

Raphael Healthcare addresses the importance of community re-integration as part of the recovery and rehabilitation process for patients experiencing mental health difficulties

You can't pick up a newspaper these days without coming across an article advocating the benefits of physical activity and exercise on one's mental health and wellbeing. What's not often mentioned are the benefits of community and outdoor activities on peoples' mental health. Healthcare facilities aim to provide their users with an improved quality of life, and this is met in part by regular outings and community activities. Raphael Healthcare specialises in the provision of care for women who are experiencing severe and enduring mental illness and/or personality disorder. Whilst the severity of patients' condition may vary, what is clear is that when appropriate, therapeutic, social and recreational activities in the community promote social inclusion and societal integration for individuals.

The Farndon Unit specialises in developing pioneering rehabilitation and recovery pathways which aim to incorporate a number of different community activities. The Occupational Therapy team at the unit provide a diverse programme of activities which include therapeutic community sessions for the patients. Whilst the women are encouraged to attend these, robust risk assessment and planning takes place in order to ensure that individuals are at the stage at which they can access the community safely. Whilst society is making headway in removing the stigma that is attached to mental illness, social exclusion remains a large obstacle for mental health service users. Issues such as a lack of life structure and role involvement, unemployment, and dysfunctional family or social environments can contribute towards a person experiencing mental illness, in addition to worsening existing mental health issues. Individuals can become isolated and / or excluded from society; either as a result of certain social inadequacies or lack of community skills, or due to being ostracised and discriminated against by others. Past and current research indicates that people with mental health conditions highlight their wish to establish meaningful relationships with others, to experience less rejection by neighbours, employers and family, and to have



increased opportunity to be involved in mainstream groups and communities. By addressing service users' aspirations (such as for work; education; social; leisure), services can promote the notion of equipping individuals with essential life skills so as to work collaboratively with them towards achieving their goals. Provision of community activities for patients experiencing mental illness can help them to develop a certain level of independence and confidence. Community sessions and groups that are provided at The Farndon Unit include initiatives such as; sports and physical activity; social and leisure activities; access to mainstream services such as leisure centres, libraries, country parks; exhibitions displaying patients' work (art, craft; conservation); volunteering opportunities. Individual sessions

are also carried out to include the women's community rehabilitation needs such as shopping, budgeting and social skills. In summary we aim to support patients' desires and interests and organise events and activities which meet their needs. Community activities and social inclusion form an integral part of the recovery pathway at The Farndon Unit, and allow the women to develop their confidence, self-esteem and transferable life skills essential to maintaining wellness.

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