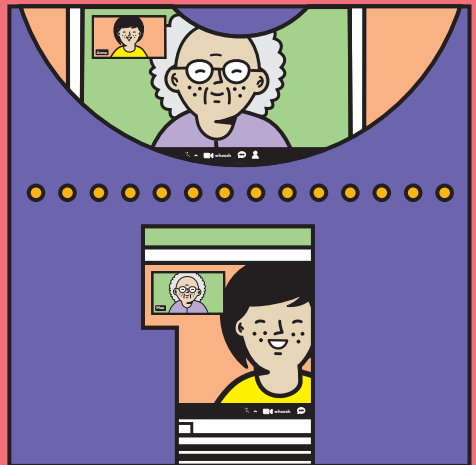
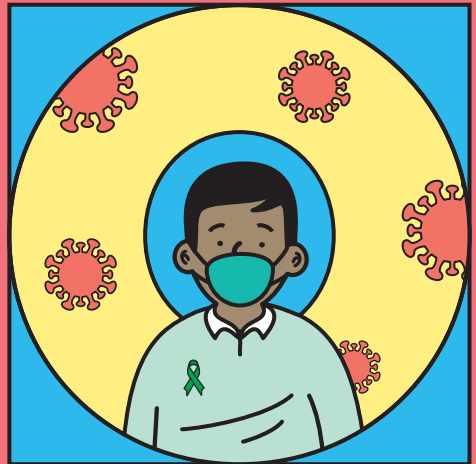


# TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Winter 2021



Strategy: One year on



# Dear Supporter,

Welcome to your first TalkBack for 2021!

This edition comes as the coronavirus pandemic strained our lives in ways that would have seemed impossible a year ago. Back then, we announced the launch of our Strategy for 2020-25 and our focus on public mental health and prevention – tackling the causes of mental health problems and providing support for people most at risk of developing them. Even before Covid-19 we knew that mental health was our biggest national concern. **We are now at serious risk of a rising tide of poor mental health.**

In this edition of TalkBack, we will explore the Strategy and its strategic aims one year on, and our response to the coronavirus pandemic.

- 1. Tell the world** – on pages 4 and 5 you can see the new findings from our ongoing 'Coronavirus: Mental Health in the Pandemic' study and how UK adults are coping.
- 2. Find solutions** – we are proud to announce that we are launching a major initiative to develop community prevention programmes across the four nations of the UK to help those in greatest need. Learn more on pages 8 and 9.
- 3. Inform and empower** – Tackling discrimination is core to the Foundation's prevention mission and we are conducting a race and diversity review internally.
- 4. Change policy and practice** – Our position on the abolition of Public Health England and our work on influencing the government's plans for how public health will be delivered in future. More on pages 10 and 11.
- 5. Build a Strong Foundation** – we have partnered with RockChoir who released a Christmas single to support us and help us raise awareness.

We also want to thank you all for your continued support during these difficult times. We couldn't help as many people as we do, or create meaningful work without your ongoing dedication and passion for preventing ill-health.

Kind regards,

**Kalina Peresterova, Individual Giving Officer**

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# A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Aisha Sheikh-Anene

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Mental Health Foundation

As clichéd as it may sound I try to live fully in the present, with a sense of positive expectation and an opportunity for expansion.

I feel blessed to have lived the life I have, even with lived experience of anxiety. As I have grown older I have understood the need to know what and who makes you happy – and add it to a list, **or as I call it my 'mental health tool kit'**.

I would also say to my younger self: remember you are the holder of the key to your own destiny. Decide for yourself what your experience will be; **listen to others but let the decision be yours.**

Also remember in life everything needs balance. Different sized cogs all play their part in the forward momentum of life – one is no less and no more important. They all require attention; **be kind to yourself.**

Finally I like to remember Desiderata by Max Hermann, an excerpt of which says:

**"In the noisy confusion of life keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy."**



Aisha has a successful background in both the public and private sector and qualified as a chartered accountant with the National Audit Office. Aisha currently works as Commercial Vehicle Project Manager for Ford Motor Company.

Aisha was appointed as a Chair of the Board of Trustees in 2020 and wants to promote greater understanding of the objectives and strategy of the Mental Health Foundation. This will help the Foundation's decision making and actions focus on the objectives and strategy of the organisation.

