

#SpeakUp: JCI Sheffield Mindful Matters Project

What is #SpeakUp?

#SpeakUp is Healthwatch Sheffield's micro grants programme, offering funding of between £500-£1000 to not-for-profit, voluntary, and community groups. The purpose is to run a project which will reach out to people across Sheffield, and hear what matters to them in relation to health and social care.



By working with groups which are already trusted partners in their communities, we can make sure we're hearing from even more people, including those whose voices aren't often heard by decision makers.

What is JCI Sheffield?

JCI Sheffield - The Junior Chamber International is a voluntary organisation that provides development opportunities for young people (in their 20s and 30s) to create positive change. We help to develop leaders for a changing world.



RISE is JCI's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic from an economic perspective. Rebuild-Invest-Sustain-Evolve; we want to be active agents of positive change by standing up, supporting and also leading our communities to be better.



Healthwatch Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield helps adults, children and young people influence and improve how NHS and Social Care services are designed and run. We're completely independent and not part of the NHS or Sheffield City Council. We want to understand your experiences, and help your views to influence decision-makers in the city



Background

Why did we carry out this project?

Young people face many pressures and there is a high prevalence of mental ill-health difficulties. From feelings of anxiety and depression to clinical diagnoses. Young professionals often experience additional pressures from a sense of ‘imposter syndrome’ which can also impact on their mental health. JCI globally support the UN Sustainable Development Goals and JCI Sheffield is focusing on ‘SG3 Good health and wellbeing’ through this project.

What did we want to achieve?

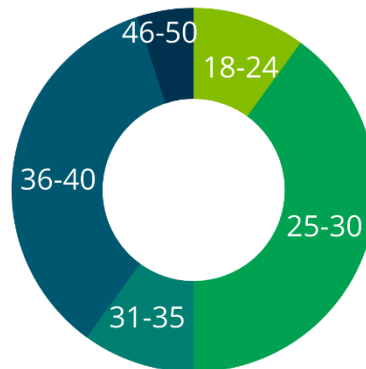
- Focus on gathering views and experiences of young professionals in relation to their direct experiences of mental health difficulties, as well as indirect experiences, such as supporting friends, family, or colleagues
- Consider what help, support and services people found helpful and useful and also seek ideas, suggestions and feedback about what else they would have found useful
- Hear about statutory and public services such as NHS support as well as help from other avenues including the voluntary and community sector or informal support.

Who did we speak to?

20 people responded to our online survey, and we conducted short individual interviews with 2 additional people. You can read the interviews in full on page 9.



12 people said they were female;
10 people said they were male



There was a wide range of ages, with most people being between 25 and 40 years old



21 people said they were White or White British;
1 person said they were Indian



7 people lived in S6
2 people each lived in S2, S8 and S70

Other post codes include S11 and S73

Findings

Have you or someone close to you (immediate family, partner, friends) ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition?

Out of the 20 people who responded to of survey:

- 14 respondents had been diagnosed with a mental health condition; over half (8) of these had been diagnosed within the past 2 years
- Those who identify as female were more likely to have been diagnosed with a mental health condition (83%) compared to those who identify as male (50%)
- 9 respondents know someone (immediate family, partner or friend) who had been diagnosed within a mental health condition

The 2 people who participated in short interviews with us had both been diagnosed with mental health conditions a long while ago - “15 years” and “over 10 years” respectively.

Did you access any support or services for help with your mental health?

People who had been diagnosed with a mental health condition told us what help and support they had accessed. Many people had accessed more than one type of support. The most common answers are in this table - other answers included A&E, hypnotherapy, psychotherapy, and an Employee Assistance Programme.

Talking therapies were mentioned more frequently than medication, but some people had accessed both or had been given a choice between them:

“I was offered counselling sessions or medication. I rejected the medication but took the counselling support”

Others gave us more detail about whether the choices offered felt right to them:

“I spoke to my GP and was prescribed medication. I was offered talking therapy through IAPT but was told I'd have to complete a group course before I could speak to anyone one to one. I didn't feel comfortable going to a group session so have never followed this up.”

