A sense of identity
What makes us who we are?

GETTING ONLINE
How you can combat loneliness

VOLUNTEERING
The positive effects on mental wellbeing

WOMEN’S MENTAL HEALTH
The specific challenges females face

CLASSISM
Why is it important to state a person’s class?
“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

Saint Francis of Assisi
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Working together with six individuals, Danny Bowyer explores the significant role identity plays
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I volunteer therefore I am
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A friend of mine sent me a book that she swears by in helping her manage her mental health challenges. Entitled The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living, the book combines the Dalai Lama’s eastern spiritual tradition with Dr Howard C. Cutler’s western perspective.

Within the publication, the Dalai Lama is quoted as saying something that seemed very apt and timely to me, given that this issue Speak Your Mind focuses on identity. He says:

“I always believe we are the same; we are all human beings. Of course, there may be differences in cultural background or way of life, there may be differences in our faith, or we may be of a different colour, but we are human beings, consisting of the human body and the human mind. Our physical structure is the same, and our mind, and our emotional nature are also the same… If we emphasise specific characteristics, like I am Tibetan or I am Buddhist, then there are differences. But those things are secondary. If we can leave the differences aside, I think we can easily communicate, exchange ideas and share experiences.”

People with health challenges can feel labelled by their symptoms or diagnosis – I know I have at times. This issue we interviewed Byron Vincent, a writer and broadcaster who speaks openly about his mental health challenges but is determined that he is not defined by them. He says, “I don’t see myself as a collection of symptoms … I’m silly, annoying, cynical, loving, flatulent and, yes, bipolar is in there somewhere too but it’s just one element, squished between all the farts and cynicism.”

Identity can mean something different to everyone, as Deputy Editor Danny Bowyer discovered in a project he carried out for this issue of Speak Your Mind.

Six individuals were given the challenge to express what identity means to them. They were given no boundaries or guidelines – they could express themselves in whatever format worked best for them. The result is a wonderful collection of writing, poetry, artwork and more, all demonstrating the individuals’ take on identity, presented throughout this issue.

The issue also takes a look at the wellness tools, hobbies and challenges that people face/use that significantly affect who they are. For example, we address specific challenges faced by women (page 30), how class influences us (page 17), and how activities such as gardening (page 18) and photography (page 28) can affect our outlook.

I’d be interested to hear your thoughts on this issue. Remember you can come along to our magazine workshops in Cambridge and Peterborough or email your thoughts and ideas to symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk

Wishing you a happy and healthy new year.

Kelly Mansfield, Editor
Get involved!

Got an idea for an article?

At Speak Your Mind we’re not only really keen to hear readers’ ideas but we’d also like you to write the articles!

Whether it’s telling your own story, writing about your wellness tools or discussing issues that are close to your heart or that you think are important to readers – we’d love to have your contribution.

You don’t have to be an experienced writer; we’ve got editors on hand for that! All you have to do is share your idea by emailing us at symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk and we can go from there.

Looking forward to hearing your ideas!
Government commits to reform the Mental Health Act

The government will introduce a new Mental Health Bill to transform mental health care, following publication of the final report from the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act 1983. The government is accepting two of the review’s recommendations to modernise the Mental Health Act.

Those detained under the Act will be allowed to nominate a person of their choice to be involved in decisions about their care. Currently, they have no say on which relative is contacted. This can lead to distant or unknown relatives being called upon to make important decisions about their care when they are at their most vulnerable.

People will also be able to express their preferences for care and treatment and have these listed in statutory ‘advance choice’ documents.

Prime Minister Theresa May, pictured above, said: “The disparity in our mental health services is one of the burning injustices this country faces that we must put right.

“For decades it has somehow been accepted that if you have a mental illness, you will not receive the same access to treatment as if you have a physical ailment. Well, that is not acceptable.

“I commissioned this review because I am determined to make sure those suffering from mental health issues are treated with dignity and respect, with their liberty and autonomy respected.

“By bringing forward this historic legislation – the new Mental Health Bill – we can ensure people are in control of their care and are receiving the right treatment and support they need.”

Further intervention on student mental health

Higher education representatives have been told to take action on student mental health by the Education Secretary. He has called on universities to do more to reach out to students’ emergency contacts when it is clear that they are at risk of a mental health crisis.

Damian Hinds has written to Julia Buckingham, who is chairing a roundtable on student mental health. The event, hosted by Universities UK (UUK), will aim to develop advice for universities on consent for the disclosure of information about severe student difficulties to third parties. Giving universities clear guidance on this issue will ensure young people struggling at university will have every possible chance of receiving help from someone in their domestic support network. This is particularly important for students studying away from home, who may have a reduced support group.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds, pictured above, said: “Ensuring that university students, many of whom will be leaving home for the first time, are supported is a key challenge for my department and the higher education sector as a whole.

“The new UUK advice will need to give 100% of students every possible opportunity to choose to receive care from families and trusted friends alongside the support they get from student welfare teams and the NHS.”
The NHS will increase mental health spending by more than £2 billion a year by 2023-24, following the Chancellor’s announcement that the NHS’ budget will be increased by £20.5 billion after inflation.

Unsurprisingly, the news has been warmly welcomed by many. For example, Centre for Mental Health Chief Executive Sarah Hughes said: “Increasing mental health spending as a proportion of NHS funding for the next five years is an important step towards parity. It is vital that this investment is earmarked for mental health to ensure it brings about the promised improvements in care and support...

“It is vital that this investment is matched by fairer funding for public health, early years and social care services in local government. Services that prevent poor mental health and that enable people to live well have been cut back in recent years, putting more and more pressure on individuals, families, communities and health services.”

However, says Hughes, parity for mental health within the NHS is not the same as equality for people with mental health challenges: “To bring that about we need to see radical changes to the way schools promote children’s mental health, to benefits including Universal Credit, to prisons and probation services, and much more. And we need to take action against discrimination and social inequality to create a fairer society that will nurture better mental health for all.”

Time to Talk Day 2019

On this year’s Time to Talk Day, taking place on Thursday 7 February, organisers Time to Change want everyone to have a conversation about mental health.

“Whether that’s tea, biscuits and close friends or a room full of people challenging mental health stigma, we want you to get talking,” they say. Mental health challenges affect one in four of us, yet people are still afraid to talk about it. Having conversations about mental health helps break down stereotypes, improve relationships, aid recovery and take the stigma out of something that affects us all. There are lots of different ways to have a conversation about mental health. And you don’t have to be an expert to talk.

Whether you’re planning an activity in your school, workplace or community, you can order a free pack of materials, including postcards, posters and tip cards, to help you get conversations started on Time to Talk Day.

NHS funding will increase, including more spending for mental health

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Children’s Mental Health Week

This year’s Children’s Mental Health Week is taking place on 4-10 February 2019, and will focus on being Healthy: Inside and Out.

Place2Be is encouraging children, young people and adults to look after their bodies and their minds.

“It doesn’t have to be difficult,” the organisers say. “Our bodies and minds are connected, so simple things that we do to improve our physical wellbeing can help our mental wellbeing too.”

