

Annual Members Meeting 2021

Discussion Forum 1

Eliminating concerns around the restrictions lifting

Led by Nick Lake, Director of Psychology and Psychological Therapy

The challenges you may be facing

The forum acknowledged the sorts of challenges that people have been struggling with both during lockdown, isolation and now returning to society, these challenges included:

- Employment and financial sustainability loss
- Loss of loved ones, friends, family and colleagues and the impact of bereavement during the pandemic
- Health and social anxiety; which can be particularly difficult for those coming out of social isolation
- The delay of seeking help for both mental and physical conditions which can now be a huge challenge moving out of lockdown, Communication between GPs and mental health providers seems to have reduced for some, which causes additional pressure for patients and carers.
- Getting to appointments and hospital for those with existing health conditions. There is a significant amount of people who are still at high risk of contracting COVID-19, even if they have received the vaccinations.
- The sense of society is moving on, but what about 'me' and not being able to move on and the impact of on-going isolation. The shared sense of crisis and purpose had brought people together, and this is a bit blurred with the easing of restrictions.
- Grief and managing your feelings
- No mask wearing or virus precautions at life events, festivals etc and participating in life that nourishes people, can bring risks to other people.

There were some recognised positives during the lockdown; a heightened sense of community and a feeling of 'all in this together'. Moving out of lockdown however can be a loss in this way.

For some people, isolating had been the norm pre-pandemic. In some ways, it was a very safe time and provided structure for those that struggle with social anxiety. However, the level of anxiety present due to the length of time isolating is now a challenge to revert.

If we are feeling stuck or caught, what can we do about it?

A serious difficulty when struggling emotionally, is when we feel we are in the wrong, to blame or unique. To people who are struggling moving out of lockdown, this is really understandable and is shared by a number of people. Normalising, understanding and empathising this is really key. The way that we take charge of our difficulties, sets out how we can move forward.

Building resilience and pro-actively reducing our anxieties is an important step. The link between physical and mental health is really key. Human contact, for most people, is a really important protective factor against mental health distress.

Actively addressing our difficulties:

The forum discussed ways in which they could actively address the difficulties, these included:

Taking courage to reach out and talk about the difficulties. This will challenge our thinking and help us to face our fears. Relationship between thinking and feeling - while the fear can be real, the feeling of the fear can become out of proportion. Trying to put things into proportion again can be a very helpful method to reduce anxieties.

Supporting people earlier while in distress is always advised, and so people should seek help when they feel that they need it, and not to consider the burden on services.

Creating structures to share experiences and support mechanisms is a positive way to help others with common experiences and maintain an accessible support network. Peer support normalising experiences and helps people to complete the 'processing' of their challenges/difficulties. This type of networking is a brilliant method of support for patients and carers.

NHS trusts providing support materials and information on engagement/support groups is really necessary. Making the access to these groups as easy as possible can make such a difference to people's experiences.

"we're all singing the same song, we just have different voices"

Step 2: Building resilience

NHS
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To reduce the impact of chronic stress, we need to try to step out of survival mode and into a 'calm and connected' mode. There are some simple ways you can move into this state:



This helps to regulate our physical state and emotions, feel safe, think clearly and plan.

Discussion Forum 2

Nature and Wellbeing

Led by Trust Governors; Mark Hughes, Carer Governor, Jeremy Sandford, Service User Governor and James Hamilton-Andrews, Service User Governor.

Mark Hughes, Carer Governor introduced the session and explained how spending time in green space can bring nature into your everyday life; benefiting both your mental and physical wellbeing. It can:

- improve your mood
- reduce feelings of stress or anger
- help you take time out and feel more relaxed
- improve your physical health
- improve your confidence and self-esteem
- help you be more active
- help you make new connections

Our trust governors presenting on activities that they like to enjoy in nature and explain how they have benefited their mental health:

Running: Service User Governor, Jeremy Sandford introduced his story and explained how his mental health recovery journey has been made possible by his love for running. Jeremy had very difficult mental health challenges during 2018 and during his time as an inpatient Jeremy starting running on the treadmill in the ward gym overlooking the hospital car park. This was the start of Jeremy's recovery; the initial benefits were physical but once he'd been discharged he moved to Sussex and was able to use running to further improve his mental wellbeing. He took to the trails within the Sussex countryside and enjoyed seeing sheep, cows, hares, deer and water which he finds particularly peaceful and therapeutic.

Jeremy become a Peer Mentor and had the opportunity to volunteer at the Trust. From here Jeremy has co-founded a running course called One Step At A Time as part of the Recovery College ([page 32 of the Recovery College prospectus 2021-2022](#)) this is a five-week course that combines both running and health hints and tips. Jeremy also plays a big part in the [Heads On Run Club](#) regularly takes on challenges to fundraise for the charity.



