

# TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the  
Mental Health Foundation • Summer 2022



Mental Health  
Foundation



## CONNECTIONS





# Dear Supporter,

Welcome to your summer update from the Mental Health Foundation! After an extremely busy few months across the Foundation we're excited to share what we've been up to.

Mental Health Awareness Week this year was all about loneliness, and in this edition of TalkBack we will be looking at the connections that can protect mental health. We may say this every year, but we really do think it was our best Mental Health Awareness Week ever. We had brilliant engagement online and on social media via our hashtag, as well as involvement from politicians and policy makers. You'll see more about the week, the research we conducted, and policy pushes we made in the coming pages.

The last few years have made one thing very clear; we cannot look after ourselves or our mental health alone. It is through connections with friends, families and communities that we find strength. The Mental Health Foundation is working to ensure that everyone has the kind of connections they need to thrive. Be it through pivotal research (page 5) policy change (page 6), or through our programmes like Voices and Visibility (page 10), all the support you give us allows us to bring people together and protect mental health.

Thank you so much for all your support. You'll see in the coming pages what you have helped us achieve – and the exciting thing is, that there is so much more to come.

Best wishes,

**Isabel Collinge, Stewardship Officer**

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## What's on at the Mental Health Foundation?

**At the Mental Health Foundation we are lucky to have amazing supporters like you who love to get involved. Have a look at the below calendar and reach out if any of these events interest you!**



**Sunday 18 September**  
Scottish Half Marathon and 10km

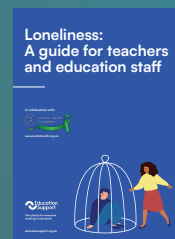
**Sunday 2 October**

- Cardiff Half Marathon
- Virtual London Marathon

**Sunday 9 October**  
Royal Parks Half Marathon

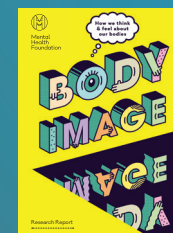


**All information about these events and information on how to sign up can be found on our website, or you can e-mail the events team at: [events@mentalhealth.org.uk](mailto:events@mentalhealth.org.uk)**



### Mental Health Foundation in schools

Our schools pack on loneliness was downloaded 7,000 times during Mental Health Awareness Week.



### Body image and mental health in young people

In June we launched a three-week online course assisting professionals who work with young people, supporting them to develop and maintain a healthy body image.

## Partnerships update

In partnership with Zizzi, Mental Health Awareness Week was supported by a celebrity promotional campaign securing support from AJ and Curtis Pritchard from *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Love Island* fame.

A video was made of their conversation in a Zizzi restaurant in central London featuring our MHAW campaign hashtag **#IveBeenThere** which was shared across AJ and Curtis' social channels with a combined 2 million followers where the campaign was seen 65,000 times on Instagram and Facebook.

The brothers brilliantly talked about their own experiences of loneliness and shared insights into coping



mechanisms which work well for them, helping to reduce stigma. The campaign video was also shared on Zizzi and MHF's website securing 60,000 views, as well as being included in a customer newsletter, reaching 1.3million customers.



**We were delighted to team up with Starbucks this Mental Health Awareness Week.**

We worked together to create an evidence-based guide on mental health for partners and provided over 8,000 badges to be worn by baristas across the UK throughout the week.

The activity was also supported by in-store messaging on digital menu boards with QR codes directing staff and customers to our website for mental health information, advice and sign posting for additional support.

## Research update

For this year's Mental Health Awareness Week, our research team conducted crucial research to highlight how loneliness and stigma affect our mental health, and who is experiencing loneliness.

### Why does loneliness matter?

We all have experienced and felt loneliness. Feeling lonely every once in a while is a normal part of life. However long term loneliness can affect our mental and physical health. It can lead to a negative spiral: people who suffer from loneliness find it harder to connect, which causes them to be afraid of social situations, thus making it much more difficult to escape negative thoughts in life.

**Four in ten adults say feeling lonely has made them experience low moods, and a quarter say feeling lonely has made them feel anxious or have negative effects on their mental health.**

### Loneliness can affect anyone

While loneliness can affect anyone, certain risk factors increase our chances of suffering from severe and lasting loneliness.

**These are:** Being widowed, single, living alone, unemployed, a carer, being between 16 and 24 years old, being from an ethnic minority community, being LGBTQ and having a long-term health condition or disability.

### Loneliness and stigma

**One in five of us hide our feelings of loneliness from other people, and one in ten would ever admit to someone they felt lonely.**

Stigma often prevents people from asking for help and the stereotypical view of loneliness as purely an older person's problem can keep people from recognising and responding to their loneliness and limit the support they might receive.





# Our loneliness policy work

**Human beings are social creatures. For the great majority of us, social connection and belonging is central to our wellbeing.**

Our social relationships are shaped by the environments that we live in. While the government has already made a promising start on tackling loneliness, it is essential that we do not lose momentum.

The UK government published the world's first government strategy for tackling loneliness, 'A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness' in 2018. The strategy lays a strong foundation for action to

tackle loneliness. However, the strategy is let down by the public health ecosystem in which it sits.

