

Depression affects more and more of us on a daily basis - KERRYANNE CLANCY speaks to a dad who found a way out to live a happier life

Small steps to beat the blues

When his marriage broke down father-of-two ALAN MAYER, aged 49, from Downey Street in Hanley, found it tough to cope. Diagnosed with depression, he decided to seek help for himself and discovered a positive thinking course which has changed his life.

“ I STARTED the STEPS (steps to excellence for personal success) course on May 10 last year. It was a six-week course I found out about through the Media Action Group for Mental Health in Hanley, where I've been a volunteer for 18 months. A circular came to the office and the group put me forward for it.

It's aimed at people who have had mental health problems in their life and it helps you begin thinking positively.

I had been through a divorce and no divorce is good really. I was the one left with the children, a boy and a girl, and I was really struggling.

My wife leaving me was very upsetting, but I had to keep the house running and try and

The truth about depression

- Work related stress affects about one in five workers.
- Stress-related conditions are now the commonest reported cause of sickness absence.
- One in 10 children under the age of 16 have a mental health problem. Among 11-15-year-olds 13 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls have a mental health problem.
- One in six adults at any one time has a mental health problem. Maybe as many as nine million people are

affected. Up to 670,000 people in the UK have some form of dementia.

- Up to one in four consultations with a GP concern mental health issues. As many as 630,000 people are in contact with specialised mental health services at any one time.
- Depression is a common mental illness which is estimated to affect up to one in five Britons at some point in their lifetime.
- It costs the UK about £8

billion a year in medication, benefits and lost working days.

- The most common symptoms include: feelings of helplessness, feeling useless, constant questioning of thoughts and actions, a loss of energy and the ability to concentrate, harming oneself, sudden loss or gain in weight, sleep disruption and agitation and restlessness.
- Treatments include psychotherapy, anti-depressants, self help groups or electro-convulsive therapy.

keep myself going too. I gave up work to look after my children but found myself alone in the house day after day and it becomes a very lonely place.

I was diagnosed as clinically depressed.

When I realised it was becoming a problem I sought help.

You cope with life and you think you're well, but I was five years depressed and didn't know it.

When my mother died that acted as a trigger.

When I was diagnosed I was on medication which I was very, very grateful for, but I came off it as it wasn't for me. It helped me to relax, but I found it hard to think and I found I couldn't function.

Medication is designed to keep you on a certain level, which meant while there was no sadness, there was also no

happiness either, yet I was a person who had always loved life.

So I took a decision to stop taking it, but I needed to replace it which is when I began looking towards support groups.

While I never really lost my self confidence, I had lost my self esteem, but before the STEPS course I never realised self esteem was the most important thing.

You can brag your way through life with self confidence, but when you go through a trauma your self esteem goes. I think completing the course helped me gain that back.

It consisted of a series of lectures, which sounds boring but you did have to take part in different activities.

There are 12 units, and one of them looked at your thought processes, how you arrive at your decisions and what you think about.

We also looked at self talk, which is all those little voices in your head about yourself and the messages they are giving you.

We had a saying, 'if you think you can or if you think you can't, you're right'. Another phrase is, 'when you want what you've never had you must do what you've never done' — it's all about stretching your comfort zones.

The course made me look in different ways at where I was going in my life.



● Brighter future: Alan Mayer is hoping to get back to work and enjoy life

Picture by Jon Bartholomew

I think the most useful thing I learned is that you've got to stay on track with a mental health problem. It's not something you're really ever cured of, so you need to be aware of it, manage it, and watch for problems creeping up on you.

Before I used to get up and think everything was wrong. You think what's happening to you isn't happening to anyone else.

But through the mental health groups I've been involved with it has been a big help to realise it is happening to so many others.

There's a fine line between being cynical and realistic and I like to think I'm more of a realist now.

It's easy to get angry about things when they're really not important. Learning is important to me now.

