

TALKBACK

Your supporter magazine from the Mental Health Foundation

Summer 2023



Mental Health
Foundation





Dear Supporter,

I hope you've had a lovely summer and were able to take some time away, get outside and relax. I've got a bumper update for you this September, as the Foundation has been working at full-pace to bring about the changes we need to build a mentally healthy society.

We'll get right down to business with some of the activities which made up just a small part of Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 – a fantastic time across the country where we came together to tackle anxiety.

Then, we've got some spotlights from our incredible programmes that work with parents. A child with a parent or guardian with a mental health problem is up to 70% more likely to develop one themselves, so parental mental health is a key priority for the Foundation, and we are very proud of the work that we are doing in this area. I hope you'll enjoy learning about all that we've been up to – none of it possible without people like you, who show such kind support, and commitment to mental health.

Isabel

Isabel Collinge, Stewardship Officer

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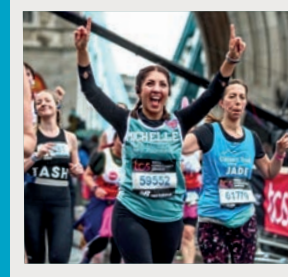
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Design: White Halo Design
Print: KPM Group

Registered Charity No.
England 801130, Scotland SC 039714

Get involved!



Michelle Campbell

2023

22 October
Edinburgh 10k

6-7 November
Santa in the City
(London)

2024

7 April
London
Landmarks
Half Marathon

14 April
Manchester
Marathon

4-5 May
Isle of Wight Ultra
Challenge walk, jog,
run (25km, 63km,
106km options)

5 May
Belfast Marathon

19 May
Hackney Half
Marathon

25-26 May
Edinburgh
Marathon Festival



EE Smith Team

All information about the events can be found at mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved/events-and-fundraising. You can also email events@mentalhealth.org.uk for more information.

New online course released!

Our new e-learning course, 'Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Modern Workplace' is now live! Developed in partnership with Mental Health at Work CIC, this interactive, CPD-certified online training course is designed for professionals like you.

Taking six hours of sessions at your own pace, you'll learn the skills to remove stigma and discrimination in the workplace and to manage mental health within your role.



Enrol for £45 per person (bulk discounts available). Find out more by visiting mentalhealth.org.uk/workplace-course



They say don't look back, but sometimes you have to, to just see how far you've come...

MHF supporter **Fiona Fogg** shares her story

I'm Fiona, and during Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 I took on the challenge to jump out of a plane at 15,000ft to raise money for the Mental Health Foundation!

Up until January 2023 I kept my experiences and journey extremely private. I needed time to accept and understand my mental health and find the courage to share my journey. Signing up for the skydive gave me this opportunity. I feel empowered and passionate about continuing to share my experiences in hope it might encourage others to speak up and to try and help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

Before 2020, I had never been in contact with my GP about my mental health and was not known to any mental health services. In the summer of 2020, I began to suffer from stress and was diagnosed with

anxiety and depression. My GP referred me for counselling, and I was also prescribed medication. Shortly into 2021 my mood really began to elevate, which, I now understand was a state of mania. I made calls to 101, mental health crisis lines, made voluntary trips to A&E via ambulance yet I was still desperately needing help.

My mental health deteriorated rapidly, and became so severe that a further 999 call was made which this time resulted in me being detained under The Mental Health Act. I spent roughly 15 hours in A&E and was eventually diagnosed with first episode psychosis and hospitalised for

treatment. My memories of the days prior and during my hospital admission are very limited. What I can remember of the five weeks I spent in two different hospitals was extremely traumatic. I had lost my freedom, my power and I felt, my dignity. My experience showed me the very raw and real side of mental illness that many never see and proved anyone can be affected, despite your successes or background.

Upon discharge, I was given a further diagnosis of Bipolar Affective Disorder, defined as a disability under The Equality Act. I was shocked, confused and it shames me to admit, embarrassed. I recalled the countless times my friends and I had thoughtlessly thrown the word "bipolar" around without regard to its true meaning, or severity. The time after my discharge was challenging and extremely sad. I feared relapse at any given moment. I questioned my entire being, my life, and ruminated constantly about the future of my career, which I had worked so hard to achieve. I felt like I'd lost all control and just wanted it to all go away.

In January 2022 I made the decision to stop all medication and returned to work. I undertook both CBT and EDMR therapy which have been enlightening, educational, and, I believe, lifesaving. I've learnt that sometimes people won't understand your journey. But that's ok, they don't need too, it's not for them.

It's taught me that being able to be your true self and acknowledge your struggles is one of the strongest components of good mental health.

I've now got a better awareness and understanding of Bipolar Affective Disorder and I've accepted that there will be extreme lows and extreme highs, but

I've now got the tools to hopefully equip me to fight through them.

