If you feel it, then it’s real and valid.
Radio 1’s Vick Hope on helping listeners open up

Student life during lockdown
How hard has it been?

The fight for mental health
Our new strategy is here

Can exercise be bad for you?
Spotting the signs of addiction
Welcome to our future

It’s a pleasure to welcome you to a very exciting new issue of Mind Membership News. It’s the first magazine with a member as a guest editor, as we seek to be guided more than ever by people like you. We also introduce our new strategy, explaining how we’re changing to take on the biggest threats facing mental health today. And you might have noticed your magazine looks different too, because we need to stand out like never before as we fight for mental health – for support, for respect, for you. We’re more determined than ever, and we’re so glad you’re with us. Paul Farmer, CEO

This magazine is made for and by you

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Tell us what you think of our new look – and what you want to see in your magazine. Email: membership@mind.org.uk

Ready for more?
Renew your membership at mind.org.uk/renewal or call us on 020 8215 2243

Not a member yet?
Let’s change that! Join the fight for mental health at mind.org.uk/membership

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Hello, I’m Hannah, and I am this issue’s guest editor! I am a history student at the University of Edinburgh, and I am passionate about advocating for mental health. Throughout my teenage years I have seen some of those closest to me struggle with their mental health, and I lost a close friend to their battle last year. This has made me determined to raise awareness of the issues faced by so many people, and of the help available to us all.

I have also faced my own battles with my mental health. I have experienced obsessive-compulsive disorder and had an eating disorder throughout my teenage years. The eating disorder was caused by the pressures of exams, extra-curricular activities and university applications during my A-Levels, and for this reason I thought it particularly important to hear in the magazine from a professional who works with young people. Teachers are often those who notice when students are struggling most, and are vital in supporting the wellbeing of young people – something I myself have found. I hope you’ll enjoy Chris’ unique insights into working with young people not able to attend mainstream schools, starting on page 12.

The pandemic has impacted everybody’s life in one way or another. From being separated from loved ones to working from home, the last year has been difficult for us all. Throughout this time, I noticed the emphasis placed on the ‘wondrous’ power of exercise by those in the media, as well as it being one of the only excuses to leave the house. While it’s an important part of a healthy life for many people, I wanted to take this opportunity to look at some of the times when exercise is not the answer, such as for those with an exercise addiction.

Finally, as a student I have first-hand experience of managing my mental health while at university. Young people in education have also been significantly impacted by the pandemic, as teaching has been moved online, and they have been unable to interact with their friends. I wanted to see how the experiences of my fellow students have differed before and after the pandemic hit, and to hear about the issues that affect them most.

I find that being a Mind member is an incredibly rewarding experience.

I know that my donation is supporting the lifesaving work delivered by Mind, and I also now have this hands-on opportunity to share my experiences. The Mind community is an inclusive and supportive one, and I feel honoured to have been involved in creating this magazine with a team effecting such positive change. Thank you for reading!

Meet Hannah, our guest editor

A massive thank you to all of you who answered our recent call out for a guest editor. We were overwhelmed by the response and by your brilliant ideas. This issue’s guest editor is Hannah, who explains here how her personal experiences inspired her to choose the content you’ll find throughout your magazine. Wherever you see the ‘Guest editor’s choice’ box, you’ll know Hannah has been involved at every stage.

Mental health and me

“I feel happiest when... I am with family and friends, sewing, singing and watching anything made by Marvel. The thing that’s helped me most during lockdown is... trying to keep busy, from doing university work to volunteering and learning coding. I’d like to bust the myth that... mental health is a choice or can be solved with a simple ‘Cheer up!’ In the future... I’d like to see mental health cared for as much as physical health and discussed openly, with help given as a basic right.”
**Behind the headlines**

**Why we stood up for Meghan Markle**

You probably saw last month that the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, opened up about suicidal feelings to Oprah Winfrey. Discussing the interview, Piers Morgan said on Good Morning Britain that he “didn’t believe a word” Meghan Markle had said. This led to widespread criticism and within 24 hours Morgan had left his role on Good Morning Britain.

