

Media release

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Getting people with mental health problems back to work can cut £18 billion cost

Finding ways to get people with mental health problems back to work is one of the keys to cutting the huge cost to society of mental illness, according to a new report out today.

The report on adults with mental health problems, *Don't mind me**, is published by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), an independent, non-profit making organisation which advises donors on how to give more effectively to charities.

There are between 900,000 and 1.8 million adults in the UK who experience a severe mental illness in the course of a year. Many end up in hospital or have to take time off sick, which can leave them jobless, homeless, in debt and socially isolated. Being without a job and a home can trigger further distress and lead to a downward spiral of poor mental health. Besides the human cost, there is also a substantial cost to the taxpayer. The Government spent £18 billion in England on healthcare and benefits for people with mental ill health in 2002/2003, the last year for which the figures are available.

NPC says both the human cost and cost to the taxpayer could be significantly cut if treatment focused more on helping people back into work, paid or unpaid, as work is good for mental health. The report highlights a number of ways of doing this, ranging from getting people involved in gardening to other types of paid, part-time or volunteer work. NPC says that work projects can cut hospital stays for people with mental illness by up to 70%.

Martin Brookes, head of research, said: "Getting people with mental health problems back to work not only makes them happier and healthier but also keeps them out of hospital. This could make a big dent in the £8.23 billion cost of health services. Where people are able to go back into full-time employment, there will also be savings on the £10 billion benefits bill."

Celebrity gardening guru Monty Don, who has suffered from mental illness, is a supporter of charities that use gardening work as a therapy. He said: "Through my own experience of depression, I found that gardening has significantly helped in the healing process. And I powerfully believe it can do the same for others who suffer any kind of mental illness."

One of the advantages of gardening as a therapy is that it is low cost in comparison to clinical services. For example, NPC says that Evergreen, a horticultural project run by the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), potentially saves the state over £2,000 per patient per year, because it

helps prevent participants from falling into crisis and being admitted into an expensive psychiatric ward.



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One charity that NPC recommends, Mosaic Clubhouse in Lambeth, gives people experience of employment by getting them involved in running the club and managing its vegetable patch. Lambeth has psychosis rates that are six times the national average and uses more high-security psychiatric beds than anywhere else in England, earning it the title of “psychotic capital of Europe.” Mosaic also offers IT training, careers advice, and supported work placements and has been successful at integrating people with mental health problems back into the work force full time. Another charity, First Step, has been contracted by local government to maintain green spaces in Lambeth, and 7% of its participants move off benefits into formal employment each year.

Hackney is an area of high unemployment where hospital admissions due to schizophrenia are three times the national average. Core Arts is based there, and offers training in art, music and horticulture, which can lead to further education and employment. Participants have successfully secured jobs in horticulture after Core Arts gave them the skills and encouragement.

The charities recommended in NPC’s report demonstrate an impact not only on the lives of their own participants, but also at local and national levels in changing the way we treat people with mental health problems. Finding a working solution for people with mental health problems pays off both socially and fiscally.

**Don't mind me*, along with some examples of recommended charities, can be downloaded free of charge from www.philanthropycapital.org. Copies can also be ordered from Central Books, telephone 0845 458 9910.

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1. New Philanthropy Capital advises all types of donors on how to give more effectively. It identifies examples of charities with highly effective approaches to tackling problems in the sector. By recommending these charities to potential donors, NPC aims to increase the quantity and quality of resources available to the charitable sector.
2. NPC focuses on human welfare, including problems in communities and families, education, and health and disability in the UK. NPC has published research on sectors ranging from cancer to older people, and domestic violence to special educational needs.
3. NPC develops a detailed understanding of social problems by talking to policy-makers, practitioners, academics and other experts. Its charity recommendations are arrived at after visiting and analysing charities across the sector. Assessments are made of the achievements, the need for additional funding, the financial structure and fundraising potential, as well as the risks.
4. NPC uses its research and experience to help donors ensure they have high impact and a rewarding experience. This can involve developing a tailored giving strategy to meet specific goals, selecting which charities to support and reporting on impact. Donors can also access NPC's research and some of its recommendations at no cost on NPC's website.