Thanks to all the professional help and support from my family and friends I know now it is possible to live well, feel well and find happiness living with a mental health condition.

Now, the skydive... nothing can prepare you for the feeling. Completing this challenge and experiencing complete and utter freedom made me feel so alive. It was breath-taking and gave me a refreshing, positive outlook on the world, opening my mind to possibilities and limiting all fears. It was without a doubt the BEST experience of my life and I did not stop smiling and was buzzing for weeks after.

I always tell myself if I can survive a war with myself, I can survive anything and once you have touched the sky, you will forever look up.



Please read my full story on [justgiving.com/fundraising/fionamay13](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/fionamay13)

We'd like to sincerely thank Fiona for fundraising for us, and for sharing her inspirational story!

Uncertain Times: our research into anxiety for Mental Health Awareness Week 2023

Susan Soloman explains our important research into anxiety

Mental Health Awareness Week could not exist without the crucial research that allows us to better understand mental health. Our research team is so important in showing the reality of the mental health situation in the UK, and helping us make recommendations for how it can be improved.

This year was no different as we turned our attention to anxiety. Our research report, Uncertain Times, has shown exactly why anxiety was such an important topic to address.

Anxiety levels increased throughout the pandemic and have not yet dropped to pre-pandemic levels. This increase means we need to understand anxiety: what is it, when does it become a concern, and what can we do about it to help ourselves and each other?

Feelings of anxiety are a natural and important human response to stress or danger, but they can become problematic if they go on for a long time, are overwhelming, or stop you from doing the things you want or need to do.

We worked with Opinium in March 2023 to conduct an online survey of 6,000 UK adults aged 18+, looking at anxiety in the UK population, its causes, and popular coping mechanisms.

How anxious are we?

- Nearly three-quarters of us had felt anxious at least sometimes in the previous two weeks
- One in five of the population is anxious most or all of the time.
- Some groups of people are more likely to be affected by anxiety than others. Eight out of ten young people aged 18-24 in our research had felt anxious in the previous two weeks. For over half (58%), this had stopped them doing day-to-day activities.
- The cost-of-living crisis was at the front of people's minds; the most commonly reported cause of anxiety in our research was being able to afford to pay bills.
- Nearly half of the people in our research (45%) were keeping their anxiety secret
- Nearly a third (30%) said they were not coping well with their anxiety

How are people coping with anxiety?

Our survey showed lots of methods. Some popular choices were exercise, sleeping more, and connecting with friends and family. However, we also had evidence of unhealthy coping strategies; for example, excessive avoidance of trigger situations, drinking more alcohol than usual, and smoking. We encourage people experiencing feelings of anxiety to try our tips to cope

[mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week/what-can-we-do-cope-feelings-anxiety](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week/what-can-we-do-cope-feelings-anxiety)

But, it's not just down to individuals to tackle anxiety!

Top ten coping mechanisms



National and local policymakers must prioritise actions to promote good mental health for all and to reduce anxiety. During MHAW, and beyond, we have called on the UK and devolved governments to:

- **Develop** and deliver 10-year cross-governmental mental health strategies in each of the nations of the UK, with a strong focus on prevention as well as treatment.
- **Train** frontline workers so they can respond to people who are feeling the mental health effects of financial stress and strain.
- **Create** financial support schemes that alleviate financial stress for people experiencing poverty or financial strain
- **Support** community social networks and resources.
- **Implement** programmes and approaches to improve relationships, and the culture and environment in which people grow, learn, live, and work. Things like parenting programmes, workplace interventions, and whole-school or college approaches to mental health

Find the full report at [mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week/anxiety-report](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/mental-health-awareness-week/anxiety-report)



Mental Health Awareness Week in Northern Ireland

Joel Anderson reports on the many activities that our Northern Ireland Office participated in to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Week 2023

I am thrilled to bring you the first-ever update from our Northern Ireland office. Opened just over a year ago, this is our maiden feature in TalkBack.

Over the past year, we have been busy establishing relationships, scoping out the local mental health landscape, and building upon the work that the Mental Health Foundation has already accomplished in Northern Ireland.

In this piece, I am excited to share with you a glimpse into our efforts, particularly highlighting our involvement in the recent Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW).

MHAW in Northern Ireland showcased the full array of community activities, reflecting the resilience and spirit of the local communities. In partnership with the Healthy Living Centre Alliance, a network of 29 Healthy Living Centres situated across Northern Ireland and particularly in areas of high deprivation, we participated in an impressive 41 events as part of our Covid Response Programme (CRP).

These events covered a wide range of activities, from restorative Tai Chi sessions and staff wellbeing days to peaceful nature walks, communal lunches, and even invigorating sea dips. Each activity emphasised the vital role that community

organisations play in nurturing social bonds and fostering good mental health.

