

Storying Sheffield

Paul Denton writes about his experience of taking part in this unique project that saw students at the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust (SHSC) service users working and studying together to collect, record and produce stories about their lives



Images from the story board for 'Institute Dentamental' drawn by Paul Denton

As a service user at SPACES North I was offered a place at the University of Sheffield along with other service users to take part in a project that was all about mental health and our experiences of it.

This was an opportunity for those of us who suffer with mental health to put forward our life experiences from an individual perspective in an exhibition at the university's Jessop West exhibition space.

I was apprehensive at first. I didn't want to tell a story about some depressing events in my life, or make people with mental health conditions sound hopeless and bleak.

In the end, I decided on making a short film. I wanted to tell the story of what I thought the day centre would be like and how the people who went there would react to me. Rather than tell the story in a factual realistic way, I wanted to make it comical and entertaining.

The film, entitled 'Institute Dentamental', has me going to the day centre and encountering my key worker in real life, Sarah, who plays a sinister zombie-like and

unsympathetic character. She's the boss of the institute who leads me into the nightmare world of this fictional day centre. I encounter some drugged-up nightmarish characters and experience some bizarre situations.

A lot of people in the 'real world' have some pretty prejudiced opinions about those of us with mental health conditions. What I wanted to do was to make a film that depicted what some people may think of those who attend day centres.

Making the film, I had help from a very generous student called Matt and his friend Angus, who developed a great atmospheric soundtrack.

My time at the university was extremely enjoyable. We were able to use all the facilities the university had to offer and the students and staff were helpful and supportive. Our lecturer, Brendan Stone, is an extremely nice man who was incredibly supportive of all of us.

There were also guest appearances by writers and professors. These sessions were

designed to give us ideas on how to construct our own individual stories for the project and also to inspire us all.

When the exhibition took place, the end result was well worth the effort. Many people who attended were impressed and commented that the film revealed a great deal about my state of mind! No, seriously - they all found it entertaining and funny, which was nice to know.

Hopefully, the Storying Sheffield project will enable more of us to feel comfortable in telling our stories and also help people without mental health conditions to understand us better and therefore see us in a more positive light.

To see my film, and other stories from the exhibition, go to: www.storyingsheffield.com

Storying Sheffield will be running again soon. Some introductory workshops will be held this autumn. The full course begins in February 2011, and runs until June. If you would like to take part, or if you'd like more information, please contact:

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For further Storying Sheffield news and events, see the 'News & events' page at the website address above.

Art exhibition to mark World Mental Health Day

An open art exhibition organised by Creative Arts Steering Team (SHSC), in association with Storying Sheffield, will be held on 9th and 10th October to mark World Mental Health Day. The exhibition will feature many different types of art, including painting and film, created by users of mental health services in Sheffield. The exhibition, which is free to attend, will be held at the University of Sheffield's Jessop West Exhibition Space from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. on Saturday 9th and 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. on Sunday 10th.