We were disappointed and concerned by Morgan’s comments. It’s vital that whenever anyone reaches out for support or shares experiences, they are treated with dignity, respect and empathy – and we published a statement on social media saying just that. It was heartening to see how fast and far that message spread. It’s since been liked nearly 100,000 times and retweeted 35,000 times. Together with Young Minds, we also wrote a letter to ITV’s CEO, asking to discuss the issue further. When mental health isn’t treated with respect, we respond.

If you ever feel suicidal or need urgent support, please go to any hospital A&E or call 999. You can also talk to Samaritans 24/7 by calling 116 123.

**Blue Light is back**

Between 2015 and 2019, our Blue Light Programme helped to improve mental health support for thousands of emergency services staff and volunteers. Now, with the coronavirus pandemic causing fire, ambulance and police emergency responders to face a whole new level of stress and anxiety, the Blue Light Programme is back.

Funded by the Royal Foundation, this new phase will run until February 2022, building on our existing Blue Light work. We recently surveyed nearly 5,000 emergency responders and found 68% felt their mental health had got worse because of the pandemic. Working with the emergency services community, we’ll make sure emergency responders have access to the high quality mental health resources and training they need – through the pandemic and beyond.

Find out more about the Blue Light Programme at mind.org.uk/bluelight

**Why it’s not really the end for Time to Change**

We know many Mind members have supported the Time to Change campaign since it launched in 2007. So we’re sure you’ll be as disappointed as we are that this brilliant initiative to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination closed at the end of March.

Time to Change has been part of a transformation. Some 5.4 million people now have improved attitudes towards those of us living with mental health problems. People are also much more willing to live, work and be in a relationship with someone experiencing a mental health problem.

So we want to celebrate the amazing impact made by the 7,500 Time to Change Champions, 1,500 employers and 3,500 schools who were the heart of the campaign. Your energy and honesty have started a conversation that isn’t going anywhere. The legacy of Time to Change will live on.

“I do feel a real sense of loss, but we’ve worked hard to come this far and we won’t let our efforts be in vain. We need to make sure no one feels isolated, alone or unaccepted.”

Jason Grant, lived experience advisor on Time to Change’s Senior Management Group.

While the UK government is no longer funding the campaign, which we ran jointly with Rethink Mental Illness, we’ll keep running Time to Talk Day in February and you can still access plenty of brilliant resources at timetochange.org.uk. We’ll also keep campaigning to make sure everyone feels the benefit of improved attitudes. We know people from racialised communities and people with less-understood mental health problems, such as schizophrenia, are still more likely to experience stigma – and that has to end.

See how Time to Change made it OK to open up at timetochange.org.uk
Round table discussion: How have students coped during the pandemic?

Guest editor Hannah, like millions of students across the UK, has spent the past year learning remotely. At times it’s left her feeling anxious and alone. For this issue’s four-page focus, Hannah wanted to understand how other students’ mental health has been affected by the coronavirus, so we hosted a virtual round table discussion to find out.

It's eight months since Anisah, a first-year psychology student at City University in London, began her degree. In a normal year, she would probably have been feeling at home by now; building friendships, getting to grips with her studies and making the most of university life. In reality, however, she barely feels like a university student at all.

“I don’t have any experience of what university is like,” Anisah says, frowning sadly in the early minutes of our round table discussion. “I don’t know what it’s like to sit in a lecture hall. I don’t know what it’s like to be in that environment. I don’t really know anybody, because it’s hard to interact with people you only know online.”

The huge gap between students’ expectations and their experiences is a theme that comes up repeatedly during our conversation. We’ve brought together seven students – online, of course – to share their perspectives on a year when university life has been transformed. What is usually a formative and unpredictable experience has been reduced for many to endless hours sat in front of a screen.

It’s not only the first years we speak to who are haunted by a sense of missing out. One third year, Takara, should be studying in Germany this year. Instead, she’s living at her family home. “This is somewhere I associated with resting. It’s like my holiday place,” she says. “But now I’m working in my holiday place. It doesn’t add up.

“And it’s such a repetitious regime,” she adds. “I get up, go on my laptop, have a Zoom call, get some lunch, have a Zoom call. You haven’t got the active part of university where you’re physically going to lectures. It’s really not good.”