While the events were incredibly diverse, a unifying theme was abundantly clear: the transformative power of community in protecting and improving mental health. Our local heroes, the unsung volunteers within these community organisations, worked tirelessly to offer resources, services, and most importantly, companionship. Their efforts provided a lifeline to those often on the peripheries of society, fostering connections and providing support where it was most needed.

Many individuals who engage with the Healthy Living Centres and take part in their programmes are living with long-term conditions. MHAW demonstrated that community programmes can serve as support system for, not only their physical conditions, but also as a crucial stepping stone back into the community. Reconnecting with the community and participating in activities such as walking groups and mindfulness classes can significantly enrich lives, offering a sense of belonging and crucial mental support.



MHAW in Northern Ireland was a vibrant testament to this vitally important role that community plays in mental health prevention. Each event, each conversation, and each shared moment reinforced the importance of fostering community spirit, a powerful tool in mental health prevention.

However, sustaining such impact requires consistent support for our community organisations. These volunteers work relentlessly within their limited means to help people navigate life's complexities. Investment in these groups would be a significant step towards building communities where everyone feels acknowledged and supported.

As we move forward, we are inspired to harness the power of our communities, continuously striving to shift the narrative surrounding mental health. In a society where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued, we stand strong together.

Stay tuned for more updates from our Northern Ireland office as we continue to make strides in embedding a preventative approach to mental health here.





"A truly thought-provoking and inspiring conference."

Amplifying Maternal Voices

A report from this year's conference from **Jessica Bondzie** and **Anisha Kee Scott**

Earlier this year March 2023, The Amplifying Maternal Voices project hosted the first National Perinatal Mental Health Conference led by the Foundation since 2018.

In partnership with the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, and funded by the Covid-Response Programme, the event felt like a milestone moment in bringing together those who are pivotal within the maternal mental health space and those who are experts by experience.

Our theme of 'Breaking Barriers' saw over 250 people attend from across the UK. In-person and online, attendees were able to share knowledge and experiences.

Why #breakingbarriers

One in five women experience mental health problems in pregnancy or after giving birth. However, 55% of women who disclose their experience of mental health problems are not referred to services or given advice about organisations who can help.

There are barriers for women to access appropriate help when they need it. It is those women, who encounter more barriers than others, that we need to hear from to find solutions to break down the barriers to timely mental health care.



For example, The Black Maternity Experiences Report (Five X More, 2022) showed that there was a lack of information, advice and support given to black mothers around mental health, choices and social support options.

On the day, we heard from seldom-heard voices, grassroots organisations and leaders in physical and mental health care for women and families during the perinatal period. We also heard research from the Nottingham University Research, with one of the active Researchers commenting:

"It was such an energising day, which really strengthened my passion for working in this area of health(care)."

The aim of the day was to increase knowledge and confidence, and create a strategy for bringing seldom-heard voices into research, policy and healthcare practice.

It was such a valuable day, and we are excited for the important work that will come in its wake. Following on from the conference, will be listening sessions to explore some of the topics further and look into feedback from the day.

We'll be looking at ways to make sure varied types of experiences aren't forgotten, such as religion and maternal mental health, young mothers, or mothers with long-term health conditions.

We can't wait to continue this work, and make sure all mothers get the support and care they need during this time of their lives.



Programme update!

Small Talk

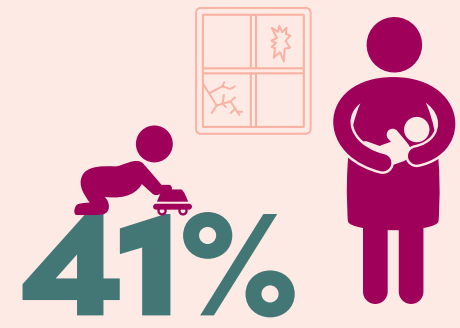
Supporting Lone Parents through our Covid Response Programme

Gillian Meens tells us about Scotland's Small Talk project

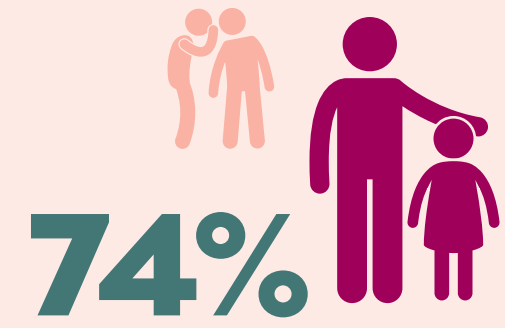
When the Foundation conducted research into experiences of the pandemic, one of the groups that we found was disproportionately impacted by it, was lone parents.

