

Overview - Onwards and Upwards!

The Crazy Escape Bed Push has finished for 2007 and the Crazy Escape Team has been released into the community! Leaving a path of love, respect and understanding (plus pink feathers!) in our wake, we turned confusion into clarity (and sometimes visa versa!) and frowns into smiles over 60 Miles of Madness! The Crazy Escape Bed pushes have had a fantastic reception en route. Thanks to the wide media coverage we were serenaded by horns, cheers and waves all the way (you can view the coverage we were given on the Links page). It was great to generate positive media coverage of mental health issues and Madness. Much of the public perception of mental health issues and Madness* is created from demonising and stigmatising reporting by the press. Headlines often recount the horrors of the 'Schizo' or 'Maniac', and create a culture of fear in society around mental health. In fact, the highest risk group for committing violent offences are young men under the affect of alcohol, a position which is widely accepted in society - encouraged even! The stigma given to Madness is often internalised, crushing the hope of those in distress through the guilt and shame associated with these fictional stereotypes. Our reports gave a chance to air the true position of Madness and the terrible poverty of mental health 'care'. Mental health is the UK's biggest social problem. Unfortunately, a terrorist plot foiled our plans for national coverage in 2006 on Channel 5 and Sky News. Ironically, The War Against Terror (TWAT) also interrupted 2005's Crazy Escape after the 7/7 incidents in London. Call us paranoid... ha ha!

One of the most striking aspects of the Crazy Escape was the way we truly changed these perceptions. In fact, nearly everyone we met identified with the cause - bemused suspicion was never miles away, but far, far more often than not it was overcome through understanding and explanation. The Crazy Escape needs explanation, as many people know so little about the wider picture of mental health care. The vast majority had no idea that forced drugging and ECT (Electro Convulsive Therapy) is still carried out in every psychiatric hospital in the UK. We related to: the increasing use of Ritalin in children; the lack of talking treatments available; the lack of activities in hospital; stigma; being 'fobbed off' with medication and over-medicated; the lack of compassion; the unavailability of information for self-help; the need for holistic treatments; the neglect of dementia care for the elderly; the importance of acceptance ...the list goes on...and on! The beauty of individuality meant we struck a chord with many.

This widespread, sanctioned abuse over centuries and continents in the name of psychiatry can form the most important civil rights movements today. We all have the right to choice, compassion and acceptance - not medicalisation, coercion and control. In the words of the anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, the power of our solidarity can give us the freedom we all deserve: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed."

As we marched along, we met many people who opened up about harmful experiences of psychiatry, either by themselves or by their loved ones. ALL had experience of the over-reliance on potentially damaging medication and had very little access to choice or control in their 'care'. Even though one in four people are affected by mental health issues, the number during our journey was probably far higher. The true state of the UK's mental health is certainly unspoken - it is denied by the very admission of Madness. It seemed sometimes that we were a voice for those who are silenced by the stigma and isolation Madness provokes. We certainly made up for the silence - there was no way of ignoring us! It was great to have the opportunity to raise awareness and give a positive and empowering vibe along the way.

Within The Crazy Escape Team there is an amazing companionship which will carry onwards and upwards. Even as our blisters are healing, we are talking of The Crazy Escape 2007! Are we mad? YES, darn it! So....

If you want to take part in a CRAZY ESCAPE in the summer of 2008 contact us via the website!Does your local psychiatric hospital need a reminder to treat its guests with dignity and respect !!?

* We use the word 'Madness' as an term of empowerment, reclaiming it from the hurtful and stigmatising usage in the past. Use it in your own way - we don't wish to label!