

An event was organised that took place in April 2015 with some of the aims being:

- Mapping services already available in the region
- Identify gaps in services
- Look at how to best fill these gaps
- Sharing information

The event was attended by around 80 people from a range of backgrounds. These included health practitioners, local authority colleagues, employment specialists, 3rd sector and voluntary organisations. There were also peer support workers and people who identified as having mental health issues.

Throughout the day there were workshops from several different agencies, including housing, 3rd sector support organisations, peer workers and colleges.

There were many opportunities to share knowledge and identify how services could support people further.

Feedback from this event led the steering group to consider what the next steps should be in order to improve services:

- Developing an East Lothian network for services supporting those into employment, to promote effective collaborative ways of working.
- Continue to work with people to find out about gaps in services, and what would be useful to support them into volunteering, education and employment.
- Consultation with employers in East Lothian to find out what they might need support with.
- Plan another East Lothian Mental Health and Employment Event

What's happened since the event…

Since this event CAPS has:

- Facilitated 2 open day events to gather people's views independently on this subject.

- Conducted an online survey asking questions about what's important to them on this topic.

- Visited established groups to gather views of people who access mental health services.

The results of the online survey and what people told us in person on the open days and group visits are shown in the rest of this report.

The steering group has continued to meet regularly and is currently planning another event for September 2016.

CAPS will facilitate a group of people who attended the last event to be involved in the organisation of this event.

Online survey

Questions asked:

How important is it to you that help is available in East Lothian to support people with mental health issues to engage in volunteering, education or employment?

Do you know that help is available through services in East Lothian?

How could information about these services be more widely publicised?

What do you think is the most challenging part of returning to volunteering, education or employment that you might need help with?

What would make it easier to get that help?

100% of people agreed that it is important to have help available in East Lothian.

80% of people were already aware that help is available, 20% were not.

People said that advertising in GP surgeries would be good to increase publicity of services. Posters and stalls along with increased social media presence were thought to be important. The idea of targeting specific groups, i.e. bipolar groups, substance use groups etc was put forward as a good idea and also publicity in job centres.
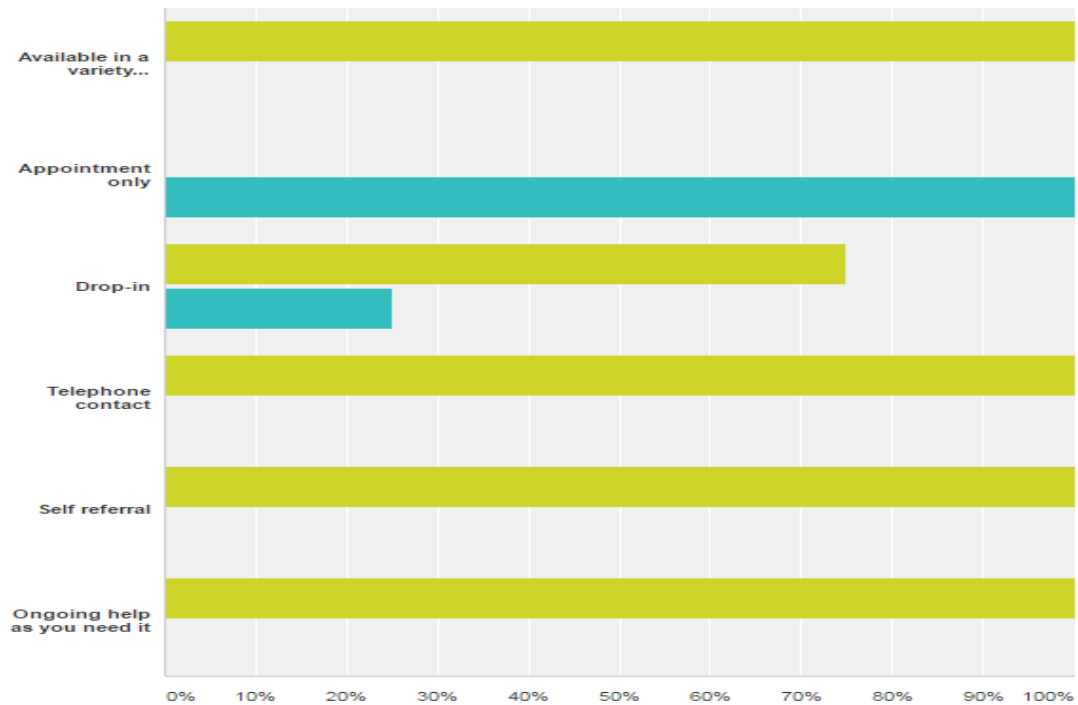
Things that people identified as the most challenging parts of returning to volunteering, education or employment were;

