

TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Winter 2022

Climate change and mental health



Mental Health
Foundation



Dear Supporter,

A big hello from me and welcome to the Winter edition of TalkBack!

It's certainly been an eventful few months! With the resurgence of COVID-19 and so much uncertainty we are grateful to have been keeping busy delivering important programmes and taking steps to help people safeguard their mental health.

An important moment of 2021 was COP26. With all eyes turned to Scotland, this was key moment to entrench mental health and the fight against health inequality as an integral part of the conversation on climate change. We know that changes to the environment hugely impact our mental health and that people in the UK are experiencing eco-anxiety. These themes will be explored in more detail in the coming pages.

In addition, I'm excited to be able to share with you some updates from our programmes and campaigns relating to diverse topics: from a biodiversity policy win to a programme connecting new fathers with sport. **Page 9** gives a look into one of our programmes, Picture This, which aims to combat digital exclusion in elderly people. Tyra shares her work on our Mind Over Mirror campaign and personal experience on **pages 10 and 11**.

Annie's got an update about an exciting new partnership with Deliciously Ella on **page 12**. Finally, we've conducted important research on student mental health, and you can read the results on **pages 14 and 15**.

So, while uncertainty remains, one thing we are sure of as we continue into 2022 is the dedication and passion of supporters like you, with whose continued support, we can make a real difference to the mental health of people around the country.

There's a lot to look forward to so watch this space for Mental Health Awareness Week this year and the theme of loneliness. Thank you for joining the movement for good mental health for all!

Kind regards,

Isabel Collinge, Stewardship Officer

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A LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Josh Elton

Long Covid Project Co-ordinator

Hi little Josh,

No one wants to tell you this, but being a kid is *really* difficult. People will tell you to look right, act right, think right... and that's just the teachers. **It is okay to struggle.** It's okay to cry sometimes. Adversity is part of life, but it breeds resilience and strength. You will need that strength too, honestly mate, you wait till 2020 – yeesh. Your ADHD does not make you *broken* and anyone who thinks that way is defensive because they are boring.

When you grow up, being weird is really okay. There will be a corner of the world where the things that make you odd make you useful.

I am you, so I know what you're scared of. You're scared to fail and you're scared of being rejected. I know you think you can achieve everything on your own and show everyone how great you are, but you have a mullet, so maybe you aren't right about everything. Thing is, you aren't an island. You aren't alone. **Community makes you strong.**

Find meaning in the ties you have to other people and they will help you through the difficult times. And there will be difficult times mate, honestly, look at you.

Enjoy your hair while you have it.
Be unapologetically you.

You've got this,

Big Josh

P.s. Buy stocks in Apple





The Mental Health Foundation's Trip to COP26

One consequence of climate change which is attracting more and more interest, is the impact it is having on our mental health and wellbeing. As a research-based organisation, the Mental Health Foundation has a longstanding interest in reducing mental health inequalities and addressing the root causes of mental health problems.

As part of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), the Mental Health Foundation hosted the COP26 Citizen's Forum on Climate Change and Mental Health. This was a community

participation event which brought together not just health practitioners, policy makers and academics, but also representatives and activists from those communities most at risk from climate change effects.

How climate change can impact our mental health

Research has identified three broad effects from climate change that may exacerbate health inequalities and negatively impact our mental health.

The first impact comes from the **direct effects** of climate change. Take a fire or a flood – anyone who lives through such events may be at increased risk of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

These events are more likely to occur in certain parts of the world and affect people to different extents. Women, those living in poverty, children and people in low- and middle-income countries are identified as most at risk of these effects.



The World Bank estimates that climate change will push 100 million people into poverty in the next 10 years if urgent action is not taken.²

A just transition

The UK and devolved governments have committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions in the next 30 years. There is no doubt that this needs to happen. However, we must be mindful of those whose livelihoods are tied to polluting industries, or who will feel the brunt of costs that come with transition.

To mitigate these ill effects on already disadvantaged populations, the 'Just Transition' framework has been created. It is aimed at supporting creation of good quality jobs, and preventing workers being left behind as we move to a green economy.

Indirect effects mean that climate change can impact the mental health of people anywhere. Fear of the consequences of climate change is now referred to as 'eco-anxiety' and includes deep worry about the future and for later generations.

Research from the University of Bath shows that 4 in 10 younger people fear having children of their own as a result of the climate crisis¹.

Lastly, climate change creates **social consequences** with negative mental health effects. Nature events or changing climate will change livelihoods and social structures. We will likely see a rise in conflict, displacement and forced migration. 'Climate refugees' will be created, and these will likely be those already experiencing the most disadvantage.