Free primary and secondary resources are now available on the Children’s Mental Health Week website, including assembly guides, slides, group activities, fundraising ideas and more. Place2Be have also shared top tips and other resources for parents and carers, as well as marketing goodies and a fundraising pack to help children, young people and adults across the country shout about the week and raise vital funds.

For more information visit www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk
Taking place this winter...

CP Learning Trust workshops
CP Learning Trust delivers a range of fun, informative and creative workshops – from rug making to barge painting to gardening and much more – across Peterborough, Fenland, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire and Kings Lynn.

www.cplearningtrust.org/whats-on
Telephone: 01354 696479

Make, Do and Mend Workshops
A friendly and stress-free place to meet other people, and a space to explore your talents and strengths. Based in the centre of Cambridge, Make, Do and Mend offers free and welcoming workshops for all people in our community who are living with mental health challenges. You can try out a workshop or simply go along and see what they do.

www.makedoandmendinfo.co.uk
Telephone 07736 916 431

Moodswings groups and workshops
A range of popular workshops designed to help people cope with a variety of difficulties. Delivered in a friendly, informal atmosphere by experienced trainers, these include: Anxiety Management; Self-esteem and Assertiveness; Sleep; Anger Management; Management of Psychosis (Funny Feelings); Mood Management. Although priority is given to people on Moodswings’ Recovery and Support projects, other people can apply.

www.moodswings.org.uk/what-can-we-do/workshops

The Green Backyard Community project
A vibrant community project in the heart of Peterborough, the team have transformed a once derelict allotment site into a beautiful and productive community garden that is open to everyone. There are plenty of ways for anyone to get involved on site; gardening, animal care, building work and many more jobs need doing every day. Just drop in or visit www.thegreenbackyard.com. They’re open 11am-4pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Mind Wellbeing Workshops
Six-week, skills-based workshops which aim to help people cope with the ups and downs of life. These workshops are all free and take place in Mind’s Cambridge, Peterborough and St Neots offices. These workshops are funded to support people with their mental health. Courses on Core Skills, I Matter Too, Anger Management for Men, Anger Management for Women and Mindfulness are also available.

www.cpslmind.org.uk/what-we-do/wellbeing-service/wellbeing-groups-workshops/

Meetup clubs and groups
Meetup is a large network of self-organised clubs and community groups, making it easy for anyone to organise their own local group, or find one of the thousands already meeting face-to-face, to help its members better pursue hobbies, advance causes, network with peers, get health support, or just arrange a friendly playgroup for their kids. Find out what’s happening around the world and start meeting up with the ones near you at www.meetup.com

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Illuminate Confidence for Change
Illuminate will be touring Cambridgeshire with its four-day Confidence for Change programme throughout the year. This course covers communicating confidently, steps to build confidence, managing fear and anxiety, resilience, overcoming procrastination, identifying strengths and what’s important, understanding limiting beliefs and gaining the motivation to set goals. If distance and travel is an issue contact Illuminate for alternative options.

www.illuminatecharity.org.uk/confidenceforchange.php
Telephone: 01223 520124

Michaelhouse Chorale
This friendly choir is open to anybody with mental health challenges – whatever their age – and their carers and friends. Arts and Minds invites people to come and sing at Michaelhouse, Trinity Street, Cambridge CB2 1SU from 2.30-3.30pm on Fridays.

www.artsandminds.org.uk/projects/michaelhouse-chorale
Telephone: 01223 353 053

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www.makedoandmendinfo.co.uk
Telephone 07736 916 431

Action for Happiness – Exploring What Matters course
This course gives you the chance to find simple ways to make yourself and others happier. The eight-week course is based in science and helps you: meet with like-minded people to explore what really matters in life and find new ways of looking at things; learn from the experts through videos, mindfulness exercises and a handbook full of resources to help you break big ideas into manageable chunks; and take small actions each week by taking time to reflect on how to create happiness for yourself and those around you. To find a course near you visit: www.actionforhappiness.org

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www.cplearningtrust.org/whats-on
Telephone: 01354 696479
Arts on Prescription Workshops  
A series of weekly art workshops for people experiencing depression, anxiety and/or other mental health challenges in Cambridge, St. Ives and soon Peterborough. Led by a professional artist and a qualified counsellor, they offer the chance to experience working with a wide range of materials and techniques, including drawing, printmaking and sculpture. Sessions last for two hours and are open to all abilities.  
www.artsandminds.org.uk/projects/artsonprescription  
Telephone 01223 353 053

Rethink Mental Illness Groups  
Groups take many forms depending on the needs of the group members. Groups can be for carers only, for people who have lived experience of mental challenges or both. They also have some siblings groups. Activities vary and can include a focus on self-help, information, peer support, campaigning and fundraising. Group meetings vary; some weekly, some monthly and others support each other by telephone and internet.  
www.rethink.org/services-groups/service-types/support-groups  
Telephone: 0121 522 7007

VoiceAbility Dreamers Bar  
Dreamers is a lively drop-in information bar in Huntingdon providing a safe area where vulnerable and sometimes isolated people can socialise and make friends and where local disabled people can access information about what is happening in their local community, and how they can get the support they need. Contact Lydia Eldridge via email on lydia.eldridge@voiceability.org or telephone 07920 481985

Recovery College courses and workshops  
Whether you want to develop new skills or increase your understanding of mental health challenges, Recovery College East is a relaxed, friendly place to learn with lots of support on hand if you should need it. The college has locations in both Cambridge and Peterborough. Courses available this term include Becoming More Assertive, Creative Writing for Recovery, Anxiety and Panic and Combating Stigma. The timetable is available to download at: www.cpft.nhs.uk/about-us/recovery-college-east  
Telephone Cambridge: 01223 227510 Peterborough: 01733 746660

Cafe Discussion Group  
A small, friendly discussion group for those of us in recovery. A chance to air what’s on your mind amongst kindred spirits. Supported by Fulbourn Chaplaincy, the group runs on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at The Locker (Old Clowns Site), 54 Kings Street, Cambridge. For more information call Mark Woods 07432 600 102 or email coast@live.co.uk

Richmond Fellowship community-based support  
Support provided on a group or individual basis to help people access social networks and peer support, and engage in everyday mainstream opportunities. Groups are incredibly diverse from art studios and gardening therapy to cafes and musical support groups. All services are tailored to meet local needs and are designed to encourage each individual’s sense of security, purpose and fulfillment.  
www.richmondfellowship.org.uk/our-range-of-support/community-based

In focus: Huntingdon social group  
I first went along to the Huntingdon social group coming up to three years ago, when it was started by peer support worker Danny Bowyer. The idea was to bring people with mental health challenges together in a social environment, to meet new people, share their experiences with others who understand or just have a chat about anything and everything.  
A few years later, it’s still going! For me, it’s been fundamental in my recovery. I can go along, even when I’m not feeling great, and just have a good chat with people who have become dear friends. If I want to, I can tell them about any challenges I’m facing, and they will listen and understand. Or we can just have a good gossip! People from all kinds of backgrounds and ages and with varying experiences and challenges come along.  
The group takes place every Friday from 11.30am to 12.30pm at the Cromwell’s Bar in Huntingdon (137 High Street). It’s a relatively small group so not too daunting. If you’re interested in coming along – just to see if it works for you – then email symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk

If you’d like to share your experiences of any the courses/groups featured, or indeed tell us about something we haven’t covered, please email us at symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk
The word identity can be evocative. For some it is a profound exploration of what it means to be a sentient lifeform, for others it is a collection of the artefacts and labels that define our character. For some it is as much about culture, fashion and taste as the definition of what makes me who I am as a person. Identity can be boiled down to a list of characteristics or it can be a more narrative experience.