# Coping with the pandemic

Mental health research reveals how UK adults are managing stress



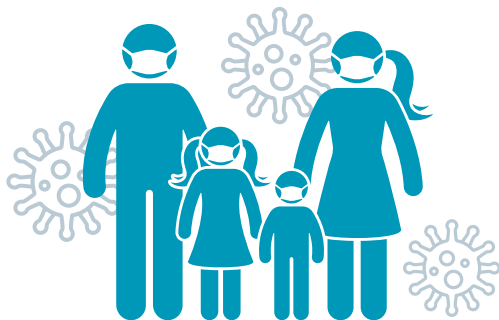
*“The good news here is that at a very difficult time for many of us, millions of people across the UK are using effective ways to improve their wellbeing. Going out for a walk, visiting a park and being in contact with family and friends are great ways for us all to protect our mental health and prevent problems. Wider research evidence, as well as our latest survey findings, makes this very clear.*

*Our new findings matter for policy, which can make it easier or harder for people to cope at a time that is stressful for millions of us. At a time of local restrictions, it’s more important than ever that local authorities invest in improving our neighbourhoods and leisure areas to create safe, green spaces for outdoor activities. That is why we are asking the UK Government to take the lead by publishing a cross-government plan to promote people’s mental health and wellbeing. We also want the Government to ensure there continues to be a distinct national body responsible for public mental health in England.”*

Dr Antonis Kousoulis, Director for England and Wales, Mental Health Foundation

**In 2020, World Mental Health Day (10th October) came as the coronavirus pandemic strained our lives in ways that would have seemed impossible a year ago.**

To recognise this, and support 2020’s theme of good mental health for all, we published new findings from our ongoing ‘**Coronavirus: Mental Health in the Pandemic**’ study, carried out in partnership with the universities of Cambridge, Swansea, Strathclyde and Queen’s Belfast.



Our findings looked at the ways we can protect our mental health and prevent mental health problems developing or worsening. In particular, we reported on the activities identified by adults in the UK as helping them to cope with the stress of the pandemic.

**According to our research, the most popular coping activities included going out for a walk, visiting a park or other ‘green’ space, contacting family or friends (for instance by phone or video chat), maintaining a healthy lifestyle (enough sleep, exercise and a balanced diet, for instance) and doing a hobby.**

Overall, just over eight in ten (82 per cent) of the UK adults surveyed said that they have experienced stress because of the pandemic.\*

Professor Tine Van Bortel, from the University of Cambridge and De Montfort University Leicester, said: “There is strong international evidence that there

is no trade-off between public health and the economy – quite the opposite: healthy, happy people make for stronger communities and thriving economies. This has important policy implications.

The government should create a sustainable wellbeing economy developed with the active involvement of our communities – and a pandemic recovery plan that reaches right across government departments and society itself. This would also help to tackle the deep inequalities exposed by the pandemic.”

**Good mental health for all is a theme not only for World Mental Health Day, but for all of us at all times, and should be a core aim of governments’ responses to the pandemic.**



**Download the full briefing**  
[mentalhealth.org.uk/news/coping-with-the-pandemic](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/news/coping-with-the-pandemic)

\* These findings are from a YouGov survey done among a nationally representative sample of 4,251 UK adults. It asked participants what had helped them cope during the previous two weeks.

# Race and diversity review

Gillian Neish, facilitator

**My colleague Mildred Zimunya and I are currently conducting a review of race and diversity at the Foundation.**



*Gillian Neish*

It was prompted by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 which has had an impact on people all over the world and triggered **'Black Lives Matter'** protests. This reminded everyone that racism is not just a US problem. It's a problem here in the UK too and racial discrimination means that people from black and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately represented in insecure, low-paid jobs, in poor housing, and in the criminal justice system. They also experience the mental health challenges associated with that.

The Foundation stands against racism in all its forms. Its approach is as an empowering, open organisation that champions racial equality and all forms of diversity. Tackling discrimination is core to its mission of prevention in mental health. With the support and involvement of the Board, Senior Management Team and staff from all backgrounds, at all levels and across the UK, this review is creating the time and safe spaces to have the difficult conversations about these complex issues. These are necessary to identify ways to address the role of structural racism and discrimination within the Foundation.

The aim, then, is to develop an action plan that will lead to greater racial diversity, including at senior levels, so that the Foundation better reflects the communities it serves and can serve them more effectively.

