

# Write Mind

10 OCTOBER 2023



## World Mental Health Day Edition

### Severe mental illness and physical health

An interview with Masira Hans, Severe Mental Illness Programme Manager

#### What is severe mental illness?

Severe mental illness (SMI) refers to those people who have a diagnosis of psychosis, schizophrenia and bipolar. The reason why these are referred to as severe mental illnesses is because the symptoms seem to be more debilitating than other conditions. I'm not saying that if you don't have an SMI, your condition isn't serious or severe, it's just that generally the symptoms can impact people more physically and mentally.

#### Why are people with SMI at greater risk of having poor physical health?

That could be due to a multitude of reasons. It could be due to the side effects of medications, as these are quite strong and can cause fatigue, and stop people from being active. It could be a result of other lifestyle factors, such as smoking or drinking alcohol. Sometimes people with SMI or even the health professionals around them, may not take physical health as seriously as mental health. These factors can result in early mortality rates and poorer quality of life for people with SMI.

#### What work is being done to reduce the inequalities that exist for people with SMI?

The first thing we're doing is raising awareness for the health inequalities that people with SMI face, alongside raising awareness for the link between mental health and physical health. We're making sure that people who have SMI and their family members and carers are aware of what they are entitled to. They are able to access a free physical health check at least once a year and this facilitates early identification and treatment. We're also trying to reduce any barriers that people may have when accessing the physical health check or physical health interventions, such as healthy eating classes or classes to help you stop smoking.

#### What does a physical health check involve?

A physical health check will last a maximum of 40 minutes. You will be asked some questions around your lifestyle. They will check your weight and blood pressure and they'll do tests to check cholesterol levels and blood sugar levels. There will be a maximum of six different checks to understand how you're doing.

# Creative writing to the next level

An interview with Ian Lamb and Steven Burton, client and author of *The Nuisance Child*.

Every Monday, Mind in Bradford run a creative writing group from 1pm to 3pm. It's a group for anyone with an interest in creative writing, whether you're a beginner or a seasoned professional. Creative writing can take on several forms; be it poetry, songwriting, or short stories, like Steven Burton. Steven has written several stories and has seen his work published. I caught up with Steven to talk about his work and his latest offering *The Nuisance Child*.

## **Ian: Can you tell us about your novel *The Nuisance Child*?**

Steven: Even though it poses as a fictional story about a character called Charlotte, it's actually a life story about myself. I am telling my story through Charlotte as she's diagnosed with psychosis and it tells the story of what life is like after being diagnosed with this and going through life and living with it.

## **Ian: How did you find putting yourself out there like that?**

Steven: OK because people can read it without necessarily knowing it's actually about me. I've always found it really difficult to talk and express how I'm feeling especially when it comes to my mental health so I found it empowering to tell my story through a character such as Charlotte. I asked my family to read it. I found they got to understand me more by reading it. It talks about my autism as well as the difficult times when I've heard voices and experienced hallucinations. My family couldn't understand but through this book, they have learned to understand more.

## **Ian: You've had several books published including a poetry book *Soul's Ink: Poetry Journal* how does that make you feel?**

Steven: I feel really proud. I've published about nine books within seven months. I get ideas in my head and before I know it, I have to write it down. Seeing my work on paper and having it published has helped my writing ability and my confidence has grown too.

I recommend anyone to write, whether it's published or not, writing is a good form of expression. It's certainly given me a purpose. I attend the Hearing Voices group at Mind in Bradford which helps and writing also helps with the voices I hear. Specifically my poetry book, this talks about death and grief as well as my mental health. It's good coming to groups and taking on board the advice given but also doing things for yourself too when you're at home, doing something you enjoy such as writing stories.

## **Ian: Tell us about your other books, where do you get your inspiration from?**

Steven: I get my inspiration through real life. My mum is currently watching a detective drama so one of my books *When You're Gone* is about a fictional character I created called Detective Inspector Scott Lawrence who solves murders. However, I've put my own spin on it by making it a supernatural detective story.



Ian (left) and Steven (right)

# Who's who?

With Mehnaz Akhtar, Co-ordinator for Enhanced Access, WISHH & SMILE



## What's your job title?

Hi! My name is Mehnaz Akhtar and I am the Service Co-ordinator for Enhanced Access, WISHH & SMILE. I have been working in this role for nearly a year now.

