

# SOUTH CAMBS USERS FORUM

The voice for users and ex-users of mental health services in South Cambridgeshire

Tim Bryson  
Elizabeth House  
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13<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Dear Tim Bryson,

I am writing to you on behalf of South Cambs Users Forum regarding the Trust's Guidelines for the payment of service users and carers (copy enclosed).

As far as we are aware, the current guidelines for the payment of service users and carers were implemented in May 2004 and they have not been reviewed, although they were due for review in April 2005.

We know that the Trust is committed to involving service users and carers in the monitoring and development of its services because it regularly carries out consultation. However, in view of the existing service user and carer payment guidelines, we question how committed the Trust is to truly valuing those service users and carers who get involved.

To give an example, we refer back to the Care Programme Approach Review Workshops that were held on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of July last year. To our knowledge, four local service users with a high level of knowledge and expertise attended these workshops and a good deal of useful work was achieved. Three of these service users were in employment and were therefore supported by their employers to attend. The fourth service user was offered just £20 per day.

Another example is that last year Lifecraft was approached by a Trust employee for assistance in finding a service user who could help conduct a survey on some of the wards. The work involved was going to take around three hours, including travel time. The initial payment offered was £10. Lifecraft explained that it was not willing to ask one of its members to do 3 hours work for £10 and negotiated £20 instead.

Service users and carers contribute a great deal of time and expertise to help improve and develop the Trust's services. We believe that to demonstrate that this contribution is truly valued the Trust should be offering fair payment for people's time and expertise. Instead, small token payments of £10 and £20 are handed out, equating to an hourly payment of around £3 when the current national minimum wage is £5.52.

The Department of Health have published 'Reward and Recognition' - a guide for service providers, service users and carers that cover the principles and practice of service user

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The voice for users and ex-users of mental health services in South Cambridgeshire payment (revised August 2006). In this guide it states that, "The National Minimum Wage applies to people who are paid for their involvement. Therefore, service providers are advised that rates of pay should comply with the National Minimum Wage Act." (Section 6).

It also states in this guide that 'cash gifts in appreciation', such as the Trust's existing token payments of £10 and £20 that we have already referred to, cannot be given as payment for work (Section 7) but only as a voluntary gift for brief one-off activity.

Furthermore CSIP and NIMHE have published 'Valuing Involvement – Payment and Reimbursement Policy Guidance' (August 2007). It recommends the recognition of nine different types of levels of service user involvement, the lowest being 'participation in working groups, committees, recruitment panels etc.' which should have a payment range from £5.52 to £15 per hour.

We fully appreciate the complexities involved when making payments to individuals in receipt of state benefit. Most cannot earn over £20 a week and others have a much higher threshold of permitted earnings but usually only for the duration of 52 weeks. Yet, as is already indicated in the Trust's existing guidelines for the payment of service users and carers, it is ultimately down to the individual to take responsibility for the amount he/she receives.

We want to see payment for activity that fairly values the time and expertise of each individual contribution and complies with the National Minimum Wage Act. The individuals themselves can then make a decision as to whether they wish to work only in a voluntary capacity, accept a smaller amount of money to fit within the threshold of their permitted earnings, or to break up their payment and receive it over a number of weeks so as to stay within this threshold.

We are therefore calling upon the Trust to make it an urgent priority to review their guidelines for the payment of service users and carers by consulting with user and carer groups like our own.

Yours sincerely,

**Amanda Price**

Lifecraft Campaigns Officer and SCUF Facilitator