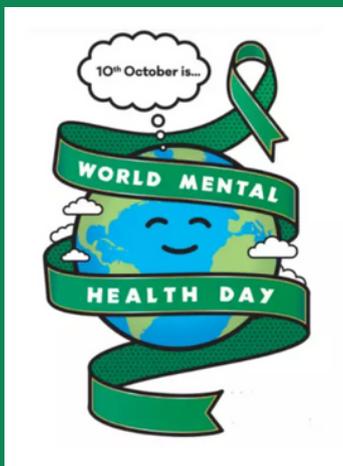


World Mental Health Day 10th October 2023



World Mental Health Day is about raising awareness of mental health and driving positive change for everyone's mental health.

The theme for 2023 is 'Mental Health is a Universal Human Right'.

It's also a chance to talk about mental health, how we need to look after it, and how important it is to get help if you are struggling.



Children, adults and whole families in Hillingdon are impacted by poor mental health. It affects people of all ages, in all walks of life. To provide the best possible support we need to understand what it is like to live with poor mental health.

This briefing has been co-produced with people with lived experience, we have used their words and language as they reflect on their own experience. Generous and brave people in Hillingdon have shared their stories, art and poetry for this briefing to help us understand their experiences.

In this briefing you hear from Ron, Angela, John, and Max.



Ron's Story

Ron is a peer employment support specialist in Hillingdon community mental health services. He is also a former patient of The Riverside Centre and has shared his story of mental ill health and hospital admission.

"It is the most important thing in your life really, your mental wellbeing... It's the foundation of everything... it's the foundation of who you are, your job, being a friend, a father, a husband. It is the foundation of everything."

Ron's tips to others who are struggling

- Treat your diagnosis with the respect it deserves and needs. Don't try to push it under the carpet and hope it goes away. It won't!!!
- When you have to make choices in your recovery, don't base your decisions on whether it is easy or hard, but base decisions on whether it is right way or wrong way for you. [By the way...The easy way is mostly the wrong way!!]
- There are no quick fixes for long-term issues

Angela and Janet's Story

My sister Janet is 68 years of age. During childhood she very quiet, like a shadow. She was bullied and we noticed a profound lack of professional support at school. From the age of 14 she spent 15 years in a locked psychiatric ward until our parents took her out of hospital against professional advice. She is now safe in a nursing home. It wasn't until she approached pension age that she was finally diagnosed with autism. What a journey it has been!



15 Years Locked in Psychiatric Hospital

During her long stay in a psychiatric hospital, Janet appeared neglected and abused: burns on her feet, a huge unexplained scar running down the left side of her abdomen, unkempt hair and clothes, lying in bed all day, put in a straight-jacket in a padded room sometimes. She also appeared to have developed new behavioural difficulties which could have developed from mimicking other people she met in hospital.

Independence Should Not Always Be the Priority

Community mental health services, contrary to the hospital care, seemed focused solely on promoting Janet's 'independence', regardless of the risks, or reality about what was achievable. This led her back to situations that were seriously hazardous and unhappy. Services misunderstood her autism and how it impacted her capabilities.

My parents felt under pressure to cooperate with professional advice, and reluctantly agreed with professionals' requests to allow Janet to get herself to go out by herself. Disaster ensued. She was taken by a stranger to his home, where she was exploited for two weeks.

The goal for Janet should never have been independence and gainful employment, but rather her safety, security and wellbeing. I wish that professionals had been more willing to listen to mine and my parents' views – we knew her best and should have been taken more seriously.



It Was So Difficult to Find Help

It was so difficult to find help. Specialist services did not seem geared up or interested to work with mature people with signs of autism. And yet she still needed help in all aspects of her life. Care provided in her home did not manage to keep her safe and well. She became seriously physically ill and was eventually moved permanently to a nursing home. She has finally been identified by a psychiatrist as autistic.



She is Finally Safe and Happy Now

When we visit Janet now, with prompts, cues and encouragement, she engages in simple conversation, enjoys having her nails repainted, watches comedy films such as Laurel and Hardy, and enjoys being read to, for example, the Ginger Bread Man. It is heart-warming when she bursts into giggles and laughter at something in the film or the story that seems to have caught her attention.