That lack of separation between studies and home is something that’s also affected Hannah, our guest editor. “Because you’re in the same room all day, you never feel that you should stop working,” she says. “I end up thinking, ‘Well, I’m still here, with my laptop, I might as well do some more work.’ So you end up working later and later, and you never really have a proper break.”

The future is another big source of anxiety. The thought of trying to find work in a tough job market is weighing heavily on final-year students Naomi and Rajavee. “I’m absolutely petrified,” Naomi says. “This is the year when we would usually go out and get work experience and we don’t have that. The uni has organised for professionals to speak to us instead, but all they say is, ‘The most important thing you need is experience.’”

There is also a shared sense of anxiety about lockdown easing. “I’ve really forgotten how to socialise,” says Rajavee, who has sought help for her mental health during the pandemic. “I don’t know how to meet people or even talk to people any more.”

Last year, nearly ¾ of students who responded to a Mind survey said their mental health had got worse during lockdown.
How universities have responded

When the conversation turns to what universities have done to support mental health during the pandemic, it’s agreed that it’s now a bigger focus than ever. A steady stream of emails and virtual meetings about wellbeing began last spring, and over time universities have become clearer about what students need most. Many of those on our panel are now able to get essay deadline extensions without needing to explain why, and more financial support is available to help students who are struggling. Hannah points out that mental health was the most important issue for candidates at her recent student elections, and Naomi is full of praise for the phone counselling she received after reaching out to her university when she was struggling.

It’s clear that students are being encouraged to get help for their mental health if they need it. But, as second year Niamh explains, that’s often not as easy as it sounds. “I volunteer for our nighttime line phone line,” she says, “and I hear a lot that support services are under real pressure, so it’s hard for people to get appointments and if they need help they have to wait. I know that’s not necessarily a fault of the university, but I hope from this experience they see that these services are important but they need more funding.”

Several of the students have also recently attended online workshops as part of our Mentally Healthy Universities Programme, and say it provided a welcome chance to learn more about mental health and discuss the struggles they have had. “I think creating a safe space and giving people the chance to share their different experiences was very beneficial,” says Rajavee. “I’ve gone on to volunteer with the project because I found it very helpful and I would like to help others too.”

The staff perspective: Natalie’s story

“It’s been made very clear by the university that everyone’s mental health comes first. Staff are very much aware of student wellbeing, and I think that makes it a natural and easier environment for us to focus on our own wellbeing too.

I’ve trained as a Staff Mental Health Peer Supporter as part of Mind’s Mentally Healthy Universities Programme during lockdown, and after that training I did an online meeting with my team, openly talking about my depression and the eating disorders I’ve experienced in the past. People have told me that they really valued that. I think lockdown has made it easier for people to talk about their mental health.

My feeling is that students are coping OK, often better than expected. The students I’ve spoken to really miss university life. They’re worried about the financial implications of what’s happening. But overall I think they have adapted quite well. This situation has been rubbish, but people are coping.”

Natalie is Student Ambassador Manager at the University of Greenwich

The positives from lockdown

The list of difficulties the students have experienced in the past year is a long one: the hours watching lectures online, the isolation, the challenge of building relationships (as J’shawn says, it’s hard to ask tutors for help with mental health because that requires a level of trust it isn’t easy to build online).

But everyone agrees there have been some silver linings too. For J’shawn, Rajavee and Anish, lockdown has provided a valuable opportunity for self-reflection. For Hannah, it’s meant more time to volunteer – which has helped boost her confidence. And across the whole group there is agreement that there is far greater openness now about mental health.

“Among our friendship group,” Hannah says, “we lost one of our closest friends because of a mental health fight last year, and because of that we’ve been checking in on each other a lot more, and we have been more open because we’ve realised how much people can be struggling without saying anything.” Takara shares a similar experience: describing how she is now discussing mental health for the first time with friends she has known for years.

