

TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Winter 2023



Mental Health
Foundation



Dear Supporter,

Welcome to our Spring 2023 edition of TalkBack!

It finally feels like the days are getting a bit brighter and longer, and we'll all be glad to see the back of a winter that's been so difficult for so many of us.

One of the good things about writing TalkBack is knowing that even when things have been difficult, positive and life-changing work has continued. The research, policy work, and programmes you'll find out more about in the following pages are all creating change that will bring around brighter days.

Of course, the cost-of-living crisis has been on all our minds and affecting our mental health. You can read about our work in this area on pages 4 and 5. On page 10, our policy team takes you to the political party conferences, showing how we change policy and practice.

Continuing the topic of making change, we'll also read about Amy's story, a single parent who created something huge out of her own experiences. There are also updates from across the Foundation, including ways to get involved in our work and fundraising. So please, read on, enjoy, and as always, thank you so much for making all this possible.

Best wishes,

Isabel Collinge, Stewardship Officer

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Mental Health Foundation
Studio 2
197 Long Lane
London SE1 4PD

supporter@mentalhealth.org.uk
mentalhealth.org.uk

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Green skies over MHAW

Over 100 people have signed up to take on a skydiving challenge during Mental Health Awareness Week (May 15-21).

Could you face a fear and join them? Email events@mentalhealth.org.uk for more info!



Mental Health at Work

Could your workplace benefit from support around approaching mental health? **Mental Health at Work** helps organisations manage and understand mental health with customised programmes for the workplace. Visit www.mentalhealthatwork.com for more information!

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION NEWS

SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS FESTIVAL

Arts festival dates announced

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF) is moving to new dates in 2023, returning from **4-22 October**, exploring the theme of 'revolution'. 'Revolution' was chosen to reflect a desire – in the midst of turbulent political and economic times – to address the impact of economic barriers and social inequality on mental health.



MHF visits Premiership Rugby

Equipped with Jenga, rugby balls and plenty of laughter, we have been delivering our '**Trauma Informed Relationships**' training with Premiership Rugby HITS staff. We are journeying with them over a period of time to support them in their incredible community work, cheer leading and upskilling their brilliant staff.

How we are responding to the cost-of-living crisis

Shari McDaid, Head of Policy and Evidence (Scotland and Northern Ireland)

Since the Autumn of 2022, we have been working hard to highlight the mental health effects of the cost-of-living crisis and calling on the Government to act.

The Foundation's November 2022 survey found that stress, anxiety, and hopelessness about personal finances were widespread across the UK even before the coldest weather came along.

- one in ten UK adults were feeling hopeless
- more than one-third were feeling anxious
- almost three in ten were feeling stressed about their financial circumstances in the previous month

At the same time, many people were reducing healthy behaviours that support mental health

- 30% of adults had experienced poorer sleep because of their financial situation
- 23% had met with friends less often
- 12% had exercised less often

We know that people living with financial stress, debt and/or unemployment are at increased risk of mental health problems and lower mental well-being. Due to the effect on parents, financial stress also negatively affects the mental health of children and adolescents.

Many people at higher risk during the COVID-19 pandemic are also more vulnerable to the negative effects of the cost-of-living crisis, which adds to the difficulties experienced over the past few years.

We have called on the UK and devolved governments to treat the cost-of-living crisis as a public mental health emergency, which needs the same effort as the COVID-19 pandemic. We need action to prevent mental distress, such as financial support schemes to lessen poverty and financial stress.

“[There is] the mental drain of checking and re-checking the best deals, ways to save etc.”

Diverse Experiences Advisory
Panel member



We also want the UK and devolved governments to:

- 1 support and fund community social networks and the grassroots organisations that support them
- 2 assess the mental health effects of all government decisions that address the cost-of-living crisis and implement these assessments
- 3 make sure energy companies, essential service providers, and creditors maintain a compassionate response to customers through their policies and procedures
- 4 make sure that frontline workers in health, social care, money and debt advice services, anti-poverty and other community organisations and energy and other services know how to respond effectively to the mental health effects of financial stress and strain

To influence the UK Government into action, we have done some UK-wide polling together with polls in Scotland and Northern Ireland to show the mental health effects of the crisis. We have worked with people with lived experience and other expert organisations such as the Money and Mental Health Institute and the Poverty Alliance.

