
PRE- AND POST- COURSE FOCUS GROUP META-ANALYSIS – AUGUST 2011

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PRE-COURSE FOCUS GROUPS

2 groups on 19th February 2009

1 on 2nd Sept 2009

1 on 20th January 2010

1 on 26th May 2010

1 on Sept. 4th 2010

1 on Feb 10th 2011

1 on May 21st 2011

Total numbers 103 started the course

women 73 **men** 30

service users 87, carers 13, 3 mental health staff (some overlap -both users and carers)

Age range: mid 20s – 50s

Ethnicity: mainly white, about 10 or 11 BME or mixed race

HOW DID PEOPLE FIND OUT ABOUT THE COURSE?

People attending the initial session had heard about it by word of mouth or advertisement, or had seen the website. A few found out through working at the University or from Heather visiting their group. Two were told about by staff members who worked with them.

HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE COURSE AT THE OUTSET

Most were hopeful this course could enable them to know more about bipolar disorder, to be able to cope better with their own life or help someone they were caring for, and to be able to improve their lives or to recover.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONDITION – 25 PEOPLE

- *I am looking for academic knowledge of illness and couple that with my own skills and to use for my personal benefit and to benefit others with the illness.*
- *You are told you have it, but I don't know much about it*

- *I want to understand the illness I have been labelled with*
- *I know what I know through my own learning, I'd like to be taught as well, I want to know what this course is offering.*
- *I just wanted to understand the illness better and learn about recovery mechanisms, I have lows particularly.*
- *to learn more about mental health and to share my own experiences*
- *To have hope and a better understanding of situations.*
- *With my daughter's illness, as she is over 18, there was no information from people at the hospital so I know little about bipolar disorder*

FURTHER INSIGHT INTO THE CONDITION AND THE SELF -21 PEOPLE

- *More awareness*
- *Improved insight would be good*
- *I want to find out more about myself, and how the illness affects me, an opportunity for self discovery*
- *I want to understand more about my problems*
- *Better understanding of mental health generally and bipolar traits and more and better understanding.*
- *better understanding of bipolar and ways to deal with it*
- *Learning new coping*
- *Growth and awareness for me.*
- *to get a better awareness of mental health and awareness of others experiences*
- *To get a better understanding of the condition and learn for me personally*
- *To be more accepting of my diagnosis and treatments. To gain more insight.*
- *Stop beating self up about things I can't control*

STRATEGIES FOR ONESELF – 24 PEOPLE

- *To learn how to protect one's own health and live better with the disorder, remain well, use existing knowledge better.*
- *Hope to learn to cope. feel paranoid a lot and hope the course will help me to accept diagnosis better*
- *Want to learn coping strategies to remain well*
- *more coping strategies to rely on, not just keep going up and down all the time, you think you've conquered it and 5 or 6 months later here we go again.*
- *it could give me an insight on how I can help guiding myself*
- *I want to try and learn bit more about myself and maybe from that focus on what I want for the future*
- *I want to cope better with my personal situation –my mental health problem – and help myself in my job here.*
- *This is the first time I've seen myself as a service user. I am a carer also for my partner. I want to be able to say 'I', and focus on my own needs.*
- *To be able to live my life to the ability I've always wanted to live my life, manage it and understand bipolar and to live with it and still be able to achieve a lot of things.*
- *to to get a deeper awareness of the illness and how it affects me, and tools to make my life better*
- *to help me manage my mood swings better, to get better stability*
- *This is an opportunity to change*
- *To build a foundation and grow in personality. To interact better in my life with people in general.*
- *It's going to help a great deal, more than psychotherapy and medication put together.*
- *I have not used my full potential but I want to. To be able to put my experiences in writing in a humorous way for my children. To laugh and learn.*

BUILDING ON EXISTING COPING STRATEGIES – 4 PEOPLE

- *Fed up of being ill over 7 years and I've picked up things that can help, I'd like build on that, combat it, find ways to do that*
- *I still think need more coping strategies*
- *It will be really helpful to make me reflect on what I've learned in the past*
- *I use counting all the time to cope, would like a better coping strategy*

Help others to understand me better – (1 person)

- *pass on information to my partner, so they are more aware of what is happening*

A CHANCE TO PRACTISE THE SKILLS LEARNED – 2 PEOPLE

- *Practical application of skills learned in books.*
- *Looking forward to practice, I know we've got homework. I've been on short courses but its only half a day, in short courses I learn a lot but don't get practice*

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT – 3 PEOPLE

- *Hope to meet other people, to know there are others out there.*
- *To meet other people see how helpful their experiences could be.*
- *To meet other people and hopefully share knowledge and coping strategies and learn from each other. To develop mutual support and feel better among other people, less isolated.*

SOMETHING BEYOND STABILISING WITH MEDICATION – 4 PEOPLE

There was a sense that nothing was really making a major difference and people felt unable to make real progress with their mental wellbeing:

- *Medication has mainly worked apart from one episode of toxicity and problems when trying to lower the dose. Once lowered own dose, with bad results.*
- *Anything that can help is worth trying, to use as building blocks, to help, despite the odds*
- *GP said govt is going to be right behind CBT so I said give me CBT and he said you are too old and stuck in your ways, it won't do yer any good.*
- *A carer said: medication works but just holds her in place.*

MANAGING BIPOLAR BETTER, E.G. PREVENTING HIGHS AND LOWS, AND MANAGING CRISES – 25 PEOPLE

- *Realising when it the episode is happening. Preventing episodes*
- *To get a grip on the condition, rule it, stop it ruling me.*
- *Now I've decided to stay alive and on the planet, I am actually losing 50% of my life, either 4 days up and 3 down or 4 days down and 3 days up.*
- *You think that you've made progress and several months later you slip back down again and not experiencing the same thing over again, I don't think you can ever be cured but just to manage it a lot better*
- *I want to become more on a straight line, I am usually up and down seem to get more up than down, control the ups more and the downs a bit.*
- *Get better at managing and predicting highs and lows and catching them early*
- *Your capacity goes out the window, when you are ill, it is hard coordinating what you are doing, you can't get anything done, when you are well, you overdo it*
- *To learn to act appropriately regardless of mood*

- *To learn how to manage the illness whilst working*

SEVERAL PEOPLE MENTIONED IN PARTICULAR THEIR WISH TO MANAGE DEPRESSION BETTER

- *Feeling I can handle it better, mania doesn't bother me but depression is severe.*
- *I am looking for a way to be told what to do so depression doesn't hit so hard, ways to divert the depression so it doesn't get a hold*
- *To feel more emotion and less apathy*

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RECOVERY AND HOW TO MOVE ON IN LIFE – 18 PEOPLE

The message that recovery was possible had reached people, but not the knowledge of what this could mean and how to achieve it. Some specifically wanted to get back to work or manage better in an existing job:

- *To never to have to be ill again*
- *To help me in my ever such a long road to recovery*
- *It might be too much to ask for, but I want more of a life, I am not working at moment but I haven't got very much time to fit in exercise, I am rushing around, so I try to relax in the evenings, and don't exercise in the evenings. I am not managing to fit in exercise, want help and advice on this. I want to know more about healthy things, relaxation and exercise.*
- *Want to improve life style and ways of thinking –Would eventually like to help others and get involved with bipolar and with people and help them.*
- *I am thinking of going back into employment*
- *I want to be more confident and feel able to hold down a job, or at least to get into a job*

IMPROVING THE DAY TO DAY QUALITY OF LIFE – 17 PEOPLE

This included: being stronger, feeling more confident and relaxed, more inner peace, more 'normal', feeling more hope, coping better with stress and other people, and feeling less isolated.

