

# Social Isolation

ALFORD CENTRE · COMRAICH · NEXUS · THE ARCHES · THE HAVEN · COMPANIONS · WESTHILL



**Friendly and relaxed at the Alford Centre**

One of the aspects of mental ill-health that many people find it hardest to bear is the all-to-common experience of social isolation. When we have positive mental health, we tend to take for granted our networks of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues and the stimulation, satisfaction (sometimes frustration too!) that these relationships bring us.

When mental ill-health affects our self esteem and our confidence in our own abilities, or makes us behave in ways that people close to us find unsettling or worrying, our relationships can suffer rapidly. We may withdraw contact from others and isolate ourselves from many ordinary activities. Others may reduce their contact with us through discomfort, not knowing how best to respond to us. If our problems grow leading to prolonged sickness or unemployment, then our incomes may drop and severely limit our financial freedom to engage in our usual activities.

People affected by mental ill-health and experiencing social isolation may feel that their lives may never recover. The experience of many who use our services and our befriending schemes shows that recovery is achievable and that their quality of life can improve greatly.

One approach is community based trying to strengthen the capacity of the local Westhill community to address mental ill-health and to promote positive mental wellbeing. Valuable work is being done by the staff of our Big Lottery-funded Westhill Project.

For individual service users, five day services operate in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. We try to tailor these services to meet the needs of each individual, treating everyone as a partner with a voice that must be heard. These services can provide a sense of purpose and direction, as well as non-judgemental company and enjoyable activities. We have just one small but very successful volunteer befriending scheme: this is enormously popular and we are keen to find the funding to replicate this service across the area we serve and to extend it to younger people.

*The Day Centre saved my life! The staff are brilliant – you couldn't ask for more!*

*This place epitomises the recovery process*

*Coming here has helped me to re-build my confidence*