! Lack of confidence

! Finance and benefits

! Criminal records and employers opinions on this

! Self stigma

! Age

Things that would make it easier for people;
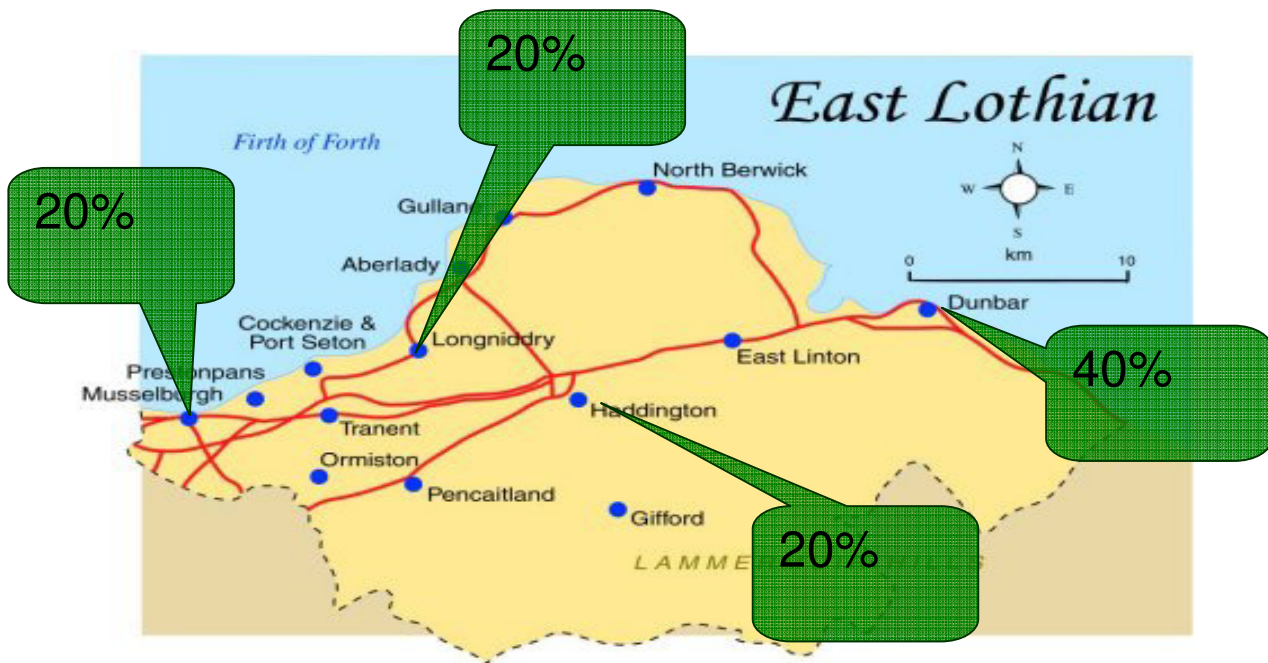
Green = Yes
Blue = No

Other things that people wrote in the survey were;

"site specific help and on the job support."

"employment is a crucial part of my wellbeing contributing to others and working towards joint goals is a positive feature of my life."

Who answered the survey?

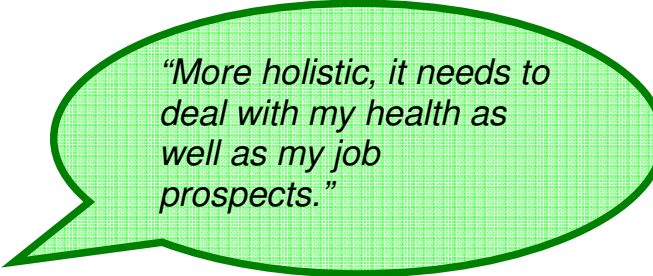80% of those who responded to the online survey were male and 20% female.

The age range of people that completed the online survey was split 20% between 18 and 25, 40% between 26 and 40 & 40% between 41 & 65.

Open events:

One of the most important themes at the open day was the importance of communication and a joined up attitude between services.

Other things that were highlighted included peer elements to support and continuing support throughout a person's journey.

People spoke about the need for help to be holistic, to take into account all elements of a person, including their physical health and life circumstances, i.e. children, location etc.
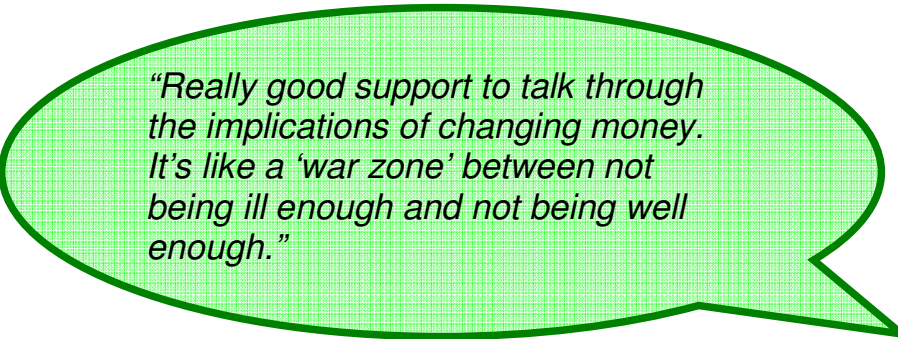
"More holistic, it needs to deal with my health as well as my job prospects."

