

Take an internationally recognised training approach, add a little bit of social enterprise with a dash of accreditation and hey presto – you have a world first.

Accrediting the Mental Health First Aid (Wales) – innovations in lifelong learning

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Introduction

The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training package is an internationally recognised approach for not only providing mental health first aid. The approach is also intended to tackle stigma and for promoting awareness of mental health across communities. The approach has been delivered in Wales for nearly ten years now but despite its popularity, quite high charges for delivery means the MHFA (Wales) is an option only to those working in organisations or those who can pay. This situation seemed to defeat the original vision and rationale of Mental Health First Aid Australia which aimed for “a community where everyone has the first aid skills to support people with mental health problems” (Mental Health First Aid Foundation, Australia 2015).

Working with Training in Mind (TiM), the University of South Wales and TiM went ahead and challenged this as a widening participation (WP) issue and developed the first ever level four accredited version of the MHFA (Wales).

This newly accredited (5 credit) module, through a bursary offered by UHOVI, offers funded opportunities for local community participants who are living in what are otherwise termed ‘hard-to-reach’ areas, to access the training. Delivered by TiM, the MHFA access to the MHFA (Wales) training remains committed to tackling stigma, discrimination as well as helping to build community resilience – while equally supporting wider knowledge of community widening participation in learning.

Innovation and creativity

The genesis of the accredited MHFA began with university outreach workers, in partnership with Training in Mind (TiM) (a third sector social enterprise that specialises in mental health

and wellbeing training and current MHFA licence holder) recognising that many of the aims of the internationally recognised Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Wales training program aligned closely with the widening participation (WP) agenda. Namely, the training relied on understanding the challenges and barriers of community outreach and working with the 'hardest to reach'. Thus the training program lent itself to becoming accredited as a part of the University of South Wales' (USW) community offer, working with TiM as its delivery partner. This partnership, through an initial pilot study, has now created in Wales the only accredited Higher Education level 4 community partnership module, out of 23 countries delivering the MHFA – it is a world first.

Innovations;

- An Internationally recognised training program which offers another route for WP
- Engages positively with community and third sector recognising and sharing a fit-for-purpose and relevant training program
- Contributes to lifelong learning through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or as a stepping stone to further study
- Enables community MHFA (Wales) instructors to attain university recognition as higher level delivery partners

Creativity is seen in;

- Modifications to assessment, enrolment and delivery approaches between partners
- Creation of a five credit module which maps with an established training model
- Plans for the development of a certificate in mental health studies comprising of community based training.
- A business model which provides mutual benefit to both Higher Education provider and partner with regards to sharing of knowledge, research and resources

Sustainability

TiM and the USW are continuing to work towards a wider rollout of the MHFA (Wales) in April 2017. A research and evaluation model for evidencing impact is also being developed alongside which aims to increase numbers of engagement across the FE and HE sectors with.

In addition, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) are able to fund credits for the part-time delivery of the module over an initial two-year period, which allows time for an enhanced and sustainable model to be developed.

Impact (from pilot study Nov 15/June16)

- 231 participants have engaged
- 231 have achieved a level 4 accredited qualification
- 20 community tutors have been/will become USW employees to deliver the training

Delivery has included:

- A local prison
- Organisations across the social housing sector
- Local community groups
- Teachers
- Social Workers
- USW student population

The role of the accredited MHFA (Wales) is also recognised within the health professions and as such is seen to increase understanding of wellbeing and health literacy. We anticipate many more participants over the period of two years.

Transferability

The model currently under development will have a two-year phased introduction which will allow both TiM and the USW to assess and develop a transferable approach for many other opportunities with local, regional and international scope. There is current interest from universities in Wales and in England to replicate the model.

Summary

This is an exciting opportunity to use existing training, which has an international reputation, as a widening participation tool. Longer term plans include recognising other training opportunities and how these might fit within the same framework.