Happy families?
The real obstacles faced by parents with mental health challenges

FAITH
The importance of hope and belief

SOCIAL MEDIA
The positive and negative impact on our mental health

TRANSGENDER
A personal tale of battles and successes

UNIVERSAL CREDIT
A new benefit causing stress for many
“The grass is not ‘greener’ on the other side – it is just another shade of green.”

Annika Sorensen, Take Stress from Chaos to Calm
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A friend of mine, who is a single parent, began to struggle with mental health challenges. Her symptoms were very visible and I recognised many of my own challenges in her. The difference was that, while I resided in the haven of my mum's house, with her watching over me and caring for my needs, my friend was battling alone with severe anxiety while trying to care for her two small children.

Not to belittle the challenges those of us without children face – I myself have no children and battle with my mental health every day – it just made me take notice of the extra hurdles those with children face.

This also applies to people expecting children – a time that should be full of joy and expectation. But it can trigger mental health challenges in those who have never had difficulties with their mental health before, or existing challenges may resurface. This issue we spoke with Deborah Murthwaite, who is a perinatal clinical nurse, working with women from the point of confirmed pregnancy up until baby’s first birthday. She says: “Any new mum or mum-to-be can be at risk of becoming mentally unwell. Unfortunately, there is no immunity from this. It’s mother nature’s response to a major, stressful life event.”

Deborah teamed up with mental health midwife Nicky Pearson-Day and mother-of-two Rebecca Langridge to create a complete picture and share their own experiences of perinatal mental health. The article provides answers to some common questions in this field – see page 10.

We also worked with mental health charity Mind to discuss parenting where your children are perhaps older and their mental health needs taking into account, as well as your own. However, says Mind, “Many people worry that it will be difficult to cope with parenting if they experience mental health challenges. It is natural to be concerned about the impact this will have on you and your children. However, with the right support and resources, it is perfectly possible to be a good parent while managing your mental health challenges, and to care for and support your children in a positive way.” The article on page 14 provides positive steps you can take to look after your and your children’s mental health.

There are lists of other organisations equipped to support you during or provide information on mental health and pregnancy/parenting. See the features on pages 10 and 14.

Enjoy this issue!

Kelly Mansfield, Editor
Join our team!

We’re looking for a diverse group of people to work with us in creating Speak Your Mind magazine.

With six successful issues now under our belt, we want to take Speak Your Mind to the next level and we need your help!

We need people with a range of expertise and skills – perhaps you’re into news journalism, would like to help us address physical health, want to investigate children’s mental health or focus on benefits – there’s lots of opportunities.

We’ll be holding a planning meeting on 13th June at 2pm, Recovery College East Peterborough, to bring all those interested together to discuss ideas and make plans. If you want to get involved email symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk
First ever cross-government suicide prevention plan published

The government has published a suicide prevention plan, which focuses on how social media and the latest technology can identify those at risk of taking their own lives.

The plan will be led by the Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Jackie Doyle-Price and includes greater focus on the increase in suicide and self-harm among young people, while social media companies will be asked to take more responsibility for online content that promotes methods of suicide and self-harm.

Other parts of the plan include:

- Every local authority putting an effective suicide prevention plan in place;
- Ensuring every mental health trust has a zero-suicide ambition plan for mental health inpatients by the end of 2019;
- Every prison putting actions in place to reduce suicides and self-harm and improve staff awareness and training;
- Addressing the specific needs of the highest risk groups, including middle-aged men, with £25 million funding; and
- Improving research on things that can be linked to suicide, such as debt and gambling addiction.

Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Jackie Doyle-Price said:

“As a society we need to do everything we can to support vulnerable and at-risk people, as well as those in crisis, and give them the help they desperately need.

“Together, we will do everything in our power to meet our ambition to reduce suicides by at least 10% by 2020.”

Government makes women’s mental health a top priority

A new government report outlines how women experiencing mental health challenges can be better cared for.

The Women’s Mental Health Taskforce was set up in 2017 in response to evidence of deteriorating mental health among women and poor outcomes for those using support services.

The taskforce’s report draws on women’s own lived experience of mental ill health. It encourages commissioners, providers and practitioners to promote best practice in their organisations, while considering women’s individual, gender-specific needs.

The report looks at:

- The influence of women’s roles as mothers and carers on their needs;
- The trauma experienced by many women in inpatient facilities when they have been victims of violence and abuse in the past.

Health Minister Jackie Doyle-Price said:

“Women are more likely to experience common mental health conditions than men… Yet, too often, we hear stories of women who describe feeling powerless when it comes to their mental health treatment, those who feel neglected by inadequate aftercare or, more alarmingly, those who feel at risk in inpatient services.

“This just isn’t good enough. I’m determined that this report will take an important first step towards our aim of tackling the injustices facing women, while ensuring that no vulnerable woman slips through the net.”
Citizens Advice has launched a new service called Help to Claim for those who need help to apply for Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a new benefit that combines six benefits into one, including Jobseekers Allowance and Working Tax Credits. It is now fully rolled out across the UK. When fully implemented, around seven million people in England and Wales will be receiving Universal Credit.

People will now be able to get support from Citizens Advice as they submit their Universal Credit application to get their first full payment. Help will be tailored to the individual and available face-to-face, over the phone and online through webchat and advice content. This may include assistance with the online application form or help with providing evidence such as childcare costs. Read more about Universal Credit on page 31.

Mental Health Awareness Week focuses on body image

Hosted by the Mental Health Foundation, Mental Health Awareness Week 2019 will take place from Monday 13 to Sunday 19 May 2019 and the theme for 2019 is body image – how we think and feel about our bodies.

During the week the Mental Health Foundation will be publishing new research, considering some of the reasons why our body image can impact the way that we feel, campaigning for change and publishing practical tools.

“Last year we found that 30% of all adults have felt so stressed by body image and appearance that they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope. That’s almost one in every three people,” says the Mental Health Foundation.

“Body image issues can affect all of us at any age and directly impact our mental health.”

As part of Mental Health Awareness Week, the Mental Health Foundation will:

- publish the results of a UK-wide survey on body image and mental health;
- look at body image issues across a lifetime – including how it affects children and young people, adults and people in later life;
- highlight how people can experience body image issues differently, including people of different ages, genders, ethnicities and sexualities; and
- use its research to continue campaigning for positive change and publish practical tools to help improve the nation’s relationship with their bodies.

To get involved in this year’s event, go to: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/get-involved

All pupils to be taught about mental and physical wellbeing

All children in England will be taught how to look after their mental wellbeing and recognise when classmates may be struggling, as the government unveils new guidance for the introduction of compulsory health education.

Bold new plans set out by the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, confirm that, from September 2020, pupils of all ages will be taught the new subject – with a focus on promoting the positive link between physical and mental health.

