

4. Welcome, Hospitality and Involvement

Welcome involves seeking ways to integrate persons with a mental illness into the faith community. Hospitality means literally extending our hand to another, touching another and getting close enough to recognise our mutual vulnerability to things in this life. When this happens the barriers between “us” and “them” begin to break down.

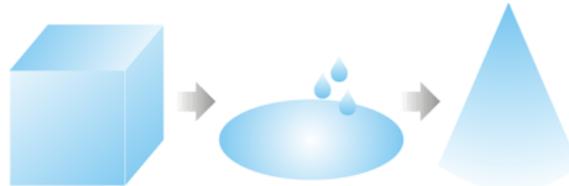
- Post specific words of welcome in worship bulletins and newsletters
- Be inclusive of persons with a mental illness in prayers, liturgies and sermon illustrations.
- Provide training for ushers and greeters to be welcoming and supportive of all persons.
- Partner with the NHS Chaplaincy Team and broom tree to support persons who are looking for a caring and supportive congregation.

5. Support

In this age of austerity the support for sufferers and their families is diminishing with voluntary agencies closing or reducing their services. Government cuts have also reduced the funds available for day service provision and carer support. The Church has a distinct and valuable role to play as one of the support networks that maintain well-being.

- Be a friend and accompany them to social gatherings and church activities and invite them to join you in a meal.
- Come alongside individuals and their families as they navigate through the maze of health and social care agencies to get the help they need

- Start spiritual support groups for persons living with a mental illness and for family members.
- Find ways to encourage family members through a support group or creating space for people to relax, chat and take a break
- Have a referral list of mental health services in your community.
- Work with mental health providers to become part of a person’s support network.
- Visit or provide flowers, cards and other tokens of support to persons who are in the hospital or a residential facility to let them know they are not forgotten. Don’t ignore the family!
- Challenge negative media images and stigmatizing language about persons with a mental illness.



If you have a large cube of ice but realise that what you want is a cone of ice, what do you do? First you must melt the ice to make it amenable to change (unfreeze). Then you must mold the iced water into the shape you want (change). Finally, you must solidify the new shape (refreeze).

Creating Caring Congregations is a tool for change for the Christian Church in Darlington.



Creating Friendly Places



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Mental Illness and Families of Faith: *Creating Friendly Places*

Churches can be “vessels of hope” for persons who may have lost hope and feel disconnected and alone. In modelling God’s acceptance and love for all persons, congregations can offer care and compassion without judgement. Spiritual support involves caring for the whole person through building a relationship with God and with others in the community.

Because of the stigma, guilt and shame surrounding mental illness, many people involved in church (and those who are not) are suffering in silence and families are despairing. Unfortunately many churches are ill equipped to provide appropriate support through lack of Will and Skill. Skills and knowledge are easily developed whereas overcoming worldly attitudes such as prejudice, bias and fear is more problematic.

In the UK, most churches do not see that they have a role to play in care especially if a person is involved with mental health services. These services cannot replicate what a caring Christian Community can provide and many individuals and their families are deprived of fellowship, pastoral care and spiritual support during times of crisis and everyday need.

We need to equip church leaders and faith communities to begin or expand a ministry to and with persons with a mental illness and their families. Broom tree is playing its part in this.

The Creating Friendly Places Model is a framework to assist leaders in driving change and features 5 key areas of consideration.

The process of becoming a caring congregation is dynamic and unique to each community and afterwards requires maintenance for successful transformation to bed in and become the new culture.

Broom tree will support and partner leaders and churches in all or some of these areas depending on how involved you want us to be.

1. Create the Will

The first step in creating a Friendly Place is to raise awareness of the problem through education and talking about mental health matters.

- Get educational material from our website
- Invite persons from the congregation to share their personal stories and/or use our ‘Hear My Voice’ training and motivational workshop delivered by Christians living with mental illness as a starting place for further planning
- Use bible studies to educate and initiate conversations about mental health
- Use bulletin inserts and newsletters to educate about serious mental illness especially during Mental Health Awareness Week in May and World Mental Health Day in October.

2. Commitment

Commitment means that the community pledges to be intentional in seeking ways to become a caring congregation.

- Involve clergy, those affected by mental illness and other members of the congregation in developing a task force or leadership team to

assess the needs of your congregation and develop feasible and practical plans and goals based on a Congregational Assessment.

- Sign up to the Friendly Places Pledge
- Communicate the importance of the issue from the ‘top down’ at the pulpit

3. Develop the Skill

Effective training develops Skills, Knowledge, Understanding, Behaviours and Attitudes (SKUBA). All training should ideally involve those affected by mental illness in design and also delivery.

- Train your leaders and pastoral care workers using the UK Mental Health First Aid Course or one of broom tree’s training products
- Invite a speaker or offer a workshop to teach people that mental illnesses are treatable brain disorders and not a moral or spiritual failure
- Train persons to be supportive companions on the journey toward healing, wholeness and recovery and to practice the “ministry of presence.”

