

## Appendix 3a

### Letter sent to specialist teachers

School Address

October 10<sup>th</sup> 2005

Dear

I am currently undertaking a research project, as part of my EdD, which looks into the issues around young people making the transition from education within the mental health sector back into mainstream education within the community. I believe that the only way to improve this very difficult time for young people is through sharing ideas and listening to the views and stories of all concerned.

The initial part of my research is looking into the language used around the issue of mental health. I would really appreciate it if you would spend a few minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire, which has been passed by the University of Hertfordshire Ethics Committee as appropriate. This will give me essential feedback in order to start developing a picture, of a yet uncompleted story, of the transition process.

I would ask that you attempt to only represent yourself, through your own experiences and beliefs, in answering the following questions. I shall, in the reporting of my findings, observe full anonymity of all respondents.

I would also be grateful if you could indicate, at the end of the questionnaire, as to whether you or your institution would be interested in participating further in this work.

Please return in the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope by Friday October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you for giving your time.

Yours sincerely

Tricia Waples  
Pastoral manager

## Appendix 3b

### Questionnaire employed with specialist teachers

Please attempt to only represent yourself, through your own experiences and beliefs, in answering the following questions.

Please give words or phrases that:

1. you think pupils in a mainstream school might use to describe a young person experiencing mental health problems.
2. you think a young person experiencing mental health problems might use to describe themselves.
3. you think mainstream teachers might use to describe a young person experiencing mental health problems.
4. you might use, to another professional, to describe a young person experiencing mental health problems.
5. Have you ever experienced language as an issue in any aspects (not just during the transition process) of your work with young people with mental health problems? If so please would you indicate as to the nature of the issue(s) and how you may have dealt or are dealing with it. All comments will remain strictly anonymous.

If you are interested in participating further in my research please fill in sufficient of the following to allow me to contact you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thankyou

Tricia Waples

## Appendix 3c

### Responses to question 5

**Have you ever experienced language as an issue in any aspects (not just during the transition process) of your work with young people with mental health problems? If so please indicate as to the nature of the issue(s) and how you may have dealt or are dealing with them.**

<p>Many outsiders coming to school expect our pupils to have learning difficulties, behavioural problems (violence), and physical problems or be very different to “normal” mainstream pupils. It makes labelling/describing in our institution difficult.</p>
<p>Care and sensitivity needs to be used, particularly with language, when trying to ‘paint’ the picture of a healthy lifestyle so that parents/carers are not shown to be wrong. For many of our youngsters anything regarded in the broadest sense of normality may never have existed in their world e.g. babies who are abused and neglected, they may never have experienced ‘nurture’ which is beneficial to their development...</p>
<p>At an interview at a 6<sup>th</sup> form college the teacher was asked, in front of the young person, “can you guarantee she won’t have another breakdown?” We withdrew from the interview.</p>
<p>Young people do raise as a concern the language to use to explain their period of time at our unit. They perceive that mental health issues will be regarded as concerning by their peers and sometimes by school staff. They are given advice on how to explain their absence from mainstream school in general terms and that they should avoid specifics. Young people are usually very reluctant to talk about ‘mental health’ and are usually discouraged from speaking in these terms with their peers.</p>
<p>... the aspect of report writing and record-keeping in the need to be strictly objective and factual, not to make any comment that could be seen as a subjective opinion or judgemental. In this sense language can be an issue when dealing with parents and other relatives who might use forceful/subjective/judgemental words to address the young person (or professional). Also, personally I have found that some consultant psychiatrists and other health professionals can be very judgemental about young people and their families, which I find uncomfortable.</p>
<p>A school wanted to know the diagnosis before a young person returned. The parents gave permission for us to talk about any symptoms or behaviours but not mention the diagnosis (schizophrenia). There were several difficult weeks where the “schizophrenia” word was hedged round but not spoken.</p>
<p>Parents for whom English is not the 1<sup>st</sup> language had little understanding of mental health difficulties. In trying to work with them around the issues for their child, there were difficulties as there is no word for psychosis in their language so something like ‘brain thinking problem’ was used. They found it really difficult to distinguish between organic neurological problems and mental health problems.</p>
<p>I find it difficult to pitch language at the right level as professional language could be threatening to young people and parents, in some meetings professionals often use jargon. I find that if I talk on a more general level and the situation is acknowledged in a more relaxed way, e.g. ‘had a bit of a wobble’ then the young people seems to respond better. So in situations where the professionals have pitched it at the right level the meeting has been a more positive experience for young person. We should also think about the use of non-threatening/threatening body language in meetings</p>