Making health education universal – and updating sex education guidance for the first time since 2000 – will ensure pupils are prepared for the opportunities and challenges of an “ever more complex” world, both on- and offline.

At primary school, pupils will learn that mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life and why simple self-care – like getting enough sleep and spending time outdoors and with friends – is important.

This will go hand-in-hand with content on nutrition, the importance of staying active, and recognising the early signs of physical illness – ensuring pupils understand how mental and physical health are linked.

Read more at: www.gov.uk/government/news/all-pupils-will-be-taught-about-mental-and-physical-wellbeing
Taking place this spring...

Mind Wellbeing Workshops
Half-day, 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. Workshops are funded to support people with their mental health. Courses on Anxiety Management, Anger Management for Men, Anger Management for Women and Mindfulness are available.
www.cpslmind.org.uk/what-we-do/wellbeing-service/wellbeinggroups-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.

Illuminate Confidence for Change
Confidence for Change is a unique course which focuses on building self-confidence and strengthening self-belief at a fundamental level, enabling people to make productive changes in their lives as they define them. This includes getting closer to work, volunteering, achieving health goals, managing anxiety and mental health. The course takes place over four days, one day a week, in a group setting. Illuminate is now open to fill places on its next course in Ely, starting on Thursday 2nd May. To find out more go to: https://illuminatecharity.org.uk/userfiles/BriefingNoteEly2019.pdf. You can also email for further details at info@illuminatecharity.org.uk

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

Michaelhouse Singers
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

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

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

Lifecraft creative groups
A range of groups which offer the opportunity to explore new methods of expression in a supportive environment:
Craft for Smiles Workshop – Tuesdays, 12pm-2pm
Fun with Words – Wednesdays, 2pm-4pm
Singing Group – Thursdays, 12pm-1.30pm
Art Course – Fridays, 1.30pm-3.30pm
www.lifecraft.org.uk/our-services/creative-groups
### 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 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](http://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](http://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

### 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](http://www.moodswings.org.uk/what-can-we-do/workshops)

### 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.


### 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](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)

### Andys Man Club
A peer-to-peer support group for men, taking place in Peterborough. Men are welcome to come along for a “brew and a chat”. Based on the fact that suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45, the group aims to let men know that it’s ok to talk.

[www.andysmanclub.co.uk](http://www.andysmanclub.co.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
Mum’s the word

Any new mum or mum-to-be can be at risk of becoming emotionally and mentally unwell. Perinatal* clinical nurse specialist Deborah Murthwaite, together with mental health midwife Nicky Pearson-Day and mother-of-two Rebecca Langridge, answer some common questions.

Motherhood is one of the toughest but most important and rewarding jobs in the world, but trying to find the balance with relationships, time to yourself and maintaining your identity whilst adjusting to this new role can be a challenge.

“As new mothers, we are faced with brand new emotions and feelings that we have never felt before. I was overwhelmed by how different I felt, suddenly I had a vulnerable little person who was entirely dependent on me. This I found extremely daunting. I know

“Having time for self-care keeps us in tune with the people we were before becoming mums. That person is still important.”

Pregnancy

- Changes in mood ie. feeling sad more than usual and difficult to cheer up.
- Not feeling connected to your baby or feeling over worried about baby.

Birth

- Feeling over worried about giving birth.
- Previous birth experiences that have left you feeling afraid.

Baby Blues

(Up to 2 weeks)

- 80% new mums can experience noticeable changes in moods up to two weeks following giving birth.

Postnatal Illness

(4-6 weeks)

- Persistent noticeable changes in mood that aren’t going away.
- Feeling more worried than usual for no reason.
- Having worrying thoughts more than usual about yourself or baby.
- Not sleeping (even when baby is asleep) or not feeling hungry.
- Finding it hard to be around your baby.

*Perinatal* means the point of confirmed pregnancy up until baby’s first birthday.
now that it is entirely normal to feel like this. Hormones are everywhere and we now have 101 new things to think and worry about.”

But who is at risk?
Any new mum or mum-to-be can be at risk of becoming mentally unwell. Unfortunately, there is no immunity from this. It’s mother nature’s response to a major, stressful life event. However, some mums are at higher risk than others, particularly mums with past or current mental health challenges.

Almost all women experience some stress, worries and changes in mood during pregnancy, just like in everyday life. These short-lasting mood changes are both normal and common and do not cause harm to you or your lovely bump.

How is this different to mental health challenges?
“I realised something was wrong when these overwhelming thoughts turned into fear; fear of intrusive thoughts that were taking over my mind and I became unhealthily obsessed with my child’s safety. The thoughts were terrifying, and I couldn’t get them from my mind. I’ve had similar thoughts for years but being pregnant and having a baby intensified them.”

When mental health challenges do fall into the equation, it may cause motherhood to feel like a lonely, frightening and stressful experience. These challenges can occur anytime during the perinatal period as detailed below.

Why would that happen to me?
What research does tell us is that one in five mums can experience perinatal mental health challenges. There is a range of factors that can make mums and mums-to-be more vulnerable. These can include previous or current mental health challenges, family history of first-generation perinatal illness, adverse childhood experiences, previous birth traumas, low self-esteem and physical health or lifestyle problems. These can be mild symptoms and go away within a few weeks to months, but for some mums they remain throughout pregnancy and for the first year or sometimes longer. Early support can reduce the time it takes you to feel better and there is so much support available.

The most important thing to remember is some stress and worry in pregnancy is completely normal and will not affect you or your bump.

Will I be dragged into hospital if I share how I’m feeling?
No! Women often feel they are flawed in some way or not strong enough to cope if they have mental health challenges and report that they feel judged (and sometimes judge themselves) as not being a good parent.

If you share any worries about your mental health with your healthcare professional i.e. your midwife, GP or health visitor, you will receive additional support within the community. Only very few mums require support within the hospital environment, and these are through mother and baby units with specialised staff who aim to get mums and babies home quickly, back to their families and on the road to recovery.

“Being unwell makes you feel like you are a burden, that you’re not doing your best as a mother and scared, but the people around you; family, friends and professionals do want to help and support you, they really do, it’s just taking that first step to speak to someone you feel comfortable with.”

Will my children be taken away if I tell a professional about my mental health challenges?
No! It is normal for you to be concerned about sharing information about your mental wellbeing as there is a great deal of negative media coverage, which leads to stigma about mental health and social services. Talking about any worries you have is a positive step, so please do not feel scared.

The role of the professional supporting you is to listen without judgement and work with you to discuss any worries or concerns when possible. In a few cases they may feel support from social care would be helpful to you, but this is always shared with you beforehand. It is a common misconception that social workers want to take people’s children away. In fact, their role is to support families staying together.

