



PLANET BALLYMENA

**An Evaluation of the Drop-In Centre
at Ballymena**

June 1999

Praxis is committed to the evaluation and monitoring of all its services. This report is one of a series of evaluations of various Praxis services.

- Home Response Schemes
- Training and Employment Action
- A Drop-In Facility

Praxis currently provides a range of services to individuals with mental health problems, including:

- Befriending Schemes
- Accommodation and Support Schemes

This report details an evaluation of Planet Ballymena, a new and innovative drop-in scheme provided by Praxis and Homefirst Community Trust, in conjunction with the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Planet Ballymena, or Planet B as it is commonly referred to, is a drop-in centre which provides recreational and educational facilities for young people aged sixteen to forty, who have difficulty integrating into society due to health or social problems.

Planet B was developed by a consortium comprising of Praxis, the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education, and Homefirst Community Trust in response to a gap in provision identified in a local needs led survey (Lynch and McCosh, 1994). The consortium received a grant from Peace and Reconciliation (Ballymena Partnership) for a period of one year, with the aim of securing further funding for the project.

The service received its first referral in March 1998. Outreach work, which involved social and recreational activities, began in August. The drop-in centre itself opened in September of the same year.

By providing a local, accessible and supportive environment, Planet B aims to:

- enhance the self-esteem, dignity, independence and overall functioning in life skills of its target group;
- provide educational programmes;
- help members to progress to further training.

Individuals are referred to the scheme by the Community Mental Health Team and other professionals, such as Occupational Therapists. Referrals are dealt with by the scheme coordinator and the Homefirst Team Leader.

Individuals who attend Planet B decided to use the term 'member' to describe their status as users of the scheme. This will be the term used throughout this report.

1.2. The Evaluation

This report details an evaluation of the first year of Planet B, from March 1998 to February 1999. This first year is divided into two stages:

(i) Service Development and Delivery

The first six months of the scheme were assessed, capturing the development of this type of service;

(ii) Views on the Service

The second six month period, beginning with the opening of the drop-in centre in September 1998, was then examined and the views of relevant stakeholders obtained.

The evaluation was carried out by the Research Department at Praxis, which operates independently from the delivery of services.

1.3. Methodology

Planet B was evaluated using a variety of measures, including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and record analyses. Information was collected from a number of sources: Planet B members, the scheme coordinator, Planet B staff, the course tutor, and referral agents.

1.3.1. The Development and Delivery of the Service

Planet B is an innovative approach to service provision for both Praxis and Homefirst Community Trust. This evaluation, therefore, set out to document the early stages in the development of the service and to identify factors which influenced the establishment and operation of this type of service.

The scheme coordinator was interviewed at three-monthly intervals - when the drop-in centre opened, and three months and six months after the centre had been in operation. Brief interviews were also held with Planet B staff and the course tutor.

Information on the daily operation of the service was also collected. This involved gathering information from monthly reports, minutes from staff and members' meetings, and minutes from steering group meetings. Monthly attendance statistics were also examined.

1.3.2. Views on the Service

An important aspect of the success of any service is the satisfaction of those who use it. Therefore,

the views of Planet B members and their referral agents were sought.

Member Satisfaction

Members were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to elicit their views on the scheme. These schedules were designed specifically for this evaluation. Members were asked questions relating to their attendance at the scheme, activities they took part in, their relationship with staff and other members, the effect the scheme has had on them, and general questions concerning what they liked most and least about the scheme.

Referral Agents

Referral agents were invited to complete a postal questionnaire to obtain their views on various aspects of the service, including accessibility in obtaining the service, information provided on the service, responsiveness of the service, impact of the service on their client/s, and general satisfaction with the service. The questionnaire consisted of both closed questions, where the respondent rated various aspects of the service on a four or five point item scale, and open-ended questions, where the respondent could comment on why s/he gave a particular response. These questionnaires were completed by referral agents approximately six months after the drop-in centre opened.

1.4. Consent

The scheme coordinator granted permission to carry out this evaluation. Members' consent was also obtained.

CHAPTER TWO

DEVELOPMENT & DELIVERY

OF THE SERVICE

2.1. Development of Planet B**2.1.1. A Need Identified**

Planet B was developed in response to an increased awareness of the lack of services for young adults with mental health problems who do not engage in mainstream statutory and/or voluntary services. This need was highlighted in a research project carried out by Dr. Lynch and Brian McCosh from the Community Mental Health Team in Ballymena (1994). This study examined the relationship between clinical input and the need for care for individuals with chronic schizophrenia living in the community. A major outcome of this piece of research was to facilitate the planning of appropriate services for this client group.

One of the main findings of this research project was that none of the sample received any input from befrienders, voluntary groups, or support workers in the voluntary sector. The report emphasized that services could be developed in these areas, and highlighted a need for

a low key, non-threatening drop-in scheme where young people would attend who will not or do not attend other statutory or voluntary projects within the area.

2.1.2. Setting Up the Service

A consortium was formed comprising of Praxis, Homefirst Community Trust, and the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education. The consortium received a grant from Peace and Reconciliation for a period of one year to

develop and set up an initiative to fill this gap in service provision. A steering committee involving representatives from each of these organizations was set up to coordinate and facilitate the development of the service.

It was intended that Planet B would be available to potential members in March 1998. The site for the drop-in centre was agreed by the steering committee. It was leased to Praxis by the NIHE.

However, the drop-in facility was not available to members until early September, some six months later. There were three main reasons for this delay:

- The building needed to be renovated and decorated before it could be used as a drop-in and further funding needed to be sought for this;
- Changes in Praxis and Homefirst personnel during the early stages in the setting up of the service;
- The scheme coordinator experienced difficulty in obtaining the key for the premises from the NIHE. A number of months passed before the key was finally acquired.

A female grade II project worker took up the position of centre project worker in March 1998. As the drop-in facility was not available until September, the project worker carried out various duties during this interim period. This

included liaising with other agencies and designing, producing and circulating information leaflets and referral forms to relevant professionals.

A number of individuals were referred to the service during this interim period. The project worker/coordinator visited these individuals to provide them with more information and to find out what they hoped to achieve from attending the scheme. This time was spent getting to know members and generating enthusiasm for the project.