- *I want to feel more relaxed about myself, I'd like to be able to feel more normal.*
- *I work in quite a stressful environment and would like to know how to cope better with the impact that has on me.*
- *To manage stress better as I can't stop worrying.*
- *To manage my temper*
- *Not be affected so much by what is going on around me*

One mother attending with her son hoped that the course will enable him to have more self confidence, be less isolated and less depressed.

HOPES ABOUT THE GROUP PROCESS ITSELF – 12 PEOPLE

- *Sharing knowledge and support, learning from others with similar problems.*
- *To meet other people see how helpful their experiences could be.*
- *To meet others who have the same thing, I've never admitted I have a mental illness*
- *I hope to meet other people, to know there are others out there.*
- *Making all these new friends will be important, I am looking forward to working with people with depression, not just manic, feel it will give me more hope you feel your the only one, when you listen to everyone you realise not the only one, lots of others with far more difficult situations than yourself*
- *Confidence – I never thought I would be able to talk about my feelings but I can [after an initial meeting]*
- *Sharing is important. Its nice its not a huge group, not intimidating*

- *Mental health is so isolating, that's the worst thing about it, most people are apprehensive when they come, but we've broken the barriers, we all have got problems and anxieties and worries, mental illness is complex. The one thing today we would all say is we've come here and shared, and it makes us realise possibilities of what can happen.*
- *I think it is the combination of tools and the group*

A CHANCE TO GRIEVE FOR LOSSES IN LIFE – 6 PEOPLE

This issue only arose in one focus group, other groups may have said the same if asked.

- *Trying to learn to accept I have BP – trying to come to terms with it – feels like a grieving process for the life I used to have, to come to terms with that, accept that things may not work out the way I hoped they would. (5 other people in the group agreed with this).*

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE/OTHERS - 14 PEOPLE

Two people with bipolar hoped to be able to help others, one of these ran a self help group:

- *On the basis that I run a self help group, I'd like to know a bit more, to be able to pass on to them.*
- *I want to learn coping strategies to remain well and help others.*
- *To be a better carer, to be able to see my son's needs.*
- *I want to be able to speak to others with bipolar and to know how to help her.*
- *So that I can help my sister. I am hoping for tools to manage.*

Most of those saying they wanted skills to help others were family members and carers:

- *My partner and mother have the diagnosis, not myself. I don't know much about the condition, and want to know how others have dealt with it. I have tried to find out about the illness on the internet and from medical teams, but still have many questions.*
- *I want to learn more about coping strategies for my relative, my family want to know more about how to help.*
- *I'd like to know how to cope when son gets ill and about meds*
- *I want to learn what this is about and about different types of mental illness so I can learn and give back what I've learned.*
- *I'm hoping to support my daughter her better and encourage her to find more coping strategies really to manage her condition and lead a better life.*
- *I want to help my wife more when she's in one of her depressions, through understanding more than I do at the moment*
- *it could give me an insight on how I can help guiding people*
- *I would like to be able to assist my clients to be more effective and to manage their mental health.*
- *I am involved with other carers who are dealing with other types of mental health problems, the insight would help me cope better and help more*

BEING ABLE TO GET OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND BETTER, OR TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS BETTER NUMBERS? +3 FROM 2011

- *Be able to explain to others what you are going through so someone close to you realises and can do something about it*
- *Reducing fear for others who are around you, mental illness doesn't mean strait jacket and padded cell.*

- *To be able to relate to my family better as I feel emotionally numb*
- *Want to hear the voice of the carer. Easy to see it from my point of view, wonderful we have carers here.*

CARERS WANTING HELP FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILY TO COPE BETTER – 3 PEOPLE

One carer hoped the course would enable his son to have a restful sleep , for his own sake and for the whole family. Another said:

- *I want to know about recovery, and how to protect my own health.*

ANY ANXIETIES ABOUT THE COURSE?

NONE – 18 PEOPLE

General anxiety (3 people)

- *Fear of starting something new*

Coming out as service user (1 person)

- *I suppose I am aware of and proud I am mentally ill. I fear that I might be identified as a service user when I announce it.*

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON WELLBEING – 9 PEOPLE

- *Will the medication I am taking clash with the course? Do they interfere with each other?*
- *When starting a course I often breakdown before or during it, so I am anxious about it triggering problems*
- *I am worried if I get emotional*
- *Bringing up painful memories, feelings and emotions*
- *I've put effort into getting into a stable position so I'm worried about 'poking a sleeping bear with a stick'. But I need to go through things and get out the other side to get the benefits.*
- *An initial concern is that I might be more vulnerable, as it might be like taking off the top layers. I'm anxious about that. But after this morning I'm very pleased with it and I'm in a safe place. My anxiety can be a problem.*
- *I can go so far and then I feel the emotions again.*

WORRY ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO COPE WITH THE COURSE – 16 PEOPLE

Several were concerned about whether they would be able to manage to keep going to the sessions for a whole 16 weeks, or that the content would be too demanding. One person was concerned it would be too basic.

- *I am spending time at a charity shop each week and find that quite difficult, so I am unsure how this will work. I can't predict how I am going to feel.*
- *Length of the course – will I have the commitment and energy for it and will I be able to understand it all?*
- *I'm worried about staying well through the course as I'm actually not well at the moment*
- *I'm worried about talking about the thoughts and emotions. Not been thinking about anything much , not been thinking about the future*
- *I've only recently been discharged from the day hospital, was there 7 days a week, now on a course, is it too big a leap?*
- *The course might be too difficult and demanding*

- *Will it be too demanding –there’s a big folder! [General laughter] I don’t want to be sitting exams.*
- *What level will it be at – if it is low I might get frustrated. Don’t want to do basics.*
- *Do we have to attend all the sessions?*
- *Taking on too much – need to pace myself*
- *I am anxious about turning up. I am still shaking, have been like this for a week.*
- *Only maintenance. I tend to start things and giving up, I need to keep committed, I feel positive about it*
- *the manual is big.*
- *The manual is a bit daunting, nothing else*

WORRY THAT THE COURSE WILL NOT HELP – 5 PEOPLE

Some people were concerned that the course will not make a difference to the current misery they were experiencing or be worth spending time on.