For Mental Health Awareness Week, we proposed that the government supports the grand vision of its loneliness strategy by better resourcing the local councils that are largely responsible for delivering it.

We are calling on the government to restore the public health grant to 2015/16 levels to fund the local action that is needed to tackle loneliness. We are also calling on the government to create a new strategy to build community infrastructure, such as youth clubs and communal spaces, to help create thriving, inclusive communities.

Nature too has an important role in preventing people from feeling lonely. Green spaces can help alleviate people's feelings of loneliness and facilitate social interactions and connections.

We are calling for the government to increase the abundance and diversity of nature, especially in places that are nature deprived.

To support young people, who are particularly at risk of feeling lonely, we are calling for all schools to have a mental health and wellbeing policy that sets out an approach to identifying and tackling loneliness.

Finally, we are asking the government to ensure that everyone has access to digital forms of communication and the skills to use it, focusing especially on residential care homes.



Illustration taken from 'A Connected Society: a strategy for tackling isolation and loneliness'. Artist: Zuhura Plummer.

**Donate today to help us bring about the change needed to tackle loneliness:**  
[mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback)



# Steph's 'leap of faith' skydive for Mental Health Awareness Week



**This Mental Health Awareness Week 36 of our incredible supporters took to the skies and braved a skydive to raise awareness and funds for mental health. Steph speaks about why she chose to take on this challenge and her experience jumping from 10,000 feet!**

"On 14th May 2022, I threw myself out of a plane! Actually, I was securely strapped to a qualified instructor who I put my complete faith in that they knew what they were doing! So why did I do this?

For many years now I have lived with depression and anxiety. Depression has a habit of sneaking up when things start to get on top of me. It only takes a few triggers, and I can be sent into a tailspin. Thankfully, this doesn't happen too frequently, but when it does, it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Anxiety however plagues me on a daily basis. **The analogy of the devil and angel on your shoulder is a pretty good way to sum up my internal dialogue.** That little devil is always chattering about things that could go wrong and likes to point out

my faults and failures. He reminds me regularly of all the things I am not good at and tells me I can't do things because I am afraid.

When I think about it, I am afraid of a lot. Dying, flying, heights, small spaces, crowds, failure, sprouting eyes on potatoes... the list goes on! The worst thing is, these fears stop me from having great experiences. I would avoid a trip into London for fear of having a panic attack on the train. Trips anywhere that involve trains and tunnels are avoided, unless absolutely essential, and have to be strategically planned to avoid busy periods.

At the start of this year, I decided that 2022 was the year I was going to stop being afraid. I am going to face my fears head on! **And what better way to tackle a lot of my fears in one, than to do a skydive!** I am also hoping that by doing this, I will also give other people who suffer the courage to face their fears too.

And of course, I wanted to raise lots of money for the Mental Health Foundation, **who do so much work around raising Mental Health Awareness and prevention.**

The skydive was petrifying and exhilarating all in one go! **There were moments of pure terror, combined with sheer excitement adrenaline.**

I don't think I could ever top that experience, **but now I know that whenever I am floundering or thinking I can't do something – I will think back to the day when I threw myself out of a plane, and know that I can do anything if I put my mind to it.**

So far, I have raised £1,420 for the Mental Health Foundation. Thank you to everyone that has donated and supported me through this truly life changing event!"



## Has Stephanie's story inspired you to take a leap of faith?



Find out more and sign up to a skydive on our website here: [mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved/active-challenges/skydives-abseils-treks-more/skydive](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved/active-challenges/skydives-abseils-treks-more/skydive)

# PROGRAMME SPOTLIGHT: VOICES AND VISIBILITY

**Our Scotland based Voice and Visibility project is funded by Glasgow City Council. Refugee and asylum seeking communities are at the heart of this project.**

Participants joined a community development course, while at the same time sitting on local decision making structures and Parent Councils. This project had three main goals:

- Building the skills, confidence, knowledge and opportunities for communities that are most marginalised
- Working with Parents Council members to identify and tackle barriers to participation that refugee and asylum seeking communities experience
- Increasing the participation of refugee and asylum seeking communities on Parents Councils by pairing them up with 'buddies' who were already part of these structures

17 participants, all from refugee and asylum seeking communities found a way to connect, learn and improve their mental health. Crucial, especially during lockdown last year.

From an initial target of 4 participants, we are delighted to have far surpassed these hopes – and we continue to work closely with 10 people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds.

What has been particularly wonderful about this project is that the 'buddies' who are already on Parents Councils are predominantly white Scottish people and the close interaction with refugee and asylum seeking communities has enabled people to build friendships, dispel myths and stereotypes and widen their social circles and spheres of influence.

Here are a few words from one of our participants...

## THIS IS WHAT HOPE LOOKS LIKE...

In my country it felt like chaos. I felt I had no control over anything in my life, people were dying – my family and friends. I was hurting so much.

What I love about Scotland is the calmness and peace. This gives me hope, there is a system of government because the whole system is built on integrity and this goes a long way to moulding the people. For me, the environment I am now in promotes positive values.