Outreach activities with members began in August. This involved the project worker and members making use of local facilities, including visiting the leisure centre, going to the cinema and ten-pin bowling, and attending events of interest in the area. Staff and members also purchased items for the newly acquired premises.

2.1.3. The Drop-in Centre

The drop-in facility was available to members from September 1998. It was officially opened by the Mayor of Ballymena in early October, with representatives from both statutory and voluntary agencies attending the event. Planet B members were also present at the opening.

The centre is based in a small, ground floor flat, situated in a residential area in the borough of Ballymena. It consists of a common room, a training room with two computers, and a fully equipped kitchen. It also has bathroom/shower

facilities. The scheme was named 'Planet Ballymena' because its design is based on that of a 'Cyber Café'.

2.1.4. Planet B Aims & Objectives

Planet B aims to

provide a welcoming drop-in centre where recreational and educational pursuits will be available for young people who have difficulty integrating into society due to health or social problems.

By providing a local accessible, innovative and supportive environment for young people with mental health problems, Planet B aims to:

- enhance self esteem, dignity, independence and overall functioning in life skills;
- provide educational programmes;
- help members to progress to further training.

2.2. Service Delivery

2.2.1. The Referral Process

Members were referred to the scheme by the Community Mental Health Team and other professionals, such as Occupational Therapists. Potential referral agents were informed about Planet B by way of information leaflets. An individual from Homefirst Community Trust, who was on the consortium, also communicated

information to the Community Mental Health Team.

Criteria for acceptance specified that members should be aged between sixteen and forty years, living within the Ballymena Borough, and not currently attending any other form of day-care or training, either statutory or voluntary. During the planning stage, concern was expressed that the project should not become obstructed by professionals using the scheme as a 'dumping ground' for their clients. This meant that the criteria for acceptance became quite rigid and individuals who may have benefited from the service were not eligible. After the service had been in operation a few months, the criteria was extended to include individuals who occasionally made use of other types of service but did not engage in mainstream activities. Referrals are, however, open to individual assessment.

A referral form requesting background information on the potential member is completed by the individual's statutory key-worker ('referral agent'). Referrals are dealt with by the scheme coordinator and the Homefirst Team Leader within ten working days of receipt.

An assessment form is completed by the prospective member, referral agent, and scheme coordinator. This form gathers information on the individual's interests and skills, and provides details of what he/she hopes to achieve from the service to ensure that the individual's

needs will be met. It also enables staff to monitor the individual's progress and personal goals.

It was intended that Planet B would facilitate twenty-five members, as identified in the survey. From March 1998 to February 1999 fourteen individuals were referred to the scheme. Nine referrals were accepted by the referral panel.

At the time of the evaluation, six members were in contact with Planet B (one member was in contact via e-mail). Three members had stopped attending the scheme during this period.

2.2.2. Staff

The scheme was initially staffed by a scheme coordinator and one female grade II project worker¹. A male grade III project worker² joined the staff team in August 1998. The scheme coordinator usually visits the scheme for two to three hours a week. However, this may increase as the need arises. The grade II project worker works ten hours a week and the grade III project worker spends six hours a week at the scheme. Only one member of staff is usually on site at any one time.

2.2.3. Availability of the Service

Planet B is available to members for sixteen hours per week. The drop-in centre is open on Mondays and Fridays from 10.00am to 5.00pm, and on Wednesdays from 4.00pm to 6.00pm.

An additional four hours per week is allocated to staff supervision and administrative duties.

2.2.4. Members' Meetings

Meetings for Planet B members are held in the centre on a monthly basis. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss forthcoming activities and events, recent developments and other topics of interest. Members play an active role in these meetings.

One of the first decisions made by members at an early meeting was to change their collective name to 'members' as opposed to 'clients' or 'participants'.

To date, meetings have been facilitated by Planet B staff. It is anticipated that members themselves will be responsible for chairing the meetings in the future. Three to four members are usually in attendance. Minutes of previous meetings are typed up and pinned to the centre notice-board to update members who were unable to attend the meeting.

2.2.5. Activities Offered

Planet B provides social and educational activities to its members with the aim of promoting personal development and to contribute to the prevention of further illnesses. The scheme activity agenda has developed as the scheme has progressed. It is the ethos of Planet B that members themselves determine what the service should provide. These decisions are often made at the monthly members' meetings. Suggestions are also made on a daily basis by those members who are present.

Activities organized to date have included: visiting the local leisure centre, cinema and museum; ten pin bowling; snooker; listening to music, watching television or videos; getting pizza; and playing board games at the drop-in.

At the time of the evaluation, a course in computers was offered to Planet B members. The decision to study computers was made by the members themselves. It was intended that the scheme would offer courses and training in a variety of areas such as computer skills, literacy and numeracy, social skills, confidence building and so forth. It is aimed that more classes will become available when further funding has been secured. The Health Promotion Agency has arranged to provide training and information to members. The nature of this training is to be identified by the members.

The Computer Course

The computer course was slow to be implemented at the drop-in centre. It was due to commence in mid October 1998 but did not begin until early January 1999, partly as a result of problems with resources and changes in staff. In the interim, members were engaged in other activities and events.

A tutor is provided by the Institute of Further Education to teach Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) at the drop-in centre. This course covers the basic aspects of computer application - word processing, spread sheet, and data base. Course fees are £5.00 per

person for a ten week period. This is subsidized by Planet B.

During the planning stages of the service, concern was expressed over the potential tutor's lack of awareness of mental health problems as the tutor would be an employee of the education authority, not a mental health organization. It had been agreed by the steering group that the scheme coordinator would provide mental health awareness training as required. However, the tutor who took up the position had a nursing background and an awareness of mental health issues. This knowledge has shown to be very useful for working in this environment.

Classes are held at the drop-in centre on Wednesday and Friday afternoons for approximately two hours. At the time of the evaluation, the scheme had two computers. Time on the computer terminal follows a rotational pattern, with each student usually attending a forty minute to one hour class. Three or four members attended the class on a regular basis. At the time of writing, the scheme had secured an additional two computers and aimed to acquire another one in the near future.