The perspectives shared at the Citizen's forum highlight voices that need to be included. More consideration needs to be given to the impact of green job growth on women's participation and equality within the workplace. We also need to better understand how changes to consumer bills will affect low-income households to make sure these changes do not disproportionately affect those who can least afford it.



By bringing people together at the COP26 Citizen's Forum, we had the opportunity to identify areas of common understanding on this complex issue and seek ideas on where understanding is limited and needs to be developed.

1. Clayton, S., Manning, C. M., Krygsman, K., & Speiser, M. (2017). Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, and ecoAmerica.

2. The World Bank (2021). Climate Change. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/overview>.

Climate change and mental health

How to look after your wellbeing



Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, which can mean it is impossible to escape frightening images and upsetting news about its effect on people around the world, and its potential impacts on ourselves.

Many people are now experiencing 'eco-anxiety', sense of dread about the future of the environment for ourselves and subsequent generations.

One of the main issues is the lack of control we can feel over such an overwhelming topic, and feeling powerless contributes to worry and anxiety.

Fortunately, there are steps we can take to minimise the negative impact that this has on our wellbeing.

Know that you can make a difference



Remember that our own choices do matter. Our lifestyles contribute to climate change and around two thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions are linked to private households. These emissions largely come from the energy, food and transport sectors, so considering how we approach these aspects of life can have a positive effect. When we make conscious decisions like this it also helps us feel empowered, with a positive effect on our mental health.

Talk about your feelings



Opening up about your fears is an important first step to easing your worry. You can speak with someone you trust or, if you prefer, remember that the Samaritans are always available for free on 116 123 (UK). Many people are experiencing some 'eco-anxiety' so it is likely that they will be understanding and appreciate having this chat.



Get involved with your community

Try to connect with local groups who are working on environmental issues.

Getting outside and being with nature, especially with other people, is great for your wellbeing so if it is possible to attend clean-ups or similar activities then this is a great way to contribute while getting the benefits of being outdoors.



Speak up

Many of these groups are campaign groups who organise rallies and events. Activism helps connect us with other like-minded people and also empowers us by involving us more deeply in the conversation. Many groups are organised online, making it easy to connect and stay up to date with events and plans.



Be aware of how the news is affecting you



It can be hard to avoid constant news alerts and stories shared on social media. However, it is worth considering how engaging with these alerts affects your mood.

Try putting boundaries on your consumption of climate change news by turning off news notifications, or muting accounts with upsetting content. It can be better to limit your news consumption within a set window each day to stop the constant trickle of updates.

In order to protect your sleep, it is also recommended to stop looking at your phone for an hour before bed.

Mental Health Awareness Week policy ask becomes law

Adam Nice, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer



Last year's Mental Health Awareness Week focused on the link between nature and mental health.

Our research found that connecting with nature is good for your mental health; it can reduce stress and lift your mood. For us to be able to connect with nature, we need high-quality, biodiverse nature all around us. Unfortunately, the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland all placing in the bottom quarter of the State of Nature's biodiversity intactness index.



The lack of high-quality, biodiverse nature is especially concentrated in poor urban areas, deepening existing mental health inequalities. For this reason, as part of our influencing strategy for Mental Health Awareness Week in 2021, we joined the State of Nature campaign, coordinated by Wildlife and Countryside Link. We amplified their call for a legally binding target to end nature's decline by 2030 to be included in the Environment Bill, a piece of legislation which is part of a new legal framework for environmental protection.

The State of Nature Campaign amassed 208,000 signatures to its petition calling for the change and, in August 2021, the Government added amendments to the Bill to halt the decline of species abundance by 2030.

These amendments were included in the final Act, which received Royal Assent and passed into law on 9 November 2021.

This makes the UK the first country in the world with a legally binding target to halt nature's decline, something that is essential for the health of our planet, and for our mental health.

Picture This

Paul Scharakowski,
Picture This Project Manager

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our reliance on digital technology increased exposing the true extent of digital exclusion with many older people not being able to communicate with others digitally.

What is digital exclusion?

There are many forms of digital exclusion; limited IT skills, lack of confidence, difficulties affording a device, lack of access to WiFi, and poor connection in many areas across the country.

As a response to the pandemic, the Mental Health Foundation created 'Picture This' - a digital creative programme to help older people access the internet whilst also taking part in a 12-week creative session helping to reconnect with others. Picture This offers participants a new tablet device, unlimited Wi-Fi for the course duration and tailored one-to-one training.

We also give each person a bag of art materials, so each week, we get the chance to discuss different topics while creating a piece of art to accompany the session.

Early indications of the project reveal that we have helped people reconnect with family and friends. We have helped people attend special events virtually,

including one person to virtually attend their mother's 100th birthday. Through zoom, people have contacted family from across the globe, from Ghana to Canada and closer to home in Scotland.

