Creating Connections - Marie’s story

Mental health - the facts
Dear Supporter,

At the beginning of a new year, we often look back and take stock of the one that has just passed. When I think of 2015, I want to say one thing more than any other – THANK YOU. Thank you to all of you, our generous supporters, for making everything we do possible.

That’s why we produce TalkBack – to show you how your donations help fund our projects. Being able to contact you and keep you engaged with our work is vital. You can read more about this on page 13, but I urge you to please tick the boxes on the back of your donation form to tell us the ways in which you are happy to be contacted.

It’s also important for us to hear your views. So I was delighted that over 1,000 of you returned the survey from the last TalkBack. On the opposite page is a selection of the words you used to describe us. Keeping this dialogue going is the only way we can keep fighting to improve everyone’s mental health. Please tell us the ways we can contact you today.

Best wishes,

Jenny Edwards CBE, Chief Executive

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Creating Connections – Marie’s story

Single mothers are three times more likely to experience depression than other groups. Marie, a single mother to her six-year-old son, found one of our Creating Connections self-management courses life-changing.

“It was through personal events and circumstances that I came to be on benefits and a single parent at age 28. I was dealing with bereavement, depression, and low self-esteem while trying to rebuild our lives from scratch. I struggled for two years to get back on my feet and adjust to being a single parent, doing everything myself with not a lot of support.

“I felt I was getting nowhere, despite all my work, and was feeling very isolated with just me and my son.”

“By the time the Creating Connections self-management course was recommended to me, I had completed a teaching assistant course but been unable to gain a school placement. I was feeling demotivated and my confidence was being affected by a lack of feedback or interviews. I felt I was getting nowhere, despite all my work, and was feeling very isolated with just me and my son.

“In all honesty, I didn’t have high expectations, but I hoped that I would gain something. I was apprehensive and worried I was going to be told how I should be doing things, or that I was doing things badly. How wrong I was! Instead, I was encouraged to be open with my opinions, and I was shown ways of thinking and seeing situations differently.

“I learnt something new during every session: from goal setting, mental wellbeing, and tools for managing emotions and stress, to training opportunities and services for single parents. The course material, other members attending the course, and the course facilitators have been a great support that has helped me so much and still helps me now, nearly a year on.

“I’ve had so many opportunities and gained so much from attending the course. I have done volunteer and train-the-trainer training, which has allowed me to give something back by facilitating parts of the course myself. I’ve also lead our fortnightly peer-support group meetings, which offer ongoing support to people who have completed the self-management course and are facing barriers trying to get back into work or training.

“I would and have recommended the course to both friends and family.”

“On top of all of this there are the friendships and connections I’ve made, both professionally and personally. The praise and recognition from within the groups has helped give me, and other members too, the confidence (and motivation) to do so much. There are so many great advantages to attending the self-management course and even greater opportunities that come from it. I would and have recommended the course to both friends and family and in fact one is currently attending one of the self-management courses!”
Developing employment opportunities for people with disabilities is hard. It shouldn’t be, but it is. UK employment rates remain stubbornly low. Short term funding prevails, quality of support is variable and only now are we turning our attention to working with young people while they are still at school, raising aspirations and expectations that they can, and should, work. However, we do know what works: give good quality support to people who are interested in finding work and we can match their skills, interests and aspirations with the needs of local employers and get good job outcomes.

Following this trip, we were delighted to hear that our colleagues in Malaysia plan to adopt some of the programmes developed by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities and to explore many of the concepts that were debated. Overall we were struck by the high regard that they placed on the employment of disabled people.

Supported employment is gaining pace in Malaysia and hopefully, with inspiration from the Foundation’s work, they will be able to build on their pilot projects. We know what works, but as our colleagues in Malaysia will no doubt echo, systemic change is a long game.

This was one of the key messages shared during a recent knowledge exchange and training visit to Malaysia. Keith Bates and Molly Mattingly from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities shared their experience of UK approaches to planning for the transition from education to the workplace. Special education teachers, job coaches, employers and representatives from the Malaysian Department of Education all attended the two-day workshop. Importantly, the session was supported by the Prime Minister’s Office, demonstrating that Malaysia is serious about improving employment prospects for people with learning disabilities.

As a result, there has been a flood of projects trying to improve the situation. However, support is sporadic and differs from area to area.

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (FPLD) has begun a project to map and evaluate the current hate crime initiatives around the UK.

We will be looking for evidence of good practice and effective programmes which either reduce incidences of hate crime, bullying and harassment or support people with learning disabilities who have experienced these issues. People with learning disabilities are long-standing targets of hate crime and harassment.