As well as being continually assessed by the tutor, those members who wish to may sit examinations. Passing CLAIT will provide the student with an RSA qualification. Assessment and exams are held at Planet B to make the process as non-threatening as possible, and also to create an atmosphere which is close to a working environment. To build confidence, the

tutor adopts a '*supportive marking system*' which involves making constructive as opposed to negative comments. Classes are very informal, with few constraints, and students are free to come and go as they please.

The computer course attempts to cater for all individuals, regardless of their illness or disability. One student, for example, had reading difficulties and studied graphical representation instead of word processing. Another student, who does not usually attend the drop-in, keeps up-to-date with the course by communicating with the tutor via e-mail.

One of the long-term aims of Planet B is to assist members to progress towards employment by converting training experiences into work opportunities. It is anticipated that members will move towards this long-term goal by participating in the next step, IBT2, a qualification in Information Business Technology.

2.2.6. The Review Process

No formal process of review is in place at Planet B. The scheme coordinator emphasized that the scheme aims to operate like any other type of club for young people, moving away from institutionalized practices such as structured reviews. An informal structure exists whereby members who have attended the scheme for a period of time are asked their views on the service and the adequacy of their 'personal goal plan' (section 2.2.7.) is assessed. At the time of the evaluation, no informal meetings of this type

had taken place with any of the members. General concerns from members are raised and dealt with at members' meetings. If members have any personal issues which they need addressed, they can contact staff directly.

2.2.7. Personal Goal Plans

As with reviews, Planet B has moved away from structured support plans. Instead, an informal process of '*personal goal plans*' is in place at the scheme. Information from the assessment form completed at the initial visit by the member and his/her referral agent is used to ensure that the service which the member receives is relevant to his/her needs. By adopting this type of approach, members' progress can be informally monitored and the service then tailored to meet changing needs. It is intended that personal goal plans are discussed at the informal meetings, mentioned above.

2.2.8. Exit Strategy .

Attendance at the scheme is voluntary. However, if members have not attended the scheme for a period of time, usually one month, the scheme coordinator contacts the member's statutory key-worker to find out why the individual has stopped attending. Planet B staff may also contact the member themselves. The coordinator pointed out that, ideally, a project worker would visit the member to discuss why s/he no longer attends the scheme. However this has not been possible to date due to lack of resources.

Membership is usually kept open for approximately three months, although this may vary depending on the reason for absence.

2.3. Operational Issues

A number of issues have been identified which have impacted on the way the service has been delivered and which will influence the future development of the service. These issues are reported below:

2.3.1. Funding

Acquiring funding is fundamental to the survival and success of any service. Planet B was initially funded by a grant from Peace and Reconciliation for a period of one year. Further funding has had to be sought to ensure that the project can continue and develop. To date, no further funding has been secured, although a number of applications have been made.

In the absence of further funding, it is hoped that the scheme will continue to operate for at least another year. The scheme has generated income from fundraising ventures and has secured some additional revenue from Homefirst Community Trust.

Difficulties in securing funding has impacted on many areas of service provision, including staffing, training, and facilities offered.

2.3.2. Staffing Difficulties

Planet B encountered a number of staffing problems during its early months. Initially, the scheme was staffed by one part-time grade II project worker. The coordinator oversees the delivery of the service but is not responsible for staffing the scheme. With only one member of staff, problems occurred when the project worker was unable to attend work because of illness - the onus then fell on the coordinator to staff the drop-in centre. Often, this was not possible as the coordinator had other responsibilities. This problem was accentuated when the coordinator herself was also not available to work (for example, either on annual leave or sick leave) as there was no one to provide cover for the scheme. This occurred during the first few months of the scheme, resulting in the drop-in centre not opening. At the time of writing, the scheme had employed an additional, part-time, grade III project worker. However, no further hours were secured i.e. the grade II project worker's hours were reduced. This has meant that the scheme is still understaffed. Funding is needed to provide relief staff to cover sickness and holidays.

Additionally, the project worker post is only funded for one year. Therefore, additional funding is necessary to ensure that the drop-in centre remains staffed.

The grade III project worker is due to leave Planet B to work at one of Praxis' accommodation schemes. The scheme coordinator pointed out that Planet B members

were unhappy with ensuing staff changes as good relationships had been established during the preceding months.

2.3.3. Safety

Concern has been expressed over the safety of the area the scheme is situated in. The drop-in centre had been subjected to two burglaries during its first six months, one of these occurring just one month after the centre had opened. In early October, the television and video were stolen. The stereo was stolen during the second break-in in early February. The centre is situated in a bottom floor flat which means it is vulnerable to break-ins. This risk is increased by the fact that the centre is unattended for most of the week.

In an attempt to alleviate this problem, staff have arranged to have wire mesh grills attached to all the windows at the drop-in centre. The scheme coordinator explained that they were hoping to avoid taking this measure as it would create a restrictive atmosphere in the centre.

2.3.4. Accessibility

Accessibility of the centre had been identified as a potential problem during the planning stage of the scheme. The catchment area for the scheme is quite wide, incorporating surrounding rural areas. It was agreed at early steering group meetings that the provision of transport would be vital in securing the success of the project. Therefore, money from the budget was set aside for this purpose. Generally, members make their

own way to the drop-in centre and transport is arranged for them to return home.

2.3.5. Membership

It was intended that Planet B would facilitate twenty-five members. Fourteen referrals were made during the first year of the scheme. Nine of these referrals were accepted. Uptake appears to have been affected by a number of factors:

- The scheme coordinator expressed a concern that potential referral agents were not taking enough interest in the scheme. She pointed out that many had not visited the scheme themselves and that, as a result, were not fully aware of what was available or what the criteria for acceptance was. As a consequence, referrals to the scheme have been slow. The coordinator suggested that this problem could be resolved by improving communication between Planet B and members of the Community Mental Health Team. Some progress has been made. The scheme encourages potential members and referral agents to visit the drop-in centre to find out more about the service provided.
- The selection criteria set for acceptance to the scheme also affected the number of referrals made during the early stages of the service. As noted earlier, in an attempt to prevent the service from becoming a '*dumping ground*' for mental health professionals, the scheme set quite rigid guidelines for admittance. This resulted in individuals who attended other services on

an occasional basis being denied access to the scheme, when they may have benefited from it. When this problem was identified, the criteria was amended to include individuals who occasionally made use of other types of service, but did not engage in mainstream activities.