Do you see yourself as the finished article or do you see identities as fluid and not fixed, ever changing, evolving and fluctuating as we go through our lives and as we take on new experiences, come into contact with new perspectives and develop our skills and interests. Do you have a story or are you the story?

With so many different theories and approaches to the nature of identity it is important to note that there is no right or wrong way to approach it, the key is to find the perspective that feels most meaningful to us. In doing so we uncover part of our identity. Whatever identity evokes for you it can be an interesting and at times important concept to consider.

Perhaps when diagnosed with a mental health challenge or a long-term physical health challenge our identity can be hijacked. All of the things that previously defined us can be swept beneath the umbrella of a new identity and it is easy to get lost within that. In this instance considering the diversity and richness can allow us to reclaim our sense of self and not to dismiss our challenges and any accompanying labels, maybe we are storytellers. I could tell you my job title and you might assume from that some of the skills and characteristics needed to do that job. Or I could speak about my journey to work, what I get from work so that the overall takeaway from the conversation would not simply be my job title, but instead an impression of what motivates, drives and enthuses me.

“One thing we always have power over is our identity and identity can be a powerful thing.”

The choice is yours. Throughout our lives circumstance and situation can give us great moments of feeling powerful, able to forge our own path and make our own decisions. At other times we may feel powerless. One thing we always have power over is our identity and identity can be a powerful thing.

When I first started asking people to contribute on the topic of identity and gave them free reign I didn’t know what to expect. I have been delighted by the ways that the contributors have decided to approach the subject and the different mediums they have used to express themselves, highlighting their own individuality in the process.
I was finding it difficult to put into words how I was feeling. I decided to try and put it down as a drawing. When I looked in the mirror, I couldn’t see myself anymore and felt that I had lost my identity. I was there physically, but facially it was like my features had disappeared, so that is how I put it down as a drawing. It has really helped to express myself in this way.

Bridgette
Finding myself

By Molly White

When someone asked me “when did you lose yourself?” it was a light bulb moment, a realisation of how much my life had changed and in such a short space of time. It had been the worst year of my life and I felt I was the worst version of myself and therefore I felt such a conflict with my own identity.

I remember looking in the mirror and not recognising myself physically or emotionally. I was not in control and day-by-day deterioration had led to a miserable existence and I was just not myself. I was stuck in turmoil of an unhealthy relationship, vocation and the feeling of being trapped in depression was suffocating.

Characteristics which make up my persona slowly faded and my family and friends missed seeing the bubbly, enthusiastic and quirky individual they’d describe as one of a kind. She had disappeared. As usual, I tried to hide my emotional pain and my anxiety-led behaviours, which only led to taking actions which I felt were not honest to my true self. My life completely changed. I completely changed. I’d stopped swimming, stopped seeing my friends, always saw the negative in everything, wasn’t able to rationalise and started to become the complete opposite of who I was, someone I wish never to meet again. Based on my experiences, when someone asks me what identity means to me, I would always say staying true to yourself, enabling yourself to do all the things you love and that make you happy and healthy, going with your gut feeling and making a decision which is totally right for you even though you are scared to take the plunge and staying aligned with your values.

I often feel envious of people, wishing I could be different; care-free, laid back and able to enjoy and live in the moment. Quite often I’d wish my mind was like that of someone else or that I was somebody else entirely. However, that would mean I wouldn’t be me and wouldn’t have all the things I love about myself and my own identity, that perhaps get lost and buried when negative thoughts and worries take over. When there is a constant battle in my mind I feel like I turn into a monster. It rears its ugly head and takes over me, but this isn’t me and I don’t want it to be. Identity isn’t what defines you and what pulls you down, it’s who you are, and is made up of all your likes, quirks, unique characteristics, your passion, your kindness, how you help yourself and others, your values and what is special to you. It is tough not to let my troubles define me, however focusing on the positives and the happy parts of the day can keep me going each day with a healthy mind, and acceptance of my own identity. Liking ourselves and being kind to ourselves is so important. So make sure you remember to pause and just be yourself for a while each day, and remember you deserve to happy within yourself.
The best way I can describe the loss of identity and the subsequent disconnect from myself and my life is... coming home to the wrong house. Everything is familiar and perhaps even comforting but still alien and distant. Below are the lyrics to a song I wrote called The Wrong House that sums up these feelings.

I think maybe I’ve come home to the wrong house
The floorboards did not creek
I did not recognise the residents and no one recognises me
I thought maybe I would see some distant daydream, but I’ve come home to the wrong house
I thought maybe I would hear old laughter echo ‘round the sink, but I’ve come home to the wrong house
I thought maybe I’ve come home to the wrong house
The pleasantries have ceased
I do not recognise the character and it does not tremble when I speak
I thought maybe I would meet some long-lost true-love, but I’ve come home to the wrong house
I thought maybe I’d return and all the ghosts would be the same, but I’ve come home to the wrong house
Identity

Identity as in I build
this den
of I

Constructions, discoveries
(lots read on the internet,
and thank you for that)

I den
away from other things
to nest cosy
free to just be
thinking things like I am this therefore I am
me
learning of a multitude of mes
spread over time and space but still
collectively
and the atoms gather decisively

Identity as in this den in which I can seek
sanctuary
from that which seeks to pry apart me
Stereotype, squeezing

Sometimes a comfort zone where things
cannot grow
Identity as in a den in which I hide
still way into the spring of things
reducing the song of myself into a labelling
a static thing stagnating

Identity as in I dent
your expectations
of what
‘somewhere who looks like’ this
does
and says
and is
as we resolutely and fearlessly be

I-dent constricting, thinning ideas
screaming at elders
who chose to shun the sunlight given by
their plentiful years
who try to darken paths we could take
because of their fears

We grow tall like sunflowers
We feel into making our identities our
powers

Identity as in the synonymity with
congruity, similarity, affinity

As in I identify with that, with you
I see and I feel, I flow as you do
Walk in your shoes
Watch your visuals for affinity clues

Identity
as in
an entity
of not just me
it’s us
it’s we

Entities unshaped concisely
we be unprecisely
really complexities
as vast as the seas

At the same time we can hold
simplificities
I see instantly congruities
between you and me

Yes i am a bustling,
populous-carrying thing
a one stacked on
many piled with all the
you there could be
Seas of identities
Entities of plenty
Which yous will
you choose?