As people progress on the Picture This project, we offer additional virtual sessions where you get to learn how to stay safe online, shop for groceries and book NHS appointments.

Overall Picture This provides people with skills that will empower them to be more independent online.



MIND OVER MIRROR

Tyra Mensah – Programmes Trainee

Last July, we launched our Mind Over Mirror campaign. It focused on promoting positive mental health and raising awareness of underrepresented body image matters.

In addition, the campaign highlighted the need for improved information on non-surgical cosmetic procedures to ensure consumers are making informed decisions. Supported by the British Beauty Council and the Joint Council for Cosmetic Practitioners (JCCP), the campaign was in response to our Body Image findings that over one third (**35%**) of adults felt depressed because of their body and **40%** of teenagers felt 'worried' (Mental Health Awareness Week report, 2019).

We worked with our MHF Young Leaders from the youth advocacy organisation *Leaders Unlocked* to identify key themes of the campaign and co-produce the social media campaign series.

These themes were (1) Societal & Social Media Pressures, (2) Cosmetic Procedures and (3) Body Textures, Tones & Individuality. In order to explore and raise awareness of these themes, we developed and launched a series of social media posts, which ran across Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

The first campaign post, 'Feeling my Mind Top Tips', aimed to support individuals developing a good body image and highlight the pressures from society and social media on our body image.

The second post, the 'Mirror my Mind Comic Strip', explored the topic of cosmetic treatment, and highlighted important things to consider before undergoing any cosmetic treatment.

The final campaign post, 'Facing my Mirror Blog' explored issues relating to body texture, tones and individuality through my own personal story. I shared my personal experience of dealing with acne and how it affected my mental health, but also how I eventually overcame my feelings of dissatisfaction towards my skin. I was essentially Facing My Mirror.



#MindOverMirror

"Whatever our textures – skin, hair or any other part of our body – we can journey towards accepting ourselves instead of wanting to be something else."

TYRA



In the weeks following the campaign, the campaign posts reached almost 60k people and had more than 2 million views!

I received overwhelmingly positive feedback on my blog, with many people expressing how relatable and helpful it was for them with their own skin struggles.

This campaign raised the bar for how we discuss the reality of body image, in light of cosmetic treatments, image-editing apps and changing societal norms.

MY STORY...

In my second year of university, I found a skincare clinic in the city where I studied, which I thought would be the answer to all my skin 'issues'. I paid for multiple sessions of facial acid peels. Yes, cosmetic-grade, acid was applied on my face with the intent of clearing up my acne and fading the hyperpigmentation I had developed from previous breakouts.

At this point in my journey with my skin, I began to realise that this wasn't the solution for me. Don't get me wrong, I think there's no problem with having facial peels, but I was focused so much on the aesthetics of my body that I hadn't even addressed other factors that were possibly causing me to breakout.

What about the stress or pressure I was putting myself through? What about the hormonal changes my body was dealing with as a young woman? What about simply learning to love my skin?

It took some time for me to get here but I'm learning to be more accepting of my skin if I breakout. It's simply how my skin responds sometimes, and I shouldn't feel ashamed. I have learned so much about myself throughout my journey in my own skin.

I do my best to think and speak kindly of myself, as I would do for a friend. I know that I am not alone, and I can talk to a friend if my body image is affecting my life.



A new partnership with Deliciously Ella

Annie Hall, Corporate Partnerships Account Manager

We are delighted to announce that we are working together with the plant-based family company, Deliciously Ella, on a 2-year corporate partnership.

Having struggled with her own mental health challenges in the past, the Mental Health Foundation represents a cause extremely important to Ella Mills, founder of Deliciously Ella. This shared passion for promoting good mental health for all has created a powerful synergy that we are excited to grow!

The partnership was officially launched on World Mental Health Day (10th October) at Deliciously Ella's Plants by De restaurant in London. Our Social Media Manager, Bethan Harvey, kicked off activity, joining Ella in the restaurant for an interview covering everything from the Mental Health Foundation's work to tips on what we can do to support our own and others mental health.

The interview was shared with the brand's 2 million followers on Instagram, reaching a huge audience and spreading our message far and wide. Deliciously Ella continued to promote the partnership at the restaurant throughout October, giving customers the option to donate £1 from every food and drink bill to the foundation. October also saw the launch of some exciting new cause-related marketing products in the Deliciously Ella range. The company has pledged to donate a percentage of all sales from their brand vegan chocolate bars to the Foundation over the next twelve months.