This will include:
- Creating a report illustrating good practice on hate crime prevention and support
- Disseminating the report, case studies and Need-to-Know briefing
- Producing short clips of successful schemes and publicising them via our e-networks and social media
- Regional events and roadshows to raise awareness of initiatives to prevent hate crime
To mark World Mental Health Day, we released an updated version of our most popular publication, *Fundamental Facts about Mental Health*. These statistics give a fascinating insight into the state of the UK’s mental health, why more needs to be done to support people with mental health problems, and why your support is so important.

**Mental health – the facts**

- **10% of children and young people** have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem.
- **1 in 4 people in England** are likely to experience a mental health problem in any given year.
- **Mental health research** receives only 5.5% of total UK health research spending.
- **Around 50% of mothers with mental health problems** are not identified or treated.
- **In the UK, mental health problems** are responsible for 28% of the burden of disease, compared to 16% each for cancer and heart disease.
- **In the UK, 70 million days** are lost from work each year due to mental health problems, making it the leading cause of sickness absence.

The complete, fully referenced *Fundamental Facts about Mental Health 2015* can be downloaded for free from our website, [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications](www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications)
Alternate realities: dementia, truth and truth telling.

How would you respond if someone living in a care home believed it was actually a hotel (or even a prison) and wanted to return to their own home, which was no longer theirs to live in? These situations, where a person with dementia may be experiencing a different reality from the one they are in, can be distressing and difficult. Trying to understand more about what these experiences mean to people with dementia, and how best others should respond, has been the subject of a national inquiry supported by the Mental Health Foundation.

Other common experiences include people living with dementia not recognising or trusting a family carer or believing that they are an imposter, believing that a deceased parent is alive and wanting to see them, appearing to gain comfort by holding a doll and believing it to be a real baby, or seeking activities or roles that replicate jobs the person did prior to developing dementia. While these experiences are often defined in conventional medical terms as symptoms, e.g. “delusions”, such terms may not always be particularly helpful. “Different realities”, “different perceptions”, “unmet needs” or “misunderstandings” may be terms that some are more comfortable with.

When can I leave this hotel and go home?

The inquiry started in 2014 and was led by a panel of experts, including people with dementia, carers, practitioners, academics and key influencers. The inquiry did not just consider the practical and ethical issues involved in these situations but also how meaningful they were for the person with dementia. Responding to them purely as symptoms of an illness and telling the truth, explaining that a parent or spouse is no longer alive for example, may be unhelpful to the person or even cause distress.

But not telling the truth causes many practitioners and carers to have concerns too. Many care facilities have created physical environments themed around times gone past to provide familiar and comforting visual cues for people with dementia. However, these may also cause confusion. The inquiry asked whether by gaining more understanding of what these experiences mean to the person we can also identify the most helpful and appropriate responses.

The inquiry undertook a literature review, collected over 400 responses to an online survey, heard from almost 40 experts in the field, and carried out consultations with people with dementia, family carers and frontline staff. Ethics, theory and practice were all considered and the evidence will be drawn together in an inquiry report with key findings and recommendations. As well as the report, practical advice, information and guidance will be produced and disseminated for carers, staff and services providing care and support to people with dementia.

Some of the key themes that have emerged from the inquiry include the importance of language and terminology (medical terms not being well liked), understanding these situations in terms of the person with dementia trying to construct a reality, the importance of wellbeing and emotional meaning for the person as well as family and friends, and how to ‘go along’ with the person experiencing a different reality in ways that are helpful and ethical.

The report will describe these themes but also acknowledge the complexities and difficulties in tackling these issues – not least among some people with dementia who are often uncomfortable discussing what the future might hold. But members of the inquiry panel who live with dementia have emphasised the importance of this project in providing opportunities to help rethink dementia and shape the care and support they may need in the future. That is why the Mental Health Foundation believes this inquiry to be so important.
Devolution put power closer to the people so that local factors would be better reflected in decision making. Most health policy was devolved, but so were other key areas like housing, education and justice, which can have a big impact on people’s mental health.

Mental health played a prominent role in the run up to the General Election in 2015, and we expect the same in the national elections. We want to get mental health on the election agenda early and make sure it is prioritised by the national parties. In Wales, a bi-lingual Mental Health Manifesto, developed by the Mental Health Foundation and Gofal, was launched in October at the Senedd. The manifesto had key messages on addressing inequalities, prevention and public health, and the launch was attended by Assembly members from the four main parties. Similar campaigning is taking place in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Because of their size, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can produce distinct, cross-cutting policy, developed in a more open, personal way. The 2016 elections represent a real opportunity for these countries to make significant improvements to how good mental health is approached in public life.