Ways for an I to meet a you
meet the human in ‘another’
like I’m from Yorkshire
too! I exclaim, sipping tea

Or a wordless eyes meeting
a-ha, you have skin
and hands too
Another me another you
As someone I love reaches
into the sea blue,
and another I with
a story is pulled aboard

Lyndsey Burtonshaw
For this piece of artwork I wanted to encapsulate the feeling of unknown identity. I wanted it so that you cannot assume the person’s age, gender, race, religion or class. The eyes are closed, as if the subject is deep in thought. When I have experienced moments of uncertainty in my life, I have spent hours and hours dreaming of who I wanted to be, always being easily influenced by others’ opinions and judgements. I hope people can relate to it, and also feel open to starting the conversation around identity, to bring us together and change perceptions.

by Lucy Shelton
We need to talk about classism...

Conversations about class can make people feel uncomfortable. In a society where we are striving to consider individuals as more than the mere sum of their labels, why is it important to state a person’s class background, asks Danny Bowyer.

Part of the rhetoric around the notion of a classless society centres on the idea of meritocracy; that being the belief that hard work and gumption, regardless of your start in life, is all that is needed to achieve social mobility; the ideology that the richer those at the top of society, the richer we all become.

In fact, we have seen in recent years an ever-widening inequality with the top 1% of wealth holders now in possession of more wealth than the bottom 50% combined. It is this mass inequality that leads to the reality that in the UK 4.5 million children currently live in poverty and over the past year 1.3 million people have accessed food banks. A recent UN report into poverty in the UK has highlighted these issues and more*. Browse through the summarised report by The Guardian

Defining class

Spectrums of relative social rank in terms of income, wealth, education, occupation, status, social capital, cultural capital and/or institutional position.

Defining classism

The institutional, cultural and individual practices and beliefs that assign differential worth to people according to their socioeconomic class; and the political and economic systems that create excessive inequality and cause basic human needs to go unmet.

Exploring Class

In June I participated in a four-day workshop entitled Exploring Class. The training was led by Betsy Leonard-Wright of Class Action (an American organisation dedicated to social justice, classism.org), with two British co-facilitators: highly experienced activist and trainer, Kathryn Tulip of the Navigate training collective (navigate.org.uk) and Milan Rai, Editor of Peace News (peacenews.info).

The main goals of the workshop were to:

- increase and develop the strengths of the participants; and
- provide a framework to apply their passion and ability to facilitating classism workshops.

Since completing the training I have developed and delivered my own version of the training to colleagues within CPFT with the intention to:

- increase consciousness of social issues relating to class at all levels of the organisation; and
- break down the unjust inequalities within our workplaces, homes and communities.

Defining classism

The institutional, cultural and individual practices and beliefs that assign differential worth to people according to their socioeconomic class; and the political and economic systems that create excessive inequality and cause basic human needs to go unmet.

and it is easy to see how each of the points highlighted directly disadvantages, and in some cases persecutes, people from poor and working-class backgrounds. Philip Alston, who wrote the report, described the government’s approach of austerity as “punitive, mean-spirited and callous.” Decreased access to healthcare, education, career opportunities and good accommodation amongst many of the basic human needs not met, culminate in a lower life expectancy for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

On top of and as an aspect of low life expectancy comes an increased likelihood of taking your own life for people from the underclass. Financial stress and the shame and stigma attached to it, and the anguish of feeling constricted either by the lack of resources to achieve your personal or career goals, are just a couple of the many different aspects of working-class life than have a detrimental impact on a person’s mental health. Barriers to accessing healthcare such as affordability of travel, not being able to miss time off work for appointments or being priced out of healthy eating can contribute to and create short and long-term physical health challenges.

These occurrences are not incidental; they exist because of inequalities created within society from the top down. The first step to help stop the negative outcomes of classism is by acknowledging their presence and standing firmly against the resulting oppressions.

*Key points from UN envoy’s report on poverty in Britain: www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/16/key-points-un-envoy-philip-alston-report-poverty-britain-uk
Nature, gardens and feeling well

Damien Newman, Training, Education and Consultancy Manager at Thrive, discusses how gardening can bring positive changes to people with health challenges or those who are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Tea, gardens and nature; three experiences that soothe me. Each day, one of these three things leaves me breathing out cathartically as I let go of worry.

Drinking tea in nature after a good day’s work in the garden and the restoration and calming of mood stays with me for days. Most people feel better for being outside and many of us recognise the relaxation that time in nature provides, but perhaps fewer people use it as a strategy within their lives for mental wellness. I feel that this is a missed opportunity, because access to gardens and nature can be free for most of us and it’s been demonstrated, amongst other things, to have a positive impact on self-reported feelings of wellbeing.

At Thrive, we work with people experiencing all sorts of challenges due to ill health and disability and we use the garden as a vehicle to help people achieve the positive change they strive for, often supporting people in recovery. However, gardens can also be valuable to maintain good health and support us to be resilient.

There are a few mechanisms that appear to drive the benefits we all seem to gain from interacting and experiencing nature. From environmental psychology, we can find evidence that nature restores mental fatigue. Perhaps due to the increased levels of concentration and other cognitive function required for modern living, time in nature can be a respite supporting resilience.

We can spend time in nature either experiencing it passively or interacting with it. To cycle through woodland is more experiential, whereas sketching landscapes is more interactive. Gardening and other natural husbandry activities are perhaps the most interactive as we shape nature to our own preferences.

It would appear that time spent in good quality green spaces, whether experiential or interactive, is supportive of mental wellness. However, the benefits of these different activities can vary and be experienced differently by each of us. The level of quality occupation, how meaningful it is to you as an individual and the social contact we can have while getting outside, all add value to the simplicity of going outdoors.

“A garden provides the opportunity to tend plants which may then provide meaning, purpose and connect us to our inner desire to nurture and look after living things. We may transform an area and create beauty and feel rightly proud of our own efforts to improve our environments and those spaces for others.”

There is lots of information to suggest that to make the most of time in nature we should do the things in nature that we as individuals like to do, using nature to enhance our activities.

Meaningful activity, whether for work or leisure, is seen as supportive of good health by the world of occupational therapy, valuable, alongside the social contact and chance to make new friends. To be a gardener is a social identity, a connection to millions of others with a shared interest.

Here at Thrive, we value gardens as being particularly good for us. Gardens are safe spaces within nature that more of us...
may feel comfortable with over places such as woodlands or hills and mountains.

A garden is a place to tend and nurture plants, a place where we can feel comfortable taking things from nature for ourselves like the fruit, vegetables or flowers we grow. The variety of horticulture provides us with a chance to engage people in activities they can successfully complete, so we can focus on what people can do and escape feelings of limitation.

A garden provides the opportunity to tend plants which may then provide meaning, purpose and connect us to our inner desire to nurture and look after living things. We may transform an area and create beauty and feel rightly proud of our own efforts to improve our environments and those spaces for others.

Thrive works to support people to use nature and gardens for good health after their time with us. This may be a plan to go walking in a county park once a week and to get into a garden or park each day, even if it is just for five minutes. However, those five minutes should be calm and not rushed, for example it could be to tend a couple of houseplants.

Many go on to access community gardens and conservation groups. From small indoor spaces where we can crop micro greens each week across the year to a coast-to-coast walk alongside Hadrian’s Wall, building time and activity in nature into your life, whichever way works for you, can be very supportive of good health.