- Another factor which has affected membership is the nature of the targeted client group itself. As the client group the service is aimed at are primarily non-engagers, it is a characteristic of the service that attracting members to the scheme will be difficult. The scheme has tried to combat this problem by creating an informal atmosphere at the scheme, and by setting aside separate sessions for new members to attend on their own until they feel ready to associate with other members.

2.3.6. Courses and Training

It was intended that the scheme would offer a variety of courses and training opportunities to help members progress to further training and/or employment. However at the time of writing, only the computer class had been offered. Difficulties in setting up the scheme and funding problems during this first year has meant that a decision had to be made as to what should be offered. The computer course was chosen as priority as this was something the majority of members had expressed an interest in. It is intended that more courses will be available over the coming months. This,

however, will ultimately depend on whether the scheme is successful in securing further funding.

There was a delay in implementing the computer course at the scheme. This was the result of problems with resources and staffing difficulties. At the time of writing, the course had been in operation for three months.

¹ Grade II project worker: a good standard of education and a working knowledge of mental health. Two years paid employment working directly with an adult mental health client group.

² Grade III project worker: a relevant professional qualification (RMN/RGN/CQSW/CSS or professions allied to health care). Two years experience working with adults who have experienced mental ill health.

CHAPTER THREE

**WHO USES THE SCHEME &
WHAT ARE THEIR VIEWS**

3.1. Members' Characteristics

3.1.1. Demographics

Nine individuals became members during the first year the scheme was in operation. Eight members were male, and one was female. Their ages ranged from twenty two years to thirty four years, with a mean age of twenty eight years.

3.1.2. Marital Status & Living Arrangements

All of the members were single, with most living with their parents (N=6). One member lived alone and another lived in a supported group home. Information on living arrangements was not available for one member.

A parent was named as the primary carer for two thirds of the members (N=6). One member did not have a carer. This information was not available for two members.

3.1.3. Mental Health History

The individuals who attended Planet B suffered from a range of mental health problems. The most common conditions were types of psychotic illnesses, including schizophrenia and paranoid behaviour. Other illnesses included depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Information on mental health history was not available for two members.

3.1.4. Attendance at Other Types of Service

Five members did not attend any other type of service while attending Planet B. Two did attend other services - one member attended a drop-in hostel twice a week, and one member attended

both a day centre and participated in a course at the local Institute of Further Education. This information was unavailable for two individuals.

Of the five individuals who did not attend any other type of service while members of Planet B, two attended day centres before they came to the scheme. They reported that they no longer attended these centres because they were '*too structured*' and '*too overcrowded*'.

3.2. Participants

During the evaluation period, three members had stopped using the service. This included the only female member.

Four of the six remaining members agreed to participate in the evaluation. All were male. Their mean age was twenty six years, ranging from twenty-two years to thirty years.

All four members were attending the scheme at the time of interview. Three of the interviewees had been attending the scheme since it opened. One had been attending for approximately one month.

The amount of times the interviewees visited the centre ranged from three times a week (i.e. everyday the centre is opened) to once a week, to once every three or four weeks. Only one of these members was attending another type of service.

3.3. The Interviews

The interviews were held in a private room at the drop-in centre, approximately six months after the centre opened.

The interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit members' views on a variety of aspects of the scheme, including attendance, relationships, activities offered, outcome, and general satisfaction. Each interview lasted between approximately twenty to thirty minutes. Three members gave permission to have their interviews recorded. The fourth member declined.

Written consent to take part in the interviews was obtained from both the members and the scheme coordinator. Confidentiality was emphasized and members were informed that only the interviewer would have access to the data.

3.4. Findings

3.4.1. Information Received about the Service

Members were asked about the information they received on the service before they started to attend. They were asked about the type of information they were given, who provided the information, and what other information would have been helpful to know.

Members received information from a variety of sources: Social Workers; Occupational

Therapists; Psychologists; and Doctors. The scheme coordinator was also mentioned as a source of information by two respondents.

Although, in general, the respondents felt that the information they were given on the scheme was 'okay', one participant referred to the information he was given as 'sketchy'. However, he indicated that this was probably because the service was early in its development. A second respondent pointed out that he was not aware that computers would be available at the scheme.

No respondents suggested any ways in which the information provided prior to admittance could be improved.

3.4.2. Reasons for Attendance

Members were asked what attracted them to Planet B and what encouraged them to attend. All the members interviewed expressed an interest in computers, and two pointed out that knowing that computers would be available encouraged them to attend:

With today's modern technology you do need a computer course for work.

One respondent explained that he attended Planet B 'more of less just to get out of the house.' When asked why he did not attend other types of service, this respondent pointed out that he had not really tried any other type, adding that

I feel more comfortable here because I know everybody.

This respondent explained that he would like to go to the scheme more regularly but depression and lack of motivation prevented him from doing so.

The two members who had previously attended other types of service but no longer did so explained that they attended Planet B because it was

Less structured than (the other service).

Just more relaxed and easy going, not so crowded.

3.4.3. Feelings about the Area

Members were asked how they felt about the area Planet B is situated in. Two members thought that the area was satisfactory. One commented:

It's alright ... I've no worries.

One member responded that

It's too far away from home for me to walk.

However, he added that he travels to the centre by bus sometimes and that the bus service was convenient to him.

The other respondent did not like the area Planet B is situated. He maintained that the area

has a serious drug problem. He also referred to the break-ins at the centre. This member believed that many referrals were not made to the scheme because of the area in which it was situated and added that, if he had been told in advance what area the scheme would be in, he would not have attended.

3.4.4. Feelings about Activities Provided

Members were asked about the type of activities offered at Planet B and how they felt about these. Members pointed out that they watched television, listened to music, read newspapers and talked while at the centre. Other activities included playing snooker and bowls, attending the cinema, and using the computers.

Generally, members appeared to be satisfied with the activities provided. Respondents were very happy with the computer course. One member described the course as '*brilliant*'.

Another respondent stated

They're (computers) helping me. It's good to have an interest in something.