- *I’m afraid that the course will be a waste of time.*
- *My concern is that there is a lot of time involved but then the end would justify the time spent. At the moment I think it will be worth it..*

ANXIETY ABOUT ISSUES OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE WITHIN THE GROUP – 14 PEOPLE

Some focused on the fear of being isolated in the group; one person worried his ideas will not be understood by others, another that he would be the only one not to improve, which would increase his depression. Several were worried about having the confidence to speak in front of people they did not know:

- *Meeting new people, will I be accepted or judged?*
- *Obviously it’s quite personal content with our life stories, so just to build up trust*
- *Trusting people on course, being able to share openly about my experiences*
- *I get quite anxious speaking in front of others*
- *Just having confidence to speak up and open up can be difficult*
- *Worried what to say what if I can’t think of anything to say*
- *A bit anxious about training with users I support in my work, and a carer I know in the group. But it’s a question of trust and opening myself up*
- *Having to talk about emotions*

HAVING TO ACCEPT HAVING THE DIAGNOSIS

- *I am reluctant to have a diagnosis and worried about how it will affect my life having this diagnosis, and what it will mean.*

SOME CARERS WERE WORRIED THE COURSE WAS NOT REALLY FOR THEM – 3 PEOPLE

One person expressed concern about the role of carers and family members, who also need support and information. This was echoed by others at one group.

I had difficulty with saying whether my mood was +1 or +2 as I’m not bipolar but I have unipolar depression. I find it difficult to answer questions about bipolar as I’m not a sufferer

HOW DOES COURSE COMPARE TO ANYTHING YOU'VE DONE BEFORE?

10 people had done short self management courses previously, from 1 to 4 days long.

- *This is different, more detailed and spread out.*
- *Some overlap similar but not the same*

Other courses people felt might have some similarity included:

- CBT
- Counselling training
- Coaching and mentoring course
- One to one counselling.
- Mental health nurse training
- Meditation
- Psychotherapy
- group therapy
- eating disorder therapy
- psychodrama
- art psychotherapy
- Psychoanalytic psychotherapy
- bioenergetics

POST- COURSE FOCUS GROUPS

1 group trainees 19th Feb 2009

1 group for people planning to become trainers 19th Feb 2009

[This group of 7 were asked the same questions as the others but also some questions specifically about their confidence in their ability to go on and be trainers on a future course]

1 group trainees 1st July 2009

1 group trainees 29th October 2009

1 group trainees 21st April 2010

1 group trainees 14th July 2010

1 group trainees 11th December 2010

1 group trainees 25th May 2011

1 group trainees 9th July 2011

1 group of new trainers talking about their first time carrying out training 1st July 2009

[this group of 7 was different from the others in that they were talking about delivering the training rather than receiving it, so their issues have been analysed separately]

- 84 completed the course
- 59 women, 25 men
- 70 service users 11 carers, 3 mental health staff (some overlap – both users and carers)
- Age range: 30s to 60s (estimate)
- Predominantly white but 3-4 BME/mixed race (ditto data to add see above)

Findings for Trainees

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE COURSES MEET PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS?

NO CLEAR EXPECTATIONS – 13 PEOPLE

- *When I saw the poster I thought that's a big promise because I've lived with mental illness 30 years. So I came to see what it meant*

DIFFERENT FROM PRIOR EXPECTATIONS – 2 PEOPLE

- *I expected more theory based. Was disappointed at first, don't usually like practical, but found can really benefit from practical work, much better than theory.*
- *I expected more theory based because of the manual which was daunting, but was very glad it was practical.*

THE COURSE MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS – 45 PEOPLE

- *It completely exceeded my expectations, I didn't expect the amount of work we went through and how it really did look at every detail, it was brilliant absolutely brilliant.*
- *Met all my expectations and more.*
- *It was better than I was expecting and broader and deeper than expected. The quality of training was really really good and it was very helpful*
- *It's been outstanding for me, the more you put in the more you get*
- *Better than expected, its helped me to understand a lot more,*
- *A brilliant course in so many ways. I asked if I could use it in a generic way, for physical health issues. I believe the course works for other mental health and physical issues not just bipolar. Doctors give treatments you don't need. I haven't wanted to take medication for my issues*
- *Fantastic the handbook is in language to be understood by all members of population, academically qualified or not, very friendly language and presentation, like the way that things are introduced early in the handbook and brought in again in different language later on.*
- *Met and more to be honest. It has been refreshing and something I will keep with me for the rest of my life.*
- *It's been an eye opener, it has far exceeded expectations*
- *More helpful than I thought, it covered a lot more stuff and more interesting than I expected*
- *It was even more thorough than I expected*
- *Even the spiritual side was covered well. I am on a huge learning curve*
- *Coming here has been very supportive, and confirmed that I have BP and now I have the confidence now to get a diagnosis*
- *I am impressed at how people can look ok absolutely fine on the outside and have problems inside. It's helped me with knowledge that can apply to anyone.*

HOW FAR DID THE COURSE MEET SPECIFIC HOPES EXPRESSED IN PRE-COURSE FOCUS GROUPS?

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONDITION – 27 PEOPLE

Clearly everyone had received a great deal of information, but their responses addressed different forms of information they had received rather than the simple issue of information, so are included under other headings. However, there were issues people wanted more information on, see below in 'What would improve the course'.

- *I got a lot in terms of understanding about bipolar disorder, detection, when up and down*
- *I wanted to find out more about bipolar, how it affects people because after 2nd relapse, I thought I'd better look into it, I've found it excellent*
- *I didn't expect the amount of work we went through and how it really did look at every detail, it was brilliant absolutely brilliant*
- *It's a very good course I would recommend for anyone who has depression – which is what I suffer from.*
- *I've never had any form of therapy or counselling, only had medication so it's a massive eye opener.*
- *Helps me feel my illness is not the elephant in the corner which people never mention*

- *I have received clarity and detail about the issues.*
- *It was general knowledge and has been really valuable*
- *Useful information and techniques which I will use in my other work.*
- *Understanding bipolar- I wasn't fully aware, its an eyeopener and insightful*
- *Being with others helped me gain awareness of my illness, and that was very important*
- *The course highlighted my problems of mood swings*

FURTHER INSIGHT INTO THE CONDITION AND THE SELF – 9 PEOPLE

- *Given me insight into the disorder What were grey areas are now more clear than before, it's been very helpful.*
- *This course has given me techniques that will help if I go back to my occupation. The course helped me see you have to meet the illness halfway.*
- *I can see what has happened to me better.*
- *Helped me understand my moods*
- *Made me acknowledge I have condition that it won't go away, that when you think you are alright you are not necessarily alright, it just means you not either too high or too low*
- *This course made me very aware of my moods and very aware what I need for me and it has made me realise I am not relaxed*

LEARNING OR IMPROVING PERSONAL COPING STRATEGIES – 43 PEOPLE

A lot of people found the course helped them learn new coping strategies or improve and develop their existing skills.