On the training courses we provide to hundreds of healthcare professionals each year, we talk about how we can intentionally use nature to meet our five ways to wellbeing. Gardening gives us a perfect environment to connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, and give.

About Thrive

Thrive helps people who want to garden at home, on an allotment, in a community setting or who may wish to access its own structured horticultural therapy programmes at Beech Hill (Reading), Battersea (London), and Kings Heath (Birmingham).

www.thrive.org.uk
info@thrive.org.uk

At Thrive, we have seen first-hand how gardens and nature can support people in recovery and we know many go on to continue using nature as a support to wellbeing and positive mental health.
Getting online: combatting loneliness

Being online can be a really positive experience, helping with loneliness and isolation by enabling people to keep in touch with friends and family and learn about events in their area. Outreach Coordinator for charity Cambridge Online, Karen Cann talks about how getting people online can really improve lives.

Cambridge Online is a charity that helps disabled and disadvantaged people get online and learn basic computer skills, but our services are open to anyone who wishes to learn. Not everyone can afford a computer or tablet, or have the internet in their homes, but we’d love everyone to be digitally included, so we offer learners the opportunity to use our equipment.

I have taught many learners over the years and have scores of positive stories from my outreach sessions. Highlights for me include a 96-year-old lady who learnt to email her daughter. She was so over the moon when she received an email back. There was also another retired lady who made contact with her brother in Australia, who she hadn’t seen for 40 years. Now they keep in touch regularly and share photos through Facebook. Frequently, she proudly shows me pictures of her grandchildren.

There are people who live alone or have physical or mental health challenges and go days without speaking to anyone, so it is great to have this communication and interaction at their fingertips. I realise that nothing beats seeing people face to face so Cambridge Online also runs a social digital inclusion session where people can chat as well as get help with their digital skills. This session can be a right giggle! We chat about what everyone has been up to, and conversations naturally arise from what each person is learning online. Last week we had two learners crying with laughter as they Skyped each other from across the room!

I also educate learners about community and social sites such as www.meetup.com where you can meet up with people that share the same interests as you, make friends and learn from each other.

Cambridge Online’s Chief Executive Andrew Entecott adds, “The internet can improve your health and wellbeing. With online access to benefits, employment and healthcare, we encourage learners to explore all these positive services.”

“There are people who live alone or have physical or mental health challenges and go days without speaking to anyone, so it is great to have this communication and interaction at their fingertips.”
health, the internet can be a difficult place to be. When you’re feeling low or vulnerable, it can be hard to stay away from the kind of content that makes you feel worse.”

Cambridge Online understands that people need to look after their mental health online and we’re frequently speaking to our learners about the dangers Eve has highlighted above, and ways they can protect themselves. We try to reassure people that it’s worth taking the leap as being online can be a real life-changing experience. Eve goes on to say, “What we hear less about is how the internet brings people with mental health challenges together, links you to life-saving information and services, or plugs you into the tools and apps that help you to take better care of yourself.”

Mind runs Elefriends (www.elefriends.org.uk), an online community where people living with mental health challenges can get support. Eve realises that clients aren’t always available during the day to see counsellors face to face, particularly if they are suffering with social anxiety or are having problems with medication. “Every day, we see new people joining the ‘herd’ and getting a warm welcome from others who’ve been there too,” she says. “For many, being listened to and understood will be the first step towards feeling better, or at least better able to cope with the difficult days.”

Indeed, for those who are experiencing mental health challenges, being online also provides the opportunity to read articles on mental health, as well as blogs from those who have experienced similar challenges and even linking with people on social media to share and support each other. “Not only do we have many learners who have experienced mental health challenges,” Andrew Entecott says, “we also have many volunteers who have been through a tough time, and they work with us while they are taking a break from employment. Sometimes volunteers join us as they would like to get back into the community or gain experience of a workplace after ill health. It is wonderful seeing these people enjoying the work and gaining more confidence every day. Moreover, I feel that having been through a difficult time themselves these volunteers bring an exceptional level of empathy and warmth to some of our more apprehensive learners.”
Each volunteer’s journey is individual with a meaning that is different for everyone and what the role represents to them. Some view their volunteer work as an important part of their lives, which is so central to their self-perception it virtually defines who they are. Others see volunteering as something that is very important to them and could not imagine volunteering just for fun, to make friends or to help them find paid employment.

It is very true that volunteering is meaningful work and that compassionate communication forms the core of volunteering within an NHS environment. The work experiences that our volunteers share are highly meaningful, these experiences contribute to ongoing involvement and deliver improvements within CPFT.

Volunteering involvement has considerable significance for belonging, which in turn leads to happiness and self-satisfaction – it is also considered as an integral part of enhancing patient experience.

Individuals that engage in volunteering vocalise that their reason is not necessarily for financial gain but the strong and direct correlation to their own positive wellbeing. Volunteering throws a stunning rainbow of skills to enhance the colours of CPFT whilst also bringing light to themselves, service users, carers and staff alike.

Give for mental wellbeing

The NHS ‘Moodzone’ website discusses how giving to others can do a lot of good for your own mental wellbeing. It says:

Small acts of kindness towards other people, or larger ones like volunteering in your local community, can give you a sense of purpose.

It can make you feel happier and more satisfied with life.

Sometimes we think of wellbeing in terms of what we have: our income, our home or car, or our job. But evidence suggests it’s our actions and our thoughts that have the biggest impact on mental wellbeing.

Positive mental wellbeing means feeling good about yourself and the world around you and being able to get on with life in the way you want.

Helping and supporting other people, and working with others towards a shared goal, is good for our mental wellbeing.

How giving helps your mental wellbeing

Research suggests that acts of giving and kindness, small and large, are associated with positive mental wellbeing.

Giving to others and cooperating with them can stimulate the reward areas in the brain, creating positive feelings.

Helping and working with others can also give us a sense of purpose and feelings of self-worth.

Giving our time to others in a constructive way helps us strengthen our relationships and build new ones.

Relationships with others also help mental wellbeing.

How you can give more

Giving can take lots of different forms, from small everyday acts to larger commitments.

Today, you could:

- Say thank you to someone for something they have done for you.
- Phone a relative or friend who needs support or company.
- Ask a colleague how they are and really listen to the answer.
- Offer to lend a hand if you see a stranger struggling with bags or a pushchair.

This week, you could:

- Arrange a day out for you and a friend or relative.
- Offer to help a relative with DIY or a colleague with a work project.
- Sign up to a mentoring project, in which you give time and support to someone who’ll benefit from it.
- Volunteer in your local community, such as helping out at a local school, hospital or care home.

“Volunteering involvement has considerable significance for belonging, which in turn leads to happiness and self-satisfaction.”
Further information

Volunteering at CPFT
www.cpft.nhs.uk/help/volunteers.htm

NHS Moodzone
www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/give-for-mental-wellbeing
The soul majority

By Alex Fox

Whatever minority this life has given us – be it gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, medical, physical, wealth, abuse, isolation, hierarchy, intellectual – we are all born into a minority.

We all feel pain. We all experience highs and lows. We all feel isolated at times. Some of us struggle; some of us appear to breeze through life. Some of us question; some of us don’t. Some are happy; some are sad. Some are lonely; some are alone. Some are wealthy; some are not. We all experience and we all explore. This is life.

