

Stories of lives transformed

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Shoreham-based Company Paradiso will be charting the way in which medical understanding of and society's attitudes toward mental illness shifted from 1970 to the present day. Over this period institutionalised health care, hallmarked by patients being shut away, evolved into community health care with more emphasis on rehabilitation.

The project, which will interview 30 people who have experienced Sussex mental health services, will look at how care and treatments were provided in five local hospitals that have since closed. These are Forest Hospital at Horsham, St Francis Hospital at Haywards Heath, Brighton General, Graylingwell Hospital near Chichester and Hellingly Hospital at Hailsham.

Working with a dozen volunteers the project will interview sufferers with a range of mental health conditions so as to gather their stories about depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, autism and dementia. Some of those involved will be looking back to the 1970s while others have more up to date experiences. One group of those involved will be young people aged 15 to 21.

A selection of the interviews will be broadcast on BBC Radio Sussex while some will form part of an exhibition that will take place at Horsham Museum. Those taking part will learn new skills including interviewing techniques and exhibition presentation. The information gathered will be stored in county archives and be available on a new website.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "This project enables service users to share the positive transformations in their lives that have come about as attitudes to mental health have altered over the years. Their personal accounts will contribute to a valuable, but frequently overlooked, historical subject."

For Company Paradiso, Director Jon Potter, said: "This project will look at moments of discovery in the lives of people who have faced huge challenges. We hope it will also inspire others to reflect on opportunities for transformation in their own lives."

Further information

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