- *I can live and enjoy life in spite of illness, moods and, highs, know about what to eat. In the past if I got depressed I used to stay in bedroom for days, months, not doing anything, but this course has taught me that I can enjoy life and can get through to the end of the day without the depression taking over.*
- *It generally really helped me, knowing you can live a reasonably normal life and deal with the illness at the same time*
- *My illness was my life – I now realise I can control it, rather than it controlling me.*
- *I've had bipolar since my 30s I'm 40 now; so its confirmed and reinforced much of what I've been doing, wonderful .*
- *What it did do was I've had session with a couple of psychotherapists in the past, and they've tried to get me to do things I've never fully understood, and this course helped me quantify things so that I so I can do those things now – so various strategies I've been told about I can do that no.*
- *Very beneficial for mood management so you can control the illness not have the illness controlling you. I feel more confident in what I've been doing Work on establishing a routine, and getting enough sleep. Hard to do but very helpful. Never been asked before how much sleep I needed, it's made me realise I need 8 hours, not 6, very simple but important.*
- *I had done a self management course before, just 3 sessions, so was wondering if it would be repetitive but I found this course went into much more depth particular coping strategies and life skills which I'd not done before.*
- *Really good at helping me get my mood changed – how to manage how I am, feeling – strategies.*
- *A lot of things I didn't know about before, a lot of useful techniques and so on.*
- *What helps - problem solving - breaking it down*
- *The coping strategies for going alone applied to me.*

- *Learned more about me as a person, my mood swings how to handle them and function better and stay calm.*
- *It quite literally slowed me down, made me able to enjoy life, very practical and simple it requires effort but helps in many ways, e.g. breathing*
- *The course in general is very good, exercises, relaxation, simple things like deeper breathing*
- *Its helped me to manage my moods.*
- *what I've got out of it is how I cope with the lows (more than highs). It will be very useful for me*

SPECIFIC TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING BIPOLAR SYMPTOMS = 39 PEOPLE

A large number of those who found the course helped them cope referred specifically to the course tools as set out in the manual. The Behaviour Thought Mood diary and activity diary were especially appreciated.

- *The Behaviour Thought Mood diary. The discipline it gives*
- *BTM chart –that is fantastic, soon as I saw it on day one I thought Oh my God, it's very black and white, so useful.*
- *The BTM chart is a permanent fixture on our fridge*
- *Particularly the BTM diary is helping and the wellbeing activity diary I find useful as well.*
- *Well being activity diary and BTM and relaxation*
- *BTM and daily schedule*
- *The BTM chart, finding where you are on it and changing things about how you feel.*
- *The diary is very useful, I use it all time, all the diaries. BTM chart is up in my kitchen.*
- *The tool I find most helpful. Well Being Activity Diary best to give structure and balance in my life.*
- *Lot of useful tools to use e.g. relaxation diary*
- *The activity diary. I thought I was too busy but actually its better than i thought. It helps work out how.*
- *The diary was very good, we were introduced to follow it and discuss it at the same time, what we experienced during the week*
- *Nice tool kit so you can take what you need, and pick and mix and have a way forward*
- *Gives you the tools to help you tackle things yourself before they get out of hand*
- *Tools I can take with me and it proves I can function and not be negative*
- *It has given me tools to cope and manage life better*
- *Life skills section and turning negative thoughts into the opposite*
- *I found the course extremely detailed and comprehensive, and full of useful tools to manage bipolar illness.*

- *I've read many self help books and found the material in the course far exceeded anything I'd read. I intend going to go through it slowly at my pace to try and learn as much as possible and work on parts of it which I think are particularly relevant to me.*

PRACTICAL ASPECTS- CHANCE TO PRACTISE THE SKILLS LEARNED 6 PEOPLE

Some people pointed out that they were actually able to use the skills there and then in the group and at home, and this immediate practical application was valued.

- *I have learned coping mechanisms which I have a chance to put into action, put them into practice and have done, with good results.*
- *I learned to analyse what you felt on the day, and also to start giving points on our ups and downs and knowing where you were – how you could bring yourself down and get in a straight line.*
- *It's been massively effective for me because there a lot of things that need to be put right in my life. As I went through each module I've used that and applied it to a section of my life, and gradually as the training has gone on, I've managed to put right every different aspect or area in relation to the training, so I've gone a complete 180 degrees, so it's been massive turn around, hugely effective.*
- *Well being action plan, and advance statement, helpful to do that at the end, it set out what your wishes were for others to take into account and it helped you summarise what you did on the course.*
- *I actually put into practice the tools and found they worked*
- *Practicality - you can have tools to look at and jot down from day to day. And see if you are doing too much or too little in the week.*
- *Its practical, not rocket science.*
- *Before I started I had found a lot on the internet, but this has been practical exchange of experiences.*

MANAGING BIPOLAR BETTER, E.G. PREVENTING HIGHS AND LOWS, AND MANAGING CRISES – 17 PEOPLE

An aspect of key importance is that a large proportion of the trainees – more than a third – found the course actually helped them manage their condition better.

- *It's been very very helpful. Medication works but don't like it.*
- *Learning to manage the highs and the lows, especially in relation to the needs and wishes of significant others [a participant who had a marital breakdown prior to coming to the course]*
- *Other things I've attended have been more of a snapshot, because I have long periods of stability I couldn't relate to them because I wasn't high or low. On this course, I've been high and low in the last few weeks - I realized there were tools I could use, and I actually put into practice the tools and found they worked*
- *learning to chart the mood swings and to manage them*

- *As a result of the course and the homework, I can honestly say my mental health condition as a manic depressive, through self management, is under the best control ever in 7 years since I was diagnosed.*
- *Over Christmas I had a slight episode and did what it said, and contacted CPN and it worked, I was only on medication for about 10 days, much less than usual.*
- *I need extra help, so when I began feeling ill again, got the book out and starting reading it and putting it into practice, it was hard work, but I got through it.*
- *Learned more about me as a person, my mood swings how to handle them and function better and stay calm. I realise when doing too much. I stopped.*
- *I was aware of having depression but I do actually have manic moods, so it has given me skills to recognise and change that. its a wonderful gift and I am grateful.*
- *I can't thank everyone else here enough, for being here every week and giving me support, and giving me the foundations I will have for the rest of my life in regard to keeping well.*

KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO LIVE BETTER AND MOVE ON IN LIFE – RECOVERY= 22 PEOPLE

A large percentage of people mentioned that the course had helped them move on in positive ways, Some mentioned becoming optimistic that their depression can be lifted, and others said they were becoming able to reflect and take positive preventive action. A number said they hoped the course will help them towards positive change.