Disclosure to employers about people's mental health issues was an important factor in what help could be offered, this was something that is very difficult for people, knowing what to say and when.

"Support with issues around telling new people about what your mental health issues actually mean!"

Issues around money and benefits were important to people. Finding out the implications on personal finance was an area that people would appreciate help with.

"Really good support to talk through the implications of changing money. It's like a 'war zone' between not being ill enough and not being well enough."

Attitudes towards mental health are still experienced as being very poor and knowing the culture of an environment people are going into was an important factor for people's confidence.

> "Perception and misunderstanding of mental health is a huge barrier."

Something people felt was very important to them was, knowing that employers were supportive *before* they joined an organisation. The idea that a point of reference, possibly a website, that employers could sign up to letting people know that they were 'mental health friendly' was something people thought could be a really useful tool.

Group visits:

Along with the open days CAPS visited specific groups in East Lothian to gather views from people who identify as having mental health issues:

SO...

firststep community project

Anxiety Support Group
Dunbar and East Lothian

From these groups several common themes emerged;

Benefits/Financial support:

> "the opportunity to go back on benefits if it didn't work out."

> "There needs to be more opportunity to return to benefits easily."

> "REAL financial support – options for housing etc."

● Disclosure:

> *Fear of the implications of being in work again "What happens next?*

> *"Disclosed and was then managed out of my job"*

> *"What do I put on an application?"*

> *"tasters would be good – going along to work places before taking a job."*

● Readjustment:

> *"Having a boss when I am used to having to manage all my decisions would be difficult."*

> *"flexibility would be needed – sleep is an issue for me."*

> *"My personality disorder needs a lot of time for appointments. I don't know how I would fit that in."*

● Expectations:

People spoke about how their experience of employer's expectations of them were made very clear, but that their expectations of employers were not taken as seriously. People felt that it was difficult to know how to express what requirements they had in jobs.

🟢 Confidence:

Confidence was brought up several times as a barrier to returning to both education and employment. People spoke about having lost confidence after bad experiences in the past, as well as feelings that they would not be accepted in any future situations.

🟢 Discrimination:

There was a lot of discussion around how people still felt discriminated against. Some people had very negative experiences of trying to apply for courses at college where their mental health had been cited as a reason why they would not be able to deal with the course.

> *"Having being sectioned….going back to nursing at college they were really unhelpful, saying that my mental health was a factor."*

🟢 Holistic approach:

A lot of people talked about their own mental health not being the only or in fact the biggest thing in their life. Employers need to look at the whole person.

> *"I have full time caring responsibility for my husband and 3 children. The pressure is more about NOT working."*

> *"Physical symptoms mean that it makes it harder to access services….which services would be best for me?"*

The idea of a mental health friendly employer website was discussed again and many people thought that it would be helpful. A site like this would be a good chance for employers to talk about what kind of attitude was encouraged amongst staff.

People also thought that it would be a good place to advertise other services that could support people with aspects of returning to work covering all subjects from form filling to housing support, benefits and childcare as well as local support groups.

Other things that came up in the discussion that were relevant to the topic were;

Employment rights:

Some people said it would be useful to have advice on what rights they have in employment and how they can use them.

Education:

There was a lot of discussion about education for employers around what mental health issues actually mean. Several people spoke about the fact that there needs to be work that goes along with any services for people that does awareness raising throughout East Lothian to employers.

From face to face contact 29 people contributed. 90% of these were female & 10% were male.

Summary

There are several common themes that people highlighted would be important for any service to include when supporting return to volunteering, education and employment.

Confidence

People spoke about previous negative experience with work and college that impacted on how easy it would be to return to another similar situation. They said they would need support and reassurance to increase their confidence before returning to a similar situation.

Discrimination and stigma

Peoples experience was that stigma of people with mental health issues was still very high and that knowing a potential employer's attitude would be an important factor when returning to volunteering, education or employment

Benefits and financial implications

People were very concerned about how benefits are designed if they returned to work. They said they would need support to look at financial options that meant they had security.

Employer's attitude and knowledge

There were real concerns over employer's knowledge of mental health and the attitudes of colleagues within the workplace. People said they would appreciate a resource that allowed them to check this out before taking a position.

Flexibility and support

Access to ongoing support from services once they were in a job or college course would be helpful. Flexibility that was agreed between them and an employer would be an important factor.

Disclosure

Knowing what to tell people about their mental health issues was a key factor for people and good practical support on this topic was important to people.

What happens next?

CAPS will make this report available to the steering group that is working on this subject.

CAPS will then provide copies of this report to the people that contributed to the content.

CAPS will continue to keep people up to date with developments.

Acknowledgements

CAPS would like to thank everybody that took part in the survey and to those who contributed through group discussions.

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