We were born to experience and, most importantly, to explore and learn; to grow – from each and every moment, whether it be happy or sad or downright dark. It is of no matter, as long as we are awake and aware, authentic and true to our self. We have nothing to prove or disprove to anyone – other than our self – just live the life that excites, arouses passion and ignites a fire inside.

Stop worrying about others’ opinions, because they are worrying about yours. As a human in this race, we are all second guessing each other over beauty, vanity, politics, education, wealth, power et al. How terribly boring and predictable we have become.

So, let’s just learn to love and respect our beautiful home – Earth. And then, love thy neighbour, because everyone we meet or pass on the street knows pain. Everyone has a story and it may be far removed from ours – but it’s real and it matters. We are all connected. We are all one.

Let’s remove our judgemental shroud, open our view, our perspective; recognise the community and environment we all share and learn to be kinder, more gentle and more understanding. We’re not here to win – we’re here to love and share, create and inspire, to teach each other and to awaken the person inside. We are amazing. No matter what we’ve experienced and explored, no more judgement, no small perspective, no gossip, no more drama. Please – just love.

We are all sharing one soul. We really are one. So - take a look inside, know thyself, be content with what you find and the rest will come. I speak from pain and love.
Celebrating Diversity Conference

On 29th October 2018 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust held its first ‘Celebrating Diversity Conference’, organised by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team. Head of Recovery and Inclusion Sharon Gilfoyle talks us through the event.

Over 100 people attended this first conference and it was an inspiring, thought-provoking and at times, even a challenging day. There was a great line up of guest speakers and some of them shared some deeply personal stories. There was also an opportunity for attendees to visit a range of stalls and the whole day was captured in pictures from John Ellson, a local cartoonist/creative notetaker.

The agenda for the day covered a wide range of topics including:

- The national context
- CPFT’s Embrace Campaign
- Strength Through Diversity
- Breaking out of the box
- Demystifying LGBT and language
- Working as a lesbian woman in CPFT
- Caring in two genders – an experience of being transgender in the NHS
- Employing staff across the generations
- Understanding the gender pay gap in CPFT
- The Benefits of assistance animals
- Being human together – supporting staff with their religious beliefs

The conference gave staff and service users the chance to take part and to share their views.

Tracey Dowling, Chief Executive, CPFT talked about the NHS being the single largest employer of black and ethnic minority people in England and how the NHS and CPFT is dependent on the expertise of staff working from all over the world. She stated that this is a record we should all be proud of – and one which she hopes will be undiminished by the future challenges of Brexit – but there’s no doubt that we can improve in areas of equality and diversity. She discussed that creating an inclusive culture within CPFT is vital – and why it is a major part of our three-year strategy, which we launched earlier this year.

Kit Connick, Director of Corporate Affairs, talked about where the Trust is in relation to our equality, diversity and inclusion agenda, stating this is a year of change for CPFT – we’ve had six months of incredible progress and there’s more to come!

The NHS has always been at the forefront of giving opportunities to people regardless of their background. We knew there were good examples of great work going on across the Trust, but we wanted to pull it all together – so we called it Embrace: 2018. The reasons for beginning this initiative were compelling. Research has shown that having a more diverse workforce increases employee satisfaction, fosters innovation and creativity, and improves decision making. But we didn’t just want to do it...we needed to do it.

So, what now? The Equality and Diversity Team are in the process of analysing the feedback and coming up with a range of actions to take forward the learning from the day. This will include:

- Launching a series of EMBRACE guidelines, starting with the transgender guidelines to support our staff and service users.
- Exploring the possibility of gender neutral toilets in CPFT.
- Better understanding of LGBT+ language.
- Creating a glossary of useful-to-know terms.

Feedback from staff and service users who attended the conference was fantastic.
How would you describe yourself, professionally and personally?
I don’t if I can help it. I never know how to describe myself professionally, probably because of imposter syndrome. No doubt a hangover from my underclass beginnings. My Wikipedia page says I’m a writer, performer and broadcaster. That’ll do. Personally, I aspire to be empathic, non-judgmental and make good work about things that matter.

How has your personal experience shaped your life, career and views on mental health?
I’ve been through some quite extreme experiences and have a diagnosis of PTSD, so I’ve been measurably shaped by my past. Trauma, especially formative trauma can be incredibly destructive. The key is to be aware of its consequences without allowing them to define you.
I’ve survived a lot of violence and drama and I have to be mindful about how much airtime I allow those memories. The present is fleeting, the future hasn’t happened, so it’s easy to wallow in the past. The past is solid, verifiable, we have the scars to prove it. It’s obviously important to draw and grow from our personal history, but you don’t want to live there.

How do you think your mental health challenges affect how people see you?
People carry different perspectives and prejudices so it’s not fair to generalise, but I experience the effects of stigma all the time. The most upsetting trope is that I might be violent or dangerous. The most annoying thing is that if I experience legitimate anger it’s often dismissed as mental ill health rather than a rational and appropriate reaction to injustice. That gets old pretty quickly.

How much do you think your mental health affects your view of yourself, your identity?
Probably less than people imagine given how much I discuss it publicly. I see myself as complex and multifaceted. I don’t see myself as a collection of symptoms. I like Rick and Morty and the Poetry of Tony Hoagland. I’m boring company on long car journeys. I cook a mean spag bol, have an embarrassingly extensive knowledge of early 90s dance music and can swear proficiently in Spanish. I’m silly, annoying, cynical, loving, flatulent and, yes, bipolar is in there somewhere too but it’s just one element, squished between all the farts and cynicism.

How much is mental health involved in your work?
Heavily. I’ve made theatre and radio about mental health. I do public speaking about it. It’s interwoven into most aspects of my life. It’s a luxury to talk about aspects of my life and work that aren’t mental health related. Not that I’m complaining.
I’ve been in the mental health system for over 30 years, I’d argue that makes me an authority. I’m not short of opinions on the subject and I feel privileged to have a platform to express them.

What message do you want to convey?
Kindness and empathy never hurt.

What does your work as ambassador for Rethink and Mental Health Foundation involve?
I’m not the sanitised face of mental health campaigns. I’m gobby and opinionated. Mental health is a zeitgeist topic. It’s often presented in the media or in campaigns in a very cultivate way. Someone with good teeth who has survived depression shaking hands with a footballer whilst extolling the virtues of a good open
dialogue. Don’t get me wrong, it’s great that people are talking more openly, but there’s another side to the mental health story. The stinky guts of it. Those people who never get better. People who don’t look good on posters, who have been incarcerated in hospitals or medicated for so long they wouldn’t have clue who the footballer was. People with mental health challenges can be unsettling, emotionally draining and difficult to manage.

It’s okay to admit that we sometimes exhaust you. Just remember that those difficult, unsettling, emotionally draining service users are often suffering horrendously. They tend to be the ones who are forgotten in the bowels of the system. They deserve your support and compassion too. Part of my roll as an ambassador is to speak for those people; because I’ve been one of them, and believe me, in that situation nobody listened to a word I had to say.