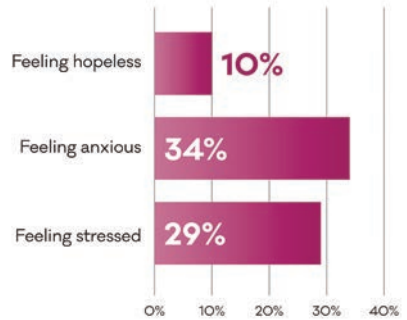
We have lobbied ministers of government and parliamentarians and have seen our polling used in a Scottish parliamentary debate on tackling health inequalities.

We can't let mental health continue as an extra casualty of this crisis. This vital research and policy work will continue to work to centre mental health within the government response.

UK poll (adults)

November 2022

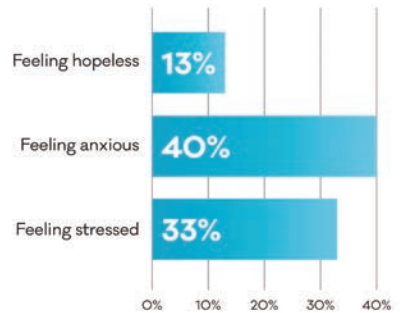
Due to financial circumstances in the previous month:



Scotland poll (adults)

November 2022

Due to financial circumstances in the previous month:



You can help us increase our influence by contacting your MP and ask them to highlight the Foundation's concerns and recommendations and sharing our social media posts about the crisis. You can find out who your MP is by going to:

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

The government must deliver a comprehensive mental health plan, say mental health charities

A U-turn on plans

In January it was announced that the Government has scrapped plans for a long term mental health strategy.

They have instead announced a Major Conditions Strategy, which will group mental ill-health with chronic health conditions (such as cancer and respiratory diseases). Mental health and physical conditions are connected, but the merging of the mental health plan with a Major Conditions Strategy looks highly likely to mean the de-prioritisation of mental health, in practice. Children and young people in particular are likely to lose out in this plan.

In April 2022, the government released a 'call for evidence' to inform their new 10-year plan for improving mental health in England. To make sure the government heard people's views and experiences our research team spoke to different groups such as our OPEN network and Young Leaders to find out more about the most important issues the new 10-year plan should address.

We provided a full consultation response, making the key recommendations that

would protect mental health and prevent mental health problems. We called on the government to take a preventative approach to tackling mental health problems, and to put mental health at the heart of all policies across government.

Bringing voices together

19 mental health charities, including ourselves, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, and the Samaritans have come together to express the depth of our concern over this U-turn. **Our own CEO, Mark says:**

"Our collective voice sends a strong message that to prevent poor mental health and support people with mental health problems in England, there must be a dedicated plan that shows our government is giving our mental health the priority it deserves.

The coronavirus pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have only increased the urgent need for such a strategy. England will now be the only UK country without either a dedicated mental health strategy or a commitment to creating such a plan."

Our policy and advocacy work is vital for pushing for change. Read more about it here: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/policy-and-advocacy>

Get involved!

Take up the challenge in 2023
and join one of our events to
raise money for mental health!

5–21 May

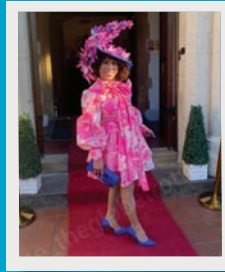
Mental Health Awareness
Week Skydive

27–28 May

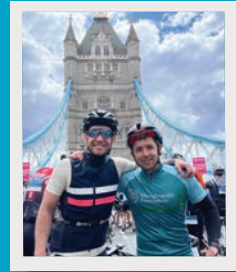
Edinburgh Marathon Festival

Kiltwalk:

- Glasgow: 30 April
- Aberdeen: 4 June
- Dundee: 20 August
- Edinburgh: 17 September



Cesar Rapanut's
Charity Ball



Rob Hodgson –
Ride London



Girls Torque Charity
Calendar



Ian Coles – Saharan
Ultra Challenge

8–9 July

Peak District Challenge

Sunday 10 September

- Great North Run
- London to Brighton Cycle

9–10 September

Thames Path Challenge

1 October

Cardiff Half Marathon

8 October

Royal Parks Half Marathon

All the information about these events
and how to sign up can be found on our
website, or you can email the events
team at: events@mentalhealth.org.uk

Thank you to everyone who took on a challenge for us this year!



The run of a lifetime: Kat's story

Kat Williamson

Back in July I started planning a personal challenge of running from John O'Groats, down the 916 miles to Land's End.

I love to push myself and find out how far I can go, which was one of the main appeals of running the country. I also love to travel and the thought of seeing more of Britain on foot was very exciting!

As well as the personal challenge, I was keen to use the opportunity to raise money for the Mental Health Foundation, which is close to my heart. I was very happy to be joined by my good friend Mark Rowland, the CEO of the Mental Health Foundation, for a day in Devon, running with me and keeping me entertained.

I completed a marathon distance every day, with one day off each week, which meant it took me 6 weeks to complete the route.

The first couple of weeks passed without incident as I ran through beautiful, remote areas of Scotland which were a privilege to see.



Kat with Mark Rowland.

I got into a nice routine of setting off at sunrise, having a half-way tea stop in our campervan and finishing the runs around lunchtime. This allowed for recovery in the afternoon and time to unwind with friends and supporters who joined along the way in the evening.

It couldn't all be smooth sailing though! Around 3 weeks in, I got an injury in my thigh, which meant running was not an option and the days became much longer. It was a tough week, but fortunately it did start to improve, and I was thrilled when I was able to run again for the remaining 2 weeks.

I had a fantastic time along the route and was completely overwhelmed with the amount of support and sponsorship I received. All the friends and family who joined me for a run, or a pint, really added to the journey and kept me going. I feel very lucky to have had their support through the challenge, which was a huge test.

Reaching Land's End was a little emotional! After such a great 6 weeks I knew I'd miss the daily endorphins, but my legs were so ready to finally have a rest!



Making friends en route.



Kat completing the challenge.



A day in the life of the policy team at Mental Health Foundation

Michael Hough – Policy and public affairs officer

In September and October of last year representatives from the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) England Policy Team went to the Labour and Conservative party conferences. Attending the party conferences is an important part of our influencing work. MPs and local councillors have the power to make a huge difference, at both a national and regional/local level.

As a charity, we are strictly politically neutral, making sure that we engage with all political parties throughout the year and attending the conferences of the largest parties in the autumn.

Labour was first up this year, so we packed our bags and donned our best suits before heading up to Liverpool. After a smooth journey we arrived in Liverpool, immediately heading to the conference



meetings and events followed, including an Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) panel event featuring our own Chief Executive Mark Rowland among the panellists. A quick trip back to the hotel to pick up our bags and then to Liverpool Lime Street for the return journey.

After a couple of days’ break and some brief respite, it was then on to Birmingham the following Sunday for the Conservative Party conference. Another appearance at the NYA panel event on children and young people’s mental health started the proceedings before we joined others’ fringe events.

venue to join in an event hosted by the National Youth Agency (NYA) on children and young people’s mental health. On Monday, the day was dominated by our roundtable event bringing together public mental health experts and politicians, including the Shadow Cabinet Member for Mental Health, who, later in the conference, used findings from one of our reports to discuss the latest developments in public mental health.

It’s always great when we can use our reports and research to shape conversations at this level, so we were really pleased with how this event went.

With no time to rest, it was on to a series of meetings with politicians and various other fringe events. Then on Tuesday, more

As with the conference in Liverpool, Monday was the chosen day for our roundtable, featuring an appearance from a Department of Health and Social Care representative. It was then on to planned meetings with Government Ministers, including a meeting with the then Mental Health Minister, with whom we discussed the findings from our Economics of Prevention report and the need for a preventative public health approach to mental health.

