

Learning from ACTION after Stroke -a short course to help you get on with your life

We would like to thank the James Tudor Foundation for supporting our ACTION after Stroke programme over the last year. As a short course to help you get on with your life, ACTION after Stroke is now a core part of the emotional and psychological care offered by Bristol After Stroke and is much valued and appreciated by participants. It is one of the benefits we can offer to carers and partners of stroke affected people together or separately.

We know that psychological care after stroke is key area of unmet need in the community for survivors and their carers. Approximately 33% of stroke survivors experience depression, 25% are affected by anxiety and 57% are affected by fatigue and cognitive problems. Mood disorders and mental ill health significantly affect recovery and increase mortality after stroke. They increase take up of statutory services which in turn increases costs associated with mainstream care and service delivery.

We asked the James Tudor Foundation for support to run three ACTION after Stroke courses over a year and to run an evaluation of its effectiveness in supporting psychological recovery. We used a well-recognised evaluation tool to gauge people's mood before and after the course. The results of our small survey match other research into ACTION after Stroke, that participants report improvements in hopefulness, wellbeing and confidence.

About ACTION after Stroke

ACTION after Stroke is particularly designed to help people who feel distressed or anxious after their stroke. The course is about learning ways to manage painful or disturbing feelings, thoughts and sensations. It teaches that we can learn to accept the things we can't control and focus on changing the things we can.

ACTION after Stroke is a four-week course. The two-hourly sessions involve a mix of presentations and practical exercises with optional "homework" to embed the ideas and techniques introduced during the sessions. These are distributed to participants as printed booklets and audio CDs.

ACT 1: Get wise to your mind

ACT 2: Facing up to life

ACT 3: Being mindful

ACT 4: Living wisely, living well

There is also an optional fifth session, facilitated by our Lead Counsellor, for those who wish to explore further the issues and their personal feelings about them in a group setting.

Our research

Over three courses, we introduced a short mood evaluation tool called the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) where participants are asked to rank a short list of statements about their mood and feelings out of five. These then add up to a score which suggests how they feel at that moment. We enabled our participants to complete the evaluation before and after the four-week course. The results were then amalgamated to give a large enough sample size from which to draw conclusions.

The WEMWBS tool asks respondents to assess their mood against seven statements on a scale of 1-5:

- I've been feeling optimistic about the future
- I've been feeling useful
- I've been feeling relaxed

- I've been dealing with problems well
- I've been thinking clearly
- I've been feeling close to other people
- I've been able to make up my own mind about things

It gives a personal score for how people are feeling at that point in time on a scale of 0-35 – with a score of below 18 being low or very low, 19-25 being average, and over 26 being above average.

Findings

By administering the tool before and after the course we were able to track the impact of the programme, and over the three courses we measured we could see an upward trajectory in people's scores suggesting that the course helped them to feel better in themselves.

We then looked at the results for the individual statements within the WEMWBS tool and saw an impact very clearly on responses to three of the statements in particular: "I have been feeling useful", "I have been feeling relaxed" and "I have been dealing with problems well"

This is what a couple of people said about the course as a whole:

"Made me feel that I wasn't alone with negative thoughts & feelings and that I now have useful strategies to work on that could help me in the future"

"I use the mindfulness activities & CD most days. They help me stay calmer and overcome frustration. I have worried a lot less about the future"

In all, our small survey bears out other research findings that ACTion after Stroke reduces depression and increases self-rated health status and hopefulness in people affected by stroke.

