Shenley history is a first for Harrow

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Untold stories from inside the former Shenley Asylum will be told for the first time thanks to a £50,000 grant given to the organisation Mind in Harrow.

Shenley Asylum was opened in 1934 and finally closed in 1998. In the mid-1950s it housed some 2,300 patients before the use of institutionalised care for those suffering mental illness began to decline. The new 20-month project 'Hidden Minds' will enable 30 volunteers, mainly mental health service users themselves, to delve behind the scenes at Shenley recording interviews with former patients and staff, their families and health professionals.

They will also research mental health records including reports, documents and photographs to build up a picture of life inside Shenley during the time when people suffering mental health problems were shut away from the community. Their discoveries will be used to create an exhibition at Harrow Museum where it will coincide with World Mental Health Day* and Harrow's ethnic minority festival Under One Sky, emphasising the experience of people from different ethnic backgrounds at Shenley.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "As well as uncovering the hidden history of both a local institution and the way mental health issues were viewed and treated in the past, this project will give those involved training in new skills that can benefit them in the future."

Mark Gillham, Chief Executive of Mind in Harrow, said: "We are delighted to receive our first grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will explore the myths and reality of life in Shenley and its heritage in Harrow today. Now is the time for this hidden history to be passed onto future generations, or we risk losing it forever."

Councillor Bill Stephenson, Leader of Harrow Council, said: "This promises to be a fascinating project that sheds light on the past and promotes greater understanding of mental health and how it is treated.

"I hope the success of Mind in Harrow inspires more community groups and organisations to bid for Heritage Lottery funding particularly to promote Harrow's rich history. Indeed, the Council is currently working with partners to explore ways to improve important heritage sites around the borough, including Headstone Manor."

Notes to editors

* World Mental Health Day is on 10 October 2011.

Harrow has been selected as a priority area by the Heritage Lottery Fund because of a hitherto low level of applications for grant aid. Organisations wishing to find out more about how to apply for funding and the range of projects that can be considered should contact Norma Pearson, Development Officer, Heritage Lottery Fund at normap@hlf.org.uk / 020 7591 6190 or Malcolm John, Corporate Funding Manager for Harrow Council at malcolm.john@harrow.gov.uk.

Further information

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