

Write Mind

Mental Health Awareness Week



13 May 2024

Moving back into work

Ian Lamb interviews Phil Woodward about Mind in Bradford's Wellness Action Plan programme.

As the theme for this year's Mental Health Awareness Week is all about 'movement', I thought I'd focus on the workplace. Being in a working environment whether it's paid or voluntary isn't only about money and paying the bills, but building up a routine and creating structure in your day. Mind in Bradford has been a great help to me in returning to work, so I caught up with Phil Woodward to talk about the return to work programme called WAP.

Ian: Could you explain a bit more about what WAP is?

Phil: Yes. WAP stands for Wellness Action Plan. It is a National Mind Action Plan which we've incorporated into our own wellbeing within Mind in Bradford and its aim is solely to help, assist and encourage people who have or are currently on long term sickness to return to work.

Ian: Being off work with long term sickness does make you feel stagnant so how does WAP help people to return to work?

Phil: It's about the employer and the employee, and WAP is designed to help employers identify better ways they can support employees when they return to the working environment. It's about creating spaces so people can have an open discussion about their mental health. This can be challenging because people don't always know how to talk about it.

I've found that employers want to help but don't know how to. They're unsure of the questions to ask without offending the person. What WAP does is create an open dialogue that is needed. It is a pen and paper action plan where those difficult questions can be asked with awareness and new understandings. So rather than let it build until the point of more sickness, there are other interventions that can be put in place. This will help the person to return to work and continue working, but also help the employer to continue to create supportive working environments.

Ian: What is a supportive working environment?

Phil: You want your workers to feel supported and empowered to do their job. People have physical health issues and there are people with mental health issues who are willing and able to work. If employers really want to maintain wellbeing, we hold interactive talks within workplaces and WAP can be a great place to start. Since COVID, we have seen more people coming forward. People who never thought they would struggle with their mental health. By talking about it, we can address the stigma and get people the right support that they need. This might be a phased return to work or change of working hours, maybe therapy sessions. All of these will have a better, healthier impact on the person affected and the wider workforce.

The healing power of the hills

Paul from Hills In Mind shares with us his passion for the Great Outdoors.

Beyond me, Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain, is growing far too rapidly and drawing closer to me; its black volcanic base, topped with snow, stands like a giant chocolate cake as hail pings off my waterproof jacket. Nearby, I will complete the last few miles of the West Highland Way, one of Scotland's great trails, a path I had been walking for six days, a 96-mile journey completed; my heart sank; I never wanted it to end.

That was 2017; several years previous, my mental health was in rapid decline, lost in a different wilderness to the one I happily walk now; a debilitating illness had me firmly wrapped in its clutches; weekends were the grimmest of days, and I had nothing to look forward to.

It was only through boredom I began walking the local fields behind the house where I grew up as a kid, the fields I fled to avoid the arguments and, on occasions, violence, where my love unknowingly began of the outdoors. As my confidence grew, I discovered landscapes I never knew existed, from the Yorkshire Dales to the Scottish Highlands.



Ben Nevis

My mental health and self-esteem were stronger than they had ever been, and my love for the outdoors continued following the West Highland Way before eventually gaining my mountain leader award in August 2020. I had now earned the right to guide others and develop my own business, Hills In Mind.

I have a story to tell that is pivotal to the creation of Hills In Mind. Its concept is to help and guide others with similar backgrounds. It is about something other than creating mass events where it's easy for the less fit clients to get left behind; it's about the people making their own personal stories, their own adventures, around their own expectations.

Occasionally, I walk alone on the hills and see how much it has improved my physical and mental health. The cry of curlew or lapwing is stunning. The view of a valley carved out by a glacier with the river winding through a Dales village is a magical experience that can only be witnessed by roaming the outdoors. When I take one last look before heading home, I thank nature for what it has given me.



Paul walking the West Highland Way

Hills In Mind is a project dedicated to getting more people walking in the gorgeous Yorkshire countryside. You can start planning your adventure with Paul by visiting www.hillsinmind.co.uk.

