

# TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Summer 2020



Mental Health  
Foundation





# Dear Supporter,

Welcome to your first TalkBack since the lockdown!

The emergence of COVID-19 has led to massive change, more uncertainty and new challenges for many of us.

The Mental Health Foundation has been at the forefront of the crisis since the beginning. We were one of the first charities in the world to launch practical mental health advice because we believe that giving people clear, evidence-based and engaging information on looking after their mental health is a key part of our prevention mission. Read our tips on page 6-7.

We also quickly launched a major UK-wide research study to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the nation's mental health and how to respond effectively. We have adapted our programmes to ensure that we continue to reach vulnerable population groups. Read more on pages 4-5.

This edition of TalkBack was put together before the huge movements for racial justice following the death of George Floyd. As a Foundation we stand in deep solidarity with all those who have experienced racism. We know there cannot be good mental health for all while discrimination remains a lived experience for so many in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. We are committed to reflection and action to build on our work over many years on race discrimination and mental health but also to renew our work to tackle structural racism in our own organisation and beyond. If you want to read more about the steps we are taking, please read here: [mentalhealth.org.uk/news/mental-health-foundation-stands-against-racism-all-its-forms](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/news/mental-health-foundation-stands-against-racism-all-its-forms)

We know that none of our work would be possible without the generosity of our supporters such as you, who give their time and money to support our work. Thank you!

**Kalina Peresterova, Individual Giving Officer**

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# A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

*Keith Leslie*

Outgoing Chair of Board of Trustees  
Mental Health Foundation

**I remember many happy events from my childhood, playing in the back garden, visiting nearby grandparents, travelling by car on holiday to Italy. When I think about 'what did I learn' or 'what would I do differently', two things come to mind:**

## **Love is not conditional**

Like any child, I did not do everything perfectly and maybe I was particularly clumsy – I didn't discover until adulthood that I have poor eyesight with little depth perception and a neurological condition that causes a hand tremor.

My father must have been a very different child himself, because I felt that I didn't match up to his expectations. I remember an Easter school holiday, I think I was 10, when I decided that I had to accomplish two tasks and he would be proud of me.

He had always been disappointed that I couldn't ride my bike and I had been unable to paint straight lines on the side of a model ship.



## **A sense of history**

I found a history book in my school desk when I was 8 – it was called 'History for Young Scots' and I devoured it. I watched a Magnus TV series called 'Who are the Scots?' and that was the start of a life-long passion for history, its heroes and its lessons and parallels with today.

**Looking back I would tell my younger self not to try to change very much at all, but see events through an undistorted lens – accept the love that is there and ignore any worries about it stopping or being conditional: it isn't. And grow a deep love and understanding of where you come from, why things are as they are – and how you might make them different one day.**

**We would like to thank Keith Leslie for his commitment and support. We are excited to announce that Aisha Sheikh-Anene has been appointed as the new Chair of Trustees.**

# Coronavirus

## Mental health in the pandemic study

Dr Antonis Kousoulis, Director for England and Wales

**As part of our regular work we lead research on what protects mental health, the causes of poor mental health and how to tackle them. This is no different in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.**

The Mental Health Foundation is leading a study over time of how the coronavirus pandemic is affecting the mental health of people across the United Kingdom. We were able to start collecting data before the lockdown was implemented, as well as set up a strong UK-wide partnership alongside the University of Cambridge, Swansea University, the University of Strathclyde and Queen's University Belfast.

### The project

Since mid-March 2020, the project has done regular repeated surveys of more than 4,000 adults. The surveys are conducted online by YouGov and participants are representative of people aged 18+ and living in the UK.

Each time the survey covers a range of topics designed to shed light on people's emotional responses to the pandemic, the key causes of stress, and what helps people cope. We are repeating the survey approximately every three weeks and overall it is expected to last for six to nine months. A particular interest is on the pandemic's impact on inequality and mental health.

We are also working with a diverse Citizens' Jury (who represent a broad range of human experience within the UK, including that of living with mental health problems) who are contributing personal insights, and comments on the data generated by the study.

### Findings

We are publishing some of our data and findings online (find out more at [mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-pandemic](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-pandemic)).