Turning to the future, the students are looking forward to things that many of us will recognise: going to new places, feeling less overwhelmed, meeting new people. And, as the discussion draws to a close, Naomi sums up another opportunity the whole group is eager to embrace. “I’m looking forward to being a better version of myself again,” she says. “The whole Zoom thing… somehow I can’t put my best foot forward on those calls. I get really anxious and nervous about that. I’m looking forward to a normal life, so I can be who I really am again.”

Find out more about Mind’s Mentally Healthy Universities Programme at mind.org.uk/universities and download our resources and videos for students at mind.org.uk/studentvideos
Red Balloon - North West London (NWL) works with students who are not in mainstream education for a lot of reasons. We take students who have self-excluded from schools because they found the experience so traumatic and detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing. We have students that have been bullied and had terrible experiences. One student I work with used to hide in cupboards because she found school so traumatic: her anxiety wouldn’t allow her to be in a classroom.

And then sometimes students have been excluded from mainstream schools. Often their behaviour has presented itself as defiance but, if you look deeper, what’s happening could be that the student is trying to get themselves kicked out because they’re escaping the thing they find so traumatic.

I previously worked as a head of year in a mainstream setting, but I was brought in to lead an outreach programme here, visiting students who are most anxious about transitioning to Red Balloon NWL. My role is largely to build a relationship and rapport and gain the trust of the student.

I’ve mostly had to work online during the pandemic, but we’ve recently reached a stage where I’m able to visit students at home again. Today I begin by visiting a Year 7 student who had a very negative experience of primary school. She actually felt ridiculed by the staff to the point that she stopped going. We’ve built a relationship largely on playing video games – first with her playing independently and me watching, then playing together, then gradually increasing the amount of adult-led activity to the point that she’s now happy to end these sessions at home and start coming to the centre. It’s a really important journey: from a student doing what they want to do, through collaboration and then being ready for adult-led work. For a child who finds school so difficult, that’s a big step.

We’d worked together for a few weeks when I found out he was interested in anime. We worked through an exhibition book page by page, and he gradually started to communicate with me on post-its. Hopefully in this way we can try and ease his anxiety about the transition to Red Balloon NWL.

At the end of the day I join one of our learning groups, which are very small – only two to four students. Everyone does English, maths, science and art, and then people choose other subjects. We’ve got people doing everything from Japanese to digital art, and at least 50% of everyone’s timetable is related to wellbeing. We want students to leave with qualifications that will lead them towards education and employment, but we also want the work they do to be based on their own interests. It’s an incredibly rewarding role because of the impact we see. Yes, students have good outcomes in terms of qualifications, but they leave us better able to understand their mental health, better able to interact and with a clearer understanding of who they are and what they can achieve. Students arrive thinking they are incapable of doing anything, then leave full of ideas of what they could do. Young people’s mental health is under such pressure but you get to see the difference we can make. The satisfaction I get working here is amazing. I haven’t found it anywhere else.

Email membership@mind.org.uk to let us know which mental health jobs you’d like us to focus on
Advice for staying well

Lost someone you love?
There’s no right or wrong way to feel.

When someone we care about passes away, it can be emotionally devastating. Grief affects everyone differently, but it’s important to remember there’s no right or wrong way to feel, and there’s no time limit on your pain either. You might find yourself feeling sad, depressed, shocked, disbelieving, numb or in denial. You might be panicky, confused, angry, overwhelmed or relieved. You might feel all of these things at once.

As time passes, grief doesn’t necessarily stop – but it can change. So try to take each day at a time – you might have good ones and bad ones. It might help to make a memory box, putting in anything that helps to remind you of the person you’ve lost. And if you find certain situations or thoughts trigger difficult feelings or memories, try to make a note of them so you can learn what makes grieving harder for you.

If you have lost someone you love to suicide, this can mean you experience extra struggles and confusion – and might need specific support. It might help, for example, to join a support group for people bereaved by suicide.

We’re here for you
You’ll find all kinds of information, tips and ways to find support at mind.org.uk/bereavement

Your questions answered

Q
I feel anxious about lockdown easing. What can I do that could help me cope?