“As difficult as it was, I started to talk about my thoughts and how they were affecting me, and it felt like a huge weight was lifted. At no point did I feel judged or was I made to feel like the awful person that I had thought I was. My priority always was and always will be my children, I knew I had to keep going for them. It was scary at first, but I started to take them to baby groups. It was nice to forget about my thoughts and what I had been feeling for a few hours and spend time with other mums who I could talk to about teething, weaning and first smiles.”

How can I get help and support?
Your midwife will ask you some routine questions at your initial appointment about your mental health, or it may be your health visitor during your first postnatal check.

Your midwife or health visitor will be able to plan your care to support your mental health during the perinatal period. This might involve offering you support from a specialist midwife, perinatal mental health nurse or psychological therapist to discuss what may help and support you. There are a lot of options available. It’s not just about taking medication!
pregnancy

What support is out there?
“I have had brilliant support from my perinatal nurse, my partner and my friend. They have distracted me from my thoughts when I’ve needed it; they’ve let me have a massive cry, which I had been keeping inside; they have made me laugh when all I wanted to do was run away. Most importantly though, they all kept reminding me that I was a fantastic mother who was loved, especially by my children, I just faced challenges sometimes, like all mothers do.”

Your midwifery team and health visitor are trained with perinatal issues and can offer you additional support or listening visits. If they feel you need additional support, you may get referred to the perinatal mental health team, but please don’t worry. We are all a friendly bunch of people and most of us in the team are mothers too, so we get it!

The role of the perinatal team is to provide guidance to your healthcare professional. They may also provide you directly with care and advice on managing your mental health. This includes advice on medication during pregnancy and with breastfeeding, pre-birth planning (should you need extra support during delivery), and other needs as identified by the team supporting you.

The perinatal team always advise that if you are taking medication, not to stop it yourself but seek advice and guidance from your GP first. There are a lot of medications that are safe to take in pregnancy and breastfeeding, should you need this. Stopping abruptly could cause your symptoms to return quickly, which may not be healthy for you or your baby in the long run.

CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) is effective during the perinatal period for treating mild to moderate symptoms and this should be offered to you first should you need this support, or alongside medication.

“I was overwhelmed by how different I felt, suddenly I had a vulnerable little person who was entirely dependent on me.”

What else can help?
Self-help is just as effective. There are loads of charity organisations locally that you can self-refer to, i.e. Home Start, National Childbirth Trust or Mind, which are experienced in supporting mums during the perinatal period.

In addition, your healthcare professional and local children’s centre have lots of contacts and resources that can guide you in the right direction.

Other national charities/organisations via the web have lots of helpful information on self-help that you can try (see box, below). Avoid googling information as there are a lot of scary things online that aren’t necessarily true or helpful.

Other self-help that works:
- Mindfulness. Research shows this is a highly effective technique, especially during pregnancy, to keep stress low.
- Connecting with people. Get to those mother and baby groups. Peer support is one of the best medicines for recovery with postnatal problems.
- Play/tummy time with your baby or bump. It can feel silly talking to your bump or baby when they don’t talk back, but it’s magic stuff in helping their development and your bond.

Advice, information and support

Mind: Postnatal depression and perinatal mental health
www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/postnatal-depression-and-perinatal-mental-health

NHS: Mental health problems and pregnancy
www.nhs.uk/conditions/psychological-wellbeing-service.htm

Dads Matter UK
www.dadsmatteruk.org/

Talking Therapies: Wellbeing for Mums and Dads
www.talkingtherapies.berkshire.nhs.uk/page_sa.asp?idKey=250

CPTFT Psychological Wellbeing Service
www.cptfts.org/services/pwa/psychological-wellbeing-service.htm

Self-Care – Pandas Foundation UK
www.pandasfoundation.org.uk/self-care/

Family Action: Perinatal Support Services
www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/early-years/perinatal-support-services/

Tommy’s: Perinatal Mental Health Experiences of Women and Health Professionals
www.tommys.org/sites/default/files/Perinatal_Mental_Health_ Experiences%20of%20women.pdf

Maternal OCD
maternalocd.org/

Tommy’s: Depression in pregnancy
www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/im-pregnant/mental-wellbeing/specific-mental-health-conditions/depression-pregnancy

Royal College of Psychiatrists: Postpartum psychosis
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/postpartum-psychosis

“I found taking time for myself helped a lot; going for a walk, listening to music on my own or just sitting down for five minutes with a cup of tea whilst my partner was with the kids or after they went to bed. Having time for self-care keeps us in tune with the people we were before becoming mums. That person is still important”.

I still feel a bit scared to ask for help!
Please don’t feel scared! Perinatal mental health awareness is on the increase across the UK, with new development of NHS perinatal services such as community teams, specialised mental health midwives and the expansion of new builds for mother and baby units. Staff who man these services receive specialised training and are aware of the barriers for women to engage to get the right help and support early on.

In the beginning of your motherhood journey there will be lots of sleepless nights and doubts within yourself. You must make your own self-care and mental health a priority; only you can look after you.

And above all else please remember this: You’re doing amazing Mumma-Bear!”
Black, dark and foggy, cold, thick and dense
Is this my end? Bad thoughts so intense
Banging and pounding, killing the brain
Why must I deal with this? I just need real pain
Attack with a fist, smash against a wall
Knock in some sense, to cope with it all
Self-harming the head, doesn’t always stop there
Ripping and tearing, hidden scars I do bear
Year after year, this cycle goes on
But this isn’t right, I need to be strong
Therapy’s taught me there is a better way
Change black to colour, that’ll happen one day.
Out with self-harm and try something new
Open up, talk to someone, a mini break-through
Unknown and scary or maybe just hard
But colour will come if you let down your guard
That person won’t judge, be brave, try and share
That person will listen, that person will care
Trust in that person, their support you will need
That person will understand, a new life you can lead
One step at a time, take it steady and slow
Confide in that person, a friendship will grow
From darkness to light, your freedom to fly
Now go! Paint a new picture, use colourful dye.

Written by KH
Many people worry that it will be difficult to cope with parenting if they experience mental health challenges. It is natural to be concerned about the impact this will have on you and your children. However, with the right support and resources, it is perfectly possible to be a good parent while managing your mental health challenges, and to care for and support your children in a positive way.

Mental health challenges can make day-to-day parenting feel harder. For example, anxiety may make you more easily worried, or low mood may mean that you have low energy.

You may worry about how your mental health affects your child; for example, whether they may experience stress or mental health challenges themselves.

Or perhaps you or your child will have difficulties because of other people’s judgement about mental health. For example, people may judge your parenting abilities because you have mental health challenges, or your child may be bullied or teased.

In addition, your child may have to take on responsibilities around the home to help you, such as preparing food or getting younger siblings ready for school. This may have an impact on their school work or the amount of free time they have to play or see their friends.