Our research is showing that whilst wellbeing seems to be improving, for some groups this is not the case, reminding us that whilst we are all together in the same storm, we are not in the same boat.

### What's next?

We are sharing our most important findings with politicians in all of the four UK Governments. These are being used by government representatives to prioritise action, inform policy, and influence recovery plans.

Also, at the Foundation we will use these findings to support the communities directly and disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

# Why kindness matters in later life



Josh Elton,  
Group Facilitator

Standing Together Cymru is a project which aims to reduce loneliness and isolation in later life housing schemes by facilitating neighbours to become friends.

Once at a peer support group, a newly widowed woman looked to an older widow for advice. She was told **“you need to find your new normal”**. This was a genuine heartfelt moment of kindness between two equals.

It felt like we were playing a fruitful game of scrabble and the COVID-19 outbreak just flipped the board, ruining a great game we were on track to win. It was illegal to congregate, isolation was mandated and neighbours who became friends were cut off once more.

## Finding a new normal for the project

We miss the project we had, but we have had to find a new normal. We developed a telephone service, crucially putting social interaction between people at its heart.

With permission we were able to pass on messages from one neighbour to another, sometimes providing people with the only contact they'd had from their friends in weeks. We have since moved on to making 'conference calls'. Using just a mobile phone



we are able to merge calls between our participant's landlines; connecting friends who hadn't spoken for over a month.

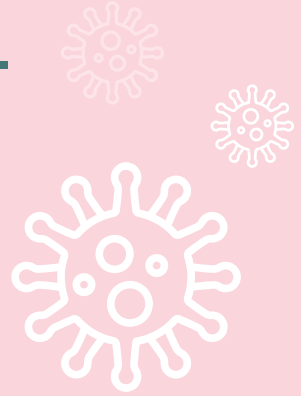
## Kindness matters

Pam, a group member, told me “we used to go to coffee mornings or play bingo and just go straight home. But in Wednesday's Group we got to know things about each other we never would before... we became friends.” It's been incredible to hear of the way they have helped each other since lockdown. Colleen has been making ice slices and lasagnes for everyone. Pam went out to buy fish paste and spam for everyone to celebrate VE day from a distance. Pam said “I love how nice everyone is being.” In some ways the new normal isn't as bad as it first seemed.

**The purpose of Standing Together Cymru project is 'to build resilience in later life communities through peer support'. As impressive as that sounds, what it boils down to for me is kindness.**

As nice as my part of the job is, it's not my kindness that matters. Our capacity is limited, but mankind's capacity for kindness is not. All we have to do is make a space for it and it will grow.

# Covid-19 resources hub – how to look after your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak



The Mental Health Foundation is part of the national mental health response during the coronavirus outbreak. We have developed a dedicated microsite with evidence-based content and advice, updated weekly by drawing on our public health expertise.

## Stay informed

Official advice is frequently changing and depends on where you live. Good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control.

There is extensive news coverage about the outbreak: don't avoid all news, keep informed, but do limit your news intake if it is bothering you.



## Relationships

We may have lost ways of seeing many people and be spending much more time with those who share our homes.

This can feel stressful, frightening or even unbearable. We need ways to protect our relationships, and cope a bit better with the relationship problems the virus creates.

## Nurture relationships



**Listen** – really listen to what others are saying and try to understand it and to focus on their needs in that moment.

**Let yourself be listened to** – share how you feel, and allow yourself to be heard and supported. Recognise unhealthy relationships that make us unhappy – this can help us to move forward and find solutions.

Living in constant proximity is tough so it may help to:

- Agree on who is using which parts of the home and when
- Make best use of the space you have
- Share out household tasks



## Loneliness

Many people are feeling lonely. If you can, get in touch with someone who lives alone or might

not have many relatives or close connections to check in on them. A message or a phone call could make a big difference to someone who hasn't heard from anyone in a while.



## Abusive relationships

For people in abusive relationships, coronavirus may make things worse. If you are affected, stay

connected to those you trust using whatever methods are safe and possible. If you are worried about a friend or neighbour, check on them or offer them support to get help.



## Parents and grandparents

Parents need time alone and it's OK to find and take it. If there are other adults

in the household, sharing caring time is a gift we can give, especially with babies and toddlers. If you have a partner at home, spending quality time together is also important.



