

Spotlight on...

Worcestershire M.E. Support Group

"When people first make contact, you can hear the tentative tone in their voice, but once we've chatted for a while they start to relax and smile, and grow in confidence." So says Ian Logan, Chair of Worcestershire M.E. Support Group.

Regular group meetings in Worcestershire first started around 25 years ago, and were held in Worcester and Malvern initially, although a group was set up in the Vale of Evesham shortly after. Within a year the group had consolidated, becoming Worcestershire M.E. Support Group and operating in six areas across the county.

"People can be very hesitant and shy when they first arrive. On the door I put a handwritten note saying 'M.E. meeting, please come in'. I think it's much friendlier than a printed thing that looks all official," says Ian.

"Those that attend the meetings always say they are so pleased that they've come. And whatever problems they bring, we can always make suggestions for things they can do, whether that's trying alternative therapies, changing their diet, reading books on the subject, attending local NHS CFS/M.E. services or even getting themselves a new, more understanding GP."

Over the years, the group has been involved in various APPG inquiries, such as the 2010 inquiry into NHS service provision for people with M.E. It also regularly attends meetings of the M.E./CFS local multi-disciplinary team, speaking on behalf of local people with M.E. and giving members' input. In April this year, the group gave their input at a Worcestershire



NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups' review of current NHS service provision for people with M.E./CFS in Worcestershire. Then in June members met with Harriet Baldwin, MP for West Worcestershire, to share concerns about the lack of M.E. research and support. "It was a very positive meeting, and Ms Baldwin has said she is willing to help local people diagnosed with M.E./CFS who experience difficulties with the benefits system," said Ian.

Change to come

However, Ian reports that the numbers attending the group meetings have sadly dwindled in recent years. "These days, there is so much information and support available online," he explains. "In addition, some of the people leading the meetings couldn't continue for one reason or another, and some of the venues became too expensive to hire, so now we are down to just three meetings per month.

"Regretfully, the group will have to change from its present form, as

we can no longer continue under our present constitution and group's aims."

So what of the group's future? "We will be holding an Extraordinary General Meeting on 5 December to formally close the group in its present form under the group's constitution," Ian explains. "This would leave the way clear for a 'new' group to start up in any form and without 'old' constraints. It may be that we decide to remove the 'office structure', and offer a telephone service instead to those who wish for personal contact and those needing information and confirmation of, for example, symptoms and emotions."

Ian would like to encourage anyone who feels able to help the group in any way to get in touch.

Contact details

Worcestershire M.E. Support Group

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Action for M.E.'s online services directory lists local support groups across the UK, plus other services such as specialist M.E./CFS clinics. Visit www.actionforme.org.uk or contact us (see p 2) for more details.

"We're a bit like the AA – people come to us when they're broken down"