Seeking help may be hard because you are worried that people may see you as a less capable parent, and you may put pressure on yourself to cope for longer than you are able.

There may be times when you become unwell and can’t carry out your usual parenting responsibilities, or have to go into hospital. This can cause practical issues, and stress and worry for you and your family.

It can be easy to blame any difficulties you have as a parent on your mental health, or try to over-compensate by becoming a ‘perfect parent’. But it’s important to remember that all parents have difficult times and there is no such thing as being perfect.

Try not to put too much pressure on yourself or give yourself too much of a hard time. Remember that you have general skills as a parent – regardless of any mental health challenges – that will remain useful.

What can I do to help myself?
Parenting with mental health challenges can be difficult and there is no one solution that will sort out everything.

- Develop self-help tools, such as mindfulness or relaxation
- Make regular time for yourself with no external demands (‘me’ time)
- Explore different treatment options so that you know what works for you

Talking about mental health
- Contact an anti-stigma campaign such as Time to Change for advice on sharing information about your experience
- Think carefully about how much you want to say and to who
- Never feel you have to explain more than you feel comfortable with

Having a support network in place
- Let people know early if you are finding it hard to cope and need support
- Ask for practical help such as childcare, transport and cooking meals
- Ask the school or nursery to keep an eye out for any behaviour changes in your children
- Try to identify one or two people who you can ask for emotional support

Being organised
- Stick to regular times for routine tasks like mealtimes and bedtimes

“Most illnesses don’t have society making you feel guilty about raising a child while sick. Mental health challenges, though, make the guilt huge – it’s as if others think you have a choice in it.”
Plan ahead for the busy morning times each evening by making lunches and packing bags

Make advance plans to reduce your responsibilities during unwell periods and check out options for extra support during these times

Write down family routines so anyone supporting you can keep things consistent

How can I help my children?
Here are a few things that you can try to help reduce any impact that your mental health challenges may have on your children:

Honest communication
- Talking to your child honestly about your mental health can reduce any fear or confusion they may be feeling. Things that will help make the conversations a little easier are:
  - stick with clear and age-appropriate information
  - explain as simply as possible how your mental health affects how you feel and how you behave
  - make regular time to talk to older children about how they are feeling
  - be available to listen if they want to talk
  - answer questions as honestly as possible
  - reassure them that they are not responsible for how you feel
  - agree what information you feel happy for them to share, and with whom

- ask people you trust to also keep an eye on your child’s wellbeing
- if you feel concerned about your child’s mental health, you can ask your GP to assess them, or make contact with a local support organisation for young people such as Young Minds

Make sure their caring responsibilities are manageable
If your child has responsibilities around the home, this might mean they are classified as a young carer. These could include looking after the household, shopping or helping you with your basic needs such as washing, dressing or taking medication.

Try to keep track of how much they are doing and make sure this isn’t having a negative impact on them:
- be aware of the relationship between responsibility and stress
- ensure that they balance any caring responsibilities with activities of their choice
- build in rest time each week where your children can ‘do nothing’
- if it feels difficult for you to help balance your child’s caring responsibilities, ask for some advice from a support organisation such as the Carers Trust.

Think about what they need in their own lives
Helping your child to be happy and healthy is a satisfying part of being a parent. In order to support them you could:

“Perfect people or perfect parents don’t exist – just focus on one day at a time and do the best you can.”

- mental health is not being adversely affected.
- Steps you could take are:
  - devise a simple way to check in with your child about their stress levels, e.g. ‘On a scale of 1–10 how relaxed are you feeling?’
  - keep an eye out for changes in their behaviour
  - notice if your child doesn’t want to participate in activities that they usually enjoy
  - pay attention when children become angry or aggressive
  - attend parents’ evenings at school, nursery or any after-school clubs as much as possible
  - talk to them about their experience of school
  - create a quiet and clear place at home where they can study and prioritise time each week for them to do schoolwork
  - support their friendships to develop and strengthen; if you don’t feel able to have their friends around, see if you can help them to set up times where they can meet outside the home
  - help them take part in activities they enjoy
  - respect their privacy by letting them have their own space
encourage physical exercise, to let off steam and reduce anxiety or worry

Help and support
If you are parenting with mental health challenges, there may be times when you need additional support to help you cope. Different types of services are available for you and your family:
- Advocacy
- Mental health services
- Social Care
- Charities and voluntary organisations.

“It was extremely hard for me to admit to my boys that I wasn’t OK. But I saw it as vital for their own future mental health to know that this was alright and they could ask for help whenever they needed it.”

Details of these types of support, as well as steps to take in a crisis, are available in the full parenting guide from Mind.

You can download the guide at: www.mind.org.uk/media/4866473/parenting-with-a-mental-health-problem-2016.pdf

Other sources of information

Mind Infoline
0300 123 3393
info@mind.org.uk
mind.org.uk

Time to Change
time-to-change.org.uk
Anti-stigma campaign led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness

Carers Trust
carers.org
Charity for/about carers

Childline
0800 1111
childline.org.uk
Confidential helpline for children and young people in distress

Mumsnet
mumsnet.com
Forums about parenting, including parenting and mental health

Family Lives
24-hour helpline: 0808 800 2222
familylives.org.uk
Information and support for parents and families

NSPCC
Adult helpline: 0808 800 5000
Child helpline: 0800 1111
nspcc.org.uk
Support for children and anyone worried about a child. Includes Family Smiles groups for children who have a parent with a mental health problem
The National Federation Women’s Institute (NFWI) is the largest women’s organisation in the UK, with some 212,000 members in over 6,000 WIs across England and Wales. It has a long history of undertaking educational work and campaigning on a diverse range of issues.

At the NFWI Annual Meeting in Cardiff on 6th June 2018 delegates voted to pass a resolution – the Mental Health Matters resolution – which sought to tackle the stigma associated with mental health challenges. The resolution was passed with 98% of the vote.

The resolution put forward was:

“Mental health matters as much as physical health. The NFWI urges all WI members to recognise the importance of parity between mental health and physical health and take action to make it as acceptable to talk about mental health as physical health.”

I think this shows how just one WI can make a difference within their local community. All the actions they are taking could have a positive influence on individual members. These ladies could share these ideas with family members, friends, as well as work colleagues and their children.

It could also help members of this WI who may have or have had mental health challenges to feel more accepted within the group whether or not they have shared this with other members.

On a more practical level the NFWI have also produced a ‘Make Time for Mental Health’ action pack (with help from mental health charity Time for Change), which offers tips on how people can look after their mental health. Also, how we can take actions to support the resolution.

They have also produced a postcard to be sent to GP surgeries. The message on the postcard asks GPs to “remember to ask your patients about their mental health as well as their physical health.”

Overall, I feel that the campaign could over time help bring about real change. This could include ensuring equal access to treatment and making equal efforts to improve standards of care. It could also help tackle broader issues including the stigma associated with mental health.