\*Trigger warning: this story mentions suicide\*

## Black History Month – Henry's story

**Henry Stone is a poet from South London who featured in the *Evening Standard's* Next Gen Trailblazers List**

*"Ill-health grew roots in my story around the year 2015. Living off bad food and no sleep with impending deadlines on the fifth floor of a university flat, little did I know I wouldn't be able to complete my degree due to episodes of depression.*

*Everybody told me that university would be the best years of my life, but the loneliness I endured was more painful than anything I'd imagined. I was struggling to make friends and I didn't feel as though I belonged anywhere. I could sense that there was something wrong with me, but when the masses are insistent you should be having a blast, you assume these moods needn't be taken seriously.*

*That was until I missed one lecture. And then another. Then a deadline. Then the eating stopped. Then the illogical terror of going outside wrapped itself around me and I would go weeks without being seen, struggling with the basics of hygiene.*

*I cannot remember when the suicidal tendencies started, but I remember the suicide notes and the weight loss. A sleeping pattern which seemingly disappeared into a void along with all remnants of peace, joy and structure. I remember calling the Samaritans hotline and bursting into tears to an operator whose name I will never recall. The tears*



*were pretty non-stop for a while. This is the part of university nobody eloquently addressed at the time. I was in counselling for three years. I had to retake several years and even then, I still had to drop out.*

*This is one of the biggest pandemics Britain has faced in a generation. The everyday battles black Brits face merely compound the effect. All we can continue to do is to encourage our brethren in the black community to continue to seek help and to make treatment more accessible to everyone in our community, especially those who have been exposed to the traumas many of us grew up with."*

**Explore these resources for support, education and empowerment:**

- **AZ Mag: AZ MAG**
- **The Free Black University**

**Need support?**

- **Samaritans are available 24/7 for free on 116 123 (UK).**

# MHF Covid response programme

Our new programme to prevent the mental health crisis

Lee Knifton, Director for Scotland and Northern Ireland

**2020 will be known as the year when the world faced and responded to one of the greatest public health challenges of our era. Schools and workplaces closed, travel ground to a halt, cities and neighbourhoods fell quiet. Amongst the deaths and physical illness, we have also seen the emergence of psychological suffering, loneliness and distress. Even before Covid-19 we knew that mental health was our biggest national concern. We are now at serious risk of a rising tide of poor mental health.**

And whilst Covid-19 has touched us all, it has magnified and accelerated mental health inequalities across our society. The poorest, the most marginalised and the most discriminated-against, have been even more disconnected and disadvantaged.

However, we know that it does not need to be this way. Individuals, communities and workers of all kinds have shown remarkable resilience and kindness throughout the pandemic. With the right action, a mental health catastrophe can be prevented.

**As the UK's leading charity for the public's mental health, we are launching a major initiative to develop community prevention programmes across the four nations of the UK, helping those in greatest need.**

In the first instance our programmes will support groups who we know have been hit hard by Covid-19: **single parent families; people with long term health conditions, refugees and people from minority ethnic communities.**

Our own nationally renowned 'Coronavirus: Mental Health in the Pandemic' study has told us that these groups are struggling now and that without help this will endure. **So with the help and support from key donors like you, we are planning on investing £2m to expand our well-evidenced programmes.** We are also joining forces with other charities and community organisations so that we can reach communities at scale.

We are launching this new programme at the start of this year and it will run for the next three years. Our goal is not just to help people now but also to support other organisations, and give them the tools and techniques to make mental health their number one priority too. There really is no health without mental health. This programme is ambitious and will draw upon our teams from across the UK, but with your support we can make a real difference.

*"The pandemic has shown that our current health system plays a crucial role in treating sickness. But it isn't designed to prevent ill-health and protect our mental health. For that, we need far greater action outside of the health service. That is why we are investing resources to support the emotional and mental health of communities at risk, and to demonstrate that prevention really is better than cure if we are to achieve happier, healthier lives."*



**Mark Rowland**  
CEO Mental Health Foundation

*"This is an ambitious and exciting initiative that is bringing evidence-informed interventions to those most in need. We want to build on what we already know about the power of peer and community led support by building the capacity of organisations and harnessing the relationship they already have with the communities they serve. By working together we can improve the mental health and wellbeing of those who have faced significant hardship and trauma over the past year."*