What help and support have you accessed?	Number of people
GP	8
IAPT - Improving Access to Psychological Therapies	6
Counselling (private or NHS)	5
Medication	5
CBT - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	3

One of the people we interviewed did start counselling but this ended abruptly, and they now take medication:

“I was given some counselling I went to two session and then the counsellor went off sick and nothing was ever followed up again”

Only one person who said they’d been diagnosed with a mental health condition said they hadn’t accessed any support:

“I found techniques myself on how to deal with it”

How comfortable would you feel telling someone you are struggling with your mental health?



This was an even split between the ‘comfortable’ and ‘uncomfortable’ options here. No one said they very ‘very uncomfortable’.

One of the people we interviewed talked about experiencing shame for suffering with their mental health and having to take medication. They said that “unhelpful” processes to get a GP appointment have exacerbated these feelings so they now use a medication delivery service so they don’t have to interact with as many professionals:

“I used to find I [had] to psych myself up before attempting to ring the doctors! That can’t be good can it?! It also just taps into those feelings of shame that I’m on these pills - that I have this condition”

What has helped you or helps you look after your mental health?

This question was designed to find out how people maintain emotional and mental wellbeing - whether or not they are currently experiencing mental health difficulties.

Respondents were given a list of options to choose from, and could also submit their own suggestions. Most people selected more than one option. As seen in the table on the next page, over half of the respondents selected ‘talking to friends or family’, ‘exercise’ and/or ‘meditation or mindfulness’.

People selected a mixture of formal support (medication, therapy) and informal support (talking to others, pursuing creative interests). Other answers included reading advice and information online, accessing helplines, and listening to podcasts.

What helped you or helps you look after your mental health?	Number of people	What helped you or helps you look after your mental health?	Number of people
Talking to friends or family	16	Talking to others who have experienced similar problems	8
Exercise	12	Creative activities (e.g. drawing, writing)	8
Meditation or mindfulness	11	Medication - prescribed from a doctor	7
Formal talking therapies face-to-face e.g. counselling	9	Listening to music	6

What helps or would help the most in relation to coping with any mental health challenges you may be experiencing?

We asked this question to understand how people manage their mental health when they are currently experiences challenges. Some key themes that came out of this question are similar to those above, including being able to talk to friends and family, formal talking therapies, and exercise. People also said that being able to take some time out of their normal routine helped them cope with mental health challenges:

“Taking time away from work”

“Space. Me time. Sleep”

Some people spoke about the barriers to accessing the support they needed:

“Therapy that isn’t time limited”

“More access to counselling/therapy services, I think everyone can benefit from these and they are underfunded and underutilised”

Other people mentioned temporary barriers to mental wellbeing, and either acknowledging that they will pass, or trying to resolve them:

“Knowing it’s not going to be like this forever”

“Removing stress and workload from my life”

What is the most difficult thing for you in relation to coping with any mental health challenges?

One of the most common things people told us was difficult for them was coping with the stigma of mental health difficulties:

“Fear of being thought [of] as weak/fragile, impact on career progression”

“Stigma associated with it”

People also mentioned internal struggles, whether these were symptoms of their mental health difficulty or struggles trying to manage it:

“Not been able to function even with basics like making [my]self proper meals”

“Not always being able to recognise when I am slowly going downhill again”

Accessing help and support was also described as a barrier - with practical issues being highlighted:

“Long waiting lists”

“Trying to get through to the doctors to get an apt. I hate it. I get so stressed at the thought”

Both of the people we interviewed mentioned similar practical barriers, as well as some emotional ones:

“They reduced the amount of tablets they give me in one prescription which is so annoying as it means I have to pay more regularly for my pills”

“The pharmacist did this review over the phone. It felt he was asking me stupid questions, he didn’t know me at all and then throws in quite cold questions like ‘have you thought about killing yourself!’”

“It takes forever to get through on the phone - often I would literally have to redial about 70 times and now their new system is to be in queue - I gave up after almost an hour of waiting. The worst thing is the attitude of the receptionists”

“It’s a mental health issue, anxiety and stuff that I want to speak to a doctor about and that therefore having to go through all their questions before they will even consider an appointment is so difficult for me.”