Each day brings me a renewed sense of hope because I am driven by what I love to see. I feel great being in a new environment where I can be a better me.

**"WHAT I  
LOVE ABOUT  
SCOTLAND IS  
THE CALMNESS  
AND PEACE."**





# Perthyn project

In 2020, the UK received 29,456 asylum applications. Each of these represents an individual life and with that life comes a story and a journey.

The Perthyn Project aims to set up a space where people seeking sanctuary can share stories, create friendships, improve emotional literacy in English and ultimately decrease isolation.

**“When you have ‘walked in their shoes’, you can help others easily. You can find the words because you have had the same experience.”**

Staff member seeking sanctuary

The initial group started in 2019 in Newport, with 11 women recruited as peer leaders who were trained to run the group. In the first year 43 women

took part in 2 groups who met twice a month. In 2020, the project was moved online, and the number of participants scaled up. Evaluation of the project has found that attending the group enhanced wellbeing, reduced social isolation, and increased social support. The reciprocity of the peer support model has been found to increase emotional resilience and can act as a preventative measure against developing mental health problems.

We know that connections are vital for all of us to thrive, and Perthyn achieved a sanctuary in which refugees and asylum seekers could develop a sense of belonging through

meeting and talking about shared experiences or topics that might otherwise be difficult to broach.

After the first evaluation, women who attended reported a deeper connection with other members of the group through the sharing of experiences and as a result, the women expanded their support networks into their communities. The message that came from the feedback of participants, was overwhelmingly one of hope, as expressed by one of the group facilitators:

**“My own experience... being a single parent and being able to say to younger single parents I am looking at this down the other end of a very long tunnel and it will get better and things do get better and you do succeed, and you can come through this and so on – the hope part.”**

Group facilitator

The current iteration of the project is part of our wider Covid Response Programme aiming to address the wellbeing of groups particularly impacted by Covid. MFH are coming alongside City of Sanctuary to build capacity within their networks to support people seeking sanctuary with their wellbeing. This will be through Perthyn groups, coproduced digital resources and investing in their Health stream of Sanctuary.

Photo by Charles Donnelly, Perthyn | Belonging



Photo by Florence Ayisi Perthyn | Belonging

The Perthyn Project was a partnership between the Mental Health Foundation and the British Red Cross, and funded by the 'Tampon Tax Fund' via the charity Mind.



## SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS FESTIVAL



Photo: Ingrid Mur

**Eilidh Morris at the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival: “It feels like something I would have benefited from being involved with a lot sooner.”**

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF), led by the Mental Health Foundation, returned to live audiences this May for the first time since 2019. Now in its 16th year, the three-week festival featured over 200 events and activities, programmed in partnership with communities across Scotland.

Our theme this year was Gather, inspired by our desire to come together and share experiences after two years of restrictions, while also questioning what it means to gather as we enter a post-pandemic world. SMHAF opened with a full-day Gathering in Glasgow, culminating in an evening of film and performance showcasing work from a series of artist commissions that we first offered during lockdown.

**Dundee-based writer, poet and visual artist Eilidh Morris was one of those commissioned, creating a new spoken word piece and accompanying video, ‘Vessels’, in collaboration with musician Johnny Threshold.**

Together, Eilidh and Johnny make up spoken word band 2 Stoned Birds and their live set at the Gathering included a performance of ‘Vessels’.

**Eilidh said: “It was the first time we’d brought our music to Glasgow and the largest crowd we’ve played to. It was the most confident and at ease I’ve ever felt sharing our music with kind strangers. It was a surreal experience, affirming that I was exactly where I wanted to be.”**

Getting involved with SMHAF, a festival designed to support and promote artists with lived experience of mental ill health, has been a **“wonderful motivator”**.

**Eilidh said: “It feels like something I would have benefited from being involved with a lot sooner. Not only does my creative expression fit, but it is a festival where I feel comfortable, welcome and appreciated for my contributions. The opportunities and support afforded to me since we created ‘Vessels’ have made me feel heard, understood, and encouraged – and valued as an artist and a person.”**

Eilidh was also named as the overall winner at our Writing Awards, which has now been running for nine years. Their creative non-fiction piece ‘The Other Side of the Door’ explores



Photo: Ingrid Mur

how their diagnosis of autism at 30 years old has helped them better understand their past experiences and find renewed hope for the future.

**“It was a surprise and a welcome fountain of validation when I heard my name called as the winner. I was extremely emotional and overwhelmed. To receive these awards for my writing, something that has always been a necessary but private way of coping and processing, was an intense and appreciated moment.”**

Overall, Eilidh describes their involvement with SMHAF as **“a necessary thumbs up to my inclination to share my mental health experiences, neurodivergence and sparkling enthusiasm in an unfiltered and open way – the only way I know how. I am all the more hopeful for my creative future”**.

**mhfestival.com**



# Nearly half of 18-24 year olds feel lonely some or all of the time.



As you have read in this issue the amazing work we are doing at the Mental Health Foundation wouldn't be possible without support from you.

Please donate today and help continue this vital work:  
**[mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback)**

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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