One thing to remember though is change does not happen overnight. In 1954 the WI put forward the campaign to Keep Britain Tidy, which is still relevant in today’s society. Hopefully WI members will carry on campaigning over many years and in time it will be as acceptable to talk about mental health issues as physical health issues.

For more information on the campaign and available resources, go to: www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns/current-campaigns-and-initiatives/make-time-for-mental-health
Where did the idea for CALM town come from?
I cycled from London to Paris in the summer of 2018 for the men’s suicide prevention charity CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably). In my work as a Methodist Minister I was coming into contact with young men who were struggling with life and it felt that they were an unseen and unrepresented group compared to others. In the lead up to the bike ride, Tim Drye was made Mayor of St Ives and one of the goals for his time in office was to raise awareness of the mental health challenges facing many, especially young men. So, we had a coffee together and thought about what might be possible if we used our positions and connections in the town.

What is the inspiration behind CALM town?
When we met we discussed how it would be great if we became a community that said no one has to struggle alone with their emotions or problems. A place where ‘it is ok not to be ok’. A town where friends didn’t change the subject if someone started to share they were not ok. The town had already done a brilliant job in becoming a Dementia Friendly town so we knew it was a place that cares about people’s wellbeing. After that meeting I was task to contact CALM and ask if they fancied working with a little market town in Cambridge to become a CALM town. When I called I got through to Ben Hawley who thought it was a great idea and so began the journey we are on now.

How many people are involved? Who are they?
To say we were worried at the start that we had begun something we couldn’t resource is an understatement! But the number of people involved in the project has started to grow. There is a group of amazing people who are meeting regularly to steer the next steps. We

“It will be a place where we don’t believe that you need to be an expert or professional to help but just a human being who wants to reach out to those for who life is hard.”
How do you think views towards mental health need to change?
I think the first thing is that we all have to look after our mental health, in the same way we need to have good health in other aspects of our lives. We all need to get over the stigmas – the ones projected by society on those who struggle, that somehow it is in their power to ‘pull themselves together’.

What is the relationship between CALM and the team at St Ives?
The CALM team are offering us support the whole way through. They came to our latest meeting and were shocked at just how many people were there and the support in the town. They have been a really helpful point of reference when we are not sure what to do.

How will you know when St Ives has achieved CALM town status?
I am not sure we have an end goal. The hope is that we will be a town that is constantly responding to the challenges around mental health as they arise. As technology moves on or the world changes the hope is that we would have the foresight and flexibility to have help in place before we wish we had done something.

Is the idea to roll this out across the country?
St Ives will always be our focus, however, as the project has grown and we have worked with CALM we have realised that this could help other communities in the UK. It was never the idea to change the world but if our experiences and stories can help we would love it to. We know that the new government Minister for the Prevention of Suicide is interested in our story and it would be great to inform wide change.

How can others get involved?
You can become a part of the mailing list, just email stivescalmtown@gmail or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CALMtown That is where we will upload all our events and info.

“CALM town gives people the opportunity to be a part of something bigger. We are not helpless and together we can achieve a culture change around the stigmas of mental health.”

What do those activities achieve?
I think there are many people who feel powerless when faced with mental health challenges. Be it themselves or loved ones – people think, what can I do? CALM town gives people the opportunity to be a part of something bigger. We are not helpless and together we can achieve a culture change around the stigmas of mental health. It has been wonderful that many of the events are made up of a mix of those who are challenged and those who want to help and no one knows who is who – there is only a desire for change that unites.

What activities have taken place so far?
One great idea that will be replicated by lots of people is Meet Your Street. Before Christmas a couple who attended one of the early meetings went away and posted an invitation to everyone on their road to a cup of tea and a mince pie. It was great success and people who had never spoken to each other despite passing each other most days had a conversation and began in a small way to build community. There was even a 104-year-old that many didn’t know lived on the road!
Yarn bombing

Kim Laidler discusses how yarn bombing is evolving into a popular art form that has done wonders for her mental health.

Yarn bombing is a type of street art that shows colourful displays of knitted or crocheted yarn rather than paint or chalk. It is almost exclusively about reclaiming and personalising sterile or cold public places.

I started yarn bombing while in hospital. The Women’s Institute at Fulbourn Hospital had yarn bombed some trees on the site. It lifted my mood and inspired me to make one of my own. At the time I had been using my creative side as a comfort and way to remind myself that part of me still existed.

I use crochet as a therapy, to keep my hands busy and bring order to a racing mind. Instead of owning endless blankets, I use what I produce to create yarn bombs.

Yarn bombing has surprisingly made me feel part of the community. I put my work up near to where I live, it’s my way of communicating and saying “hi, I’m here”. I also like to think I can pass on that spark that art brings into my life when people see my work. People stop and ask me about my yarn bombing when I am putting it up, I say I want you to look at it and for it to bring a bit of happiness or humour to your day.

Putting my work up in public spaces has made me a more confident person. Yarn bombing can be seen as graffiti, but I know from experience it can be taken down so easily. Because of this it makes me feel capable of taking life a little less seriously.

I’ve discovered that yarn bombing is so widespread. I love looking at other people’s ideas and finding different ways to express myself by using the wool and the structure it is coating. It excites me to think of new ideas, each design is individual to the tree, post, railing, bench, postbox, traffic light, bus stop, Anthony Caro sculpture…

“Yarn bombing has surprisingly made me feel part of the community. I put my work up near to where I live, it’s my way of communicating and saying “hi, I’m here’.”
Wellness

What do I think is normal for me?
When I meet other people, I wonder what they see?
Do they understand the standards that I set myself?
Or has my attitude left me lonely and on the shelf?

Have I been treated really well in my life?
Or has it all been about stress and strife?
The “Black Dog” of depression is never far away
So, I have to bring him to heel every single day

When I am feeling down and feeling low
Please hold my hand and I’ll try not to let it show
Someone to care about me is what I need
To keep well and nurtured we shouldn’t have to plead

Exercise can give you time to clear your mind
It’s a chance to escape and forget life’s daily grind
And completing a task you set yourself to do
Gives a sense of achievement that can leave you feeling brand new

The warning signs are there for all to see
Not speaking and head down below your knee
Now’s the time to contact a friend
It’s time to get real and comprehend
Time to talk about your problems and let it all out
With someone to tell what it’s all about
Someone who listens and doesn’t interrupt
Try to unwind and don’t be abrupt

A wellness toolbox could help you to survive
Using its contents will help you to thrive
So, fill it with the things that help you each day
So, they’re ready to use to help you on your way
Things that give comfort and help you to keep calm
The ones that are special and work like a charm
So, don’t get downhearted get help if you need it
Use what you can if you know it will fit
Everything’s gonna be alright

As soon as you believe something, you cease to accept that things have no significance, says John Nicholson, CPFT Chaplain, as he discusses the importance of faith.