A
If you’re feeling worried or unprepared as more businesses reopen and restrictions ease, you’re definitely not alone. We’ve heard from lots of people who want to go out more but also still feel they should stay at home. Many of us also feel conflicted about life getting closer to how it was before, especially if we’ve found some aspects of lockdown good for our wellbeing.

Try to remember there’s no normal response to lockdown changes. This is anything but a normal situation. Your feelings might be affected by lots of things out of your control.

Talking can seem tough, but many people find sharing their experiences helpful. If you’re not able to open up to someone you know, you can call Samaritans anytime on 116 123 or try Side by Side, Mind’s online peer support community. Getting creative – by writing, drawing or painting, for example – can also help you express your feelings.

For more information and support related to coronavirus, please visit mind.org.uk/coronavirus

Thanks to Mind’s info team
Annie Crabtree
Information Officer
Stephen Buckley
Head of Information

Got an issue or question about mental health? To contact Mind’s Infoline, call 0300 123 3393, text 86463* or email info@mind.org.uk
Lines are open 9am-6pm Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays)

We are Mind
Introducing our new strategy
Mental health is not hidden any more. It’s on the front pages. It’s on the political agenda. It’s discussed at the dinner table. For millions of people, mental health is now something to be honest about – not ashamed of.

The Mind community – including our members, funders and supporters – has been at the heart of this transformation. Together we’ve shown what mental health really looks like, what support makes it better and what needs to change.

But there’s still so much more that needs to be done.

Waiting lists are far too long. People are pushed into poverty because of their mental health. The mental health system is failing racialised communities. And a generation of young people are dealing with anxiety, trauma and self-harm. That’s why we are reaffirming our commitment to fight for mental health.

This new strategy is the result of careful learning and reflection. We have listened to over 25,000 people with mental health problems, as well as funder and sector partners, who have shared their experiences and priorities for Mind’s future work. We have studied the areas where people’s needs are greatest – before and during the pandemic.

Because, at Mind, we never stand still. We have always taken on the biggest threats to our mental health. We won’t give up until everyone experiencing a mental health problem gets support and respect.
How we’ll do it

We’ll work in four ways to deliver on these strategic priorities:

We connect minds
No one can take on this mental health emergency alone. But, as the nation’s leading mental health charity, we can connect people and organisations who want to join the fight for mental health.

We support minds
Through life-changing mental health support and relevant, clear information services, we'll help more people to get the help they need, stand up for their rights and live their lives fully.

We change minds
People need support right now, but they also need long-term change to the way society views mental health. Through this strategy, we'll speak out boldly in the face of injustice, to make sure we can all get support and respect.

Together, we are Mind
To respond to the mental health emergency, we must become a more inclusive and effective federation. We will only be able to achieve our ambitions with the generous support of funders and supporters.

Advice to protect your rights

The law and mental health

Wellbeing lessons are coming to Welsh schools
Big changes are planned for the way mental health and wellbeing are taught in Welsh schools. At the start of March the Senedd (Welsh parliament) voted to pass the new Curriculum and Assessment Bill. As long as this is passed into law – and there's no reason why it wouldn't be – it means that, from September 2022, children and young people in Wales won't follow a national curriculum anymore and head teachers in Wales will have a much greater say over what pupils learn and how they learn it.

The bill will impact on how mental health is taught in schools in two key ways. Firstly, head teachers will need to ensure pupils are taught about health and wellbeing. Secondly, each school’s curriculum must take pupils’ mental health and emotional wellbeing into account.

This is really positive news. We had hoped the bill would go further and make mental health a mandatory element of every curriculum, but we think the changes are a really positive step forward. As you can read in your pullout about our new strategy, we’ve never been more focused on young people’s mental health – and we’ll be pushing politicians in England and Wales to make sure young people have the support they need to thrive.

Your questions answered

Q
Will the Curriculum and Assessment Bill give my child a right to mental health support in school?

A
No. The bill’s main focus is on enabling pupils to develop and learn, rather than on spelling out enforceable rights that schools must support. But there are two other laws in Wales that set out organisations’ duties to make sure children get mental health support.

The first is the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010. This explains how local authorities and NHS services should provide mental health support to people in Wales, and it applies equally to children, young people and adults.