## Why did you want to work for Mind in Bradford?

Throughout my personal and professional career, I have always found myself in situations where I am helping others, be that filling out a form for a family member or offering a listening ear to a colleague. I have a calm and empathetic approach and find it easy to relate to people and understand their perspective.

When the world came to a standstill due to Covid-19, a family member of mine was admitted into hospital. Sadly, he was unable to fight the disease and passed away all alone in hospital due to the restrictions in place.

I was fortunate enough to have a good support network around me to help me deal with the loss, but it was in that moment when I thought about the people that may not have anybody to speak with or know where to go for support.

I decided I wanted to volunteer for a charity that supported mental health. In the past one of my friends had used the Guide-Line service and spoke very highly of the support she received. I then got in touch with the volunteer co-ordinator (Donna Hudson), who was absolutely amazing and helped me settle into the volunteer role. From there I became a relief worker working on Enhanced Access and now service co-ordinator for Enhanced Access, WISHH & SMILE.

## What do you enjoy most about your role?

I admire the variety of my role; no two days are the same. I enjoy providing valuable support to clients, be that a listening ear or an onward referral, whatever it is that the client needs to feel supported.

## What do you like to do outside of work?

I like to spend my time socialising with friends and family, when I say socialising what I really mean is have a good catch-up and eating food.

## What is Enhanced Access?

Enhanced Access gives you the opportunity to speak to a Mind Wellbeing Practitioner over the phone about your or a family member's mental health and wellbeing.

## How can I book an appointment?

1. Check the list on our website to see which GP practices offer Enhanced Access.
2. Call your local GP reception and ask for an appointment with a Mind Wellbeing Practitioner in Enhanced Access.
3. If you have any difficulties booking an appointment then please contact [admin@mindinbradford.org.uk](mailto:admin@mindinbradford.org.uk) or call us on **01274 730815** so that we can help you get booked on.

# What are the benefits of baking for your mental health?

Learn how baking can make your life a little sweeter!

In today's fast-paced world, stress and anxiety now impacts many of us. The demands of work, personal life, and the constant bombardment of information can take a toll on our mental wellbeing. While there are various strategies to cope with these challenges, baking can be an unexpected remedy!

## 1. Mindfulness and focus

Baking requires your full attention, from measuring ingredients to following precise instructions. This focus on the present moment is a form of mindfulness, which has been shown to reduce stress and improve overall mental wellbeing. Try and immerse yourself in the process of baking, and let worries about the past or future fade into the background. Concentrate on the texture of the dough, the smell of the vanilla extract, or the rhythm of stirring. This meditative quality of baking can be incredibly calming.

## 2. Creative expression

Baking is a creative outlet that allows you to experiment with flavours, textures, and designs. Whether you are crafting intricate cupcakes, decorating biscuits, or developing your own signature bread recipe, the act of creating something from scratch can boost your self-esteem and create a sense of accomplishment.

## 3. Sensory stimulation

The sensory experience of baking can be incredibly therapeutic. You can touch and feel the ingredients, observe the transformation of raw components into a creation, and enjoy the results with your sense of taste and smell. This sensory stimulation can be especially beneficial for those dealing with sensory processing issues or conditions like anxiety. It provides a gentle way to connect with the world around you.

## 4. Social connection

Baking can be a social activity, allowing you to connect with friends, family, or even strangers who share your passion for the kitchen. Spending time with loved ones while baking can strengthen your social bonds and create positive memories. Even if you bake alone, the joy of giving someone a homemade gift can create a deep sense of connection and happiness.

### Easy Feel Good Flapjacks

You will need:

- 150g butter
- 150g light brown soft sugar
- 4 tbsp honey
- 300g porridge oats
- 100g frozen raspberries

#### STEP 1

Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6 and line a 20 x 20cm baking tin with parchment. Melt the butter, sugar, honey and a pinch of salt in a pan. Once the mixture is bubbling and combined, stir in the oats.

#### STEP 2

Tip the oat mixture into the lined baking tin and press down with the back of a spoon. Scatter over the raspberries, then lightly press them into the oat mixture. Bake for 25-30 mins until golden brown. Leave to cool, then cut into 9 or 12 flapjacks.



**If you are a client and would like to be involved in Write Mind please get in touch.**