## Children

Children also need time alone, as well as time with others. If there's more than one child in the house

it can be great fun when they spend time together – but each child needs their personal space too. Help them find their own space. This is hard to do in small flats – do what you can to create space, perhaps by building a den on their beds.



## Bereavement

Coping with the death of someone close is tough, worse if you could not be with them. Be

conscious of your feelings. You may want to talk with someone, or to be alone with your feelings. It might be helpful to contact bereavement charities such as Cruse or Winston's Wish.

## Stay safe

It is important to stay safe, particularly if you are older and living alone. This crisis has brought the best and the worst out in people. People may not always be who they claim in person or online. Always check for identification.

If something feels wrong don't engage with it. Don't let strangers into your home without identification. Don't reply to an email that's asking you for personal information about you or your finances. Don't give out your bank details to anyone in person or online.



To find out more, please visit [mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus)



# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK HIGHLIGHTS



The Mental Health Foundation has hosted Mental Health Awareness Week since 2001, and its purpose is to highlight and promote a universal public mental health message. In previous years, we have examined how anxiety, stress, relationships and body image can impact on our mental health. We decided to change the theme to **Kindness** to connect with the mood of the nation and provide a message of hope.

Usually MHAW is a chance for events to take place in schools, universities, clubs, workplaces and communities around the country. This year, due to lockdown, we had to use digital approach instead.



**WE HAD 1.3 MILLION WEBSITE VIEWS - 75% HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR. ALSO, WE SAW 47% GROWTH IN OUR SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT.**

- **All major party leaders and numerous MSPs and MPs engaged with and shared out content** – including **Keir Starmer's office** and **Nicole Sturgeon**. We have met with the **Mental Health Minister Nadine Dorries** and **Scottish Mental Health Minister Clare Haughey**.
- **The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge** engaged with Mental Health Awareness with radio and TV and social media outputs on three separate occasions.
- The week was covered in **prime-time BBC national TV news** and **ITV national TV news**. We saw substantive media engagement a cross all four nations – England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- A range of major corporate organisations including **ASDA** and **Waterstones** engaged with the theme.



- A very wide and eclectic range of celebrities and public figures engaged with the week including **Kourtney Kardashian, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** and **Dame Kelly Holmes**.
- We launched a new fundraising campaign called **Take Action, Get Active**. It was a 31-day challenge where supporters signed up to take on 30 minutes of movement every day for the month of May. We got 1759 sign ups!
- We developed **new partnerships** with fundraising organisations – notably **Rock Choir**
- Our policy document was viewed **3,240 times** compared to 312 times for last year's report.

**THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION HELD 72 PERCENT SHARE OF VOICE WHEN COMPARED TO ALL MAJOR ENGLAND MENTAL HEALTH CHARITIES DURING MHAW.**

# KINDNESS IN PUBLIC POLICY

ALEC WILLIAMS AND LUCY THORPE, POLICY TEAM

The theme for this year's Mental Health Awareness Week was kindness. Few people need convincing that kindness is important and beneficial for individuals, to both human relationships and our personal wellbeing, and throughout the week we heard about many heart-warming acts of kindness across the country, at a time when it is needed most.

What is perhaps less clear is the role and value of kindness in shaping public policy. Much public policy for the last fifty years has been characterised by efficiency, effectiveness and economy, with emphasis on value for money, short-term impact and outcomes, that can be determined more by what can be easily measured, than by what it might be most helpful to measure.

The dimension of policy-making that is much harder to quantify is its effect on

human relationships, which are the core concern of kindness. In policy-making, therefore, kindness has tended to be dismissed as irrational and sentimental.

However, given its importance to our wellbeing, policies affecting our mental health should not ignore kindness. Rather, they should be fundamentally concerned with what kindness gives individuals and communities, and how the conditions can be created to foster

the support and interconnectedness it offers, including through services that are experienced as being more responsive to people's needs.

We therefore need to challenge the idea that kindness is nothing to do with governments and politics: it should be a key part of how governments develop policy and how our services are shaped. Policies rooted in the values of kindness, empathy, equality, dignity, and respect have great potential to



reduce inequality and discrimination, and to strengthen relationships and trust between governments, citizens, and society.

