

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ATTENDED AND THEN HOSTED
BY THE PANEL OF REFERENCE**

AN ENABLED VOICE IN MENTAL HEALTH

Support for exchange and information on equal opportunities for disabled people

The overall aim of this project was to assist service users and carers to gain confidence and feel able to contribute more effectively to, and influence, the planning, commissioning, provision and monitoring of mental health services at a local level.

The project involved 3 countries and 3 significant people, Herta Kuna from Austria, Veroniki Karidi from Greece and Jim Flowerdew from Scotland. These three practitioners had been involved in a previous exercise Helios II and had travelled to several countries including each others. Dr Flowerdew and Herta Kuna took members of the service on these visits on each occasion.

At the very beginning Dr Flowerdew had contacted the Ayrshire Panel of Reference which had at that time been in existence for about one year. Dr Flowerdew indicated that he had received an application form the European Commission's, "Support for exchange and information actions on equal opportunities for disabled people". Dr Flowerdew with the authority of the Panel of Reference contacted his previous European partners in Austria and Greece who signed up to an activity which resulted in a successful funding application for the project called, "An Enabled Voice in Mental Health".

Those involved visited each country and became informed about each others mental health issues. Translators were employed to support the visits and a range of activities were planned. The group visited hospitals; hostels; day centres; after care situations and other support agencies.

As a finale to the visit to Scotland, Greek and Austrian partners were welcomed to a civic reception in Ayr Town Hall hosted by the Provost of Ayr. This reception was also attended by representatives of health and social work departments and local member of the European Parliament, Mr Brian Donohoe.

The Panel of Reference receives some funding from Ayrshire and Arran health Board to assist them to develop their function. The Panel of Reference would like to extend its thanks to south Ayrshire Social Work department for a match of funding contribution of £1000. Thanks also to Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust Clinical Effectiveness Department for its match funding contribution of £3000 and the allocation of match funding of staff time from all three European partners without whom the entire project would not have been possible.

A full report is available and includes personal reactions and an evaluation of the project including examples of the sharing of good practice.

14th March A&A Adult Mental Health Services – Fenwick Hotel.

Helen and Kay attended this review of the Adult Mental Health Services in Ayrshire and Arran. The review is being managed by Ray Wilkes who is the acting Director of the Mind Your Health Service. Ray has been brought in by A&A as a trouble shooter. He stated openly how appalled he was by some of the service as it stands but welcomed the commitment of many of the professionals to move forward.

A cross section of people attended this review day – users of the service as well as professionals and lay people. Ideas were openly shared and a paper will be collated.

Already new posts have been advertised for the new service and Ray was keen to share his optimism regarding the changes. He mentioned the commitment of the Primary Care Trust to improving the mental health service.

16th March Ramada Jarvis Hotel Ayr - The Road to Recovery

Martin and Morag had both attended this conference with workshops. They reported how enjoyable it had been – excellent speakers and really imaginative workshops.

Martin mentioned how one of the speakers had flagged up the total lack of resources for 12-18year olds in A&A and that this age group had to attend Gartnavel if they needed treatment.

The emphasis on the day was how to move forward and Dougie Manchip shared a really good approach on how to move from feeling negative about ‘who I am’ to feeling positive about ‘who I am now’.