In 2016, The Mental Health Foundation is calling on the devolved powers to prioritise the following:

1. Address mental health inequality by targeting support to the needs of groups who are most susceptible to developing mental health problems
2. Tackle the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems and increase public understanding
3. Ensure cross-government commitment and action on mental health, accepting that all policies affect people’s mental health

The Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly will all hold elections later this year on 5th May.

At the Mental Health Foundation, everything we do is made possible by you, our generous supporters. Your donations are vital if we’re to continue working towards better mental health for everyone. We value your support and appreciate how important it is for you to know how your money is spent.

You may recall that last summer charities faced close scrutiny in the press for their use of supporter data. We hope the ‘Our commitment to you’ article in the September 2015 issue of Talkback helped to reassure you that we always adhere to best practice and treat your information respectfully. We will never sell or swap your contact details with other organisations.

As a charity we rely on a variety of methods to keep our supporters engaged with and informed about our work. It is vital for us that we are able to contact you in the best and most cost-effective ways, so please return your preference form. If you have any questions, email supporter@mentalhealth.org.uk or call us on 020 7803 1121.

Congratulations to Quynh Pham who has been awarded the Janice Sinson Award, a prize that highlights key contributions in mental health research by postgraduates.

The expert panel gave top marks to Quynh whose original piece of research studied the effectiveness of a mobile phone app helping people with anxiety. Quynh said, “This recognition is incredibly meaningful to me as a young researcher.”
Do you want to be part of the team which challenges themselves for mental health in 2016? Email events@mentalhealth.org.uk or visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved

Tea & Talk
Thank you to the 959 people who signed up to hold a Tea & Talk event this year. So far you’ve raised over £12,000! We’ve heard about some amazing Tea & Talk events: from huge events at major companies to small events at cafes; from sponsored walks to quizzes and competitions; and even hanging paper underwear on a washing line! You really have thought of it all.

The money you have raised is vital for us to continue the ground breaking mental health research we conduct every single day. But your Tea & Talks are also important because they get people talking, breaking down the stigma of mental health and starting essential conversations.

Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU to everyone who baked, donated and supported a Tea & Talk last year.

New Year! New You!
With the start of 2016, many of you will have set yourselves New Year resolutions, vowing this is the year you will try something new, lose weight or focus more fully on your mental health. Sadly, statistically, by the time you read this many of you will already have broken your resolution.

One of the best ways to achieve your target is to set yourself a manageable goal such as a race or challenge – and what better way to keep focused and driven than to fundraise for mental health along the way?

There are hundreds of events across the country you can challenge yourself to in 2016. From your local 5k run, to a trek from London to Brighton, to a marathon along the Great Wall of China – there are so many ways to get involved!

Held an event? You can pay in your donations on www.teaandtalk.org.uk or by calling 020 7803 1123

Thank you for an amazing 2015!
We want to say a great big thank you to the 1,323 events fundraisers who ran, baked, swam, walked, cycled, skydive, gave up alcohol or grew beards last year to support the Mental Health Foundation. Thank you also to everyone who sponsored or supported them with their challenges - you’re heroes too!

81 people ran the London Marathon
21 people did skydives
1 person trekked across Iceland
959 people held a Tea & Talk
The Mental Health Foundation is linked with the Goodwill Partnership, an organisation that helps make writing your will as quick and hassle free as possible. They send out home-visit solicitors, so there’s no need to visit their offices, and will arrange a time that suits you, even evenings or weekends.

Legacies are a hugely important source of funding for the Mental Health Foundation. Your support helps us find solutions that could save thousands of people from living a lifetime of mental health problems.

You can contact the Goodwill Partnership on 0844 669 6148 or visit www.thegoodwillpartnership.co.uk for more information on writing your will at home.

GET INVOLVED AT WORK

Following our feature on mental health in the workplace in the September 2015 TalkBack, we’ve produced a new booklet full of information on how employees and organisations can support the Mental Health Foundation. Get Involved also contains details of the information and services we can provide to organisations to help them look after the mental health of their employees. You can get your copy by calling 020 7803 1150 or download it for free from www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications

If you would like to make a gift towards our work, please go to www.mentalhealth.org.uk/talkbackdonate

Text THRIVE to 70300 to give £3 (MHF gets 100%)

We’d like to contact you with updates. If you’d rather we did not text you again then include the words “No Info” when you text e.g. THRIVE NO INFO

For regular updates on our work via email, please sign up to our e-newsletter at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/newsletter