

Talking Therapy

The Listening Service (TLS) Quarterly Newsletter
Issue 6 June 2011

Welcome to Issue 6 of Talking Therapy.

Over the past few months we have begun to notice a shift in the recognition of specific issues within the minority ethnic communities in relation to mental health issues. You'll be able to read some brief information about the Time to Change campaign which is working towards ending the stigma for people with mental health problems as well as the Mental Health Foundation's work on African, African-Caribbean and South Asian women's narratives of recovering from mental health distress. It is certainly positive to see the work and research of others supporting the need for organisations like The Listening Service and this is something we will continue to highlight to all.

You will also find Neelam's regular insightful article, this time about ending the stigma relating to mental health, along with a new piece introducing one member of our Executive Committee. We hope, once again, that you enjoy Talking Therapy!

TLS Executive Committee

Time to Change and Mental Health Awareness in Sport

By Neelam Farzana

It was my pleasure to be amongst an audience of mental health sufferers and those working to bring about change in attitudes towards those with mental health issues at this launch of the Time to Change campaign in Harrow.

One speaker at the event on Thursday 9 June mentioned how, during her difficult time, she was expected to hide away from her relatives which led to her having difficulty in communicating with others. Another speaker sang some songs, spoke about her own ordeal and struggling with mental health issues. After three years of receiving support her confidence has increased and now she is fulfilling her wishes, including performing in public.

Also as part of this campaign, the Time to Change team have begun to work on mental health awareness in sport and this has included a workshop for those involved in sports. Neelam attended one such workshop at Chelsea Football Club where the trainer spoke about her own experiences of poor mental

health, comparing it to having any other medical condition, such as diabetes. She also spoke about the difficulties she faced when attempting to gain the understanding of her treating consultant.

Towards the end of the workshop I provided flyers to those who were present and elaborated on the difference between this service and others and many commented that they would be "handy" for their women. Having heard this, I felt that some of the stigma had already melted away.

At these events there were those who were on the road to recovery and those who are now helping others after having gone through their own experiences in their journey in life. The confidence and enthusiasm displayed in conversations and the body language was evidence that they felt supported by this initiative which was marvellous to see. The work is a long-term initiative and we all, including TLS, will play our part.

SUPPORT THE LISTENING SERVICE BY DONATING

Email info@thelisteningservice.org.uk

DID YOU KNOW?

Sleeping poorly increases the risk of having poor mental health.

Source: Mental Health Foundation

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Ending Mental Health Stigma

By Neelam Farzana

I feel like congratulating those who have decided to work on bringing awareness on how it feels like when one is going through times of feeling low as well as the stigma attached to it. There is a quote from C. G. Jung, who is a Swiss renowned psychiatrist, which is of importance here:

"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed."

This quote fits well here but from the perspective of two personalities from two different dimensions – this campaign is about bringing awareness to those who are unaware of the impact of poor mental health, however, it also works in other ways by also supporting those who have and are suffering from mental health issues. Mentioning celebrities who experienced or are experiencing poor mental health, the Director of the Time to Change Campaign also spoke about her own experiences and so provided an opportunity for all to understand that anyone can suffer from poor mental health and it can be worked on. These examples often help reassure us and help us realise that what we are going through in our lives is a universal theme which has been happening for many years. This realisation and awareness often helps us to feel less alone and this article is the evidence of my passion to work on this mission.

A physical injury can be visually seen and care, sympathy and empathy easily flows from others. I see that not having good mental health is an injury that is not easily noticeable. Yet, even if it was noticeable, do we really want to help? Do we realise or want to know the reasons of the behaviour that we may see? I remember an incident where a young man pulled an old lady, someone who was perhaps in her 70's, out of his car, left her on the pavement and drove off. The lady was reluctant to come out of the car and now lay crumpled on the pavement. The Police was called and I was left with questions about the mental well-being of the two as well as whether it was simply a case of not getting on.

I believe that support from the family, friends and relaxation are the most important factors for an individual experiencing mental health issues. A variety of emotions have been expressed by the individuals going through this phase of the journey such as feelings of rejection, isolation, not being heard, loneliness, being taken advantage of and lack of support, to name a few. These situations can add fuel to one's condition, making our inner struggle harder. My almost lifelong work in the care field has taught me that a few words of encouragement and support from the people around you goes a long way. It is acceptance that we look for, the listening ear with sympathy and empathy from those whom we value. We have a link with these people, which though not visible, is very strong and perhaps as strong as an iron rod. The continuity of such experiences, including rejection, can become perceived rejection and with the longing of being accepted creating inner conflict, leading to more damage, including the sufferer distancing themselves as well. Although we look to be in control of ourselves, our wellbeing, our destiny, we all need to be with others sometimes and that support and help can have an immense effect on one's being. I have observed the effects of support resulting in strengthening one's foundations thus leading to fruitful outcomes. Loneliness makes us look for attention and company from others. Long-term loneliness can lead to depression, isolation, anxiety, lack of motivation and much more, which can then lead to poor physical health in addition to the mental health issues.

FEEDBACK FROM CALLERS

"TLS is one of the most effective services I have used. It helped me cope with situations I thought were so big and painful and unresolved...TLS was just a call away...I felt that I could be myself without being judged or ridiculed."

"This service is invaluable, one in a million. I have been suffering from depression and have had various types of counselling most of which have not been as effective as calling this telephone line."

"I have introduced a number of people and will continue to do so."

"Keep up the good work, your service makes a difference in my life."