John and Rosemary's Story

My wife Rosemary was diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD), in 2017 when she was in her mid-sixties. Her dementia was already at an advanced stage and I could not leave her alone by this stage. She had been unwell for about 2 years, increasingly withdrawn, obsessed with leaving the house, and she had started getting lost.

Loss of My Soulmate

As my wife's dementia developed I was having to cope with her personal care, and she had become doubly incontinent. Moreover, I was having to cope with the loss of my soulmate, the very person I would look to in challenging times. My daughters were a huge support, but they have their own families and I wanted to insulate them as much as possible from the reality of what was happening.

Struggling to Cope

Whilst I received some respite care and Admiral Nurse support, after the diagnosis I was nonetheless struggling to cope, both physically and mentally. This, in turn, impacted my ability to adequately care for Rosemary. I was exhausted.

Not everyone amongst friends and family knew how to give us the support we needed. It was isolating. One's own reluctance to seek help can also create a void.



With the Heaviest of Hearts

It was with the heaviest of hearts that we realised in 2019, that there was no other option but to arrange for my wife to live in residential care. This was, of course, a decision that is almost impossible to reconcile and, to this day, I agonise over whether I have done the right thing. I can only take comfort in the knowledge that I have always tried to do what is in her best interests.

I don't know whether Rosemary still knows who I am, but she always seems pleased to see me. This was not the future we had planned but I live nearby and can visit most days. As the saying goes - "If life gives you lemons ..."

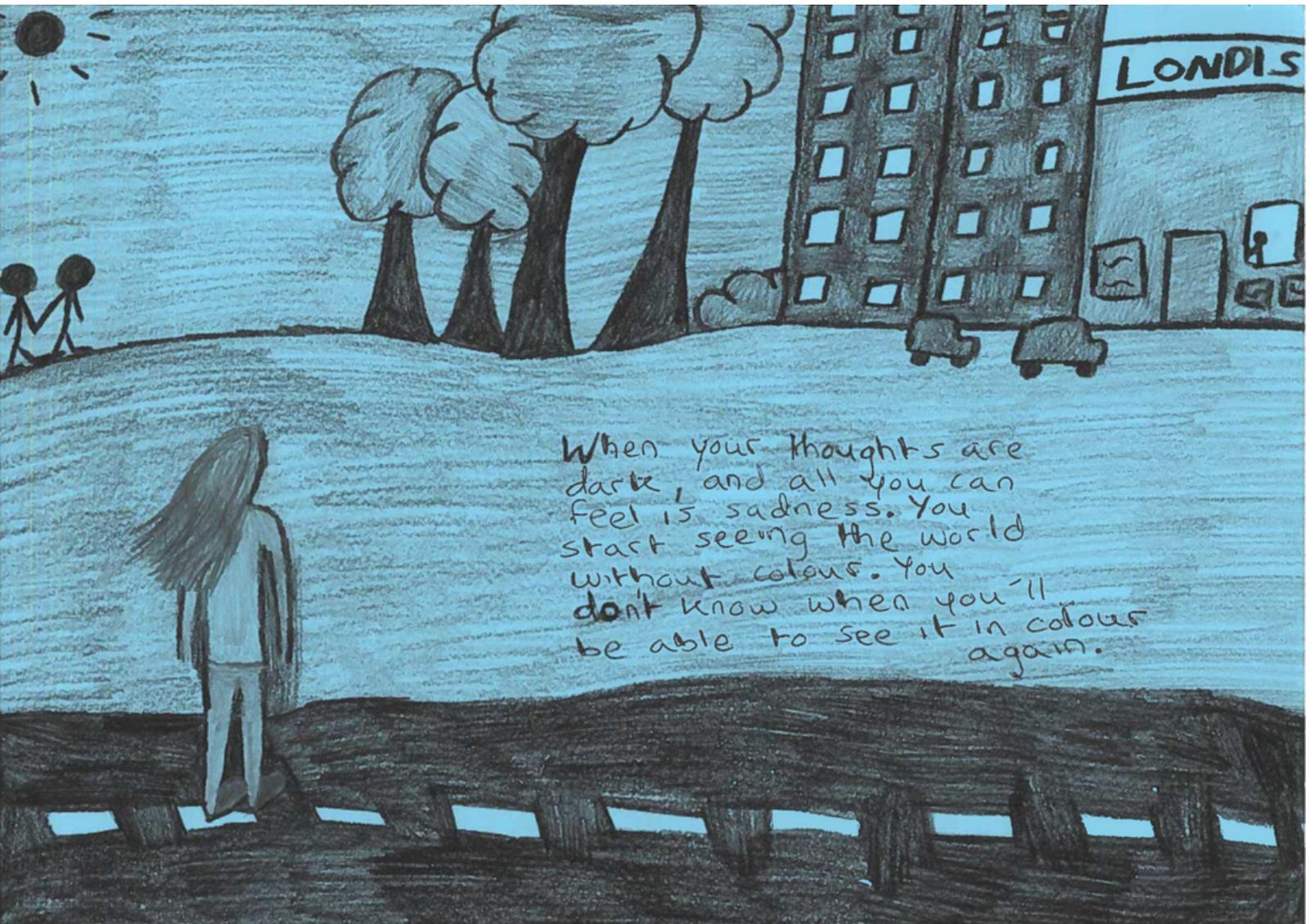
I Could Not Have Managed Without the Admiral Nurse