The second is the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. This sets out the duties on local authorities to provide counselling services that are independent from schools. Counselling should be available to all school pupils from Year 6 to the end of secondary school, and to all children aged between 11 and 18 who are not in school. It should be provided on school grounds and might also be offered at other locations, like a community hall.

Your questions answered

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As one of the hosts of Radio 1’s Life Hacks show, Vick Hope sensitively helps young people explore issues from anxiety and depression to relationships and sex. It is, she says, like therapy every week, as she shares her own mental health struggles and creates a safe space for listeners to do the same.

“No matter what the conversation is on Life Hacks,” Vick Hope says, beaming at the thought of a show she clearly loves, “we’ve found that as soon as one person says, ‘I’m struggling’, the texts just start coming in, from people saying, ‘I’ve been feeling that way too, and now I know I’m not alone’ or ‘I was feeling like that and I got through it’. We deal with heavy stuff, but it’s a very hopeful, very uplifting, very positive show. It’s a real community, and we are all there for one another.”

It’s been six months now since Vick began co-hosting the Sunday afternoon show alongside Katie Thistleton. They are backed up by a team of experts, including a doctor and psychologist, who offer practical, straightforward advice – the life hacks – in response to listeners’ experiences. Vick describes listening to the show’s predecessor, The Sunday Surgery, as her own weekly religious experience as a child, and admits hosting Life Hacks had always been her dream radio job. Her approach now is to be completely candid about her own experiences so others feel comfortable opening up.

The show has never shied away from painful issues. “We did a show on suicide for suicide prevention week,” says Vick, who has a light touch and natural affinity with her audience but obviously takes her role very seriously. “We spoke to this amazing girl called Chloe, who had tried to take her own life several years ago. I said to her, ‘How are you feeling now?’ And she said, ‘I feel the best I’ve ever felt. I’m so happy I’m still alive because my life is worth living and there is so much light and so much joy in every day’.

“Around the time of that show I’d just lost a close friend to suicide,” Vick adds, “and I did become quite emotional taking that call. I remember wishing my friend had known how much light there is out there. That’s one of the messages we always try and put across; there will be better days, you just need to stay to see them, so please don’t go. If your mind is going to see that darkness, please know that it won’t last forever.”

Vick first sought help for her own mental health during her final year at Cambridge University. “I had always had ups and downs,” she says, “but in my final year I lost three people in very close succession who were close to me. I couldn’t put my finger on what my emotions were but it just made everything seem insurmountable. All these other feelings that weren’t connected to losing people just got too much and I just went into a dark place. I couldn’t leave my bedroom. I started missing lectures because I felt like I couldn’t face the world. I didn’t feel like I had any place in the world.”

It was only after she told friends that she was getting counselling that she realised how many of her peers were also struggling. That led to a fascination with mental health that has never left her – and fostered a determination to get people to talk more about how they are feeling.

It’s heartening to hear how positive she is about Mind’s work. “I see Mind as a lifeline,” she says. “At a time when you can feel like you’re alone, it’s a reminder that you’re not, that there is someone there always who is ready to support you, to talk to you.”

And it’s also clear that, as well as helping listeners to cope and find hope together, Vick is seeing plenty of benefits herself from hosting Life Hacks. “I think I’ve been more honest and emotional than ever before, but less out of control with my emotions,” she smiles, looking back on the past few months. “It’s about being mindful of the fact that we all have these emotions and it’s OK to express them. If you’re feeling it then it’s real and it’s valid – and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

Life Hacks is on BBC Radio 1 on Sundays from 4pm.
Just days after the first lockdown began, the team at North East Wales Mind were due to launch the Flint Wellbeing Hub – a new centre for information and support, based in the local library. It will one day open its doors, but in the meantime they’ve already shown how powerful this innovative approach will be.

United for local change

It was back in November 2019 that the Flint Wellbeing Hub first began to take shape. The Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board had applied for Welsh government funding to set up wellbeing hubs across north Wales, and the team at North East Wales Mind sensed a valuable opportunity. They joined forces with Flintshire County Council and Aura, a local leisure company, to shape plans for a community hub based at Flint Library.