- *It's not a miracle cure, but I got skills to make a complete recovery*
- *I am learning to be more self confident*
- *As a result of the course I am going to a diet and exercise group and hope to make it part of my life*
- *I learned to take better care of myself, stop putting things on a back burner because I've got to do this or do that.*
- *Having listened to everybody else made me a lot more hopeful for the future*
- *Learning to stop drinking to the point of stupor, and to move to socialising in more socially acceptable ways which are less destructive and more satisfying*
- *The course is applicable for day to day living giving self esteem to people*
- *More help than any psychiatric services I've used, had CPNs and psychiatrists, this is more helpful and empowering*
- *the point of this course has been about me. Its been really useful at this time of my life and been very supportive, it has made me look at my recovery process.*

A CHANCE TO GRIEVE FOR LOSSES IN LIFE

Though nobody referred specifically to grieving the losses in their lives, two participants said they had come to terms with having the illness and were now able to manage better in a variety of ways.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT – 36 PEOPLE

People enjoyed the experience of working in the group and socializing with people they had met there.

- *The chance to share experiences with others, has been liberating to me, I kept it to myself before, now I find myself able to be more open about my life.*

- *Seeing people say I've experienced that, makes me feel more normal. Prior to coming here I thought I had a peculiar way of thinking. I'd get upset about little things that shouldn't be, that bothered me, because of this I got into hospital.*
- *The people in the room provide a large element – being supportive, empathising, talking about their own experiences, being , non judgemental. You can't quantify this but it is an essential part of the course. The course is specifically trying to achieve this.*
- *I liked sharing experiences in the whole group.*
- *Hearing people's stories gives hope and inspires me.*
- *I enjoyed pleasure of companionship of other group members*
- *There's been the camaraderie of group. I think if this course was available across the country there'd be less people end up in hospital*
- *I've never been with people who felt like I did before, so that group interaction has been helpful.*
- *Meeting others and finding I am not the only one with this disorder*
- *Helpful to hear everyone's point of view*
- *I had an opportunity to discuss feelings and have a sort of group therapy*
- *[appreciated] talking amongst us and common issues and communication in group.*
- *We all get on and care for each other*
- *The course builds trust. Began to look forward to it after first few weeks*
- *The social part is important. As we got to know each other we went to the local and had a drink. I came to the course to learn about self help techniques but I also wanted to meet others who were bipolar. We had a good cross section in our group.*
- *We work with each other, drawing out more from each other*
- *I appreciated getting to know the group, getting feedback from everyone.*
- *It is very helpful sharing experiences*
- *I really enjoyed the group discussions in smaller groups, having chance to talk it through, some personal stuff came to light, that was nice.*
- *I learned more from the group, especially the depressives, and feedback from others.*
- *It was good having a smaller group, I wouldn't have got so much from it if it had stayed as a big group as it was at the start. We feel the love. We can be ourselves.*
- *We all get on so well we phone each other and socialise*
- *The breaks were very important. We still talked to each other in breaks and lunch but needed the breaks.*
- *Group support was very good. Hearing others talk about their experiences is very valuable.*
- *I learned from everyone here, and we are going to stay in contact, it's been wonderful*
- *Everyone was honest and dealt with themselves, and shared personal information and it was great they laid it all out.*
- *I enjoyed being listened to and the insight I got from everyone else*
- *Thanks to all in group for trust and nurturing,*
- *It was a very good forum to say what you want to say*

BEING ABLE TO GET OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND BETTER, OR TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS BETTER – 7 PEOPLE

One person came as a carer and expected to learn understand and respond better to the person she cares for, but learned on the course that she has serious depressive moods herself.

- *My daughter got no help for her problems so I was prepared to try it. It has been beneficial to me, made me more aware of what it is like to be bipolar.*
- *The experience of being here with people with personal experience, because I am a carer, it has helped me to feel a lot more patience with my son and people around me as well, I think it was an excellent course, I'd highly recommend it to anyone. .*
- *This course shows how to take control through activities, e.g. mood charts. Some people put them up so their families can see and understand better how it works.. When I seem ok people think I am ok and they don't understand you can be ok one day and not the next, this helps people be able to ask you questions.*
- *Everything that was going on in my life outside the course has benefited from the course. It helped with my weekly newsletter by and for people with manic depression one of group members joined and is helping to increase the circulation a lot.*
- *It helped me to guide others which is what I want to do.*
- *It helps others to help me better.*

COVERAGE OF CARERS' PERSPECTIVES -6 PEOPLE

- *Covered a wide range of subjects about living with BP as a carer than I had thought about previously*
- *I got involved in the book, I am my wife's carer she's done the course*
- *I am a carer -I've been able to talk about how it affected me -it's a forum, its generally for service users but it's also been a support group for me, also being able to spend the day each week, where you can concentrate on something other than day by day stuff.*
- *I came to help my son but it helped me look at my moods to use the diary for myself as well, monitor my moods and realise I need to do something about them. It would be good for other carers.*
- *I support others and it will have a knock on effect for others that I help.*
- *An important aspect of the course is learning about people's experience and finding out how people handle it.*

Other aspects not mentioned in the pre-course focus groups

THE TRAINERS (16 PEOPLE)

- *Any problem we've raised the trainers have got a good solution for, so I am very happy with the people who have given input .*
- *For me it was the way it feels personal, felt tailored to yourself, even though there are all these different people with different diagnoses, the fact that we were addressed individually quite often during the course and if we did have a problem or a question they could give us something that felt tailored to you as an individual, I wasn't expecting that.*
- *It's not just the course material but also the way it is delivered. The trainers have a massive impact, it's tailored to you, you get almost like a one to one a lot.*
- *Heather personalises it, she takes each case and remembers it and talks to us, remembers each person's story*
- *Trainers very empathetic.*
- *The trainers were excellent, I liked the fact they gave us time to talk, and found that very helpful, they gave us time without overindulging, they never made us feel we couldn't speak.*
- *Trainers worked well together*

WRITTEN BY SOMEONE WITH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE – 2 PEOPLE

- *You can tell it has been written by someone with BP, that was really helpful.*
- *Found it useful that someone with mental illness wrote the materials – who can understand where we are coming from. So many books and info are by doctors and psychiatrists who don't understand. The trainers had personal experiences.*

GENERAL ASPECTS LIKED

- *The medication section was delivered very well and so useful*
- *As a whole the way it was constructed, very comprehensive, going through all those*
- *No patronising this has been problem with other service providers. Especially doctors. This is an alternative to the system - use your own knowledge and power gives you some control over it.*

EXPECTATIONS NOT MET

Most people said there were no expectations not met (though a number had not known what to expect). The few dissatisfactions that were expressed were to do with lack of time. In one group, some people said that the time given to each component covered by the course was often insufficient, while the trainer was urging them to move to the next component.