This individual added that members had a say in what activities were offered:

You can do whatever you want.

This member pointed out that, although he would not like to see any changes in the activities provided, he would like the television

and video replaced as these items had not been replaced at the time of interview.

Another respondent suggested that more money would need to be invested to '*really make a go of the computers*'.

3.4.5. Changes in Self

Members were asked what they hoped to achieve from attending Planet B and whether they had noticed any changes in themselves since they first attended. These comments are shown in Figure 1.

The fourth respondent did not notice any changes in himself.

Figure One. Changes in Self

I feel more relaxed, confident, than I did before.

Bits and pieces ... it's more or less getting the motivation to come. If I do come I'll know that I'm achieving goals.

'No, it's like normal'

All the respondents hoped to achieve something in relation to computers. One member wanted to gain a qualification:

I want to get a certificate in computers so I can get a qualification at the end of it.'

Two members hoped to progress to studying for a computer course, with one of these members aiming to work abroad, and one expressing a desire to set up his own web site.

The member who hoped to achieve a qualification stated that, to date, there had only been a few computer classes. Therefore, he could not really say whether he wanted to take further classes at the Institute.

3.4.6. Relationships

Members were asked how they felt about the relationship they had with staff and other members at the scheme. By 'staff' it was emphasized that this related to all staff involved with the scheme - the coordinator, both project workers, and the tutor.

All members were very happy with staff at the scheme. Comments included:

Staff's brilliant.

(the relationship with staff is) dead on, couldn't be any better.

I like the staff ... they're easy going.

Staff were viewed as being easy to talk to:

I'd just pull them to the side

with support being available if members needed it. One member emphasized that staff had put a lot of work into the scheme.

Respondents were also asked about the relationship they had with other members at the scheme. Three respondents stated that relations with other members were good. Comments included:

They get on the best

(relationships are) alright, there's no fighting whatsoever

Good, just seeing other people in the same boat as yourself.

One participant did not have much contact with other members. This participant only attended the scheme once every three or four weeks. He pointed out that he did not have a lot in common with the other members and stressed that the scheme did not have enough members, especially female members. He stated that proper socialization could not take place if the members were practically all male, maintaining that

It's not a normal environment.

3.4.7. Members' Meetings

Members' meetings take place once a month at the drop-in centre and involve both members and staff. Respondents were asked if they

attended these meetings, what topics were discussed, and how they felt about them.

One respondent stated that he attended all the meetings and pointed out that there was also a meeting of some sort everyday the scheme was opened. He described the meetings as being 'alright' and pointed out that they keep you informed about what's going on:

It's more or less talking about are you happy, or is there something new you want to do.'

One respondent went to the meetings only occasionally and explained that minutes of previous meetings were pinned to the centre notice board to update members who were unable to attend.

The other two members did not attend the meetings. One did not go because he didn't want to. The other would only attend if he thought that something would be discussed that would affect him.

3.4.8. Making a Complaint

In order to ensure that it provides a quality service to all its service-users, all Praxis services operate a formal complaints procedure.

All four respondents maintained that if they had a grievance about any aspect of the service, they would know how to go about making a complaint. Generally this would involve telling a member of Praxis staff. One respondent pointed out that if he had a serious complaint,

he would bring it up with his Occupational Therapist. Another respondent stated that he would make a complaint

to improve the service, not to openly criticize it. When there's a thing wrong you're perfectly entitled to your rights.

3.4.9. General Satisfaction

Members were asked what they liked most about the service, what they liked least, and whether they would like to see any changes made to the service.

• Liked Most

Members identified a number of aspects of the service which they liked most:

Going to the cinema, snooker or the cinema.

Getting out to socialize, and the decoration (of the drop-in).

Just going here, more or less relaxed.

Computers were also mentioned by one member as an aspect of the scheme that was liked most.

• Liked Least

Three of the respondents stated that there was nothing they disliked about the service. One member pointed out

I don't like anything least about it, it's brilliant.

The fourth respondent reiterated his earlier concerns - that he really disliked the area, that there were too few referrals to the scheme, and that not enough female members attended.

• Changes/Improvements

Two members stressed that there was nothing they would like to see changed about the scheme:

There's nothing to change about it because it's brilliant.

One respondent suggested that he would like to see additional, and more flexible, opening hours at the scheme:

Maybe a wee bit more, more days for opening you know, handier hours, maybe that's why they're getting help to get more money, to employ more people, you know ... it's only just starting up the scheme.

The respondent who felt that the scheme did not have enough members suggested that more referrals should be made to the scheme, and emphasized a balance between male and female members. He also pointed out that more research should have been put into the planning stage when deciding which area to locate the drop-in centre.

In relation to the computer course, this member specified that he would like to have more time working on the computer and less people

chatting in the room when the classes were taking place.

At the end of the interview, the four members were asked to rate how they generally felt about the scheme on a five point item satisfaction scale. The dimensions were - Delighted; Pleased; Mixed Feelings; Unhappy; Terrible. One member reported feeling 'Delighted' with the scheme. Two members were 'Pleased' and one member expressed 'Mixed Feelings'.

CHAPTER FOUR
REFERRAL AGENTS' VIEWS

4.1. Referral Agents

Six professionals were responsible for referring nine members to Planet B. One referral agent referred two members, and one referred three members.

Three of the referral agents were Occupational Therapists, two were Community Psychiatric Nurses, and one was a Clinical Psychologist. All were female.

4.2. The Questionnaire

All six referral agents completed the semi-structured postal questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both fixed choice questions, where the respondent was requested to rate various aspects of the service on a four or five point item scale, and open-ended questions, where the respondent could comment on why she gave a particular response.

A number of issues were covered in the questionnaire, including: accessibility of the service; information provided on the service; facilities offered by the service; the impact of the service on their client/s; and general satisfaction. One referral agent only partially completed the questionnaire as both her clients had stopped attending the scheme and she felt that she was unable to answer some of the questions.

4.3. Findings

4.3.1. Organizing the Service

Referral agents were asked how they first found out about Planet B and how accessible the service was to organize for their client/s.