A QR code on the packaging also links to three mindfulness classes designed by Deliciously Ella and the Mental Health Foundation to help customers take a moment for themselves. The bars are stocked in major retailers including Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Holland & Barrett and we can confirm that, as well as raising money for MHF, they are delicious!

Deliciously Ella's support will enable us to deliver evidence-based information, advice, and project support through our Covid Response Programme to people whose mental health has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.



*Deliciously Ella founder,
Ella Mills*



Kicking off mental health

Natalie Sadler, Communications and Marketing Manager

The Dads and Football project report was published on International Men's Day (19 November) to raise awareness of men's mental health.



"Connecting over sport is something that I think is really positive, football anyway, and having that opportunity to meet other dad's and that peer-to-peer support really, I think is what has benefitted the project."

Father of three,
Chris Lawrence,
project participant.

One under-reported area in life where mental health can be affected is fatherhood. Becoming a parent is joyful and exciting for men, but also a time of worry and uncertainty. Our Dads and Football project, which has run for the last two years, connected new and expectant dads through football to understand what becoming a dad meant for them and their mental health.

The report was a result of a 2-year project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, in partnership with Cardiff City FC Foundation and the National Centre for Mental Health at Cardiff University.

The project findings, that **over half of the men polled in our study said that they did not receive the mental health support they wanted and needed** and **70% of dads** surveyed want more information on what to expect when becoming a father. **56% of dads** surveyed said groups for men would be helpful but don't currently exist.

In response to the need expressed by dads involved in the project, the Mental Health Foundation teamed up with the Fatherhood Institute to create 'Becoming Dad', a useful guide containing up-to-date research and information alongside lots of practical tips and advice.

The 'Becoming Dad' guide, and full project report are free and can be downloaded on our website at mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/dads-and-football-project

Thriving Learners

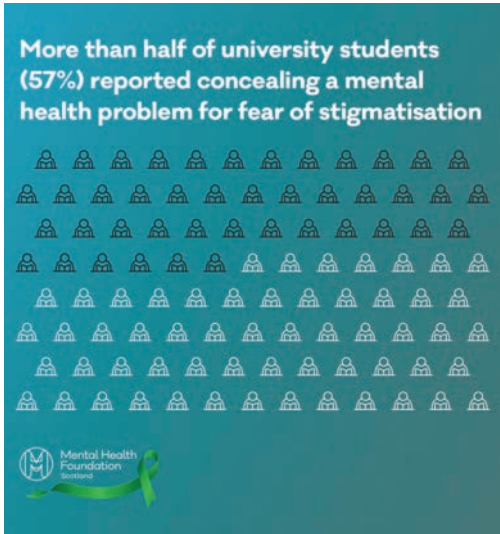
MHF leads ground-breaking study into student mental health in Scotland

Claire Fleming, Communications & Marketing Manager (Scotland and NI)

Last November the Mental Health Foundation in Scotland published the findings of the first year of its Thriving Learners study which is one of the most significant, and potentially largest, studies of students’ mental health that has ever taken place in the UK.



Working with universities in Scotland and 19 Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, the study was led by researcher Christopher Maguire and involved over 15,000 university students who shared their experiences – both good and bad – of mental health needs and support offered.



74% of university students in Scotland reported having low wellbeing



The findings, along with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions involving university staff, were analysed to produce a series of recommendations for the sector to progress and implement.

The study found that almost three quarters (**74%**) of university students surveyed had low wellbeing and more than one third (**36%**) reported moderately severe or severe symptoms of depression.

Furthermore, nearly half of respondents (**45%**) reported that they had experienced a serious psychological issue that they felt needed professional help.

Thriving Learners was made possible thanks to funding from The Robertson Trust. The second year of the study will focus on colleges with a survey issued to students at colleges across Scotland in early spring.

Julie Cameron, Associate Director of the Mental Health Foundation in Scotland, said: “The number of students experiencing low wellbeing or symptoms of poor mental health is alarming. We all feel low at times, but it is vital that the right supports are in place to prevent mental health problems developing or escalating.

“We know that universities all over Scotland care about the wellbeing of their students. Currently the path to mental health and wellbeing support for students can be confusing and often the proposed solution is mental health counselling, for which there may be a lengthy wait.

“We need sector-wide change, and we are pleased that universities across Scotland are open to our recommendations for continued improvement including incorporating student wellbeing within their measures of success. We’d like to see a broader wellbeing support model that includes a variety of interventions and services available at every university to empower students with the skills and knowledge to live a healthy and happy life and feel reassured that more intensive support is available when it’s needed.”

Read the full report at mentalhealth.org.uk/scotland/supporting-students-thrive



36% of university students

report moderately severe or severe
symptoms of depression.



Source: Thriving Learners: Initial Findings from Scottish HEIs (2021)

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