Everything’s gonna be alright. We sang this in Chapel this morning. It comes from a song Bob Marley made famous: No Woman No Cry. It’s a statement of faith. I’d happily sing that line a thousand times and sing it because I meant it or because I want it to be true for me. I want it to be true for you as well, of course I do. And that’s a statement of faith, an expression of hope.

For a little while in my life I was overwhelmed with a sense of pointlessness; hope in nothing. No hope. This opened a door to destructive habits and dark despair. I put any faith I might have had in anything in a box and set it on fire, so to speak.

What surprised me was that a handful of people who found out about this experience asked me not to give up on faith [and I don’t mean religious faith – although some of them were religious people]. They invited me to not give up on faith in living, in life, by not giving up on putting trust in them, even the tiniest amount of trust, almost invisible to the naked eye. I was lucky enough to recover faith for myself, letting it grow in me as a result of the kind and caring influence and companionship of the people I mentioned. And then they were gone, and I moved on.

Alcoholics Anonymous showed me the power of faith, the kind of faith at work in recovery. I helped AA set up a meeting in a church where I worked, and I sat in with them several times for their open meetings. I found a brother in one of their members. He was wise. Wise in life’s ways and in staying well and healthy in body, mind and spirit – heart and soul, you could say. And I have never forgotten him, nor the lessons I took with me that helped that faith in me to grow.

I feed my faith in what I do — and in what I notice I do every day. I notice how deeply I love my son and feel the joy of being his father, being just the right father for him, so that he is happy and feels safe, cared for and accepted, just as he is, right at home. He and I have faith in each other. And I have never met someone as loyal and devoted to her family as my wife. That’s faith. Then there’s my daughter who goes where she will, like a free bird, finding her way out there, reaching out and reaching back to me and her mother when she needs that something extra from us. And that’s faith too.

And if you can identify with that struggle between hope and despair but choose hope, you are not alone. We are all around you. We are with you. We travel together. As I read today in a blog here: www.nathancolquhoun.com/2015/10/27/nihilism-vs-faith

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The only cure for nihilism [a belief in nothingness and of being cynical about loyalty] is faith. . . Faith in humans, faith in God, faith in goodness, faith in anti-oppressive practice, faith in the future or faith in an outcome. As soon as you believe something, you cease to accept that things have no significance.

“If you can identify with that struggle between hope and despair but choose hope, you are not alone. We are all around you. We are with you.”
A shock is an understatement. After all, I have worked with bodies as a remedial masseuse for over 25 years, I know how memories and stresses get locked in. But I was watching a TV programme when the subject of unexpressed grief came up. This was in relation to parting with a child for adoption – just what had happened to me.

My marriage had broken and I was pregnant, which at that time was unacceptable. A private adoption was arranged. I already had two small children and the divorce meant the children had lost all the relatives from their father’s side. That’s how things were back then. I was rented a terrace house for myself and the children.

When the baby came the children went into care until all was over. I was supposed to just get on with life, which I did, no space to grieve.

I started to suffer from migraines and was referred to in detrimental terms when I couldn’t work because my vision was blurred, let alone the pain. Things did not improve, by now the house had been sold and I was living and working in my parents’ house, in their office, which was the downstairs front room. The doctor said I would not be free of the migraine until I was out of my parents’ environment.

I bought *The Lady* magazine and took a residential post as a cook general. Life went on and after a few years doing various residential posts I met and married Mike, a gift from God. But after two and a half years of a happy marriage, Mike died.

“People cross the road because they don’t know what to say to a young widowed mum.”
This added to the unexpressed grief as there were the children, Mike’s mother and his son to consider. People cross the road because they don’t know what to say to a young widowed mum. I had one friend who had lost her father when young and she told me she had purposely stopped her mum from getting involved with anyone. Despite this, not realising that just the initial shock takes a good two years, I met a widower with a son and 18 months later remarried. Shortly after this I was to have a silent breakdown. The doctor wanted to double my already heavy load of prevention, treatment and side effect medication; I declined and came off the lot, this before they knew about withdrawal and the Tranx organisation. Over the next few years I followed a specific diet, had chiropractic medication and regained my health. The chiropractic enabled me to breathe through my nose at 35, this was wonderful.

Seven years later, the business got into trouble, a key factor in me and my husband then getting a divorce. I had to rehouse the animals and the children. Dismantling your home and family is an extremely distressing thing, I had to grit my teeth and organise it. I got myself a residential post looking after my old headmistress who had had a stroke. Wagners’ Rienzi overture was my comforter. On my own I could cry or be comforted by the music, probably the only time I did cry, always silently.

Five years ago, I had an email from the adoption society saying my daughter was trying to trace me. I was invited to Australia by her mother and spent two months with them. When we met at the airport it was if we had never been apart. Mandy was so like my other daughter in so many ways it was amazing. I was able to send her older sister to meet her younger sister the following year and we are still in regular contact. All that didn’t touch the grief in the way that hearing I had probably not allowed my grief, which I hadn’t. Fifty-five years held in, buried. I’m still getting flashbacks but the iron bar has gone.

Poem

Where do you put the pain?
Pain which you have not allowed?
Pain which was NOT allowed
You weren’t supposed to feel
Did carrying on as normal help?
Did you even get time to heal?
Or did further pains push it further down?
Another loss and yet another
And, because you are a mother
All your needs you have to smother
Numbness, enormous void
Out in space, away, away
You’ll have to feel another day
Put off yet again
Your right to pain, to grieve
Black holes have, nothing to compare
Try coming back from out there

“Wagners’ Rienzi overture was my comforter. On my own I could cry or be comforted by the music, probably the only time I did cry, always silently.”

This surgery they also gave me a gall bladder op for the iron bar which was across my chest under my ribs. The symptoms persisted. To my amazement, after watching the TV programme I started to sob gently, still silently, and it went on for a couple of days, really heavy sobbing; guess what, my iron bar has gone. The memories of parting were too painful, the memory of my husband mingled with the joy of having had the two and a half years with him.
I see social media as being a double-edged sword, with both pros and cons. On the down side, I have found some posts trigger negative feelings, such as people happily socialising with people who have mistreated me, excitedly posting about something they’ve succeeded at that I haven’t due to my health difficulties, and even in a couple of instances have seen raging posts written in response to me having tried to explain why I couldn’t do something due to my disability.

It had taken me 15 years to gather up the courage to start asking for support from people who are familiar with my health challenges. I lost out on graduating from my nearly-completed university course due to my intense fear of speaking up about it, so seeing these aggressively written posts claiming that my explanation had been that of an unintelligent person hit me really hard. Posts like this can be hugely damaging, especially for those of us who are anxious about reaching out for help with their mental health.