Collectively, we are currently living through a time when kindness is very much to the fore, frequently commented on and valued. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to spontaneous, widely recognised and (literally) applauded acts of kindness, from individuals, communities and the private, public and third sectors across the UK.

We hope that the kindness we have all witnessed and celebrated, that has moved us and buoyed us up as a society, will herald a resetting of our values as a society.

The online survey of 4,256 UK adults conducted by YouGov for the Mental Health Foundation in April 2020 suggests that people consider this important, with 72% of UK

adults aged 18+ agreeing that 'It's important that we learn from this crisis in order to be more kind as a society'.

As part of Mental Health Awareness Week, we called on governments across the UK to take preventive action rooted in justice and kindness to protect people's mental health by strengthening our social safety nets and giving hope to our communities.

In the UK, it should look to Scotland's National Performance Framework, which sets out a vision for national wellbeing across a range of economic, social and environmental factors, and to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 in Wales, which provides not only the ambition and permission, but also the legal obligation, to improve social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being.

## WE ARE CALLING ON GOVERNMENTS TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS AS A PRIORITY:

- The Foundation is calling on every government department to undertake a public policy review and apply a values-based approach to all workstreams, with kindness, equality, dignity and respect informing each government framework, with measurable outcomes.

This should include developing new metrics, co-produced with the people and communities the policies aim to benefit, such as satisfaction and attention, which require a focus on the relational and the kind, not only on the rational.

- The UK Government should publish a Wellbeing Economy Green Paper, drawing on international experience from New Zealand, and experience from elsewhere in the UK.

To read our briefing 'Why kindness matters in public policy', and for a full list of our mental health awareness week policy recommendations, please visit our website.



# Building a Strong Foundation through our partnerships

Berta Nuredini and Chris O’Sullivan, Corporate Partnerships Team

The pandemic has changed working life for most of us, in all sort of ways. For our corporate partners, Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW) created a moment to focus and celebrate activities around mental health during the pandemic.



In May we launched a partnership with greetings card firm TouchNote, which uses an app to order cards using either personal photos or a

range of stock images. They are then printed and sent by post. During lockdown, this was a great idea for sending physical post without the need to go out.

In a bid to inspire the nation’s stressed mothers TouchNote brought together a group of women, who all have first-hand experience of mental health issues, to create an inspiring new collection of cards designed to support and help other mums reconnect with each other during these troubling times.

All the proceeds from sales of this Cards for Kindness range are being donated to the Foundation – with over 800 cards sent in May.



**Be Kind to Yourself** by TouchNote user Lucy, who struggled with post-natal depression after the birth of her daughter 11 years ago and spent: *“a few blissful hours designing these cards with her. A rainbow is a natural symbol of hope, which is what I needed to cling to in dark days. It is so hard when feeling depressed to lift yourself out of the feelings of utter despair, and equally hard for friends and family to know what to say to help.... one day at a time is a good mantra”.*

TouchNote CEO, Dan Ziv, said: *“Over the past few weeks we have all shared feelings of distress and yet seen utter kindness too. We couldn’t be more proud of this collection of beautiful cards and their inspiring messages to help support mums, and others, who find themselves under huge pressure. We hope that the Art of Kindness helps people to share love and hope during these difficult times”.*

# withers <sup>LLP</sup>

**We are thrilled to have been chosen as the Charity of the Year for Withers, a leading international law firm.**

Since the launch of the partnership the Mental Health Foundation has worked closely with Withers' team and their diversity strands to help promote good mental health at work.

Our Covid-19 resources were embraced by the Withers team and resulted in many team members taking the initiative to post articles and blogs about their experiences and ideas relating to how to look after your mental health during lockdown.

The leading UK law firm sought to fundraise during Mental Health Awareness Week via digital fundraising events such as pub quizzes, virtual auctions, virtual walks and volunteering days. October will see the Withers team embark on a virtual trek of Mount Kilimanjaro with the aim of raising awareness and funds for the Mental Health Foundation.

