

Internalised or Self Stigma...

People of all ages experiencing mental illness, are at risk of internalising stigma, and, consequently, suffering diminished self-esteem, confidence and shame.

This low self-esteem, feeling unwanted and un-needed can affect a person's self-belief, confidence and motivation to seek appropriate mental health and physical health care, employment, closer relationships, or independent living.

This avoidance of treatment, social opportunities and employment further exacerbates their mental distress and can lead to lower levels of recovery.

Fear of stigma and discrimination can lead people to lose their self-confidence, becoming more socially isolated and defensive.

Such are the potential effects of self stigma that they can lead to increased misuse of alcohol and/ or other drugs and potentially increased risks of financial problems, relationship issues, justice issues, depression, self-harm and suicide.

Suicide is the most tragic outcome of mental illness and is integrally connected to internalised stigma.

Two of the most powerful and effective strategies to combat self-stigma and self-discrimination are empowerment and recovery.

Empowerment has been described as the opposite of self-stigmatisation.

Empowerment involves ensuring people with experience of mental illness have opportunities and experiences where they can access appropriate treatment and have positive experiences of being accepted in their communities.

Mental health recovery is never easy. It is often more of a journey of healing and transformation towards again living a life of meaning and enjoyment.

"One of the biggest barriers to recovery is discrimination. That is why stopping discrimination and championing respect, rights and equality for people with mental illness is just as important as providing the best treatments and therapies."

Blueprint for Mental health Services in New Zealand, November, 1998.

For those facing mental illness, it can be a matter of life and death that we succeed.

There are a number of agencies and services that provide support and aim to promote mental health and counter stigma and discrimination.

In Taranaki:

Like Minds Taranaki 06-759-0966
50 Devon Street West, NP 0800-454-536
mental.health@xtra.co.nz
www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

Supporting Families in Mental Illness
44 Liardet St., NP 06-757-9300
manager@sftaranaki.xtra.co.nz

A couple of other useful websites to visit are:

www.mental.health.org.nz
www.depression.org.nz
www.thelowdown.co.nz

Countering Stigma and Discrimination

associated with Mental Illness...



(Including Self-Stigma and Self-Discrimination)



50 Devon Street West
New Plymouth

Telephone: 06-759-0966
Free: 0800-454-536

Email: mental.health@xtra.co.nz
www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

Stigmatisation of people with experience of mental illness is created by bias, prejudice, distrust, fear, stereotyping, embarrassment, ignorance, anger or avoidance.

Stigma leads others to avoid living, working or socialising with, renting to, employing or supporting people with experience of mental illness.

It impacts on people's abilities to access resources and opportunities in their communities.

It can lead to low self-esteem, isolation and a sense of hopelessness.

It deters the public and politicians from adequately resourcing mental health services and mental health promotion.

More tragically, it can deprive people of their dignity and their participation in their communities.

Stigma demonstrates a lack of information and understanding about mental illness and compassion for the people it affects.

When people who have to face the challenge of recovering from mental illness are avoided, deprived of employment, housing, close relationships, and participating in their communities, the impact can be devastating.

Stigma can lead people to feel flawed, ostracised, unneeded and unwanted.

It can, at its worst, lead those who need help the most, towards social isolation, depression and suicide.

Stigma refers to attitudes and beliefs that motivate people to fear, reject and avoid those who are labelled with a mental illness.

Stigma also affects those who provide practical support to people with experience of mental illness. It can also affect family and those paid to provide professional medical care – making the mental health field unattractive to many medical staff and GPs.

Discrimination occurs when people and organisations act upon their feelings of rejection and discomfort about people with mental illness by withholding some or all of their rights.

So what causes such Stigma...?

Stigma consists of three related problems; knowledge, attitudes and behaviour—leading to discrimination.

Discrimination is based on ignorance, prejudice and arrogance.

Ignorance of the need for and value of people with experience of mental illness

Prejudice based on fear and avoidance

Arrogance from being part of the mainstream

Ignorance:

For too long, mental illness has been a taboo subject, has been misunderstood and has resulted in too few resources being allocated for education about mental illness.

Prejudice:

Fear, anxiety and avoidance are common feelings for both people who do not have a mental illness (when reacting to those that do) **and** for people with mental illness who often expect rejection and discrimination and therefore impose upon themselves a form of self-stigma.

Arrogance:

This can come from being part of the mainstream culture by those living without a mental illness.

Discrimination:

There is strong scientific evidence that discrimination negatively impacts on the lives of people with mental illness making education, forming of close relationships, employment and socialising much more difficult.

Making a difference in supporting people with experience of mental illness:

Know the facts: Take time to learn a little more about mental illness—learn the facts instead of the myths.

Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviour: We can all change the way we think and see people as unique - not as some label or stereotype.

Choose your words carefully: Use more accurate and sensitive terms when speaking about someone with experience of mental illness.

Educate others: Take opportunities to inform others about taking more positive attitudes to people who experience mental illness.

Focus on the positive: People with experience of mental illness have many other aspects and skills that define who they really are.

Support people: If you know someone with a mental illness—provide the sort of support you think you would want if that person was you.

Include everyone: Accepting someone with a mental illness also means including them in your life—helping them connect to their community.