Referral agents found out about the service from a variety of sources:

- 2 were involved in the planning of the service and were therefore updated at the regular steering group meetings.
- 3 found out about the service from their team leaders or line managers.
- From Planet B staff when the scheme first opened.
- By talking to other professionals.
- From information leaflets.

Three respondents found the service 'very easy' to organize for their client/s. Reasons given for this response included:

Straightforward referral [process] and speedy response.

Prior established links with [the scheme coordinator]. Flexibility of service, and good communication.

Information regarding service and application forms were supplied by Praxis staff. Staff easily contacted on phone and always helpful regarding referrals.

Three respondents described the service as being 'fairly easy' to organize. Two felt that, because their clients had been referred during the early development of the scheme, some complications arose:

My client was referred in the early stages of the scheme. I think procedures are more straightforward now.

[The scheme] had initial teething problems until premises eventually became available which caused a slight delay of the initial interview.

The third respondent referred to having 'good links with Praxis staff'.

4.3.2. Information Provided on the Service

Referral agents were asked to rate the information they were given on the service. This information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Rating of Information Provided on the Service

Excellent	Good	Fair
28.6%	42.9%	14.3%
(N=2)	(N=3)	(N=1)

The referral agents who rated the information provided on the scheme as 'excellent' (N=2) described the information as being 'well presented' and were happy with the verbal communication. One of these respondents felt that being invited to the official opening of Planet B was beneficial.

Three referral agents rated the information provided as 'good'. Reasons for this response included:

Because I was involved in the introduction of the project.

Obtained flyers. Staff able to answer any questions, and give any information needed.

The respondent who rated the information as 'fair' maintained that little information was available due to the fact that the scheme had only just been established:

The service was just up and going at the time and the information I received was broadly about social and educational opportunities with little more detail than that.

4.3.3. Facilities Provided by the Service

Referral agents were asked to rate the facilities provided by Planet B. Three rated the facilities as being 'excellent'. Comments included:

Homely, welcoming atmosphere.

The individualized and flexible service is an excellent resource for clients with specialized needs and who respond well to smaller scale provision.

Two referral agents rated the facilities provided by the scheme as 'good'. They responded:

Service-users are able to give input into what they want and these appear to be catered for.

Facilities provided are good but slightly confined due to size of the building.

The facilities provided by Planet B were rated as 'fair' by one referral agent, who commented that 'space is limited' at the drop-in centre.

4.3.4. Responsiveness of Service

Referral agents were asked to rate how responsive they felt the service was in responding to their client's needs and what the outcome had been for their client/s as a result of using the service.

The service was rated as 'very responsive' for three members. Their referral agents commented:

No other similar service for non-engagers. Even with limited resources and manpower, [client's] needs have been fully met.

Tailored service to meet client needs. Time spent with client and referral agent in planning the service provision.

The service was rated as being 'fairly responsive' to three members' needs. One referral agent commented:

[client] reports that most of the things s/he asks for are provided, though not as often as s/he would wish.

Information on responsiveness was unavailable for three members.

Referral agents proposed a number of ways in which attending the scheme had benefited their client/s. A number of comments were made and are shown in Figure 3. As noted above, no information was available for three members.

Figure 3 Outcome For Clients

Has left the house. Now socializing and involved in activity.

Motivation to the leave house. Opportunity for learning new skills. Social support.

Has now become 'live' on the Internet and enjoys e-mailing which has boosted his/her self-confidence and stimulated interest and learning processes.

Unsure due to [client] being no longer involved. Client did respond well at initial stage.

Engaging in structured day-care.

4.3.5. General Issues

Referral agents were asked what they liked most and least about the service.

- **Liked Most**

Referral agents identified a number of aspects of the service which they liked most:

Fills a big gap in service provision for young people with mental health problems. Takes focus off individual therapy. Provides social network. Personal development. Removes sense of isolation.

Non-pressurized environment. Small groups.

Small numbers. Homely, laissez-faire approach. Specifically aimed for non-engagers.

Outreach service to people like [client] who have difficulty meeting people and mixing in crowds.

- **Liked Least**

In relation to what was liked least about the service, most comments were concerned with funding and/or resources issues:

Short-term funding.

Not enough of it.

I would foresee difficulties when the service becomes over-stretched. Many referrals will need longer term input for specific reasons.

Small environment if group is to develop. Resources needs to expand.

One referral agent responded that she did not like the location of the premises.

- **Overall Satisfaction**

Referral agents were then asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service on a scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very unsatisfied'. Two referral agents responded that they were 'very satisfied' with the service. Three revealed that they were 'satisfied', and one referral agent did not answer this question.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1. The Scheme Model

Social exclusion is a significant problem for individuals suffering from mental illness. Planet B is a drop-in centre which provides recreational and educational facilities for young individuals who have difficulty integrating into society due to health or social problems and who are difficult to engage with services. By providing this service, it aims to reduce isolation, promote personal development, and contribute to the prevention of further illnesses. Participation in meaningful activity can help to reduce symptomology and may reduce the need for other services such as admissions to hospital (Oliver et al. 1996).

Referrals to the scheme are made by mental health professionals, and are dealt with by the scheme coordinator and the Homefirst Team Leader. Members should be aged between sixteen and forty years, living within the Ballymena Borough, and not using, or infrequently using, other types of day care services.

5.2. The Evaluation

This report details an evaluation of the first twelve months of Planet B. This evaluation documented the early stages in the development of the scheme and identified factors which influenced the evolution and operation of the service. The views of members and their referral

agents were obtained. These views were predominately positive.

A variety of issues were raised in this evaluation and are outlined below. A number of recommendations for the future development of the service are made in Chapter 6.

5.3. Use of Service

5.3.1. Referrals

Membership of Planet B fell significantly short of the twenty five members originally anticipated. During its first year, a total of fourteen individuals were referred to the scheme, with nine of these referrals being accepted. This relatively small amount of referrals may be the result of a number of factors:

- The selection criteria set during the early stages of the scheme was quite rigid and may have excluded individuals from the service who might well have benefited from it;
- Lack of interest or confusion about the purpose of the scheme from the Community Mental Health Team may have impacted on the number of referrals made. This may have been augmented by problems in communication between the team and the scheme;
- The nature of the client group itself may affect membership as they are a difficult group to engage in services.