“The idea was to set up a place for support somewhere people might already be, rather than it being somewhere you go only to think about mental health,” explains Steph Walsh, Community Wellbeing Manager at North East Wales Mind. The application for funding was successful, and the details were rapidly ironed out.

Volunteers from Mind would be based in a quiet corner of the library. A range of wellbeing courses and groups would be held there, a piece of wasteland outside would be transformed into a wellbeing garden, and private rooms would be available for people who wanted to talk to Mind staff and potentially be signposted to a higher level of support. Everything was ready to go and then… lockdown.

Staying positive through the pandemic

The hub was due to launch on 1 April 2020, just one week into the first lockdown. Obviously that wasn’t possible, so services ranging from drop-in sessions and chair yoga to reading groups and craft sessions were swiftly shifted online. Feedback has been fantastic, with around 50 people now getting involved each month as word spreads. The hub is already playing a vital role in fighting isolation locally.

But for Steph, another huge benefit is the way the it has brought local services together. One person contacted the hub struggling with their mental health because of a housing issue, and Mind staff worked with the council’s housing team to get the right support put in place. Another person who was experiencing psychosis is now getting effective help thanks to the efforts of the hub’s wellbeing social worker. “Where issues like that might have got stuck in the past,” Steph says, “everyone is really pulling together. It’s a very holistic way of working.”

The hope is that as the pandemic eases, the hub can open permanently at the library, but one thing is already certain: this is a perfect example of how coordinated and effective mental health support can look.

You and your local Mind

Local Minds offer a huge variety of groups, mental health support and activities. They are always delighted to hear from Mind members, so whether you’re interested in finding support, meeting like-minded people or volunteering, why not give them a call? Find your local Mind at mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds
“I had quite a lot of trauma in my childhood and, as I grew up, that manifested itself in different ways, mostly after I had my daughter. Having this beautiful little human made me see the reality of how things had been for me. I became depressed and started drinking too much, and the amount I drank gradually increased. Eventually, I managed to reduce the drinking, but the basic problems were still unresolved and that’s when I turned to food.

It was a control thing. I wouldn’t really eat anything all day but then in the evening I would secretly binge in bed. I would feel really anxious if I didn’t have the food I used to binge on. I was always trying to change how I looked because I was disgusted by myself.

I ended up having quite a lot of intensive therapy. I was fortunate enough to have private medical insurance, which meant I could attend an eating disorder clinic. That was really when I realised how bad things were. I had to eat regular meals and snacks, and initially I found it horrific because I wasn’t in control any more. When I started trusting the process and got used to eating that amount of food though, I did start to feel better over time.

I’ve taken various medications and I’ve often thought to myself, ‘This next tablet will be the magic bullet that makes everything OK,’ but it doesn’t exist. This isn’t a short-term thing. Some days aren’t perfect, and if you expect perfection you’re going to fail. Life isn’t as hard as it is, if you’re struggling, you need to get help. You have to keep chasing the right support. It shouldn’t be that way, but it often is.”

How can eating problems affect you?

Focusing on food can be a way of hiding feelings and problems, even from yourself. Eating problems may be linked to stressful events or trauma, and can make you feel depressed, anxious, tired, ashamed, guilty or scared of people finding out. You might find it hard to concentrate, or controlling what you eat might become the most important thing in your life. Things like socialising or travelling (when they are permitted) can be harder too.

What help is out there?

Talking about eating problems can feel scary. But to access treatment, the first step is usually speaking to your GP or hospital doctor. They should then be able to refer you to specialist services. Possible options include online self-help programmes and talking treatments, as well as medication for underlying issues like depression or anxiety. In some cases you may need to stay in a hospital or clinic because of an eating problem.

What is an eating problem?

It’s any relationship with food that you find difficult. Many people think someone with an eating problem will be overweight or underweight, but that’s not true. Anyone can experience an eating problem – whatever their age, gender or weight. If you feel like food and eating are taking over your life, it may become a problem.

