Mental Health Service User Focus Groups

Better service through greater understanding

Police are committed to improving their response for Mental Health Service Users (MHSU) and recognise the need to better understand MHSU experience of Police.

“the best interactions with Police are where staff are patient, calm, explain the process…”

To that end a number of Wellington based Mental Health Non-Government Organisations arranged focus groups for MHSU to discuss their experiences – good or bad with Police.

Feedback from these groups has informed the development of new training packages for both recruit and frontline officers, and has also highlighted the importance of having MHSU involved in future thinking around mental health crisis response.

APPLYING THE KNOWLEDGE

We know from listening to mental health service users that the best interactions with police are where staff are patient, calm, explain the process, give one message at a time, ask what would help and empathise with how the person is feeling.

– Assistant Commissioner Dave Cliff

Up and Running

Welcome to the first New Zealand Police Mental Health Team newsletter.

Since starting in October 2013, I have been on a steep learning curve. Mental health service users have taught me a lot about ways we could make things better.

This newsletter is an update from our team, to give our partners and stakeholders an insight into our approach and objectives.

We aim to improve our response to people in mental distress, and to work with stakeholders to improve the interagency response.

I’m proud of our Team who are committed to making a difference and bring a range of skills to the project.

We would like to thank everyone who has helped us in this work, and take the opportunity to wish everybody a safe and happy summer.

– Inspector Sue Douglas

Project Manager: Mental Health Team

The Mental Health Team officially started on 1 July 2014. Assistant Commissioner Dave Cliff, Inspector Sue Douglas, Heather Darroch, Christine Jamieson, and Sergeant Emma Fleming.
Mental Health Week Every Week

Police respond to a growing number of mental health calls for assistance

Assistant Commissioner Dave Cliff

Assistant Commissioner Dave Cliff says October’s focus on mental health awareness was timely as new Police data (see chart below) showed a significant increase in calls from people experiencing mental health issues and threatening or attempting suicide.

“The Police Executive is aware we’re dealing with an increasing number of people in mental distress, and that these interactions are complex and time-consuming, taking on average two to three hours to resolve.”

In response, Dave says, the Mental Health Team at Police National Headquarters is working to identify and resolve issues between agencies in order to improve the overall multi-agency response to people in mental distress.

“In addition to ongoing work with the Ministry of Health to clarify inter-agency roles and responsibilities, and work to understand and reduce demand, the team is partnering other areas of Police to support frontline staff.

“In August 2014, the Royal New Zealand Police College rolled out new mental health training for recruits, and next year Otago University’s leading-edge e-learning packages on mental health will be available for frontline staff.”

“On average, we respond to almost 500 mental health jobs a week.”

“While Police is not the lead agency on mental health, the calm, professional and empathetic way our staff respond to these challenging situations clearly makes a big difference to vulnerable people who are often stressed and frightened.”

– Assistant Commissioner: Dave Cliff

Calls for Police assistance with mentally distressed or suicidal people has been increasing

As the number of interactions mental health service users have with Police has increased, so have the opportunities to improve outcomes for people in mental distress, and their whanau.
Recruit Training

Training led by people with first-hand experience of mental distress is giving recruits at the Royal New Zealand Police College insights and practical tips on how to approach situations.

She says the guards were respectful, but the way they crowded around the man increased his agitation and although he asked everyone to back off, this was ignored. Sue suggested everyone take a step back. When we gave him that space he could see he had a say about what was happening and he relaxed."

With everyone calm we were able to negotiate. “We’re used to resolving incidents quickly,” says Sue. “The training, and feedback from mental health service users, emphasises the need to be calm, respectful and listen, not dominate the situation.

A few extra minutes taken at the beginning of an incident can lead to better outcomes for all.”

“The first thing I did was make eye contact and ask if he was OK.”

Sue says the inter-agency work on the crisis response aims to secure the best outcomes for frontline staff and service users. “I know how large a part of general duties work this area has become - this work is a priority for us.”

– Inspector Sue Douglas Project Manager: Mental Health Team

…and a word from KITES

Kites Trust is delighted to be part of this work with NZ Police. Kites undertakes work as part of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme and it is fantastic to be extending key learnings to NZ Police. The response of recruits has been open and interested, and it has been great to spend time with them because we know that what they do will make a difference.

That NZ Police has initiated engagement with Like Minds shows a fundamental belief in the equal value of every member of our society, regardless of whether their experience is a match for our own. The commitment NZ Police has shown to working with people with experience of mental distress by implementing a national training programme is unique and inspiring.

Recovery is the goal for people with experience of mental distress. By taking active steps to reduce the stigma and discrimination present around this experience the NZ Police gives us all hope that we can work together as a society to make each other’s lives as good as they can be.
Our Partner in Mental Health – Dr Sarah Gordon

In each edition we’ll hear from one of our partners without whom we’d be much the poorer in our work. First up is Dr Sarah Gordon from the University of Otago.

The University of Otago is thrilled to have been contracted by the New Zealand Police to develop a mental health eLearning package to support the Police to recognise, engage and respond to people experiencing mental distress in a way that is understanding, communicative, compassionate and respectful.

“better outcomes for everyone - the person experiencing the distress, the Police, and family/whanau.”

We know from other Policing jurisdictions internationally that taking this type of approach leads to better outcomes for everyone - the person experiencing the distress, the Police and family/whanau.

- Dr Sarah Gordon, PhD, MBHL, LLB, BSc, Research Fellow, University of Otago (Department of Psychological Medicine)

Public Trust and Confidence in Police

78% of the public have “full” or “quite a lot” of trust and confidence in Police.

“The results highlight the good work of our staff who go the extra mile every day to serve their communities, and it’s great to see their commitments recognised through the survey. We also recognise that we can’t take it for granted and will continue to work hard in order to maintain the trust and confidence of New Zealanders.”

- Acting Deputy Commissioner Grant Nicholls

OUR APPROACH

Vulnerable people are at the centre of everything we do.

Working with people and communities affected by mental health issues is part of our job. It may be challenging, but the difference we can make is far greater than the challenge they present.

Valuing Empathy and Diversity

Commissioner adds new value to Police

In September 2014 Police Commissioner Mike Bush announced that Valuing Diversity and Empathy have been formally added to the existing values of Professionalism, Respect, Integrity and Commitment to Māori and Treaty.

“Our values make a clear public statement about the ideals that Police stand for and what guides us in our decision making and the way we interact with the public. So it’s important that they reflect the things that matter to us and to the communities we serve. Empathy is an essential trait in a victim-focused Police service. And Valuing Diversity recognises that New Zealand is made up of many different communities and that we should not only celebrate the things that make us different, we should ensure as many different perspectives as possible are brought to our work”.

– Police Commissioner Mike Bush

Police Commissioner Mike Bush

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