Attempts to address these issues have been made:

- The criteria for acceptance has been extended;
- An effort to improve communication between the Community Mental Health Team and Planet B has been made. This has included the encouragement of visits to the drop-in centre by potential members and their referral agents to find out more about the scheme;
- To encourage members to attend the scheme, separate sessions have been arranged to allow individuals to visit the drop-in facility on their own, gradually building-up to include socialisation with other members. This includes providing separate computer sessions with the tutor.

The number of referrals made to Planet B may also be influenced by the location of the scheme. The drop-in centre is situated in an area which experiences a high level of crime. The centre had been burgled twice during its first six months. One of the members pointed out that, if he had known in advance that the drop-in centre would be situated in this area, he would not have become a member. A referral agent also expressed a dislike of the area.

5.3.2. Female Membership

The scheme has attracted a relatively small number of female referrals. It is not known

whether this is a reflection of the caseload of the Community Mental Health Team, whether female clients are not interested in this type of service or the courses offered, or whether they are more difficult to engage in this type of service than males. There are both male and female staff at the scheme to ensure the needs of both male and female members are considered.

Other research has revealed similar results. Gauntlett et al (1996), in a study of three outreach teams which provided support to individuals with mental health problems, found that all three teams offered support to more male than female clients. In a study of employment opportunities for people with long term mental health problems, Nehring et al (1993) reported that, in three of the four work projects observed, women represented a third or less of the work force. They added that this appeared to be a common situation in traditional sheltered work and training settings. This study raised a number of questions:

- Is this a reflection of the nature of work/training offered (although two of the projects offered tasks such as catering, office skills and cleaning);
 - Are females less interested in services which centre around work;
 - Is there more social pressure for men to gain employment or to be seen to go to work (or related activities) each day.
-

As one of the aims of Planet B is to encourage individuals to progress to further training and/or employment, these factors are worthy of consideration.

Another reason for the fewer number of women participating in such schemes may be due to impairments in social skills. In a study of specialist work schemes for individuals with severe mental health problems, Schneider and Hallam (1996) found that two thirds of the work force were male. They added that, although the prevalence rate of severe mental health problems was similar for both males and females, social impairments appeared to affect more men than women (Lantz et al, 1983; Test et al, 1990). They pointed out that this may be why there was a greater proportion of men in the participating schemes. Additionally, Mann et al (1998) report that treatment response and outcome is likely to be poorer among men than women suffering from schizophrenia, and service use tends to be longer term. Therefore, it could be suggested that males require this type of service more than females.

The reason for the small number of female referrals to Planet B is an important area to be followed up on.

5.4. Setting Up the Service

As can be expected of any new service, Planet B experienced a number of difficulties during its early months. These included:

5.4.1. Staffing

Changes in staff were experienced by all the services involved, Praxis, Homefirst and the North East Institute. This caused a number of delays including acquiring the premises, recruiting staff for the drop-in centre, and setting up the educational programmes. Funding also impacted on staffing levels. The scheme encountered difficulties in providing staff cover during annual leave and sick leave because of the small staff team.

5.4.2. The Drop-In Centre

Once acquired, the premises for the drop-in centre had to be renovated to meet health and safety standards. This delayed the opening of the centre. Further funding had to be located for this additional cost.

Those members who were interviewed were generally happy with the premises - although one member disliked the area the centre was situated in. Although the referral agents were satisfied with the centre and the facilities available, some commented on the small size of the building and limited space, and were concerned that this would be a problem as the service expands.

5.4.3. Courses Offered

It was intended that Planet B would offer a variety of training and educational courses to its members, with the aim of promoting personal development and encouraging members to progress towards further education and/or employment. It is engagement in meaningful

activities itself which is one of the main aims of this type of service. The importance of constructive activities is highlighted in *Keys to Engagement* (The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 1998):

For many people, the idea that they are moving towards meaningful occupation may be almost as powerful a motivation as securing employment itself.

At the time of writing, the computer course was the only course offered at Planet B. Factors such as staffing problems, securing membership, and limited funding have all impacted on this aspect of service delivery. Given the limited resources available to the service, a decision had to be made as to what should be provided at the scheme in the short-term. The members themselves decided that computers should be the first course offered. The members interviewed were very happy with the course, although one member did suggest some areas for improvement.

It is intended that more courses will be available when further funding has been secured. Other organisations, such as the Health Promotion Agency, have been approached to provide information and training to the members in the intervening period.

5.5. Funding Issues

Funding has been a major factor in the development of Planet B - both during the early months, and for its future survival. It has impacted on almost all areas of service provision, such as staffing, training and facilities offered.

The break-ins at the scheme also impacted on the service's financial resources as stolen items had to be replaced and anti theft measures had to be taken, such as placing wire mesh grills on windows.

At the time of writing, further funding is being sought to ensure the future development of the scheme.

5.6. Impact of the Service

At the time of evaluation, it was too early in the development of Planet B to effectively assess the impact of the service on the lives of those involved with it. A one year follow-up evaluation of Planet B is recommended to provide an opportunity to assess outcome.

However, from the information available to date, the scheme was shown to have some impact on members. Interviews with members themselves suggested that they enjoyed attending the service, that social networks had improved, and that some members were making future plans regarding training and employment. In addition,

most referral agents found the service to be responsive to their clients' needs, commenting that the service increased clients' motivation and had provided an opportunity for learning new skills and stimulating interest.

It must be noted that, with a non-engaging client group, it is important to look at the long term benefits of attending this type of service. Indeed, in *Keys to Engagement* (The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 1998), it is pointed out that the scope for short-term improvement with the non-engaging client group may be limited, suggesting instead that

Success should perhaps be measured in terms of achieving initial engagement and gaining acceptance of what may seem fairly low-level interventions, and which may appear to have little to do with mental health.

5.7. Attendance & Non-attendance

Although attendance at Planet B is optional for members, the scheme has been successful in encouraging a number of its members to attend on a regular basis. However, three members stopped attending the scheme during the evaluation period. The reasons for this are not known, although one member pointed out that s/he would return when Planet B has more female members.

