

JUDGES REPORT

TACKLING MOOD DISORDERS IN THE WORKPLACE BLACK DOG INSTITUTE WRITING COMPETITION 2008/9

The judges were very impressed with the standard of the many submissions to this year's contest. Entries came from those living with mood disorders, their work colleagues, and managers. When assessing each contribution we decided to place equal weight on relevant ideas raised, writing style, and practical suggestions to improve the current situation.

The vast majority of entrants still feel very reluctant to disclose their illness for fear that it will have an adverse effect on their career prospects. It seems that a "work mask" is still very much the norm. Comments such as "the act is taking its toll" and "hiding in the toilet is not a long-term solution" reflected the quiet despair.

The occupations most frequently represented in the submissions were teachers, lawyers, and recruitment consultants.

It was very difficult to narrow the final field down to the three winners and 10 "Highly Commended", but they provided some clear messages.

Organisations need to be much more proactive in educating employees and managers, in how to recognise and support those with a mood disorder. Whilst the importance of appropriate policies was highlighted, contributors stressed that the most crucial element was a compassionate manager who reached out to address the issue quickly. Many lamented that "values on the wall were not lived on the floor".

Whilst diversity in gender, ethnicity, and physical disability is actively encouraged in many organisations, it is sadly lacking for those with mood disorders. In addition to supportive work colleagues, the other critical organisational requirement is flexible hours to allow for doctor/therapist visits, and low mood in the morning, when required.

Those working with mood disorders stressed that they also have an obligation to balance their lifestyle and manage their mental health – "Ironically it was only when I started working on my wellness that my work performance improved." Many also explained that their mental health was made worse by pursuing the wrong career. Despite the challenges of work, the vast majority stressed how important it was to their self-esteem.

It was extremely difficult to pick a final winner, but we felt that the contribution chosen, could well act as a summary for around 200 entries.

Graeme Cowan, Judges' Chairperson May 28, 2009