Head of Talent Acquisition and Diversity, Jaya Louvre said: ***"We are proud to have Mental Health Foundation as our charity partner and we are working hard to support the charity and our employees during this difficult time. Giving back is hugely important to us and we are delighted to be working with the Foundation to raise awareness and support for this significant cause."***



**This year, we also celebrated the third year of a very successful partnership with TEMPUR®.**

The leading mattress brand joined us in spreading kindness and by providing free appointments for sleep consultations through their sleep experts for NHS staff and key workers. During Mental Health Awareness Week, TEMPUR® had a special landing page on their website about the partnership, what they wanted to achieve and allowed those eligible, to book a free sleep consultation.

Despite the enforced lockdown during Mental Health Awareness Week 2020, TEMPUR® made a substantial donation to the Mental Health Foundation.

**TEMPUR®**

# Peer Education Project in Scotland

Eilidh Quinn,  
Project Coordinator for Schools in Scotland



The Peer Education Project has been successfully running in England since 2015/16 and in 2019, the Mental Health Foundation Scotland piloted the project to assess the suitability of the content, structure and implementation guidance for the Scottish context, in order to begin expanding the reach of the project across the UK.

The Peer Education Project (PEP) is a low-cost, evidence informed and effective approach to addressing the challenges children and young people are facing with their mental health and wellbeing.

Five schools from across Scotland took part in the pilot which saw 138 senior pupils (Year 12) being trained as Peer Educators

and then delivering mental health lessons to around 800 S1 pupils (Year 7) towards the end of 2019. The pilot was really successful with key findings from the evaluation which centred around positive developments in mental health literacy, resilience, coping strategies and knowledge on where to access support.

We received a lot of useful insight from all involved into what worked well and also areas where there were challenges to overcome – the learning from which has contributed to some significant developments in the project across the UK.

The Peer Education Project is now available to all schools in Scotland and we are really pleased that four of our five pilot schools have already taken part in our first Scotland school staff training in February 2020.

We are working closely with our PEP schools across the UK to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on their schools. We are developing guidance and adapted activity suggestions so that schools are supported in embarking on implementing PEP in an unfamiliar school environment and are still able to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils.



**To find out more about PEP in Scotland and to download the Scotland Pilot Report, you can go to [mentalhealth.org.uk/peer-education-project-scotland](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/peer-education-project-scotland) or contact [schools@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:schools@mentalhealth.org.uk)**

# Virtual events

Zoe Lonergan,  
Events and Community Officer

## The new way of fundraising?

In March, we found ourselves in a situation that was unfamiliar and scary. Events were being postponed or cancelled across the UK, but we have been blown away by the innovative ways our supporters overcome this to continue supporting the Foundation.

In March, we launched our **Virtual Running Challenge**, which many of you supported. Not only does running make you feel healthier, but it's a great way to manage stress. Niall, ran an impressive 200km in May and raised over £300!



Niall

In April, the 2.6 Challenge was launched to support UK charities. Lots of you took part in something involving the numbers 2 and 6 to raise money for us. Sophie was supposed to be taking part in the postponed London Marathon on April 26th, so decided to run her own marathon,



Sophie

and completed the impressive 26.2 miles. She even picked up a social distanced donation along the way!

May saw our first ever **Virtual Pub Quiz**, streamed live on Facebook, hosted by our CEO Mark Rowland. Many of you have hosted themed quizzes online! We also launched our **Take Action Get Active** Challenge in May for Mental Health Awareness Week which over 1700 of you signed up to!

As well as our virtual events many of our most popular events such as **Tea & Talk** and **Curry & Chaat** can also be done virtually and are a great way to stay connected to others. Do head over to the **Get Involved** section of our website for more information about these.

Thank you to everyone who has continued to support us. Despite your fundraising plans being changed, you have been unphased by this and as we move forward, you have proved that this new way of fundraising will be part of the Foundation for years to come.

**To find out more information about any of the events mentioned above please email [events@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:events@mentalhealth.org.uk)**



**72%**

of UK adults say it is important we learn from the coronavirus pandemic to be more kind as a society

*Kindness briefing research, Mental Health Foundation, May 2020*

Make a donation:

[mentalhealth.org.uk/donate](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/donate)

Take part in a challenge event or hold your own fundraising event:

[mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved)

Keep up to date with our work: [mentalhealth.org.uk/newsletter](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/newsletter)



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