Small Talk was set up in June 2022, with six partner organisations to respond to this situation. The project's focus is on improving support for lone parents during pregnancy and early years. The aim is to give staff in the partner organisations confidence and knowledge around mental health and wellbeing, so they can support the parents they work with in group settings. It will also improve peer support services, and reduce stigma.

While training the professionals in the partner organisation, the project has also co-written with them a framework to help support parents going forward, through principles such as play and creativity and inclusivity. It has also given them session plans for their group work on themes around mental health, stigma, and selfcare.



41% of children from single parent households in Scotland are being brought up in severe poverty.*



74% of single parents have experienced negative attitudes and felt stigmatised.*

Tackling stigma

Lone parents have told us that they often experience multiple stigmas – the stigma of being a lone parent, the stigma of poverty, the stigma of struggling with their mental health.

To tackle some of this, the project co-wrote with parents and partner organisations two short films looking at the experiences of lone parents in the perinatal period. Chloe is 20 and experienced postnatal depression following the birth of her son. She shared her story as part of the film.



Chloe's story

"I didn't think you could get as low as you could. At the start it was as if there was no emotion... it took me a lot to open up about my mental health...speaking about it has made it a lot better. In a way I felt embarrassed but when I spoke about it... it made sense."

"I'm glad I got the help. The group gave me a break and my own time. It's always just me and him. I'm a super mum and I never thought I could be. To be a single parent, I didn't think anyone could do that...it's the best job, ever."

Chloe has been supported by one of our partner organisations to attend weekly groups that provide support to her as well as her son.

To watch the films and learn more about the Small Talk project visit our website here: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/programmes/small-talk/videos-lone-parent-experiences

Young Mums Connect

Jayde Edwards explains our project for young mothers and their families



Young Mums Connect is our peer support project for young mums, up to the age of 25. Over three years we work with the whole family, within their community to approach mental health prevention. We believe that connecting young mothers with their families, service providers and their community promotes good mental health and positive futures.

As part of Young Mums Connect we believe in:

- Building young mums' confidence as parents and help promote healthy parent-child bonding.
- Empower young mums' to embrace their support systems and know how and when to get any extra help they might need.
- Enhance life chances through building aspirations for the future!



Jayde speaking

Over the past year this project has achieved so much:

- We launched three groups in Nottingham City Council, and another in Greenwich, also including young dads. They've shown the importance of continuing to have peer support groups for young parents. Most if not all young mothers who have progressed on from the group have gone into employment, education and shown interest in becoming a peer facilitator, and delivering local groups for young mothers themselves!
- In March 2023 during the Amplifying Maternal Voices Conference Young Mums Connect hosted a breakout room with the aims of educating, sharing innovative ideas on how service providers can support young parents and it was the most booked onto breakout session which was fantastic!
- I, a young mother myself, took part in our Mental Health Awareness Week skydive with another parent, to raise awareness of anxiety and encourage other young mums to be bold and courageous.

If you want to hear more about the project or get involved, please contact Jayde Edwards (Project Manager) – jedwards@mentalhealth.org.uk

How sport can support good mental health



Heather Lewis tells us about the Foundation's work supporting sports teams and communities in England and Wales

Equipped with card games, paper airplanes, rugby balls and a whole kit bag full of fun, we have been working with staff at stadiums, pitches, and training rooms, supporting them to use sport to support good mental health in the young people they work with.

Trauma Informed Relationships Workshops

Our Trauma Informed Relationship workshops are all about recognising and utilising the relationships which so many sports clubs foster. Over several months, through these workshops, we help develop relationships, and build knowledge and confidence in staff, so that a culture of support and knowledge about mental health is embedded into an organisation.



This past year we have been training Premiership Rugby Hitz and staff from professional football club community organisations, who work in their local communities with children, young people and adults. We have loved cheer-leading the staff and hearing about how they have been utilising our training in their everyday work.



Wellbeing Tent

Our wellbeing tent visited the Premier League Disability Football Festival hosted by Chelsea Foundation. We provided a safe, welcoming and fun space for moments of quiet, time to think about emotions, learn a new skill or pick up some resources.

"Working with MHF has been an incredibly rewarding experience, from planning to delivery the care and attention to detail that goes into their work is outstanding."

We had the pleasure of working with the MHF for our Premier League Disability Football Festival at the Chelsea Training Ground in Cobham, whereby we had over 200 participants, alongside parents, carers and club staff had the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe space, with expert knowledge and a huge amount of care. The MHF ensured our wellbeing tent was a central focus for many on the day and we're all hugely thankful for their support and eagerness to support young people's and their families mental health and wellbeing."

Ellie Crabb, Inclusion and Disability Senior Officer, Chelsea FC Foundation.

None of this would be possible without your support.



Please donate today to help us carry on this vital work.

mentalhealth.org.uk/talkback-summer23



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