

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2008 – LOCAL CHARITY SUPPORTS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS GET BACK TO WORK**

**FIRST STEP TRUST**

Each year, between 900,000 and 1.8 million adults in the UK will experience severe mental health problems. World Mental Health Day is taking place on 10th October but for local charity, First Step Trust (FST), everyday is a day to treat people living with mental health issues with dignity and help them to help themselves overcome stigma and prejudice.

Only a quarter of people with long-term mental health problems are in work, the lowest rate of employment for any of the main groups of disabled people. FST challenges this by providing real work opportunities and training to people with mental health problems and other disadvantages. Studies show that a job can reduce symptoms, decrease hospital admissions, reduce service use and improve the social skills. “When I started at FST I had no confidence and didn’t get up in the morning. I now have endless confidence and am up at 6am everyday” says workforce member, Craig.

The way FST works is that each of their projects runs as a small business providing a service for real customers. People with mental health problems, drug or alcohol misuse problems join as workforce members and fully participate in the every aspect of running the business – they are critical to its success. Joining FST gives people the chance to become part of a team, build up their work experience, gain qualifications and get help in finding a job. Workforce member, Paul said “FST has given me the chance to gain skills that will help with future employment. It has done me a lot of good working in a friendly team.”

FST has 14 projects around the country but its head office in Woolwich acts as its administrative centre providing work experience and training in business admin, finance, office skills and IT. “I hadn’t touched a computer before I came here but because you learn on the job, and not just an hour a week on a training course, you learn quicker. The beauty of FST is that you are doing real work so you feel like you are needed and that’s a big part of it for me. They treat you like an adult”, said June, Project Administrator. For those more interested in practical work, FST’s project in Bexley provides work experience in painting and decorating, gardening and grounds maintenance.

Alongside work experience, workforce members can gain accredited qualifications, and, when ready, are given support to find paid employment.

Most people with mental health issues want to work, but lack the skills, qualifications, work history and confidence to get a job. FST gives them the opportunity to develop coping skills in a supportive environment that helps them meet the demands of ordinary working life in a sustainable way.

All sorts of people sign up to train and work at FST. If you want to find out more, call FST on 020 8855 7386 or visit their website: [www.firststeptrust.org.uk](http://www.firststeptrust.org.uk)

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#### More information

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For more information please contact:  
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For more, go to First Step Trust website <http://www.firststeptrust.org.uk>