**Julie Cameron**  
Associate Director, Scotland and Northern Ireland



# 'What next for public mental health in England?'

## The abolition of Public Health England

Lucy Thorpe, Head of Policy

**Readers of *TalkBack* are already familiar with our new Strategy for 2020-25 and our focus on public mental health and prevention – tackling the causes of mental health problems and providing support for people most at risk of developing them.**

In August 2020, we heard the extraordinary and unexpected news that the government in Westminster had decided to abolish Public Health England (PHE), the national body responsible for improving the health of the population, and to create a new National Institute for Health Protection, focused on responding to communicable disease pandemics. This happened in the midst of a pandemic that has had a significant impact on people's mental health.

**Mental ill-health remains the biggest contributor to overall population ill-health in the UK.** Yet, the protection and improvement of public mental health is at risk at a time when it has arguably never been more important to invest in co-ordinated, well-resourced, and sustained action to safeguard our mental health. This decision could be deeply damaging to both public mental health and to wider physical health improvement, which have so far received little attention in government statements on these reforms.

**This is of great concern to the Foundation, and we have been working hard to influence the government's plans for how public health will be delivered in England in the future.**

We know that the health of our society depends on our commitment to protecting and supporting the mental health of the whole population. Public health efforts that include public mental health will deliver the greatest health dividends in all areas of health.

This is increasingly understood and accepted, as people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to mental health have shifted in recent years. Yet the existence in England of a co-ordinated national public health body, supporting an integrated regional and local public health structure, is no longer guaranteed.

It is a priority for the Foundation to do all it can to influence a good outcome for future public mental health arrangements, come April 2021. We need an improved public health system that gives parity to mental health, both in its own right, and as a vital component of public health challenges often seen only through a physical health lens, such as obesity, smoking and substance misuse.

In the autumn of 2020, we led a coalition of 18 charities and social enterprises, including Mind, Samaritans, Rethink and YoungMinds to agree a Joint Statement on the future of public mental health, and the core elements we want to see in any new system that replaces PHE.

It is too early at the time of writing this article to have received a reply to our letter, but we will keep you informed of developments in the next issue of *TalkBack*.

In November 2020 we sent this Joint Statement to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock MP, to express our strong concerns about the abolition of PHE and asking him to consult widely on what will replace it.

We called on him to make a "historic" change by putting mental health at the heart of a new strategy.

### **Our Joint Statement calls for five main things:**

1. A new public health system that gives parity to mental health
2. National leadership from an influential expert body independent of government and the NHS
3. A public mental health strategy with a core focus on better population mental health and reducing inequalities and the social and economic risks to mental health, including racial and other forms of discrimination.
4. A clear relationship between the new public health body and the National Institute of Health Protection, which itself must include public mental health leadership and expertise in its structure and responsibilities, recognising the mental health impacts of communicable disease pandemics.
5. Enhanced funding for public health improvement.

**The full statement can be read on our website [mentalhealth.org.uk/news/charities-write-to-matt-hancock-future-of-public-mental-health](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/charities-write-to-matt-hancock-future-of-public-mental-health)**

# Fundraising during lockdown

## Deb's story

Debra Fry, supporter

**During the first lockdown, a friend messaged me asking if I could crochet a bear in NHS scrubs, wearing a face mask for her. She had a pattern of a hero bear that was circulating on the Internet.**

When the bear was finished, I posted a picture of it on Facebook. This sparked other people's interest and the orders started coming in. Each time an order was completed, pictures would go on Facebook which would bring in more orders.

**Each bear took about 7 hours to make.**

I was fortunate to have kept working throughout the lockdown so when I wasn't working, I was crocheting! **I made over 30 bears in total and raised £545** to donate to the Mental Health Foundation. My employer has also fund matched this.



Another fundraising opportunity presented itself when it became compulsory to wear face masks in shops and on public transport. I have made over **250 masks** so far and the profit from these will also be donated to the Mental Health Foundation.

In 2018 I was chosen to run the **London Marathon for the Foundation**. Unfortunately, I slipped down a few stairs and damaged my knee, but I was determined to participate in the Marathon, so I had to approach it differently. I trained to speed walk it instead. Well that particular year was the hottest London marathon on record so I was not the only person walking! I completed it in **7hrs 39 mins 45 seconds**.