A number of reasons may be proposed for members ceasing to attend. It may be that the

scheme no longer caters for their needs, they may be unwell, or they may have moved on to use other types of service. It is important, however, that the support provided by Planet B is on-going, enabling members to return as and when needed. As Salem et al (1988) observe, a balance needs to be reached that enables the individual to achieve independence while providing a support structure when needed:

Programs must find a balance between care that is assertive enough to reach clients who typically fall between the cracks in the system and care that is flexible enough so that individuals can develop their own resources without counterproductive over-dependence on the mental health system.

The reason for non-attendance by members is an area which requires further attention.

5.8. Main Likes & Dislikes

Members valued the activities offered by the scheme, socialising with others, the relaxed atmosphere at the drop-in centre and the computer course.

Referral agents also commented on the relaxed, non-pressurised environment of Planet B. Some also made reference to the fact that the service was providing their clients with a social network.

Most of the members could not find fault with any aspect of the service provided by planet B. One member, however, felt that the scheme did not have enough members, especially female members, and thought that the drop-in centre was situated in a 'bad area'. This last comment was reiterated by one of the referral agents.

Many of the referral agents made reference to the small size of the drop-in centre and the short-term funding for the service. Although they pointed out that this had not significantly impacted on the service provided by Planet B to date, some referral agents felt that this may become a problem in the future when membership grows.

5.9. Conclusions

This evaluation set out to document the early development of Planet B and to identify factors which influenced its development. Additionally, it set out to determine whether relevant stakeholders were satisfied with the service provided and whether the service had any impact on its members.

As noted earlier, Planet B had experienced a number of difficulties during its first twelve months. However, this is to be expected of any new scheme. Despite these difficulties, it has survived its first year of operation and aims to continue to provide a supportive and necessary service to its members.

Planet B operates a schedule of planned social activities and continually attempts to recruit new members, including setting aside separate sessions for new members to familiarise themselves with the scheme. It also encourages its members to play an active role in deciding what the service provides. The application of this eclectic approach to service provision has been instrumental in ensuring the continued existence of the service. In a study of the development of nine drop-in centres operated by mental health consumers, Kaufmann et al (1993) identified a number of common factors which distinguished the drop-in centres which survived their first two years of operation. These included:

- **Planned social activities**

Kaufmann commented that activities particularly valued were those which were

predictable and combined regular activities with special events on weekends and holidays. The group cohesiveness and social support provided by such activities was important to the projects success;

- **Ongoing recruitment of new members**

The successful centres operated active outreach programmes for new members which promotes attendance and involved the participants in the running of the centre.

Other factors included the use of consumer volunteers, adequate financial resources, and good leadership and organisational skills.

It is too early in the development of Planet B to successfully evaluate outcome for members. A one year follow-up study would provide more information in this area.

Those involved with Planet B were generally satisfied with the level and quality of service provision. However, a number of issues were raised which require further consideration. These will be discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX
RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Premises and Facilities

The scheme experienced a few operational problems during its initial months. Reasons for the delay in opening the drop-in centre included problems in securing the premises and in ensuring their suitability, and changes in personnel (Section 2.1.2). Other accommodation issues included the location of the scheme (Sections 2.3.3. & 3.4.3.) and the confined size of the building (Section 4.3.3.).

It is recommended that, if further resources are made available, larger premises should be secured in a more central locality to enable the scheme to develop and expand.

It is also recommended that similar future projects should secure appropriate premises and recruit personnel in advance of the project start date. Where possible, these premises should be located in a safe and neutral environment to maximise membership.

6.2. Staffing

Planet B encountered a number of staffing difficulties, particularly in relation to sickness and holiday cover. Additionally, at times when a staff member was required to work 'off site', there was no one to man the drop-in centre. Effective costing of such projects should include contingency planning for staff sickness, relief workers, and enabling accessibility to the scheme when staff are 'off site' (Section 2.3.2.).

An increase in staffing resources would enable the opening hours of the drop-in to be extended to include evenings.

6.3. Membership

Planet B fell short of its target membership of twenty-five members. To encourage membership, the criteria for admission was made more flexible and communication systems between the community mental health team and Planet B staff were improved (Section 2.3.5.)

To facilitate an increase in membership, it is recommended that the scheme extend its referral base, particularly to social workers who were not represented in the current sample. An 'open door' policy of attendance should be encouraged with follow-up when attendance declines (Sections 2.2.8. & 5.7.). Additionally, developing outreach work would help to engage potential members in the project and hopefully sustain their participation.

The relaxed atmosphere and informality of the scheme encouraged attendance by members who felt that other types of service were too restrictive. This should be continued.

The evaluation also highlighted a shortage of female members attending the scheme. As the scheme develops, consideration should be given to increasing female membership. It is recommended that a gender mix in user groups and staffing be established, with a range of activities offered which are inclusive to both males and females (Section 5.3.2.).

6.4. Increasing Member Involvement

It is part of the ethos of Planet B that its members take on as much responsibility as possible for the running of the scheme. Initially, this has been reflected in the role members have in deciding what activities and training is offered. Monthly members' meetings provide a forum for expressing these views. It is recommended that empowerment of members is encouraged, with members meeting without staff and becoming more involved in the management and direction of the scheme (Section 2.2.4.).

A strong member focus should permeate the structure and organisation of similar pilot projects.

6.5. Future Directions

Planet B has shown to be effective in achieving its aims to date. It is recommended that further funding is proactively sought to enable the scheme to continue and develop. Suggestions for the future development of the scheme include:

- The continuance and expansion of accredited training programmes as prioritised by members (Section 2.2.5.);
- The exploration of opportunities for linking the project to local Praxis accommodation schemes;
- Re-launching the project at an appropriate time to inform statutory and voluntary agencies in the locality of the role, purpose and current success of the project;
- Exploring the possibility of developing the supportive work provided to the families of members;
- Accessibility was considered to be a potential problem for the service, therefore money from the budget was set aside to assist transport costs (Section 2.3.4.). It is recommended that transport costs continue to be considered both for Planet B and for similar future services, particularly where there is a potential rural catchment area;
- A follow-up evaluation is recommended to assess the impact of the scheme on those who use it (Section 5.6.).

CHAPTER SEVEN

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