- *The only thing was we wanted more. Sometimes time ran out, and we couldn't finish discussing something interesting.*

PRIOR WORRIES ABOUT THE COURSE – WERE THESE REALIZED?

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON WELLBEING

Nobody said the course had impacted negatively on their wellbeing. However on one course the participants mentioned that some people had stopped coming, and they did not know what had happened to these people. They would like to have had some discussion about this.

One person said that the course had been painful at times, but this was not put across as a complaint.

On the same course, a few participants mentioned that one of the trainers, not the main one, had lacked empathy and could sometimes be dismissive of people.

On one course, where there were two people in their early 20s, younger than the usual age-group, there were the following comments:

- *I sometimes felt talked down to, like my parents talk to me.*
- *I have heard some negative things about how about how it gets harder when you get older, which is hard to deal with [presumably from other participants]*

CONCERNS ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO COPE WITH THE COURSE

There were some dropouts from the course, so there may have been some people who did find it too much to cope with. A large proportion did find the course intense and tiring, but had different opinions about what should be done about this, if anything.

THE COURSE WAS TIRING – 14 PEOPLE

One person mentioned feeling pressure to come every week even though this was not always possible.

- *The continuous day was tiring. It might be better if the course was over 16 weeks – you'd probably gain a lot more. We get tired towards the end of the day.*
- *The day-long session is taxing, I am a serious advocate for this course but I'm flagging by afternoon, if you get so much good stuff offered to you throughout the morning, it's worth spreading over longer - it would be good for there to be parallel courses for those who can only do afternoons or evenings or even weekends*
- *Sometimes we were very loose about everything as we had plenty of time, potentially one could tighten things up and make more focused*
- *A whole day can be difficult – long, intense*
- *Draining and intense*

YOU HAVE TO PUT IN THE WORK: 3 PEOPLE

Some argued that the hard work was necessary and brought rewards:

- *Case of you've got to keep working at it for it to work*
- *You do have to work at it, you have to spend energy working and doing the stuff and practicing, and then you get some of the energy back*
- *you have to do the work, not relying on external medical person to do it for you*

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE COURSE?

MORE TIME

Some people felt there had not been enough time to cover everything fully. The topic of the material on negative thinking and suicide prevention was raised by one group. They thought these themes were very important and needed more time to be discussed and properly digested.

- *Would prefer the course to be whole days not half days, each module given in a full day.*
- *Only things – the evenings may not be the best time. I really appreciate that I have been able to come in the evening but it makes a long day and we get quite tired (a lot of the group agreed with this)*
- *Sometimes more time would have been better, but it's a problem for some people to commit to the course as it is.*
- *A lot of people can't cope with full days. Maybe an extra 2 weeks would help.*
- *I don't suffer bipolar so I could concentrate for a whole day, maybe we need more time, the course to be tailored slightly.*
- *Better to have a whole day, you wouldn't want to go back to work after a morning on this.*
- *Too intense to be able to go back to work after a half day of it.*

MORE WORK IN SMALL GROUPS (2 PEOPLE)

- *Probably more small groups rather than whole group would be good – not enough small group work.*

MORE INFORMATION ON SOME SPECIFIC TOPICS

- *More information on Bipolar and claiming benefits, especially DLA as I understand it bipolar is the middle care rate. Info on claiming DLA would be useful*
- *We should have had some information on law and rights in mental health, perhaps a discussion of different kinds of treatments and drugs, not just handouts.*
- *Law and employment - whether we have to disclose on application forms.*
- *Include in course some direction we could go in when we leave this course to get continually updated about this kind of information – law, rights, benefits, as they keep changing.*
- *Discussion of disclosure issues, not just re applying jobs, but also friends and colleagues, . I never know whether to tell people or not, that I am bipolar, it would be nice to air it, just briefly, get some ideas on it.*
- *Could have done more in employment finding, this is a major area for some.*
- *I agree about the employment more on finding voluntary or pt or ft work and how to phrase absences on cv.*
- *An aspect not covered by the course was sex and personal relationships, these weren't dealt with, that would be good to cover. (5 or 6 others agreed)*
- *Although only a marginal part, there could be a mention of different kinds of therapy available, what else you might do afterward.*

IMPROVEMENT OF TOOLS

- *I wanted the manual to give page references instead of referring you to a section. I learned to look in the index instead for page references.*
- *With this index, would be good to have a course contents as to how it is presented, two indexes, one to the modules, one to the topics, page number order, or colour code. Better indexing to find things.*
- *Electronic download of charts would be good*
- *The forms, e.g. wellbeing, etc. are a bit confusing, and too similar. It would be useful for In-Sight to have the forms on their website to download and use on a daily basis at work. For those without spare time – it could be useful to be able to print them off – more accessible. Sometimes you've written on them and then you don't have any blanks*
- *Learned you can kind of cross reference didn't notice till recently page numbers were all over the place but ideas were mapped out for you, I've yet to find out why she did that, they didn't match the content but matched the ideas*

IMPROVEMENTS TO PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Variability of trainers – 3 people

- Some of the course leaders were better than others
- Some trainers better than other

One group mentioned needing a telephone number to call if they were unexpectedly unable to attend.

One course was affected by a 2 week break caused by problems in paying the trainers. This had annoyed the trainees though they did not blame the trainers for this:

- *2 week break a problem. We had to read it at home, not the same, the university messed up.*
- *The university should understand how much this course was giving people. There doesn't seem to be enough support for the course.*
- *The University problems put stress on us and the trainers. You couldn't find better trainers, so understanding.*

Other issues included food , training environment and travel problems:

9 people said they would like healthier nibbles, e.g. fruit

- *Less confectionary on offer for nibbles, we are here for health reasons, nice but we need more healthy nibbles*
- *venue – sense of being seen as odd by office staff*
- *windows can't be opened, no control of temperature*
- *The room was cold*
- *Cold venue and distance to travel.*
- *Cold venue and distance, too far, would put some service users off attending. Needs to be more courses like this in local areas.*

Relaxation doesn't work too well -3 people

- *Relaxing in group difficult with light on. I'd rather do it at home*
- *relaxation – the lights make it difficult*
- *Relaxation with lights on – I would relax better lying down.*