Happy 5th Birthday Write Mind!

Trustee and volunteer Ian reflects on the fifth anniversary of our client-led newsletter.

Led by journalists, a brand new group began, aimed at service users from Mind in Bradford, to come together and create a newsletter. Straight away, I thought, WOW! This sounds interesting. Could I do it? Feeling inquisitive, I attended a small but talented gathering of people; each one was just as intrigued as I was. There were so many ideas and creative thoughts.

Fast forward to 13 May 2019, Write Mind's first issue launched. Naturally, I scanned the four pages, wondering where I'd be, and there, on page 2, was my name and contribution. The launching of Write Mind was during Mental Health Awareness Week, and the theme back then was all about body image. So, I wrote about my struggles and also included some information on the charity Beat. Automatically, I found myself reading the whole newsletter and finding it fascinating and colourful. It felt amazing to see my name alongside other talented writers and researchers. That began my journey with Write Mind.



Ian Lamb



Five years ago, I would have never believed I could sit and interview someone. Still, I've interviewed various health professionals, teachers, Credit Union's Ian Brewer, the current Lord Mayor Gerard Barker, and even Alastair Campbell, to name a few. Of course, people have come and gone, but Write Mind has continued—even during the pandemic. Due to lockdown measures, physical copies were gone, but somehow, with drive and determination, we had several issues published that people could access online.

As Mind in Bradford grows even more along with further Tea 'n' Talk locations and services, we hope to continue to create more articles, whether in physical copies or online. Perhaps you'd like to contribute your own lived experience, creative writing, or art. If you do, then we'd like to hear from you.

Until then, thank you to all at Mind in Bradford and the many people, volunteers, and fellow service users who have contributed to Write Mind.

If you have a story to tell about your own mental health journey, we'd love to hear from you! If you would like to write an article or share your creative writing please contact laura@mindinbradford.org.uk.

Meet the team

We interviewed Anne Cowman, Senior Service Manager for Children and Young People.



Anne Cowman

What's your job title?

I am a Senior Service Manager for Children and Young People's Services and Youth in Mind.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I love all aspects of my role, in particular working with the staff team and supporting them in their work with young people. I particularly like to visit the services within Youth in Mind and listen to the voices of the young people who access our services.

What do you like to do outside of work?

I am a lapsed Pop Choir singer, (which is probably a relief to many). I also love the theatre, live music and eating out. I am a mum to Tom and Lou and a devoted Grandma to Woody, who I look after as often as I can. I love American TV and horror films and just the company of my friends. Oh, and red wine, a good Malbec!

Youth in Mind is a partnership of six mental health and wellbeing services that provide support to children and young people in Bradford District and Crave. Find out more at www.mindinbradford.org.uk/YIM.

Why did you want to work for Mind in Bradford?

I have lived in Bradford all my life, 58 years, and wanted to work within my community and give something back. I had worked in prisons and police custody for 25 plus years all over the country seeing how childhood trauma had led to the path of criminality and addiction and wanted to make a difference. The opportunity of working at Mind in Bradford has been a great opportunity to support young people and help address adverse childhood experiences and therefore help them to build brighter futures.

Creative Corner

The Forbidden Artist from Mind in Bradford's Creative Writing Group writes about dance.

Most dancers will tell you that they dance to feel, express, and share, but there are a lot of dancers who also dance to heal their inner trauma.

The American dancer and musician Gabrielle Roth set up a specific dance style called "5Rhythms" to help people heal from trauma and recover from disability. This dance style focuses on five body rhythms – flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, and stillness, a kind of moving meditation, a way to become conscious through dance to heal the body through a transformative process.

It was decided that this type of dance class should be taught in private rooms as most people who have gone through trauma can be

left with a paralytic self-consciousness when moving their bodies and students often had issues with breathing.

The type of music used in the class creates a rhythmic aura that transports the dancer in a similar way to yoga music. There are now over 400 5Rhythms teachers worldwide helping people to heal and feel whole with the mind and body connected through dance movement.