On the Tuesday there was time for more meetings with politicians to discuss our work on body image and asylum-seekers and refugees before a quick dash back to a crammed train and the return journey.

It was an intense week for the team, but each meeting, reception, and event is such an important opportunity for us to steer the conversation around mental health in a way that translates into policy that changes people’s lives for the better.



Single Parents Wellbeing



How two friends walking for wellness became a community of thousands

I'm Amy and I'm one of the founding members of Single Parents Wellbeing, a support group for single parents and members of single parent families based in Cardiff. Backed by the Mental Health Foundation, a few years ago and together with my friend and colleague Rachel, we turned a small idea into something huge.

To understand how Single Parents Wellbeing came about, you'll need some background on my experiences. I have two children, who are now 10 and 7. When they were younger, I experienced post-natal depression, which I feel was worsened by the stigma of being a single parent. It was a really hard time, and I was very unwell. Looking back now I remember trying to avoid the park at busy times, so other parents and families wouldn't notice me there on my own with the kids. At a time when support would have been so beneficial, I felt so alone.

Amy Holland
Founder at Single Parents Wellbeing



Fortunately, I did have my good friend Rachel. I knew she was also having difficulties with her mental health, so between us we had this tiny community of two to lend each other support. All we did in the beginning was walk together, through the beautiful area of Wales we live in.

These walks came to be so valuable to me, especially because the help that had been offered to us both in terms of mental health had been so clinical. There was nothing about your general well-being, or from a self-development lens that could help us with our confidence and future plans. The courses we went on just didn't quite seem to quite fit with our experience of being single parents.

So that got us thinking! If we're feeling this way, there must be others. And so, our walks became a walking group! We promoted walking for well-being and getting out in nature with the kids. In the beginning, Rachel and I would meet up with our laptops in a café every Friday to try and get the group off the ground.

While the pandemic was in full force, we spent our spare time applying for grants and got national lottery funding in partnership with the Mental Health Foundation, which gave us what we needed to grow the group even further.

Now we have over 2000 members. As well as walking, we run socials, well-being workshops led by counsellors, and have

recently launched a programme for young people from single parent families. We also have a great series of workshops run in partnership with the Mental Health Foundation called Connecting Creatively. Parents or caregivers and children come together, have fun with art and creativity and connect with one another.

Now our members reflect the true diversity of single-parent experiences. We exist in every walk of life and our group feels like it has every possible profession and lifestyle represented. This means we can find understanding and compassion in one another and different perspectives. A lot of us share the same hardships, and these will often become topics for group sessions to be tackled together.

The result, I think, is feeling heard and supported. It's so healing and being able to tell your story is powerful.

If any single parents or members of single-parent families are reading this and finding things hard right now, I'd encourage you to get involved. If you're not in Cardiff, we also have a Facebook group, which is a really active and positive community.

Our website resources and information could also be helpful, so do have a look. I'd also say, if you can, take a leap of faith and try to attend something in your area – or set up your own outdoor meet-up with a friend or two. Whether it's online or outdoors, a community is out there.



Find more info and connect with the group via:

 www.facebook.com/groups/singleparentswellbeing

 www.singleparentswellbeing.com

Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 – anxiety and the things that can help

You'll no doubt have seen that last year we announced that Mental Health Awareness Week will return in 2023, from May 15 to 21 and this year's theme will be anxiety and the things that can help.

We'll be taking on one of the most common and pressing mental health concerns of our time, and we want you to join us!

What do we mean when we talk about anxiety?

It's a natural human emotion but, in some circumstances, it can get out of hand and become a mental health problem.

