Carers Education Course
Group Evaluation

Falkirk & District
Association for Mental Health

April – June 2017

Summary of Evaluation
As with previous courses three different methods were used for evaluation: Evaluation Tree, Final Evaluation and the impact on participants Behaviour/Knowledge/Attitudes with regard to their role as carers.

During the first session of the course, participants were asked to place themselves on the Evaluation Tree and provide comments about how they feel and why they have placed themselves at that point. Then, once the course was completed, participants were asked to revisit the Evaluation Tree and once more place themselves upon the tree and provide comments about how they felt after completing the course and why they placed themselves at that point.

Participants were also asked in the final session to complete an evaluation form which asked them to consider how useful aspects of the course have been, how well presented the course has been and if they feel any changes need to be made.

The final Behaviour/Knowledge/Attitudes sheet was handed out on the second last session and participants were asked to consider how their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours have changed (if at all) since completing the course and what, if any, has been most and least helpful about the course.

The course began with 13 interested participants, 1 person did not attend, and 1 person managed two sessions, but did not attend subsequent ones. Over the 7 weeks 11 people attended and there averaged 10 attendees and 9 participant's questionnaires are included in the evaluation summary.
The Evaluation Tree

$ - Indicates where participants felt they were prior to starting the Education Course.
@ - Indicates where participants felt they were after completing the Education Course
Before and after comments from participants:

($- start, @ - end)

$ “Hanging on by my fingertips”
@ “Feel more supported, greater understanding, less alone”

$ “Trying to understand, trying to be positive and doing something by reading, finding information”
@ “Still climbing the tree, the course has given me a better understanding of how to handle things better, thought provoking and been supported now”

$ “Hanging on - - just! Could be anywhere on the tree at any given time and only figure not represented is person walking away”
@ “Almost there but now understanding a little better, a progress & still in the learning & comprehension stage”

$ “Hanging in there but hitting head of a brick wall”
@ “Feeling stronger but still need some supports”

$ “Kind of hiding & not sure what to do”
@ “Still a long way to go nut now feel supported and safer”

$ “Falling out the tree and feeling pretty down about stuff”
@ “Feeling happier, confident, content and well”

$ “Burying head in the sand”
@ “Massive change, more understanding, sympathy, tolerance and awareness”

$ “On the ground & lost”
@ “Half way up and feeling less alone and supported”

$ “Hanging on just now but waiting for the crash because I see it coming”
@ “Crashed and knew this was coming”

Final Evaluation

8 evaluation forms were returned and have been summarised.
What has been useful?

The participants were asked to rate how useful or relevant the course topics have been (1 = no use, 2=not particularly useful, 3=useful, 4=relevant, 5=very relevant).

1. How relevant to your needs were the sessions? 100% very relevant.

2. What does mental health mean to you? 12.5% relevant
87.5% very relevant

3. Recognising and managing stress? 28.57% relevant
71.43% very relevant

4. Dealing with feelings of loss and change? 50% relevant
50% very relevant

5. Anger? 12.5% useful
50% relevant
37.5% very relevant

6. Coping Skills? 25% relevant
75% very relevant

7. Relapse? 25% useful
75% very relevant

8. Relaxation? 50% useful
50% very relevant

9. Presentation of sessions? 100% very relevant

Thoughts and Feelings about the course

Have there been changes in your Knowledge since starting the course?

1) “I've learned something every week. I can now take a pause when 'situations' are about to happen”
2) “Mental health covers a huge spectrum. Being more aware of my own feelings & reactions, what good mental health looks like”
3) “There is no magic wand to help, and it will take time to get over what has happened”
4) “Yes, that I am not alone. My feelings are normal. How to change my feelings/behaviour. How my partner may feel”
5) “I'm starting to understand more about how they can feel & how they can see things different from what is really going on & not much can change their way of thinking at that time”
6) “Yes understanding mental health more and how to deal with things”
7) “A greater understanding of the person I am caring for is feeling and how I may be causing some of the problem by my actions and words”
8) “learning I’m not the only one dealing with issues about stress etc”
9) “I’ve learned I don’t always need to know what to do which helps me feel less guilty”

Have there been changes in your **Attitude** since starting the course?

1) “I think I’ve understood how to reflect and understand how mental health is from other points of view”
2) “I have tried to be less angry because nothing can change the situation”. “The person I care about is in ‘distress’, I must try & not over over-analyze this & their behaviours”.
3) “Understanding the varied issues that come under mental health issues”.
4) “I was very skeptical about the support I could get from a group. I learned that I need to allow others to give me support. I have gained so so much from the support of Neil, Susan and the entire group”.
5) “I’m trying to switch off more, try not to take that he’s speaking to me personally, thinking about myself more and my feelings”.
6) “that anybody can become mentally ill, not to have too much expectations of my daughter”
7) “I have tried to stop and think a bit more before I react to situations and try to calm myself down enough for a rational conversation”
8) “Trying to think before I speak or react getting upset”
9) “I have begun to see how I can influence my relative by changing how I am around them”

What changes in your **Behaviour** have there been since starting the course?