Over to you

Our final questions prompted respondents to give advice and ideas based on their own experiences which they felt could help other people.

Many people find self-management techniques like this useful, but if you are worried about your mental health you should contact your GP, or call 999 in an emergency.

Is there anything else you have learned from your experience or someone close to you, that could help others with their mental health?

One of the biggest messages people wanted to share was the importance of talking about your mental health with someone you trust:

“When worry is causing anxiety it is best to talk about it and actually have someone sense check things”

“Talking about it is key. Becoming comfortable with talking to anyone about it because that way the topic becomes normalised and less of a taboo”

“Telling someone helps”

The other key message was that it might take a while to find what works for an individual in terms of managing their own wellbeing:

“Find what works for you and don’t expect it to work every time. What works one day might not the next and you need to practice it”

“There’s no one size fits all approach and no magic cure. Just keep trying things that might work for you, give yourself time”

Are there any particular resources, apps, websites, podcasts, tools, books etc you would recommend (in relation to mental health or coping)?

- **Apps:** Andrew Johnson’s meditation apps; Woebot; Calm; Headspace; Slimpod (for healthy eating)
- **Books:** A Little Pick Me Up: Shining a Light on Your Darkest Emotions by Katie Portman; Reasons To Stay Alive by Matt Haig; Notes on a Nervous Planet by Matt Haig; Can’t Hurt Me by David Goggins
- **Music:** White noise playlists (ocean, spa, rainforest etc.); Spotify
- **Podcasts:** Happy Place; Audible (for hypnotherapy podcasts)
- **Meditation:** Yoga; Hypnotherapy
- **Writing:** Send a friend 3 things that you’re grateful for each day

Conclusion

The survey respondents and the people we interviewed reflected on their own experiences of mental health and wellbeing. They considered what helped them with managing their mental wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, as well as when they are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Their thoughts clearly show that different approaches work for different people. For instance, when it comes to formal mental health support, some people prefer talking therapies while others prefer medication. For informal support/self-management techniques, what works for each individual can be very varied, for instance peer support or creative hobbies. What works for an individual may also change over time.

It makes clear the importance of individuals having **choice and control** over their support options, and the opportunity to explore **different approaches** to see what works for them.

Appendix - Interviews

Male, 37 years old

“I have found my doctors to be a very mixed response to my mental health over the 15 years I have suffered with it. When I was first diagnosed with anxiety and panic disorder I was given some counselling I went to two sessions and then the counsellor went off sick and nothing was ever followed up again.

I find my doctor to be really understanding and helpful whenever I have need to see them however the receptionists have caused me to have panic attacks in the past as they are extremely unhelpful and have put pressure on me causing me upset. I get they have to be a bit of a gate-keeper but I find them to be so cold, detached and they make you feel like they don't care and that you are a burden and a pain! Sometimes if I could find the strength, I would tell them that it's a mental health issue, anxiety and stuff that I want to speak to a doctor about and that therefore having to go through all their questions before they will even consider an appointment is so difficult for me. They often just don't sound human!

Since this I changed to using Pharmacy2U for my repeat prescriptions and this service has been excellent meaning I haven't had to deal with receptionist as much and it's much more convenient. I used to find I to psych myself up before attempting to ring the doctors! That can't be good can it?! It also just taps into those feelings of shame that I'm on these pills - that I have this condition. In many other areas of my life I have learned to cope with it and the pills really help. But no one likes to feel ashamed do they?”

Male, 40 years old

“I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression over 10 years ago and I have been on anti-depressants ever since. It's only this year that my doctor has bothered to call me in for a review! Then they reduced the amount of tablets they give me in one prescription which is so annoying as it means I have to pay more regularly for my pills.

Overall the GPs I've seen have been good. It was when the pharmacist did this review over the phone. It felt he was asking me stupid questions, he didn't know me at all and then throws in quite cold questions like 'have you thought about killing yourself'!

Also it takes forever to get through on the phone - often I would literally have to redial about 70 times and now their new system is to be in queue - I gave up after almost an hour of waiting. The worst thing is the attitude of the receptionists. They literally bark at you 'date of birth'!”