Community Garden: Service User Governor, James Hamilton-Andrews explained how being in a green space on his family's farm helped his recovery. James was surprised by how much he enjoyed it, so much so that when he came back to Sussex he approached the Parish Council about using some land they had purchased for allotments as a therapeutic community garden for people with mental health problems. The Parish Council were very supportive and James has



gone from having two plots to now having five and a community orchard. The community garden is open to everyone regardless of gardening experience and it provides a space for people to talk about their mental health or any concerns they have. The community is supportive and has become a place for people to make friendships and share experiences. In addition to the gardening, the project brings people together for vegetable preparation classes and nature walks in and around the allotments, and pizza and music evenings. The garden is funded sponsorship from the Horticultural society, donations, volunteers

and the local community and parish council. If you'd like to find out more about James community garden project or get in touch with him visit:

<https://www.ourcommunitygarden.org.uk/>

Geo-caching: Carer Governor, Mark Hughes is an avid geocaching fan. Mark explained that geocaching is an outdoor recreational activity, it's like a treasure hunt in which participants use a Global Positioning System satellites and a GPS receiver or a mobile phone to hide and seek containers, called "geocaches" or "caches", at specific locations marked by coordinates all over the world. They are hidden, sometimes disguised within the environment and can be found in countries, towns, the International space station and even on the Mars rover (virtually). Mark explained how he'd struggled with depression and was introduced to geocaching by a work colleague, he's come to love the activity and the way in which it's made him become adventurous and immersed in nature.



It's an activity you can do with friends and family and with over 3 million routes and places worldwide they'll always be a treasure hunt for you. Mark shows the forum some the items he had collected over the years and explained he had found 6,500 to date. Not only does the activity keep you fit but you'll also visit places you never knew existed. For more information on geocaching visit:

<https://www.geocaching.com/play>

Mental Health Foundation

Our top tips on connecting with nature to improve your mental health

There's a lot of good research to support the role nature can play in protecting and supporting our mental health.

For many of us though, 'being in nature' may not be as easy as it sounds.

The good news is, you don't have to climb a mountain to feel the benefit - there are lots of simple ways to bring nature into your everyday.

Here are some top tips on how you can build your own connection with nature.

01. Find nature wherever you are

Nature is all around us. It might be a garden, a local park, a nearby beach or open countryside. Even in cities, where nature can be harder to find, there's things community gardens or courtyards to discover and explore.

Look out for the unexpected - an urban fox on your way out for the early shift, changes in the weather or birdsong outside your window. Try to notice nature wherever you are, in whatever way is meaningful for you.

02. Connect with nature using all of your senses

Taking some quiet time to reflect in natural surroundings using all your senses can be a real boost to your mental health. Whether you're relaxing in the garden or on your way to work, try listening out for birdsong, look for bees and butterflies, or notice the movement of the clouds. All of these good things in nature can help you to find a sense of calm and joy.

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Before ending, attendees of the forum looked as some top tips on connecting with nature, as being in nature is not always as easy as it sounds. These top tips were collected by the Mental Health Foundation as part of World Mental Health Awareness Week earlier this year. To view these top tips on how you can build your own connection with nature click [here](#).

Discussion Forum 3

Overcoming Loneliness

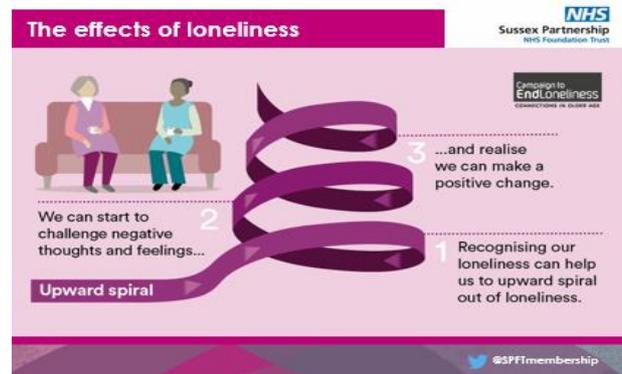
Led by James McMahon, Trust Chaplain and Julie Pierce, Occupational Therapist & Spiritual Support Lead.

Loneliness is a topic at the forefront of conversations no matter the situation and this forum was for people who are struggling with loneliness or know someone else who may be experiencing loneliness. The forum engaged in the following discussions:

What is loneliness: It was recognised that loneliness can mean different things to different people, but there is a general sense of isolation or disconnection from others, or a feeling we are lacking or missing social connections and companionship. It is subjective and an unwelcome feeling which results from a mismatch in the quality and quantity of social relationships we have and those that we desire. The forum discussed what they would like versus what their current experience is and for many this is very different.

Causes and effects of loneliness: People are social beings and loneliness can be an unpleasant experience and a source of dislike or disinclination. The group explored the internal and external causes and their emotional significance.

Overcoming loneliness and stages of recovery: Looking at a number of resources the forum looked at the five stages of recovery and accepting that loneliness is a perfectly normal reaction to external life events or internal experiences.



The forum participated in two activities:

Activity 1 - why are groups important: The group shared experiences about different types of groups which they had found helpful, these included sporting activities, book clubs. It was acknowledged that not everyone felt able to join groups and that there were other helpful actions to assist with overcoming feelings of loneliness other than social contact, for example embracing creativity and spending time in nature.

Activity 2 - How many close friends do you think the average person has? Answers from those attending ranged from 2 - 10. Research says the answer is two. Sometimes perhaps it is easy to think that everyone else has many friends, so it is interesting to discover that the actual average is two.

The presentation ended with a wonderful quote by Rick Warren:

'Love is the antidote to loneliness. Instead of waiting to be loved, we need to give love; then love will be given back to us in abundant measure.'