1) “I’ve tried to listen and not try to fix person or sort by talking or trying to solve a problem that isn’t there”
2) “I have probably felt stronger”
3) “Try not to ‘mirror’ the person you are caring for, think how I would want to be responded to/treated, important to keep communicating”
4) “Yes, being more aware of the other person’s needs. I feel much more able to cope with my caring role &situation. I’ve acknowledged feelings/thought to be real (I’ve been in denial). I feel calmer, less alone, more normal”
5) “I’m trying to be more calm, listen more, speak less & step back but still let them know I am there for them”.
6) “Not over-eating as much, joined a slimming club, feeling less angry/stressed”
7) “A calmer reaction to situations arising at home and outside”
8) “Being more understanding towards others but I still feel low and tired”
9) “I am far less reactive and more able to distract myself rather than get angry at the situation”

What was most helpful about coming on the course?

1) “The sharing of experience and hearing other people’s problems and how they cope”.
2) “The support of others”
3) “Talking to other carers in similar situations, sharing experiences & feelings, recognizing stress, take each small thing as a positive, gave me a focus when dealing with this new situation”.

4) “Talking about our problems and there is help out there and we are not alone”.

5) “Being able to talk more open about stuff with people that are not connected to you & your life & listen to others in the group”.

6) “Helping and supporting each other, you’re not alone, learning how to cope better. The Fun helped relax the atmosphere”

7) “Listening to other people on the course—how they cope etc, facilitators suggesting and making me think I need to try to take care of myself”

8) “I found that by coming on the course and seeing my situation and others on the courses situation that mine is not as bad as I thought and that how they act in their situations I might be able to use in mine”

9) “Being around and learning from and about the tools we can use for ourself and for the person we care about”

What did you find least helpful or anything you would change for future courses?

1) “Never attended anything like this before & wasn’t aware of the centre and I would like to see some kind of awareness on social media/face book to highlight the benefits”

2) “Handouts not always relevant eg reactions to grief”.

3) “Course could be longer but I know there are other people out there needing help and support”

Any other comments/suggestions

1) “I wasn’t sure how this journey would turn out but feel it’s like I came during a storm & was taken to where the rainbow ends”

2) “The course brings up a lot of different feelings & emotions, both good and bad. Neil & Susan are very helpful, friendly people who made you more relaxed and open up.”

3) “Over the six weeks the course has run I’ve learned something positive & used to help me understand both how I perceive things & others deal with issues”

4) Both Neil & Susan are very caring & thoughtful trainers and I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to be part of the course”

5) “I wish I had come earlier—before reaching total despair, the course has given me so much support, understanding and no longer feel alone”.

6) “The tree did not have a place/figure that was walking away!”

7) “If there was any future courses or things for my daughter her support worker could take her. The course made me see things in a different light”.

8) “I really enjoyed my sessions in the group. It gave me a lot to think about and gave me more of a positive outlook and ways to help clam me down if I get upset and the organisers were very supportive and funny at times which made for a relaxing session at times”

9) “Talking to others in the same situation and not keep it to myself”
Conclusion

Participants comments suggest that the “meeting, talking and sharing” with others as the most valued part of the course. This is consistent with previous course evaluations.

The evaluation process and discussions produced a very usual response, in that people wanted to continue to meet and have contact with other carers. This particular group wished to have a “last session” so they could come together in a more informal and social setting. From this a number shared contact details and have suggested they will continue to have contact with the center’s services for themselves and if possible for the person they care about.

The course evaluations highlighted the benefits carers gain from the course content, the opportunity to meet other carers, the wish to continue connections with others and the opportunity to develop and influence support networks that work for them.

Perhaps of significance were the frequent comments about people’s lives being changed? I would like to attribute this to the openness and faith in the group process, the participants own courage and curiosity to explore their potential to change, and the supportive group environment.

Both trainers felt this group, from the very start were open and willing to participate and believe this was the driver for the whole group to learn and grow together. The group quickly demonstrated they were willing and able to support each other and nearly all sessions brought some tears as people began to connect with emotions and feelings they had been holding within themselves. Although this was upsetting and challenging for the individuals there was also an expression of relief as well as people reflected on their own situation. As facilitators we are always moved by others experiences, their courage and determination to look at their own situation from a different position with renewed hope for the future.