A lot of different things can contribute to feelings of anxiety, including exams, relationships, a new job, a date, or a big life change. It's also an emotion people frequently

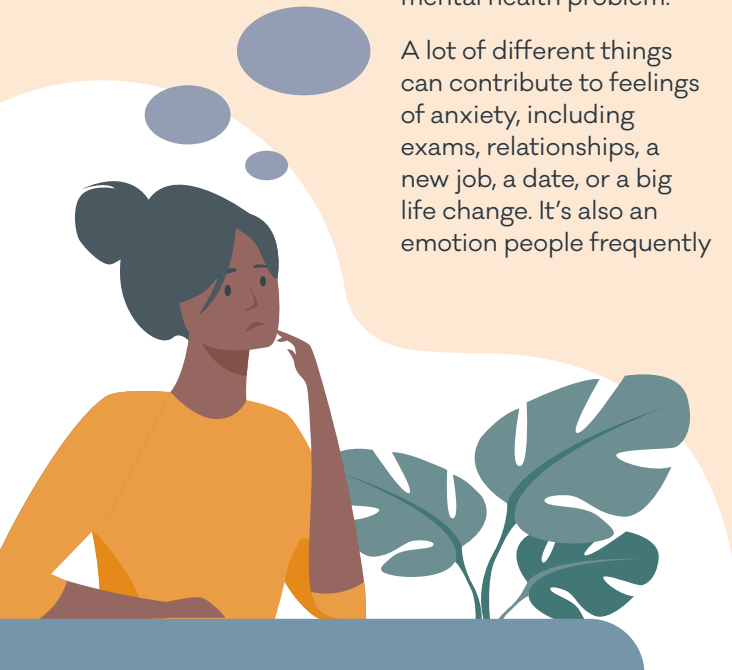
experience around money and not being able to meet life's basic needs – especially now, in the cost-of-living crisis.

However, anxiety can be a problem if it affects your ability to live your life. If your anxiety is ongoing, intense, hard to control or out of proportion to your situation, it can be a sign of a mental health problem.

Anxiety can affect your body and mind, with mental symptoms like feelings of dread, panic, or irritability, and physical symptoms such as (but not limited to) nausea, dizziness, or panic attacks.

Anxiety can also affect your behaviour. You may withdraw from friends and family, feel unable to go to work, or avoid certain places.

You may also be hiding the way you're feeling, so other people don't notice.





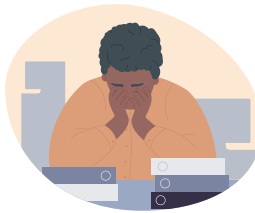
Why did we pick anxiety for our 2023 theme?

It's one of the most common mental health problems people face. According to a survey we carried out recently.



A quarter of adults feel so anxious that it stops them from doing the things they want to do some or all of the time.

Six in ten adults feel this way at least occasionally.



Our recent cost-of-living research found that more than a third of UK adults feel anxious about their financial circumstances.

The good news is that anxiety can be made easier to manage.

By focusing on anxiety for Mental Health Awareness Week in 2023, we want to improve public understanding of anxiety and share some of the things that can help prevent it from becoming a problem. And we also want to keep up the demand for change – to make sure that improving mental health is a key priority for the government and our society.

Look out for updates about our plans for the week, and ways to get involved over the next few months!

If you are struggling with anxiety, the first step is usually to speak to your GP. You can find more information about anxiety and how to get help here: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/anxiety





Save the date to wear it green for mental health!

On 18 May join schools, workplaces and communities around the country raising awareness and money for mental health!

Get dressed up in green, and with our resources start important conversations about anxiety and mental health. Visit our website for more information!

We can't make change without you. Please donate today and help continue this vital work: mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback-winter23



Take part in a challenge event or hold your own fundraising event: mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved

  [mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthfoundation)

 [@mentalhealth](https://twitter.com/mentalhealth)

 [mentalhealthfoundation](mailto:mentalhealthfoundation@mentalhealth.org.uk)

 supporter@mentalhealth.org.uk

Glasgow Office

McLellan Works
274 Sauchiehall Street
Glasgow G2 3EY

London Office

Studio 2
197 Long Lane
London SE1 4PD

Cardiff Office

Workbench
16 Neptune Court
Cardiff CF24 5PJ