What is your inspiration?
These days it’s quite often injustice and a desire to want to contribute something useful and positive to the collective psyche.

What does a day’s work look like for you?
It varies massively. I’m either writing or in meetings or rehearsing or travelling to do a show. Today I have flu, so I’m swaddled in a duvet doing as much as I can on my laptop. I’m better at looking after myself than I used to be. I put things in place to manage my stress, try not to spend all day in front of a screen and get as much sunlight and exercise as possible.

Tell us about your current projects.
You can find a few of my radio documentaries on BBC iplayer, the latest one is called The Problem With Social Mobility and is due to be broadcast on Radio 4 in January. I’m touring a show over the next year about men and mental health with a focus on masculinity and suicide called Live before You Die. My new solo show about truth, love and anxiety, Instagramming The Apocalypse will be touring from early 2019, and I’m also writing a memoir.

What’s different about what you do?
Almost everything. I’m an underclass neuro-diverse artist with an atypical personal history. I think my strategies for dealing with life are different to most people’s. The lens I interpret the world through was shaped by anomalies.

When I was a little kid I felt so different that I honestly believed that any day now a spaceship was going to show up and take me back to my own planet. I’m not sure I’ve ever gotten past that belief.

What do you enjoy about your work?
Variety of experience, meeting inspiring people and occasionally feeling like I’m an agent for positive change.

What are your goals?
I want to tell stories that make people relate and connect to each other, give voice to the disenfranchised but more than either of those things I’d like to have 24-hour access to a room full of puppies that I’d have no roll in cleaning or looking after. Is that too much to ask?

What response have you had to your messages around mental health?
Overwhelmingly positive. I get hundreds of messages a year from people who are compelled to share their own stories with me; and although sometimes that can feel like a lot of responsibility, it’s also pretty awesome.

What’s the best way for people to find out about your work?
Google my name, Byron Vincent, then come and talk to me on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook. My website is www.byronvincent.com
Looking back, I suffered from depression all through my school years. As a young child I was bullied – I wore glasses and had undiagnosed dyslexia.

At around 18 years of age, after getting just a five in my CSE English, I took a basic skills literature course that identified my dyslexia, but life in general was not easy. I fell out with my parents and moved out into what can only be described as a run-down bedsit with a crowd of people who weren't positive for me to be around.

At 20 years old, I was estranged from my family, feeling alone and without a job. There didn't seem to be any help available to me at that time, and it was not a great life. So, I took my first overdose, then went out to the hairdressers where I was violently sick and was very unwell.

However, I returned to studying, passing GCSE and A Level English Literature and City and Guilds Computing. Life moved on and I found myself working for a cleaning company and married with a baby daughter. However, this relationship broke down and I became depressed again.

Life was tough for me, as my physical health was not good either. Having half of my prostate removed resulted in side effects that prevented me from sleeping at night. The stress aggravated my back pain and mental health and over the next few years I took another couple of overdoses, one of which resulted in an A&E admission.

I believe my health issues, including fibromyalgia, sleep apnoea and overactive prostate, contributed to a full breakdown. On discharge from a mental health unit I felt I was unable to leave my house anymore.

Around this time, diagnosed with EUPD (emotionally unstable personality disorder), I was referred for cognitive behavioural and ‘mentalisation’ based therapies, which helped me get a better understanding of my own and other people's emotions. Here I learnt a lot about my own emotional responses to things and the cues that I take from other people's behaviour, which affects my own. These are often based on my own assumptions, not the facts. For instance, if someone is snappy with me it might actually have been someone else who annoyed them, and I may have done nothing wrong.

I joined Cambridgeshire charity Red2Green's Support Service for people living with mental health challenges. Going to their regular weekly drop-ins and walking group sessions all helped me develop a better routine and give me something to get out of bed for. The opportunity to meet and spend time with others living with similar conditions has certainly helped me to deal with my depression and to avoid the isolation that so commonly accompanies it. The support group has definitely helped me build up my confidence and self-esteem, and also given me the reassurance of knowing that they are always there for me to fall back on if I need it.

I then stumbled across a leaflet about Cambridge Community Arts and the photography course appealed to me. Years later I am still involved and am currently studying digital editing.

“My photography has definitely given me a new focus as well as somewhere to go, and something to do. Over the years I have developed my skills and enjoy sharing my knowledge with others.”
My photography has definitely given me a new focus as well as somewhere to go, and something to do. Over the years I have developed my skills and enjoy sharing my knowledge with others. Much of my photography takes place outside and being in East Anglia on the edge of the Fens with its endless skies really lends itself to landscapes. These are definitely my favourite subjects and the ones that others seem to appreciate the most. It has given me a real sense of achievement, not just in seeing the finished results but also in exhibiting them. I have also now started to sell my pictures.

Today? Well, I am in quite a good place. I have a 19-year-old daughter who has moved away to be close to her college and boyfriend, we meet up when we can and I check in with how she's doing through social media.

I have moved into a new house, have a girlfriend and am working part-time as a school bus driver. I am running a photography group for others at Red2Green and I'm about to take part in a peer support group for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust. I have learned so much on my journey: it is important for me to find something to distract myself when feeling low or I feel like self-harming, not to overstretch my finances and most importantly that taking my own life is not the answer no matter how bad things get. There is support out there like Red2Green, Samaritans, Mind and other organisations, not just the NHS.

No matter how bad my life gets, I know that all problems have solutions, and there is light at the end of the tunnel. I have also learned I will always have EUPD (Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder) and fibromyalgia, which I have to live with, but medication seems to help and I know that sometimes I just have to let my body rest and recover and to live life day by day.
Women can be classed as over sensitive, too emotional and at times hysterical. So, is it surprising women internalise their thoughts, doubt themselves, have low self-esteem, self-worth and generally view themselves negatively?

In a world where sexism is still very apparent both in and out of the workplace, women find themselves juggling the various roles of having a career, being a partner/spouse, being a mum, a carer and a housewife. Women carry the expectation and belief that they have to do everything: going to work, looking after a child or children, cooking, cleaning and generally looking after others. This isn’t just the expectation we put on ourselves, but the expectation others put on us.

If that doesn’t have enough of a detrimental effect on our mental health then take a look at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other forms of social media. Here we find, as soon as we start scrolling through news feeds, images appear of others who appear to show they have the perfect life. Their hair is perfect, as is their make-up. Their houses are immaculate, they have a great social life and the perfect family life.

What we have to remember are these are just snapshots of people’s lives. Of course, no one is going to post a picture looking like they have just got out of bed with no make-up on or that they are crying.

I have come to the realisation that there is no such thing as perfect and I’m sure the people behind the posts face multiple struggles. Before I became a mum I worked in childcare for 12 years. Suffering with mental health challenges for a number of those years a question people wanted to ask me but didn’t very often was “Are you suitable to be in this job?”. Now that was a question that I asked myself and internalised a lot, not because I wasn’t suitable to be in that job role as I knew somewhere deep down that I had all the qualifications and was more than capable, but at the time I was suffering from depression and anxiety and felt the whole world was against me.