I simply could not have managed without the Admiral Nurse. She would meet me on a regular basis and was a counsellor, fixer, and facilitator regarding respite care, access to benefits etc. In my view, Admiral Nurses are crucial support for carers.



Contact Hillingdon Admiral Nurses on 01895 556480 or click the icon for more information

Max, 17 years old, has produced powerful art and poetry to communicate how she feels when she is depressed



HOPE

Max's art and poetry reflects her feelings at her darkest times. Now she is seeing in colour.

The combination of talking to people and taking medication has supported her.

Her Stronger Families key worker has encouraged her to talk about stuff that she hadn't spoken about before, and that this has been really important to her.

Leaving school and starting college has been really impactful for her, and that whilst her college course is tough, she is enjoying it.

Max's tips for professionals: Don't judge, just listen. Don't be patronizing.

Advice to other young people who are struggling: you are not alone, there is always someone to listen, never give up!

Max wrote this poem when she was feeling really sad, but she is in a much better place now.



Max. 17 years old

*its not that i want to die
its that i want the pain to stop
its not that i dont want a bright future for myself
its that i dont see one.
its not that i dont want a good job and a family when im older
its that im tired of fighting with my own head everyday
its not that i dont have a good family
its that i feel like i stress them out
its not that i dont care
its that i cant see the light at the end of the tunnel
its not that im being selfish
its that i just want to be at peace
its not that i dont try
its that my thoughts always win
its not that i dont want help
its that i fell like im beyond help
its not that i dont want to get better
its that i feel like im trapped
its not that i want to relapse
its that the thoughts get too overwhelming to ignore*

*its not that im being lazy
its that i just dont have the motivation
its not that im being negative all the time
its that the thoughts are so overwhelming its all i can hear
its not that im not trying
its that i feel like im not strong enough
its not that i dont want to be happy
its that i dont remember what it feels like
its not that im being mean
its that the sadness comes out in anger
its not that i dont want to talk about it
its that i dont wanna burden anyone
its not hormones
its a chemical inbalance
its not 'just my period'
its been going on for years now
its not that i want to be late or dont want to do my school work
its that i struggle to get out of bed in the mornings
its not that i 'stayed up all night on my phone'
its that i was up all night tryna convince myself to hold on a little longer
its not that i want to die
its that i want the pain to stop.*

Resources



Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust



For urgent mental health crisis support for all children and adults there is a 24/7 helpline staffed by clinicians. Anyone can call for help.



0800 023 4650

CNWL's Single Point of Access (SPA) is a 24 hour telephone service which offers support, advice and signposting for children, young people, adults and older adults who may be experiencing a mental health crisis. Individuals, family, carers and professionals can contact SPA for urgent mental health advice.

SPA clinicians can support with risk assessments, referring to secondary services, referring an adult or a child for urgent intensive community support or can explore whether hospital admission might be needed. NB: If someone already has a mental health clinician in place try to speak to them first if possible.



Call 116 123 for free

[Other ways you can get in touch >](#)



Hillingdon Mind provide a range of support and advice to people with mental health needs.



Contact Hillingdon Admiral Nurses on 01895 556480 or click the icon for more information



Hillingsdon Autistic Care & Support
Registered Charity Number 1066855

HACS provides support to autistic children and adults in Hillingdon

Safeguarding Partnership published this briefing: Safeguarding Children and Adults with Mental Health Concerns