However, as someone whose health has left them with problems of social isolation, I have also found there are many positives in social media which help me to connect with others as well as finding good opportunities to partake in. My best friends happen to live elsewhere in the country to me, and I find social media to be a vital part of staying in touch with them. It can really uplift my mood on a difficult day to be able to online chat and joke with friends I have a lot in common with. It can also cheer me up to look back at happy photo memories of my own, to be reassured by reading positive affirmations, and to laugh at funny memes.

In my school days I remember that arrangements with friends would often fall through. Event invites on social media arrangements tend to feel a lot more solid to me. We receive updates about them and I tend to get invited to things by a wider range of people I know. It can also lift my mood to find new photo memories after special occasions which had been taken by others. It can be a lot easier to find things to attend and end up feeling part of new communities which stay in touch online in between seeing each other.
Notifications.
- Stay off the newsfeed during events we can’t attend, holidays and times of political voting.
- Edit our settings to appear offline when we do not wish to be disturbed.
- Look back at photo memories of our happiest moments.
- Try to plan something else nice for ourselves to look forward to if we feel we are missing out on something social.

How to be considerate to others
In return, we can also try to limit triggering other people ourselves. We can:
- Take a moment to edit the audience of our post to exclude a person if we are posting about an achievement we know they have been unsuccessful in, or something we know would trigger upsetting memories for them.
- If our ideas of what is triggering differ too much we can try keeping in touch via methods which don’t have a shared newsfeed, such as Messenger.
- Remember that someone’s opinion and abilities will be based on their own life experiences and not yours. So don’t give an aggressive response if someone says they find something difficult that you are fortunate enough to be able to do easily. Pause to consider the circumstances of others and that you could be harming a vulnerable person.
- Don’t pressure someone if your message happens to show up as read without having had a response yet. The receiver may have just been leaving the house, just been about to go to sleep, have other commitments or need to take a day to best think over their answer to you.

How to protect yourself online
There are a number of things we can do to help protect our mental health online. We can:
- Unfollow people whose posts we find to be triggering.
- Edit our newsfeed settings to prioritise the posts of people that we’re happiest to see. It can help to include support pages which post a lot of positive affirmations.
- Edit our settings to limit our email notifications.
- For further information on protecting our mental health online you can visit Mind’s website pages on online mental health and Internetmatters.org.
In 2010 I completed a return to nursing course and by 2011 had secured myself a job as a mental health nurse on a ward within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT). A few years later, I switched to a community role as a Band 6 CPN and now, at the beginning of 2019, I work as a Band 3 Support Worker in the community.

This is not what you would call linear progression, and for you to understand it I would need to take you back to 2004. At this time, I was working in London managing a small mental health team. This was also the year I fully realised what I have always known; I experience what, at that time, was generally called Gender Dysphoria. My felt gender did not match at any level my visible gender.

Some things happened in my life that persuaded me this was now the time to understand and accept my transgender self. I left London, left my life as I knew it, and changed gender somewhere on the A1 travelling north. Of course, I wish it had been that easy! In reality, I went through numerous psychological evaluations and met several psychiatrists who diagnosed Gender Dysphoria and opened the gateway to accessing gender reassignment services (Charing Cross Hospital in my case). I began hormone therapy, underwent surgery, developed an affinity with chocolate that has lasted until this day. The chocolate thing I put down to being in a bed close to a snacks machine while in hospital. I now have a Gender Recognition Certificate and my Birth Certificate says ‘Female’.

There are decisions, and there are consequences. I did not anticipate that my decision to pursue gender reassignment would also precipitate my first confrontation with social exclusion, prejudice, and the nastier side of society. I will immediately balance that and say

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I have also been fortunate to have met some people who I would describe as truly beautiful in their acceptance of me. In the years immediately following gender reassignment my joy that I had been able to finally ‘become’ myself was replaced by struggles with mental health – notably, social anxiety in a most acute form. For a period of time, I did not step

Support worker Beth Collins tells of the battles and successes of her transgender journey.
I have had several conversations with colleagues and managers who ask, in a supporting way, if I would consider returning to qualified nursing. My pride always feels stroked at these times!

Outside of my house, I used to put the bins out after dark, when I could hide in the shadows. I was not working. I had not anticipated that society could be so scary for transgender people. If this coincides with a time of feeling fragile the result can be devastating.

Long story short, I rebuilt myself to the point where I was able to consider returning to mental health nursing – in a different gender. This was actually a major undertaking emotionally and psychologically. Once again, I underestimated the strength needed to complete this journey. This was not just about ‘doing’ a return to nursing course but also about redefining myself in relation to colleagues and those I cared for.

The stress of trying to juggle so many emotional tasks is extreme. I remember working nights and being in charge of the ward at a time when a service user took exception to my being transgender. This is a story for another day, but weeks of abuse took a steady toll. I did not share it with colleagues because my being transgender was one of those conversations that had never really happened. I think ‘being transgender’ was an elephant in the room.

To this day I cannot easily watch certain early evening TV programmes – the theme tunes remind me of getting ready to work nights. They give me flashbacks. The culmination of my return to nursing after gender reassignment was a mental breakdown that lasted, all told, for about 18 months. In my absence, my job as a CPN was subject to a wider consultation period. I don’t remember much about this – nor much at all of that 18 months. There came a time when, money running out, options diminishing, I had to make a decision about my role within CPFT. I was offered some qualified and non-qualified options. I was still very fragile and my confidence was at rock bottom, so I opted for reduced hours in a non-qualified role. The key deciding factor was that the team I would be working with were people I knew – I felt this would allow me to rebuild in a safer environment. A decision which proved true.

Here’s the thing. At one level I have experienced a sense of failure – of having ‘gone backwards’ in my career. I have had several conversations with colleagues and managers who ask, in a supporting way, if I would consider returning to qualified nursing. My pride always feels stroked at these times!

There is another reality, however, and that is I am probably still recovering from all that has gone before. Extreme trauma does not just vanish. A broken stick mended with glue cannot escape the fact that it was once broken. But a stick held together with glue has its own beauty – it exists, it survives, it functions.

I have learned to measure success differently. My role as a support worker has helped me to recover. It has helped me exist on a day-to-day basis. I enjoy what I do. I look back over the last few years and realise I have succeeded in things I did not fully accept I was even trying to achieve. I don’t put the bins out after dark any more. I have conversations with colleagues about being transgender. I am a diversity champion for CPFT. I have spoken at a diversity conference.

