

Charity Focus: 'Tomorrow It Could Be You'

This month's Charity Focus is on a relatively new charity in Gibraltar, whose main area of concern is support for those with mental health issues. 'Upon This Rock' magazine spoke to Jayne MacDonald, founder of 'Tomorrow It Could Be You' in order to find out more about this up and coming charity, what her plans are and what she hopes to achieve in the future.

'Tomorrow It Could Be You' (Charity No. 186) was founded in March 2007 together with her husband Shane and support from her good friend Emily Olivero, with the main aim of raising awareness of mental health issues and breaking the stigma that is often attached to such problems. The charity also aims to provide more activities and services for mental health patients and to encourage acceptance by society. "A member of my family has suffered from a mental health problem for many years," said Jayne, "and I was disappointed to discover that there is very little support for mental health patients in Gibraltar."

As for the name of the charity, Jayne hopes to emphasise that anyone can develop a mental health issue, from depression to schizophrenia, but it should not mean that those individuals be ostracised by society. "I wanted a name that would grab people's attention," she said, 'but also to underline the fact that mental health problems are common. I myself suffered from post natal depression for a long time and there was no-one who could help me through that. I had to overcome it alone."

Jayne commented on society's reaction towards mental health issues. "There also needs to be a change in society's attitude. There is little respect and a lot of discrimination and I aim to change that," she said.

The charity's current activities include simple tasks such as reading The Chronicle with patients. "Just for them to know what's going on in Gibraltar, and having someone to discuss it with, that can make a real difference to their day," said Jayne. The charity also involves patients in recreational activities, such as regular outings, and music therapy.

'Tomorrow It Could Be You' recently held a Gala Night on the 12th December where patients mingled with the public. "It was a very successful night," said Jayne. "We had members of government there and the patients really enjoyed the social inclusion." The charity has also organised two successful walks for patients and a trip to St Michael's Cave, which many of them had never seen.

The charity has developed a befriending scheme, which encourages social inclusion and public acceptance of mental health patients. The charity would also like to offer alternative therapies, such as massage and aromatherapy, to those with mental health issues, as well as see single gender wards and a respite ward for temporary visitors to King George V Hospital. "I'd also suggest renaming the hospital as there is a lot of stigma attached to 'KGV' in itself," said Jayne.

Amongst its many supporters, the charity has also received donations from the Minister for Health, Yvette del Agua, and in-kind support from George Bassadone, Lourdes Barea (Bassadone Motors Ltd), and Louis Calvente of Louis' Pharmacy,

ICC. "Louis has been brilliant, providing support and assistance on a weekly basis," thanked Jayne.

Jayne believes that more information should be made available to the public on mental health issues and she plans to organise more school talks on the subject in the near future. The charity would also like to develop a sheltered employment and accommodation scheme for individuals with mental health problems.

Charities such as 'Tomorrow It Could Be You' are always in need of funding to achieve their aims and Jayne offers suggestions as to how people can help. "We really need sponsorship and regular donations," she said. "People can donate anything including unwanted gifts, clothes and money. Everything helps." Jayne is also aiming to acquire an 8-seater minivan for the regular outings that the charity organises.

In finishing, Jayne had a few comments for us to ponder over. "I would encourage people to treat others as they'd like to be treated. Mental health patients should be able to say 'yes I have a problem' with society's acceptance, not discrimination or rejection. We need to break the taboo that currently exists in our society towards mental health issues and those individuals who suffer from them."

On behalf of 'Tomorrow It Could Be You', Jayne encourages any donations and welcomes those who would like to volunteer in helping to achieve the charity's aims.