On occasions when I wasn’t in a great place I would be advised by my doctor to take time off work and that is what I did to try and help myself to get better. But surely with any illness be it mental or physical we are all able to make the decision as to whether we are suitable to carry out our jobs or not.

I had always wanted children and couldn’t imagine life without children in it. We tried for two and a half years before falling pregnant. I always had an image of how motherhood was going to be. I would take my child to groups, cook all meals from scratch, be in a routine, and I would have a very tidy home because at the end of the day I thought I knew exactly what I was doing. I had such high expectations of myself and I was naive to think it would be easy.

Back in June 2017, about a month after our first child was born, I was experiencing severe perinatal mental health challenges and was contemplating suicide. I was struggling to adjust to

“Women carry the expectation and belief that they have to do everything… the thought of saying no to anything brings fear and anxiety.”
being a new mum and was putting pressure on myself to be a good mum. My self-esteem and confidence were at rock bottom. Part of me wished I had never had our son. Surely he would be better off without me?

I thought that if I spoke out about how I was feeling my child would be taken away, but with the help from my amazing husband and great friend I accessed services and fought for myself to get better.

I accessed the perinatal services at CPSL MIND in September 2017 and this is when my recovery journey started to begin.

I am now a volunteer for the perinatal project where I support other mums in similar situations.

I have come to notice that, throughout my life, I have always tried to please other people to the sacrifice of my own feelings and the effect it has on my mental health. I am never going to be skinny, my home will never be the tidiest (how can it be with a toddler running around?) and I will never be perfect because there is no such thing.

The thing I have always been good at however is internalising how I feel, comparing myself to others and at times wishing my life was different.

But not anymore. Everything I do now is for me, my husband and son and I can honestly say I am the happiest I have been in a long time.
I first got into photography when I was about 10 years old. Back then if you wanted to use the flash, you had to fix a flash cube to the top of the camera! I used to love taking a roll of camera film to Boots to be developed and picking up the photos the next day.

When I’m not feeling too good I sometimes look back at old photos. Looking at them can make me feel a whole range of emotions - some memories make me smile, and some can make me cry.

I have always enjoyed taking photos of people and groups of people. Being able to freeze one moment in time is a fantastic thing. Capturing a moment of sheer joy or seeing the look of togetherness in a group of friends is such a lovely thing to do.
Why not send your five-minute found poem into us at symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk and it could appear in a future issue!
# Useful sources of support and information

| **ACAS** | Information and advice on workplace relations and employment law | www.acas.org.uk | 0300 123 1100 |
| **Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families** | Children’s mental health charity | www.annafreud.org | 020 7794 2313 |
| **Anxiety UK** | Charity for people with anxiety, stress and anxiety-related depression | www.anxietyuk.org.uk | 08444 775 774 |
| **Arts and Minds** | Arts and mental health charity in Cambridgeshire | www.artsandminds.org.uk | 01223 353 053 |
| **Best Beginnings** | Supports the mental health of pregnant women and new mothers | www.bestbeginnings.org.uk |
| **Blurt** | Support for people affected by depression | www.blurtout.org |
| **Campaign Against Living Miserably** | Charity dedicated to preventing male suicide | www.thecalmzone.net | 0800 58 58 58 |
| **Carers Trust** | Support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring | www.carers.org | 0300 772 9600 |
| **Centre for Mental Health** | Charity specialising in research, economic analysis and policy influence in mental health | www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk | 020 7717 1558 |
| **Change Grow Live** | Help and support across a wide range of areas including mental health, substance use, criminal justice and homelessness | www.changegrowlive.org |
| **Citizens Advice** | Free advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities | www.citizensadvice.org.uk | 03444 111 444 |
| **Crisis** | Charity for homeless people | www.crisis.org.uk | 0300 036 1987 |
| **Dancing With The Black Dog** | Charity dedicated to the eradication of the stigma of anxiety and depression | www.dancingwiththeblackdog.com |
| **Do-it** | National volunteering database | www.do-it.org |
| **Equality and Human Rights Commission** | Statutory body dealing in discrimination and human rights | www.equalityhumanrights.com | 0800 800 0082 |
| **Heads Together** | Campaign inspiring charities that are tackling stigma, raising awareness, and providing vital help for people with mental health challenges | www.headstogether.org.uk |
| **The Helpful Clinic** | A social venture that helps people cope better with everyday life | www.thehelpfulclinic.com |
| **Illuminate** | Provides coaching and personal development courses throughout the east of England | www.illuminatecharity.org.uk | 01223 520124 |
| **Imroc** | Works with communities to develop services, systems and cultures that support recovery and wellbeing | www.imroc.org | 0115 9691300 ext 12485 |
| **Inclusion Recovery Cambridgeshire** | Support for people affected by drugs and alcohol | www.inclusion-cambridgeshire.org.uk | 0300 555 0101 |
| **International Workplace** | Employee relations advisor | www.internationalworkplace.com | 0333 210 1995 |
| **Keep Your Head** | Local support for children and young people | www.keep-your-head.com |
| **LifeCraft** | User-led organisation offering creative activities, recovery groups, social activities and employment and volunteering opportunities | www.lifecraft.org.uk | 01223 566 957 |
| **Loch Employment Law** | Specialist employment lawyers acting for employers and employees | www.loclaw.co.uk | 0203 667 5400 |
| **Make, Do and Mend** | Skills workshops, volunteering opportunities and peer support to people who have experience of mental health challenges | www.makedoandmendinfo.co.uk |
| **Making Money Count** | Provides financial information and support across Cambridgeshire, West Norfolk and Peterborough | www.makingmoneycount.org.uk |
| **Mental Health First Aid** | Offers training for all in mental health first aid | https://mhfagland.org | 020 7250 8062 |
| **Mental Health Foundation** | Charity for mental health, aiming to find and address the sources of mental health challenges | www.mentalhealth.org.uk | (0)(20) 7803 1100 |
| **Mental Health Handbook, Lifecraft** | Information and contact details for relevant organisations such as advocacy, hospital services, housing, employment guidance, education, benefits advice and carers | www.lifecraft.org.uk/our-services/information/mental-health-handbook |
| **Mind** | Charity which provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing mental health challenges | www.mind.org.uk | 020 8519 2122 |
| **Mindscape** | Independent charity committed to breaking the link between financial difficulty and mental health challenges | www.mindscape.org | 0207 848 1448 |
| **Money and Mental Health Policy Institute** | Championing and funding research into mental health | www.moneyandmentalhealth.org | 0333 440 1220 |
| **MQ** | Providing vital help for people with mental health challenges | www.mq.org.uk | 020 7712 358172 |
| **The Mix** | Offers a safe place to talk at any time about whatever is getting to you | www.themix.org.uk | 0808 800 3333 |
| **The SUN Network** | Aiming for everyone in Cambridgeshire to have equitable access to mental health and/or drug and alcohol interventions and services | www.sunnetwork.org.uk | 07712 358172 |
| **Time to Change** | Campaigning to remove stigma around mental health | www.time-to-change.org.uk | 020 8215 2356 |
| **YoungMinds** | Charity committed to improving the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people | www.youngminds.org.uk | 0300 036 1987 |
“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

Maria Robinson