Success does not have to be linear – it does not have to be all in a straight line. Success is sometimes about winning those battles that no-one else even knows you are having – the hidden battles of mental health. As I write this, I think I have succeeded in unexpected ways to be successful in surviving. There are still days when I wobble, but I accept these for what they are. Each day is its own journey, and success is completing it.
For me art making is about connecting. This might be with a material, a source of inspiration, an experience. Often the materials I use and the way I use them add layers to the meaning. I use the creative process as a tool to gain perspective, relax, motivate and most of all to feel a sense of playfulness that can often be lost in this serious, adult world. Usually my work will organically become a mirror that can be used for self-reflection. In this way my art making stimulates acceptance and makes space for personal growth. I predominantly use clay and natural found materials and love getting messy whilst engrossed in the creative process.
Universal Credit is a new single, monthly benefit payment being introduced by the government to replace several benefits including those that support people who are too unwell to work.

However, the way it’s been rolled out has already caused real problems for many people with mental health challenges. For some the impact of going without financial support has been devastating.

We’ve heard from many of our Local Minds and campaigners that people are really struggling with the process. From the online system to how and when payments are made, it is leaving people vulnerable to debt and making their mental health worse.

Even research from the Department for Work and Pensions shows that there are many issues with Universal Credit that need resolving. They found, of people with long-term health conditions:

- 24% could not register a claim online
- 53% said they needed more support setting up their claim and
- 38% said they needed more ongoing support
- 50% were in financial difficulties compared to 33% of people in general

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We have been urging the government to fix these issues and to not start moving more people onto Universal Credit until they are ironed out. And we’re not the only ones. The National Audit Office produced a damning report which highlighted many of the same issues.

The next stage
The government has been looking to push ahead with plans that open up thousands of people with mental health challenges to the risk of being left without any income. Under these plans, anyone on older benefits would be told that their payments would stop, and that the responsibility for reapplying for Universal Credit would fall squarely on them. Anyone unable to reapply – for whatever reason – would be left not with their old benefits, not with Universal Credit, but with no money at all, which could leave people vulnerable to debt and with deteriorating mental health.

We want to see the government change those plans so that everyone can keep their older benefits until they’re on Universal Credit. If the government can’t guarantee that nobody will be left without their income as a result of the switch, we need to see MPs voting against these regulations.

IMPORTANT UPDATE
Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions, Amber Rudd has decided to delay the vote on these plans and has announced several changes including plans for a pilot of 10,000 people who currently need support from the benefit system. We hope this signals an important change to their approach to moving people over to Universal Credit. But there is still a long way to go to make sure that people don’t risk losing their income as part of the switch over. Keep checking this webpage, www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/benefits/universal-credit/the-next-stage/ or sign up as a campaigner for updates.

For further information, take a look at some frequently asked questions at: www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/benefits/where-you-can-find-help/moving-from-esa-to-universal-credit-faqs/
The Edge Café

Located in Cambridge, The Edge Café is the first of its kind in helping to promote and sustain recovery.

The Edge recovery café has just celebrated its second birthday (well – in November 2018) and is going from strength to strength. It has become a recognised and valued venue in Cambridge to provide individuals in recovery from substance misuse and/or mental health challenges a safe, supportive space to develop skills, lost confidence and generate opportunities for positive change. Most importantly, it is a place where people can be.

The Edge Café is located at the front of the Brookfields Hospital site on Mill Road, serving great coffee and delicious healthy, homemade food to the general public. The café works collaboratively with Fareshare – the UK’s largest charity fighting hunger and food waste – and is the home of the first community fridge in Cambridge! The Edge Café is a community café with a recovery heart. A working café, but one which also provides a visible demonstration of the possibility of recovery from substance misuse and/or mental health challenges. The café provides space for those in recovery to meet, volunteer, gain paid employment, share skills and experiences and feel part of the local community.

A range of arts and crafts and wellbeing groups run out of the café, including ‘knit and natter’, tai chi, mindfulness and meditation, walks, drumming workshops, music and social events and storytelling. There is also a conference room in the building – The Hayman Room – which is fully equipped with interactive multi-media boards for meetings of up to 15 people, which can be rented out by the community and local groups or businesses.

This is the first dedicated recovery café to be developed in Cambridgeshire and is run as an independent resource and registered as a social enterprise. It runs as a commercial business in order to provide sustainability for the project. The Edge Café received an initial capital grant from Public Health England. The project is a great example of coproduction and building community resilience, with individuals in recovery working with The Edge Café and CGL treatment service to develop a unique resource for the local community.

“The Edge Café is a fantastic resource providing genuine opportunities for those in recovery,” says Gail Sawyer, Senior Recovery Coordinator, The Edge Café. “It places recovery within the heart of the community and is run for service users by service users. We want the general public to use the café, to enjoy the range of great food and drinks on offer and to help support the project. It is important that everyone can see the possibilities of recovery.”

For more information visit: theedgecafecambridge.org
colouring page

Lucy Shelton
Feature your work on the cover of Speak Your Mind

Do you enjoy photography or art and would love to display your work on a magazine cover? Well, we have the opportunity for you!

Every issue, we like to feature original images designed to illustrate the issues covered throughout the magazine.

That includes the all-important front cover!

So, if you’d like to grab this opportunity, drop us an email at symmagazine@cpft.nhs.uk and we’ll send you a proper brief!

Looking forward to seeing your work.
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
0207 794 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.blurttout.org

Campaign Against Living Miserably
Charity dedicated to preventing male suicide
www.calamzone.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
0344 441 444

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
0808 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

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.lochlaw.co.uk
0203 687 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://mhfagenland.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
020 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

Mind CPSL
Support those recovering from mental health challenges
www.cpslmind.org.uk

Money and Mental Health Policy Institute
Independent charity committed to breaking the link between financial difficulty and mental health challenges
www.moneyandmentalhealth.org
0207 848 1448

MQ
Championing and funding research into mental health
www.mqmentalhealth.org
0333 440 1220

National Sleep Foundation
Dedicated to improving health and wellbeing through sleep education and advocacy
www.sleepfoundation.org

Recovery College East
Delivering courses and workshops to explore and improve personal wellbeing
www.recovery-college-east.org.uk
Cambridge 01223 227510
Peterborough 01733 746660

Red2Green
Cambridgeshire charity supporting people with learning disabilities, on the autistic spectrum or living with mental ill health
www.changingtheredlightsgreen.co.uk
01223 811662

Rethink Mental Illness
Expert, accredited advice for everyone affected by mental health challenges
www.rethink.org
0300 5000 927
rethinkyourmind.co.uk

Richmond Fellowship
Recovery-focused organisation offering a range of mental health support services
www.richmondfellowship.org.uk
0207 6973300

Samaritans
Offers a safe place to talk at any time about whatever is getting to you
www.samaritans.org
116 123

Scope
Provides support, information and advice to disabled people and their families
www.scope.org.uk
0808 800 3333

The Mix
Support service for young people
www.themix.org.uk
0808 808 4994

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
“Finding the key will set you free. YOU are the key.”
Hazel Butterworth