Course aspects not liked: 4 people

- *Most of time been doing 2 jobs not had time to do homework BTMD. Too much*
- *Homework. Didn't suit my personality, not part of me and never will be*
- *Homework didn't come naturally to me either but I got into it.*
- *Could have done without diet weight exercise I knew those staying healthy but they are important for some people.*
- *I did find the behaviour thought mood a bit hard to do every day*

More time needed on particular aspects of the course materials – 20 people

- *More time on course materials rather than relaxation*
- *Possibly extend a week or two. Some didn't cover all material in the module, missed important bits, maybe split a module into 2 weeks, e.g. countering negative thoughts and positive thinking. Need more time on those.*
- *Less time going over BTMD and activities diary, do more on the coursework, some weeks that took up more than half the session and coursework was rushed.*

- *Want to go more deeply into other stuff - I missed a couple of weeks - would be useful to go back into some things e.g. anger management*
- *Some weeks we only got through half the module, taken up with things we'd done before, too much going back.*
- *Maybe breaks could be shortened to give more time for the work.*
- *We got a bit waylaid sometimes when we were talking. It was fantastic to hear about peoples experiences but sometimes we didn't go into all the sections in the file. Sometimes we didn't get into the content so much.*
- *I feel materials were not focussed on enough in sessions.*
- *We did spend a lot of time on our problems rather than the agenda*
- *There were parts of the course we didn't get to, Some bits we didn't get to because of discussion, some I'd like to have done, will look at it in my free time.*
- *At times it feels too much time spent on discussion, even though it was helpful for all of us.*

Trainers distributed differently

I'd like to see the people distributed more and know which trainers were on so would allow us to know in advance who was going to be doing it. Some were more suited to some aspects than others could be married up better.

Anti stigma – 1 person

Stigma connected to BP something to help deal with that

Further promotion of the course is needed

On most of the courses, participants expressed the wish that more people knew about and could access this course, and also said that they would be telling others about it:

- *A friend is asking about it and has booked to come, and I will recommend it to others.*
- *Family and others should go on a course like this to help them*
- *We need families to come*
- *This course should be part of recovery programme, not just medication*
- *It should be rolled out across country, you can get things like CBT but that's just, it doesn't work, it depends on whether you're a pessimist or an optimist (might help people who are pessimists).*
- *Massively essential part of the when someone is diagnosed, you don't seem to get any no explanation or info, just medication, some therapies you can pay for, some don't work on their own, if everything is combined, it should be implemented when diagnosed, there should not just be medication, this is an essential part of learning how to cope. Like if you have a broken leg you need physiotherapy. It is a massive gap which this is obviously filling for us. Us few lucky people who have been able to get access to it.*
- *It has of course to be given at the right time, that's crucial, it wouldn't have been any good to me when I was down*

HOW MANY TRAINEES (OF THOSE NOT ALREADY ON TRAINING FOR TRAINERS TRACK) WOULD LIKE TO GO ON TO BECOME TRAINERS?

- 9 more people would like to go on to become trainers
- 1 person maybe in a year

QUESTIONS ONLY ASKED OF THOSE WHO HAVE COMPLETED TRAINING TO BECOME TRAINERS (N=7)

DO YOU FEEL READY TO BE A TRAINER?

- *Feel ready as was already a qualified trainer.*
- *Looking forward to starting. Concerned about how long it will take to get familiar with the material, could take up to a year.*
- *Have concerns about fact each module will have a different co-trainer. Difficult for the trainees, maybe problem with continuity of training styles. The regular trainers will have to re-bond each time with a different co-trainer.*
- *Looking forward to it. But have concerns about continuity and getting to know the trainees. Hopefully more people will come into it and be delivering training.*
- *Looking forward to it, will be ok because working with an experienced trainer, it wouldn't be possible otherwise. It may be a problem with different trainers for each module, knowing what has been covered before.*
- *We need more trainers trained, the more the better. No worries re what has been covered as it is all clearly set out in the manual. Concerns about fact we won't be able to get to know the trainees and their individual experiences in one session.*
- *Looking forward to it but nervous, concerned about short time to get to know the trainees.*
- *I am looking forward to my first session. My co-trainer has already shown she can scribe for me.*
- *Some apprehension about continuity, but understand why it is this way. The existing trainers can't be everywhere at once. It is a challenge. We don't know how it will go till we try.*

SATISFACTION WITH THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF TRAINING

Nobody expressed problems about use of equipment – flipcharts or powerpoint, or ground rules.

VIEW ON AVAILABLE SUPPORT FOR NEW TRAINERS

- *Heather has offered full support to the new trainers and we will be training with experienced co trainers so will not have to handle anything on our own.*

DO YOU FEEL ABLE TO MODEL THE SKILLS YOU HAVE LEARNED?

- *It may be good for trainees to see us brand new trainers up there trying to facilitate and to GET THEM UP THERE TOO IN A FEW MONTHS, IT COULD INSPIRE THEM.*

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SELF DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?

- *It will help to give trainees more confidence that we have personal experience.*
- *It is good to have trainers with a bipolar background, it gives a more holistic approach.*

DO YOU FEEL COMPETENT AT LISTENING SKILLS?

- *I noticed when people on the course expressed negativity Heather would gently encourage them in a more positive direction. I would like to develop this ability*

OTHER THOUGHTS

- *I think healthcare professionals should go on this course they need to get further insight into what it is like to be bipolar*
- *I believe PCTs should be funding this course before starting people on antidepressants.*
- *Some on the course don't have personal experience, but their life experience as family members and suffering distress and highs and lows themselves is still relevant experience.*

FINDINGS FOR NEW TRAINERS (N=7)

IT WAS A GOOD EXPERIENCE – 7 PEOPLE

- *It's given me the opportunity to do more training, and I love being able to pass on what I've learned.*
- *I think it gave me as much back [as being on the course], being a trainer*
- *I know I learned something every time I did a session about my training*
- *It went ok. I only did one session as I was not well next time. I've been a trainer(teacher) all my life, so I was not uncomfortable.*

IT WAS GOOD TO SEE HOW THE TRAINEES BENEFITED – 3 PEOPLE

- *It was quite amazing to see the change in them. That was great to see.*
- *The trainees were receptive and joined in*
- *Today was the last session and feedback and everything, and it was really lovely to see as I was here for the first one and I'm here for the last one. To see people talk about where they were on the mood scale. It was really good to see how much they had advanced. It came out that some had quite a few obstacles but they'd managed it, so it was nice to see*