There always has to be a challenge for me to participate in, so I signed up to trek the **Great Wall of China in October 2019 for MHF**. This was probably one of the hardest things I have ever done, as my knees are damaged and have arthritis in them too, so stairs are a daily challenge. I don't know if you know much about the Great Wall of China but there are more stairs than you could ever think of! I met an amazing bunch of people during the trek and we have stayed in touch since. **We started as strangers and came home as friends.**



# Mental Health Awareness Week 2021 Theme



## Why have we chosen nature and environment for 2021?

We have chosen 'Nature and the Environment' as the theme for Mental Health Awareness Week 10-16 May 2021!

The evidence is clear that access to nature is crucial for our mental health and millions of people re-discovered that during lockdowns this year. However, this was not the same for all of us. We want to explore what the barriers are and ensure everyone is able to share in the natural world and experience the mental health benefits.

The week will be an opportunity to open our eyes to the power of nature.

We have set the theme, organised and hosted Mental Health Awareness Week for the last 21 years, during which time the event has grown to become one of the biggest awareness weeks across the UK and globally.

The Week is an opportunity for people to talk about all aspects of mental health, with a focus on providing help and advice.

# SITUATE project, one year on

## Students In Transition at University: Aiming to Enhance mental and social health and wellbeing

Marwah El-Murad, Programme Manager for Families, Children and Young People's programmes

One year on from starting the **SITUATE** project with the University of Sussex, the world looks quite a bit different. Today's first year university students have lived through the uncertainty of the A-Level results, months of disruption to learning in their final year of school, and not being able to properly mark and celebrate significant moments, like their last day of school, and leaving home for the first time.

They're now facing a university experience unlike any other before and must still **contend** with all of the challenges university brings. Then there are the added challenges faced by mature students, students who are parents or carers, students who work part time, or students living with long-term conditions.

A positive outcome of the pandemic is that across the country there seem to be more and more conversations about the impact of our circumstances on our mental health.



As students are among the least likely to ask for help for a mental health problem, tackling the stigma around mental health is crucial.

**75% of students with a mental health diagnosis admitted to concealing their symptoms due to a fear of stigma.**

That's why we spent the summer working with students from the University of Sussex to design and deliver a national student-led social media campaign, **#BehindTheBooks**. We launched the campaign at the end of September to coincide with Freshers' Week. The aim was to tackle stigma, raise awareness of the issues faced by students, and to encourage students to seek support for their mental health.

Over the coming year we'll be training students to deliver workshops to their peers, aiming to increase mental health literacy and help-seeking.



# RockChoir

## 'Keeping the dream alive'

On World Mental Health Day, Rock Choir, the largest contemporary choir in the world, announced that they would release a Christmas single to support the Mental Health Foundation and help raise awareness of mental health.

Thousands of Rock Choir Members from across England, Wales and Scotland came together as one choir for the **FIRST** time since lockdown began to record their vocals on a **national Christmas single of a very special Rock Choir version of 'Keeping The Dream Alive'**.

Mark Rowland, CEO of the Mental Health Foundation says, **"We are delighted that Rock Choir released their own version of 'Keeping the Dream Alive' in support of good mental health for all. Music is great for our mental health; both listening to it and playing or singing which is why Rock Choir are such a great fit for us."**

In May 2020 and as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, the Rock Choir Team hosted a 24-hour back to back music and well-being online event 'Rock Choir 24', which raised over £45,000 for the Mental Health Foundation. Raising awareness of Mental Health continues to be a priority for Rock Choir and we would like to thank the organisation and all of their members for their fantastic ongoing support.



**"The lyrics of the song are extremely relevant to arts and entertainment at the moment; "The game will never be over, because we're keeping the dream alive". It was one of the hardest hit industries last year and everyone was desperate to find a positive and successful way forward to allow music and singing to take its place in society again. Singing brings a sense of community and togetherness with a power to uplift and heal individuals.**

**The Christmas single united us all, brought us together and reinforced why Rock Choir is so very special for the UK. I am so proud of everyone who took part and delighted to have once again joined forces with the Mental Health Foundation."**

Founder and Creator of Rock Choir,  
Caroline Redman Lusher



# 50% of UK adults

who had experienced stress because of the pandemic said visiting green spaces, such as parks, helped them cope.



Research from the Mental Health Foundation and collaborating universities, 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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