I'm 50 next birthday and I

love education and I've done several courses, including an introduction to counselling course. Now I want to get back to work.

My problem before was that I tended to take too much on board because I cared too much for people, and if I had problems I tended to push them to one side but they were always on the back burner.

I still feel I've got a bit further to go as it's a difficult process.

I feel I can talk about anything now and I don't think I've got anything to be ashamed of. I had a break down and I'm part way through it. Taking the children on is a very tough job, and if you're not mentally well it's almost impossible and I don't know how I came through it. Now I can look forward to the day I see my daughter get married.

A little positive thinking can work wonders

POSITIVE thinking is something we all need a little bit more of — and now a course aims to teach us how to put it into practice.

As Mental Health Action Week begins, the Mental Health Foundation is encouraging us all to exercise our way to good mental health.

The STEPS (Steps to Excellence in Personal Success) course hopes to get mental health service users to get their minds in shape with the help of some practical exercises of a very different kind.

Common experiences, such as relationship break-ups, bereavement, financial worries, and stressful jobs, can all act as triggers for depression and anxiety.

So, all things considered, it's no surprise that in the UK we spend a total of £570 million a

year on anti-depressants. But Sharon Taaffe, programme director for mental health at Health Promotion, which is running the STEPS course, believes we could all benefit from learning how to manage our own mental well being.

Usually run over three days with a maximum of 12 people, STEPS has already been used within Stoke-on-Trent among parents and teachers to help raise the aspirations of young people.

"We became involved because we recognised the importance of giving people the skills to manage their emotional well being," says Sharon.

"We look at the way people think and the way they talk to themselves — the course teaches you to challenge those negative thoughts which stop

you being able to do things. If you believe you can't do something then you can't do it. I'll give you an example: suppose you're on a bike and you see a stone in the road ahead.

"You start looking at that stone in order to avoid it but, because of the way our minds work, you'll often end up going towards the stone.

"However, when you learn to drive a car you don't look at the wall or the pedestrians. Instead, you look at a spot further in the distance to help keep the car on course. That happens in other things in life too. If you visualise things the way you want them to be, mentally you start moving towards that picture."

The STEPS course was developed in America and began being used by Health Promotion last year. So far two

courses have been delivered in-house to staff at Health Promotion, and the course has been tried with people with experience of mental distress.

A survey of the people who have taken the course reveals that, in almost all cases, people reported an improvement in their confidence.

But Sharon is keen to stress that the course is not therapy.

"We also look at goal setting and motivation.

"We look at a balance wheel which is divided up into areas of your life such as personal relationships, work and so on, then people are asked to put themselves on a scale of one to five for each, working out where they are now and where they want to be. It helps you set goals for yourself in those areas where you have most work to do.

"One of the tips I find most useful if I'm feeling angry or stressed, is knowing that you can't hold two conflicting emotions in your head at the same time.

"Therefore, if you're angry you need to have something which makes you feel calm and makes you go 'ahh'. I have a picture of my dog going up a hill which does that for me and helps to break the angry cycle.

"When you're angry your body releases damaging hormones into the bloodstream, so it's good for your health to combat them and breaking the cycle helps you return to the thing which is making you stressed in a calmer frame of mind."

Information: contact Sarah Walker about the STEPS course on 01782 400565.

everybody's
free to
feel good!

With Slimming World
there are no limits!

For more support than you ever
thought possible join a warm
and friendly group near you.