Email info@thelisteningservice.org.uk
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Each and every person is different and has different needs, such as cultural, spiritual, linguistic etc. The understanding of these needs is of paramount importance for those who are looking to be or are being helpers and carers. I once accompanied a professional working with a female and, according to the helper, the client's husband had left her with young children, he was a violent man and so the helper felt that she should be applying for divorce. The client, however, was not responding in relation to this. I felt that she may not be ready for divorce and so asked her whether she was willing to start the divorce proceedings. Her instant answer was a resounding, "No." I later explained the social, cultural and inner pressures that the client may face due to a divorce and the related fear. This was a simple understanding of the factors impacting the individual's life.

I also had a client who refused to be treated in a Psychiatric Department in favour of counselling in an agency setting. During the two and half years that we were together she complained about the cold behaviour of the individuals in the Psychiatric Department. When it came to finishing our counselling sessions, this was **her** decision as she felt she was able to support herself. She reached this point after self-examination where she moved from not feeling supported, to feeling vulnerable about whether she would be able to support herself, to feeling she may be able to support and take care of herself. When we take care of ourselves, our performance will take care of itself.

Hearing about and being a part of the work being done on removing the stigma attached to mental health distress made me think about this worthy mission of informing and teaching others about mental health so that they support individuals to blossom like a garden full of beautiful flowers. This reminded me of documents that have been discovered of the treatment of patients from centuries ago in the Persian and Turkish communities where the hospitals were built in the image of palaces full of nature, green areas and fountains to aid the recovery of the patients. These hospitals were almost a holiday resort, aiming to provide relaxation, which was the part of their treatment together with actual physical treatments. I know from personal experience that when I am in such places my energy levels shoot up and it makes a visual difference in my looks as well as my inner state, enabling me to function better. This is energy that plays a significant part in our well being. Visualising this, I hope that the awareness campaigns will lead to the addition of such holistic and natural treatments in working with those with mental health conditions. After all, relaxation is healing at a deeper level.

The road to success is never an easy one. There are several obstacles, and you are bound to fall sooner or later. You will hit a road block, you will taste failure. But success lies in being able to get up every time you fall. That is a critical life skill and it is the habit of all successful people. This reminds me of some poetry from the famous scholar, philosopher, poet and thinker from India/Pakistan:

Jahaan main ehlay emaan soorat-e-khursheed jeetay hain - Idhar doobay udher nikley idhar doobay udher nikley

This translates roughly to:

In this world, believers live like the shining Sun. They may be drowning but will come out safely time and again.

A promotional poster for MWSF Just Play! activities. The background is dark purple with a rainbow and stars. The text is in various colors and fonts, including red, yellow, and white. The main title 'Just Play!' is in large red letters with a white outline. Below it, 'Strictly female only environment' is in white. The activities 'Basketball' and 'Indoor Football' are in yellow. The rules, cost, venue, and time are listed in white and yellow text.

MWSF
Just Play!
Strictly female only environment
Basketball Indoor Football
Rules: Just turn up & play (ages 16+)
Cost: £3 per session
(included in MWSF Silver & Gold membership)
Venue: Preston Manor High School
Carlton Ave East, Wembley, HA9 8NA
Time: 10am to 12pm

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Behind the Scenes...Introducing Our Senior Director

Umar Farooq is a vibrant rock in the background at The Listening Service and has been involved since the idea conception stage. He is also Treasurer of the Muslim Women's Sports Foundation and has been for a number of years, proving his passion for supporting all human beings to achieve their potential. His own passion lies in flying and so he is currently working towards his private pilots' licence! After graduating from university, he qualified as an ACCA and is now a Fellow of the body whilst working for a FTSE 100 company. He intends to continue supporting community groups across the world to bring about positive change for all.



If you have any comments for Umar or would like to know more about our fantastic volunteers in our next issues then do get in contact at info@thelisteningservice.org.uk.

Recovery and Resilience: Narratives of Recovering from Mental Health Distress

By Rimla Akhtar

This is the title of a recent production from the Mental Health Foundation which recognises the stories of women from ethnic minority backgrounds who have faced their own issues that have affected their mental well-being. These are women who have faced injustice, coercion, and negative stereotypes. They are women who have taken a number of paths towards their own personal healing and share their wisdom through their unique stories whilst relating their understanding of recovery and resilience.

As the report notes, the issues facing women from minority ethnic communities haven't been well researched and the benefit of this piece of research will hopefully be the guidance for the authorities and supporting organisations in working with these women. The research focused on exploring distress and recovery, formulating an approach to recovery, contributing to knowledge on supporting people and rethinking the term 'recovery' and how it resonates with people's experiences.

Recovery and Resilience is a guide towards helping the world understand and showing those women from ethnic minority communities that there are many others with whom they can relate and share experiences without fear of judgement or

misunderstanding. The main message being received from the study was that the understanding of 'recovery' for these women was very much linked to the ways in which they understood their mental distress.

This was impacted by many areas, importantly including their familial and personal settings, and it was important elements within these areas that impacted directly on their recovery. For example, attitudes of the family and immediate social circles had a key effect on recovery where negative and stigmatising attitudes hindered recovery whereas family support enabled it.

The feedback we have received from our callers is supportive of this view – they often feel a lack of support within their own families and look to find that support through the TLS. For example, a caller to us commented, "It is nice to talk to you otherwise it's just me and my thoughts". We at TLS certainly feel there is a great shift towards working to end the stigma and focus on the recovery of individuals, which can only be a positive move, and this report is welcomed towards helping make that change.

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER:

"I don't know what the key to success is, but the key to failure is trying to please everyone."

Bill Cosby

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