

Unemployment and Isolation – the curse of many with long-term mental illness.

Being unemployed or underemployed for any length of time can be a debilitating experience.

For too many people it can lead to social isolation. This occurs when a person's well-being is such that they are unable to participate fully in the wider community.

Such people often face financial constraints as well as considerable psychological stress as they are denied the self-esteem and sense of well-being associated with being in the workforce.

Facing family and friends can be difficult. Society places so much emphasis on work as an indicator of social status.

It becomes increasingly difficult to face up to people, to listen to what they are doing, where they have been and where they are going – when you have not been working and cannot afford to go anywhere that involves cost.

For many, it is just so much easier to dodge friends and family – indeed most, if not all, chance of social contact. Some shop at times and places when they will least expect to see people that they may know so that they can dodge the embarrassment of having to speak to them. This leads to further isolation and can have devastating effects on health.

For many, the poverty, the loss of self-esteem, feelings of depression and the sheer loneliness of unemployment can be too much to bear. Census data suggests that those experiencing unemployment are more than two and a half times more likely to commit suicide than the employed.

Coming to terms with unemployment is, for many, a major challenge. It requires so much more sustained effort to remain positive – for the benefit of others and themselves.

And for many it takes immense courage towards taking the first step towards reentering the workforce and meaningful employment.

That is why Like Minds Taranaki has initiated a 68 page Guidebook on ***“Employment: Taking the First Step – A Guidebook for People with Health issues.”***

Getting motivated, seeking the right support, sorting out desired work options, getting an updated CV., relearning about application letters, and interview skills can be daunting in itself, but it is, for most, the pathway towards their next job.

For some, longer term support is needed. Others, once they recognize their skills and experiences and gained some self-confidence are ready to take on and achieve their desired employment goals.

For a few, the process may involve some hands-on work experience, often as a trainee or volunteer, before they feel ready for the workforce.

A positive side-effect for many is that entering the process is often the first step towards ending their social isolation.

The Guidebook was launched in early July 2008.