Mental health and young people – looking back to



Members of Youthforia

One in ten young people experience mental health problems. Today, treatments and attitudes are improving thanks to scientific advancements and major efforts to remove the stigma and taboo surrounding the subject. But this has not always been the case.

Mental health issues are not new, but little is known about the history of those affected by it. For the Youthforia Mental Health Action Group – part of charity North West Regional Youth Work Unit (NWRYWU) – telling this story is a vital part of their campaign to raise awareness of the challenges still faced by young people with mental illnesses today.

The heritage of mental health is a subject close to the project participants' hearts. Many of those involved come from youth councils, forums and parliaments and their passion is a main driver of the Mental Health, Past, Present, Future project.

[quote=Ciara, Youthforia] It is important that we can use the past to effectively shape our future! [/quote]

Ciara Brodie, 16, from Youthforia, said: "This is amazing news for Youthforia, and very exciting to say the least! Youthforia, with youth representatives from across the North West region, chose Mental Health as our campaign focus in 2014. It has proved to be something close to many young people's hearts, and an area where we are passionate to

make a difference. The appetite for this movement also extends nationally, as the UK Youth Parliament has recently adopted mental health as their national campaign. This funding will allow us to form a greater understanding of our campaign within a wider context, and be a part of such pioneering research. It is important that we can use the past to effectively shape our future!”

Five groups of young people will explore local archives, museums and art galleries across the North West, particularly focusing on Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire. Prestwich Hospital, which now houses a centre dedicated to young mental health patients, will also be an important source of information dating back to 1850. This information is held in Archives+ in the refurbished Manchester Central Library.

Looking as far back as the 19th century, the groups will map out a timeline of key dates and research the personal and wider stories behind them. The timeline and display boards from each area will form an exhibition which will be taken to venues across the North West.

Some of the main questions they will explore include:

- How have treatments and attitudes to mental health changed?
- Why were young people diagnosed as mentally ill and why were they sent to asylums and other institutions?
- Did religion play a role in determining mental illness?
- What role have different agencies played?
- How have pressure groups changed perceptions and treatment regimes?

NWRYWU has also been working with Manchester based young person’s mental health charity 42nd Street, the UK Youth Parliament and the British Youth Council to put plans together to distribute the project findings nationally.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: “Mental health problems were just as important to those affected in the 19th century as they are to those affected today, but social and scientific changes mean we now live in a very different world. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, we’re delighted to support this incredibly worthwhile project to tell these stories, reveal the lessons learnt and ensure this heritage is preserved for future generations to look back on as attitudes and treatments for mental health advance.”

Elizabeth Harding, CEO of North West Regional Youth Work Unit, said: “It is so exciting for Youthforia to have been awarded the grant to help them look back and understand their current campaign to improve awareness of young people’s mental health within the context of history. They will be able to see the changes have been made, maybe find areas that haven’t improved so much and use that understanding to look forward and identify the changes they want to see in the future.”

Project partner Manchester Central Library will provide a base for the groups to meet and will host a celebratory event for project participants before their exhibition goes on tour around the region.

Councillor Rosa Battle, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure at Manchester City Council, said: "The Archives+ centre of excellence at Manchester Central Library is the perfect place to support this project. Studying the information stored here will help the participants to build their understanding of the history of how young people with mental health issues have been treated, as they seek to ensure that outcomes for patients continue to improve in the future."

Notes to editors

About Youthforia

Youthforia is a regional youth forum made up of young people from across the North West that gives young people a voice at a regional level. There are around 80 regular members with close to 130 young people engaged at different points through the year. Each young person represents their area and is part of a local group, for example a youth council, youth forum or UK Youth Parliament group. Each local group is different but will usually contain young people from across a local authority area, from a range of different backgrounds, and in most cases their members are elected by other young people. Youthforia is run by a steering group of elected young people with the support of NWRYWU.

About North West Regional Youth Work Unit

The North West Regional Youth Work Unit (NWRYWU) is a strategic organisation working with the 23 local authority areas to promote and support youth work and services to improve the lives of young people across the North West. This is done through partnerships and collaborative working with central and local government, local authorities, voluntary youth organisations, private organisations and young people. The NWRYWU remit covers youth work, services for young people, workforce development and giving young people a voice at a regional level.

Further information

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