

## Psychology in the Real World: Understanding Ourselves and Others

Following on from the positive feedback about the original 10-week course run in the CHEC café, a second course was run in Autumn 2003. Eleven people completed the second course, with several others coming to just a few of the sessions.

On a scale of 0 (poor) – 10 (excellent), 11 participants rated the course overall at an average of 9.

Individual sessions received the following ratings:

1. Introductions and first meeting. What is psychology? **8**
2. Why are we so afraid of becoming “mentally ill” I? **8**
3. Why are we so afraid of becoming “mentally ill” II? **7**
4. What makes us depressed? **8**
5. Why are we so troubled by anger? **8**
6. In what ways do childhood experiences stay with us? **9**
7. How come so many people are taking psychiatric and other drugs? **9**
8. How can we help and hinder children’s psychological development? **8**
9. What makes us feel insecure and what helps us feel safe? **9**
10. What is it like to be listened to? What is it like when things come to an end? General feedback and certification. **10**

Written feedback about the course revealed that participants liked:

*Hearing and learning from other’s stories and experiences (five participants made similar comments to this).*

*Sharing experiences and exchanging ideas and views.*

*Being treated with respect and not patronised. Being accepted for who I am and not being judged.*

*The bravery to disclose things, the openness people had with each other and the support from course members.*

*The learning from each other including how others cope with things.*

*The relaxed environment. The informality.*

*The sense of fun. The drinks and tables.*

*The stimulating content of the sessions and thoughtful construction and design of the course.*

*The interesting discussions that led to self-disclosure that brought the group close together.*

*People giving me positive feedback and helping me to find out more information about things that interest me.*

*Learning more about myself.*

*The insights gained into psychology. The handouts.*

*Meeting new people and making friends.*

Things people did not like about the course were:

*The room – it felt like we were on display. The lighting in the room. The room décor.*

*The noise. The traffic.*

*We sometimes wandered off the subject quite a lot during group discussions.*

*Women outnumbered the men.*

*Nothing after I overcame my nervousness about talking in a group.*

*One and a half hours was not long enough.*

All participants said that they would recommend the course to a friend and would like to go on a similar course at CHEC in the future.

Participants' recommendations for future courses of this type were:

*More of the same. A follow-up course.*

*An exploration of us, our world and what makes it work and not work.*

*Longer sessions – two hours for full discussion.*

*20 weeks rather than 10.*

*Biscuits.*

*A greater mix of men and women. A greater range of age.*

*Not in the café as the noise and disturbance from traffic and children is very off-putting.*

My own thoughts correspond very closely with those expressed above. Personally I like the idea of something called 'psychology in the real world' being held in a café, but, given the personal nature of many of the things people brought to the discussions, the training room may be a better venue. The courses have been two of the most enjoyable things I have been involved in during my 8 years working in Telford. CHEC is a great venue – it really helps that it is separate from often inappropriate and stigmatising mental health venues. People on the course sign up for other courses and get involved in their local community in ways that people attending something at the CMHT or other mental health services rarely do. The lack of suffocating policies, rules, and monitoring of people who attend frees me and the participants up to explore complex and sometimes personal issues in ways that they clearly find both stimulating and helpful. People come to do a course but clearly get many things they might get from, for example, a therapy group. I believe that by having it as a course these things happen even more powerfully (for example, people do not come for treatment or cure, but to learn, but take away many more things than pure knowledge). I think it is vital that CHEC keeps an independence from Health Trusts and Social Services otherwise it will lose the informality and friendliness that characterises the place and makes it so successful. Brenda, Caroline and Dave are great members of staff and their friendly encouragement and help were vital in making the courses so successful, as was the crèche which enabled several single mothers to attend.

Guy Holmes.