



YOUR COMMUNITY WORKING WITH UNIVERSITIES OF EXETER & PLYMOUTH



## Your experiences of Stress & Anxiety

**Hello and welcome** to the first De-Stress project newsletter. De-Stress is a research study looking to understand how and why stress-related issues are being increasingly medicalised with record levels of anti-depressants being prescribed and used.

**Where's it happening?** in West Teignmouth and 3 areas of Plymouth – Devonport, St Budeaux and Barne Barton.

**Who's running it?** The small team includes researchers and GPs from both Exeter and Plymouth Universities and you may have already met Felicity Thomas and Lorraine Hansford who are conducting focus groups and interviews in your community. There is also an advisory group that helps shape the project and a mix of health professionals and local people from your community are part of this group.

**Why is this study relevant to you?** Listening to your experiences and views is vital for this project and we want to hear about what stresses make things difficult for you and how you are dealing with them. We are really interested to know what prompted you to seek help from a GP, what kind of help were you offered and how did that work for you?

With massive health-service cuts, on-going welfare reform, inadequate housing provision, unemployment, social isolation and more people living on the breadline, more of us are experiencing these stress-related issues and pressures but we all respond in different ways – and we want to hear what helps you.

This project will try to understand these issues by looking at the bigger picture of **how environment and circumstance can be the cause of these problems** and how people's health and wellbeing are being affected by the high levels of prescribing and use of anti-depressants.



### What are we trying to achieve?

Your experiences will help to identify what can be done in the future to improve support for people facing these issues and to get policy makers to listen to why and how things need to change.

So far there have been **16 focus groups** (with 97 people) and **42 interviews**. Everyone who has taken part has been thanked with a £15 gift voucher. We would like to say a **HUGE THANK YOU** from all the team for sharing your experiences and for giving your time



### How to get involved?

We would love to speak with **people aged between 18-65 who have seen a health professional (like your GP) about stress, anxiety or feeling low because of the kind of issues mentioned.** We would like to hear about **what prompted you to seek help, what support you were hoping for and how you felt about the GP visit and the support given.**

Interviews can be at a time and place to suit you.

Call or email us for more information or if you would like to take part



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## Questioning the long-term use of antidepressants by

Dr Felicity Thomas

Nationwide, prescriptions for antidepressants are at an all time high, up by 100% since 2015, and 500% since 1992.

It is estimated that half of all people on antidepressants in the UK have been taking them for two years or more and that nationwide, a third of all people taking them long-term have no clinical reason to continue with their treatment.

### So why does this matter?

Increasingly evidence suggests that rather than treat mental ill health, long term use of antidepressants can actually be significantly detrimental to mental health and wellbeing – and that in many cases, long-term use of these drugs not only worsens existing mental health conditions, but may also trigger new ones.

Recent studies have shown that at each follow-up assessment, people who had taken antipsychotic drugs were significantly more likely to display psychotic symptoms than those who had never taken medications. Others have argued that antidepressants not



only have limited effectiveness over placebos but may also affect people's vulnerability to depression in their future lives.

**Findings from the DeStress project** indicate that long-term antidepressant use is common amongst people in low-income communities. Many of the people interviewed have been taking antidepressants for years – even decades, with what they describe as little opportunity for review within medical consultations. In a situation in which GPs are encouraged by clinical guidelines to reassess treatment decisions only when side effects are really harmful to patient health; when health providers are massively constrained by cuts to resourcing; and when people may assume that they are expected to continue treatment unless otherwise advised, the likelihood of people remaining on antidepressants in the long term becomes increasingly apparent. And despite the potential risks associated with withdrawing

from antidepressants, few of those we have spoken to have found any support available to help them to come off the drugs. Those who have been able to withdraw have described the often horrific experiences of doing this without professional support, and the adverse impacts this had on them and their families.

There is an urgent need for health providers to review existing practice on antidepressant prescribing in the UK both to ensure that medications are being prescribed appropriately, and to guarantee that their use is monitored and regularly assessed in light of changing patient circumstances. A failure to do this is not only costly and wasteful in terms of resourcing but is morally and ethically dubious.

### IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**SHARING THE FINDINGS:** What we are learning and finding from your interviews & future plans for this project

**COMMUNITY PAGE:** - support and groups in your local area



## Sharing Ideas, Support & Hope by Glynis Lidster

Back in September, Debbie Roche, Karen Coombes and myself (all resident members of the Destress project advisory board) travelled from Plymouth to Teignmouth for a visit with the Helping Hands group (also on the project advisory board) and the Pow Wow Crafters group to learn about how these groups came together and how they do things that make their peer support so successful in their community.

The trip was an amazing experience, lots of different people, all listening to each other, no talking down, no hierarchy, people wanting to do it for themselves, taking control of their health in so many different ways, I want to see something like that in my community. Running the Welcome Hall, people come to me with their problems – because I suppose they trust me, for them

life is gloomy, they have lost hope, but Teignmouth has hope and energy and people coming together in a safe environment to help and support each other and ultimately feel better and of course have a laugh – that what Devonport needs.

A very productive day, meeting many wonderful people and coming away with so many ideas and the knowledge of what works really well. I have a vision and will be able to realise it with so many willing to help and support us moving it forward – the Helping Hands mums are visiting us in Plymouth on 18<sup>th</sup> October and I feel excited with the prospect of something similar happening here in Devonport.

**Watch this space.....**



Sharing ideas at the Pow Wow Community Café, Teignmouth

