

What is the Dorset Mental Health Forum?

Dorset Mental Health Forum is a Dorset-wide-independent charity run and led predominantly by people who have experienced mental health problems.

The Forum, which is based in Durngate Street, Dorchester, employs about 40 staff and has a range of projects across Dorset and ongoing developments, funded in a number of different ways – including contracts from local statutory organisations, a grant from the Big Lottery fund and social enterprise income.

It provides information for mental health service users and their carers, the general public and statutory services. It provides day services, an advocacy service and mental health awareness training.

Becky Aldridge, assistant services manager, said: “The Forum has a clear philosophy and ethos. Service users, people with lived experience of mental health problems and recovery are at the heart of everything we do. According to the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, “recovery” is defined as “a set of values about a person’s right to build a meaningful life for themselves, with or without the continuing presence of mental health symptoms. Recovery is based on ideas of self-determination and self-management. It emphasizes the importance of hope in sustaining motivation and supporting expectations of an individually fulfilled life. Many of our staff are being supported along their own personal journey of recovery, having become employed by the forum at a time when other employment was not achievable for them. Not only have these people been able to experience flexible, understanding and supportive employment but in some cases they have been able to utilise their own experiences to positive effect for others, which has enabled them to grow in confidence and to develop themselves. Another example would be how we have empowered and enabled service users to believe they will be heard and to have a voice regarding the shaping, modernising and delivery of local statutory mental health services. We have a growing constituency of several hundred mental health service users and people with lived experience in Dorset, with whom we regularly consult and involve in statutory service planning. Many people are also involved directly in influencing service provision by attending meetings and providing representative feedback, taking part in recruitment and training of statutory staff and developing Forum peer-led services themselves”.

For more information about the forum, go to the website at www.dorsetmentalhealthforum.org.uk