DID YOU FEEL WELL PREPARED AS A TRAINER? – 7 PEOPLE SAID YES TO THIS

- *Well prepared. It's like going through the course, and we knew it, from doing the modules ourselves.*
- *I had how I was taught on the course, I had Heather's notes and the strength there, I've got my own notes, when you put it all together it can be very helpful.*
- *The notes were very useful, and our experience from doing the whole course ourselves was extremely valuable. Its made a difference to my life [having done the course] and it wasn't that difficult to share that with people.*
- *Having done the course – it grounds us in tools and techniques so it becomes quite natural to pass them on. The course notes are so good. I have ideas myself, I can be flexible, but it gives me boundaries. It's a very well prepared course, and it has very well thought out trainers' notes.*
- *I am fairly new to the teaching. At first I was slightly nervous, found it more difficult. I had 3 sessions. By the time I came to the 3rd one, I was ok. I had feedback, people always get that, it was useful*
- *I felt skilled enough; I have bipolar, life experience. We had training sessions prior to doing the training which were good. I have done one to one tutoring before. There is ongoing training provided. I was a bit nervous the first time but felt well prepared.*
- *Enough preparation - in the end you've just got to bite the bullet and go for it. And I think we were all quite nervous at the beginning- ut the notes for the trainers were great.*
- *The manual worked ok though I prefer to use note cards. Heather thinks I should use flipchart but I have a hand tremor.*
- *There is enough training for trainers to start off with. There are other courses we can take, such as City and Guilds basic qualification for training adults.*

ORGANISATION OF THE COURSE AND PROVISION OF SUPPORT FOR THE TRAINERS

Everyone felt the course was well organised and they got enough support]

- *Fine. Plenty of support.*
- *I had enough support and information as a trainer, and we formed our own self help group from the course which was very helpful.*
- *Well supported.*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT E.G. WITH OWN RECOVERY OR CARING FROM BEING A TRAINER ON THE COURSE

Most of the trainers found that the experience of being a trainer reinforced their own learning.

- *I gained from doing it.*
- *It wasn't like taking the course again, but was looking at the course in a different way*

- *I felt valued as well, that I should be given this opportunity*
- *The course is about lifestyle changes. It gives tools and techniques. It is quite generic. I am using the activity diary daily to manage my routine. Everyone could benefit from the opportunity of this course. If you feel sick or sad it helps you feel more positive.*
- *The teaching gave me more confidence. The continued reading of the Handbook reinforced my learning.*
- *Everyone needs the activity diary to manage their lives*
- *I do use the activity diary, it helps me cope and care for my partner and manage my life.*

The carers benefited personally as well as those with bipolar.

- *It enabled me to make sure I look after myself.*
- *It is a very generic recovery system, not too specific, it doesn't put anyone in a box.*
- *I don't have bipolar, my husband does. I work in mental health. When I do training there, people say they want recovery programmes. I can see really clearly how it would help them and it is frustrating not being able to apply it in my work.*

HOW DID THE TRAINERS MANAGE THE SELF DISCLOSURE?

Most had had not problems with this. One person did find it a problem because of being a carer, not a service user:

- *I found it quite difficult sometimes because of not having a mental illness and not being a user: 'oh you don't know what we are going through' – I found it important to let them know I have been through mental experiences, I have touched on the question, I do know what it is like to be depressed – so I can be a little understanding*

The others explained how they introduced themselves and put across their shared experience of being bipolar:

- *I felt the need to introduce myself and give a brief personal history. That was my choice, and I think it was beneficial to the trainees to know.*
- *I think it is important for them to know that I'd had [bipolar] as well, that we were not just trainers but were doing [self management] ourselves, and that I could demonstrate that I had actually done the course, was not just a teacher.*
- *At the beginning I introduced myself, saying that I had the same condition, and I did draw on a couple of personal experiences.*
- *They were very aware that the trainers had gone through the training and that we have been managing our moods; that gave them some hope.*

WHAT MIGHT HAVE IMPROVED THE EXPERIENCE AS A TRAINER

Greater continuity for the trainers

Most of the trainers did find, as expected, that the lack of continuity for them as trainers was a problem. They each only had a few sessions, often spaced out across the course. Several explained that they accepted the good reasons why this was done:

- *I accept the reasons why the course was organised this way*
- *I know the necessity of why it was done like this. Because we were new trainers. To give us all a chance.*

- *We knew in the beginning it had to be done this way.*

Only one of the new trainers did not find the lack of continuity a problem:

- *I had no problems with the continuity, I still built a rapport with the trainees and did not find it a problem. I worked with Dan who kept me updated about how people's moods had been.*

However, most did feel it had adversely affected their own experience and to some extent that of the trainees:

- *One thing I did find difficult was the length of time between seeing everyone. Right at the beginning and then nothing for long periods and then again at the end.it felt like stepping into the course as opposed to being with a group of people for a long period of time, and when it came to seeing them again – I knew what they had done because I'd been through the training myself, but 'I was saying 'I know you've covered this' but if I'd been there I could say 'I remember you had this issue and now look how you've grown with it. It's more supportive. I felt very 'clinical'*
- *Continuity - that's the only downside. Definitely there needed to be more continuity, mainly for the trainees, as well as the trainers. There were such huge gaps. As a trainer we didn't know how they had coped.*
- *It would be much better for the trainees if they had the same trainers. I imagine they would share a lot more if they had the same people to build a rapport with them. But that said, I think that the idea was that we were in communication to see how people were doing on particular issues. But then its very difficult to do that because of confidentiality. We only got very small bits of information.*
- *When I came in they had to backtrack to put me in the picture, so I knew what they were talking about. As a trainee I would find it hard if that was happening to me, having different people as trainers.*
- *I felt bad not to have ownership of the process so I don't know if I gave my best. I tried to but it was very difficult, being in one module every month, in isolation*
- *We definitely gained more as trainees on the previous course because of the continuity. We were more open with our trainers than these new trainees were with us. As a trainee, if they opened up last week, this week nobody would know, so we couldn't actually get to know them.*
- *I was nervous about exercises where I had to move people around and put people together due to the lack of continuity, not knowing how things were in the group, could be risky putting people together and do more damage if there'd been any problems. If there was a tension between 2 people, I don't know about it. If something had been difficult and it came to the subject there had previously been problems about it I wouldn't know. I was wary about putting people together and this is very restricting.*
- *If had been doing it more consistently I would have progressed more.*
- *Not knowing [trainees] history, sometimes people need time to say something – how to manage the time between people – sometimes it's like treading on eggshells. I did it but had to really concentrate on doing it – without knowing the outcome – it was taking risks. It's not good to take risks without some backup.*

6. ANYTHING MORE YOU THINK WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU AS TRAINERS?

- *It would have been beneficial to have been given a profile of each of the trainees because Heather and Roger knew about us from Day 1. I think we should have just had a small brief profile. Somebody did have a minor incident when we were doing the course I think it would have helped to deal with this.*
- *I think some modules there is so much information there could be an extra module so things weren't so squashed. I think in the next course it is going to be 2 modules in one day which is a lot to take in. If possible there should be more time on each of the topics*
- *No, the training was good, we just need more practice.*