Thanks to Clare for sharing her experience. You’ll find a lot more about eating problems at mind.org.uk/eatingproblems and at beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Talking to others who know what you’re going through can help. Join our Side by Side peer support community at sidebyside.mind.org.uk

Mind member Clare began limiting what she ate as a way of trying to control her anxieties. Therapy helped, and so did accepting that some days will always be harder than others. She shared her story with guest editor Hannah.

Guest edito’s choice

Your experience of an eating problem

Mind Membership News

Issue 43, Spring 2021

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Why we’re inspired by

Mind Jersey’s story gathering

In the first of a new series on what’s got us fired up lately, we look back at Mind Jersey’s brilliant efforts to tell the story of lockdown mental health.

“Why in doubt, I ask people to tell me stories,” smiles Patricia Tumelty, Executive Director of Mind Jersey – and that’s exactly what she did last year. At the start of the pandemic, the Mind Jersey team put the word out that they wanted people to share their stories. How were they feeling? What were they missing? What was helping them cope? Within days, they were inundated with letters and calls, from people aged eight to 88. Over 500 people sent in stories, and Patricia and her team (including peer support coordinator Louise, pictured) compiled them into a booklet. Each year Jersey Post supports one charity mailing, sending a copy for free to every home on the island. They had already sent one last year, but the Mind team convinced them to do another – and the whole of Jersey received the booklet. It’s also now been added to the island’s archives.

Key themes included everything from relationship pressures and isolation to the sense of lockdown as a new beginning. And part of what is so inspiring is that these insights are now driving Mind Jersey’s work forward. This is more than a story gathering exercise: it’s a co-created strategy. That’s the real power of listening.

Members’ lockdown stories

“Lockdown has made me realise I am content without the need for endless things in the diary, and working from home has given me a better work life balance. But it is sometimes difficult when it feels like you can’t leave your stresses at the office.” James

“It’s been a real struggle not being able to see my friends and at times it’s made me feel so isolated... They always make me feel better. Having a good support network is so important for you and your mental health.” Debi

We’d love to share more of your lockdown stories in future magazines. Email yours to membership@mind.org.uk

Can exercise be bad for mental health?

Physical activity can have all kinds of benefits for your wellbeing. But, our guest editor Hannah wanted to know, are there times when exercise can actually become a problem?

Many of us have recently experienced how exercise can lift mental health. It can reduce stress and anxiety, help with sleep and boost our mood and self-esteem.

But our guest editor Hannah has sometimes felt pressured by the expectation that we should all be exercising during the pandemic – and she’s not alone. It can be difficult to be physically active if you’re struggling with your mental health, and hearing about the benefits of exercise can be frustrating. Their could be physical reasons why you’re not able to exercise too.

If that sounds familiar, try to be kind to yourself. It might help to start with gentle walks where the focus isn’t on exercise but on something like taking photos. And if you can’t be as active as you’d like, you could focus on caring for yourself in other ways – like getting creative, trying mindfulness or connecting with other people.

What about over-exercising?

Hannah’s question is also well timed because at Mind we’ve recently started to focus more on over-exercising and exercise addiction. We’ve brought together a group of experts by experience who have all struggled with exercising too much. We’re about to publish new guidance on the subject too, to help coaches and sports volunteers support people they are concerned about.

It’s a sensitive subject, but we know over-exercising and exercise addiction can be linked to mental health problems, including eating problems. Signs might include exercising without eating enough, not taking rest days or exercising despite being injured. If you’re struggling with exercise addiction, you might feel you need to exercise every day and feel guilty or anxious if you’re not able to. Sometimes exercising too much can be a kind of self-harm, with people using physical activity as a way to deal with difficult feelings or emotions. But over-exercising can be hard to identify and understand, so we’re looking to understand more.

To share your experiences, please email sport@mind.org.uk. And for advice on getting active safely, visit mind.org.uk/sport
You’re just who we’re looking for

Our shops will hopefully be open again from mid-April – and we urgently need more volunteers! Join us and you’ll be welcomed with open arms by people who care about mental health as much as you do. It’s your call whether you serve customers, sort donations or help in other ways, and every penny you help raise will support the fight for better mental health.

Find out how to contact your nearest Mind shop at mind.org.uk/volunteer