★ New Consultant
★ LONGPORT
★ John Baskeyfield
School ★
★ Thursday 7pm
★ Tel Wendyann
01782 680158
★ ★ ★

MONDAY
May Bank
Tel. Dawn 740074
Talke Pits
Tel. Alison 868252
Dresden
Tel. Mandie 316487
Weston Coyney
Tel. Melissa 315455
Fenton
Tel. Angie 284977
Eccleshall
Tel. Steph 750652
Stockton Brook
Tel. Sue 625025
Clayton Tel. Dawn 714586
Knutton Tel. Anny 870853

TUESDAY
Audley Tel. Dawn 714586
Burslem Tel. Alison 868252
Chell (am & pm)
Tel. Nicki 01270 650602
Hartshill Tel. Debbie 627924
Hanley Tel. Kelly 373553
Abbey Hulton
Tel. Paula 774260
Sandford Hill
Tel. Melissa 315455
Stone
Tel. Kay 250880
Cheddleton
Tel. Eve 874263

WEDNESDAY
Longton
Tel. Mandy 316487

Bradwell Tel. Dawn 714586
Macleay Tel. Jenny 680685
Kiddsgrove (am & pm)
Tel. Claire 787705
Meir Park (am & pm)
Tel. Mandy 315660
Westlands Tel. Debbie 627924
Bucknall Tel. Justeen 328256
Basford (male only)
Tel. Jeff 819159
Cheadle Tel. Ena 269034
Oakhill / Trent Vale
Tel. Sam 719982

THURSDAY
Newcastle (am & pm)
Tel. Claire 787705
Burlaston
Tel. Mandi 643931
Basford (ladies)
Tel. Cher 634892
Sneyd Green
Tel. Eve 874263
Cellarhead
Tel. Eve 874263
Blythe Bridge
Tel. Louise 314562
Fenton Tel. Ena 269034
Chesterton
Tel. Dawn 714586
Trentham
Tel. Steph 750652
Longport
Tel. Wendyann call 680158
Forsbrook
Tel. Melissa 315455


NEW!
mix2
max

NEW!
success
express

HURRY!
great
offers
end soon

Slimming
WORLD
the future of slimming

08700 75 46 66
www.slimming-world.com



The 3rd Annual North Midlands Headache Lecture

Migraine and Womens Issues: Hormones, Menstruation, Pregnancy and the Menopause?

FIND OUR MORE REGARDING MIGRAINE IN WOMEN:

- Preventative medication
- Evidence based Effective Treatments
- Self-help measures

Wednesday, March 30th 2005 • 7.30 to 9.00 p.m.
at The Wade Hall, North Staffordshire Medical Institute
Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs. ST4 7NY

Speakers: Dr Brendan Davies, Consultant Neurologist from the North Midlands Headache Clinic, University Hospital of North Staffordshire and The local Migraine Action Association support group

Light refreshments will be served

For more details, please contact: the Neurosciences Department on 01782 554689

Admission is free but booking is advisable to ensure a place is held for you (Tel. 01782 554689)

How do I stop my breath smelling?

Dear Doctor,
I have a problem with bleeding gums and bad breath. I use an electric toothbrush and dental tape, and have been referred to a hygienist. What else can I do?

One of the most effective approaches is using a treatment known as Gengigel (from pharmacies), which contains hyaluronic acid. This hydrates the gums and stimulates production of collagen to promote new gum formation. When used after dental treatment to remove plaque, Gengigel significantly reduces gum redness and inflammation. Use a tongue scraper to remove bacterial accumulations on the tongue which can contribute to bad odours. Drinking green tea or taking extracts of an edible mushroom, Agaricus bisporus, can help to neutralise bad breath by breaking down malodorous bacterial chemicals. It is also important to drink at least 2 litres of fluid per day.

Dear Doctor,
My baby was delivered three months ago in distress, using ventouse suction. He now cries



SARAH BREWER
Second Opinion

a lot and is hard to settle. Could this be linked? A ventouse or suction delivery is a more gentle form of assisted delivery than obstetric forceps, and involves applying a suction device similar to a sink plunger to the baby's head. This helps the doctor pull the baby out as the mother pushes down. As you are worried, talk to your health visitor who will have a wealth of advice to offer regarding crying and colic, which may be the problem. Cranial osteopathy is a gentle complementary technique that is often helpful for crying babies, and involves gentle manipulation of the head to correct distortions caused by a prolonged or difficult birth, and to relieve irritability and colic which may occur as a result.