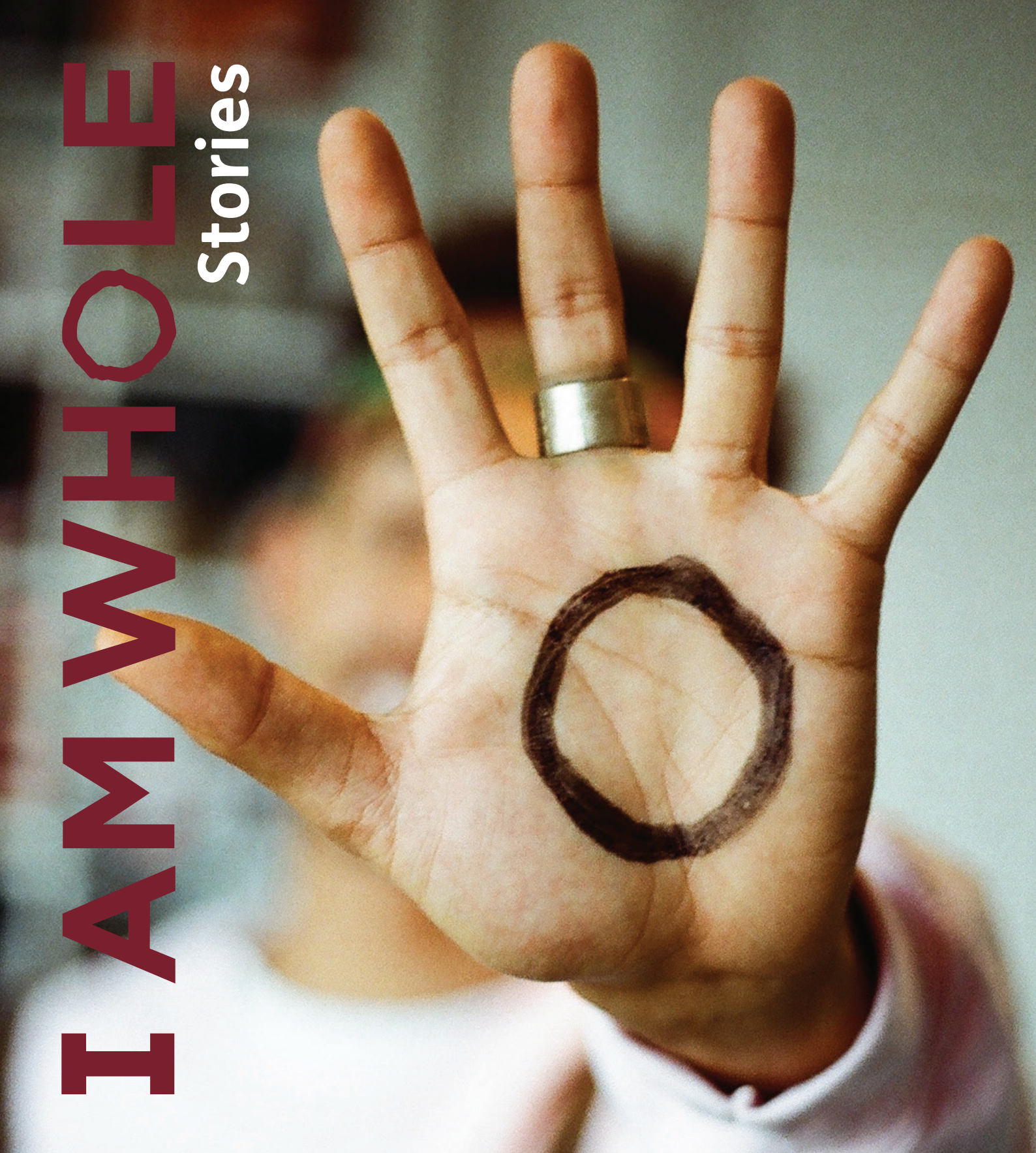


I AM WHOLE

Stories



A collection of stories from young people about their experiences of mental health difficulties

October 2016



FORWARD

Having mental health difficulties is like being trapped inside a thousand invisible prisons.

There are a thousand reasons that as a young person, you are driven deeper into that colossal void.

Not only isolated by the struggles you're facing mentally, but further enveloped in a thick, suffocating darkness.

The darkness descends...comprised of a tangled web of myths, harmful language, misconceptions and misunderstandings. This is stigma.

It traps you... makes even the thought of vocalising, of opening your mouth and putting your voice into the room to ask for help, terrifying.

From someone who has been there: this isn't how it should be. Those who are suffering need support, not shame.

It is time for these myths to be dispelled, the web broken and the isolation to end.

It is time for us to be free to talk about our mental health difficulties openly, so that we can access the services we need.

Mental health is exactly that...an element of our health, just like our physical health. It is something that needs to be both discussed and looked after, even when we are feeling 'well'.

Talk to your friends about how life actually is for you, how things are when you're mental health isn't so great, and how you look after your mental wellbeing, and what happens?

Speaking from experience, you find a lot more people have been in your shoes than you can imagine.

Once the conversations begin, you promote understanding for others and break down misconceptions people hold, and others illuminate your own understanding.

It is like being stood in the dark, untangling parts of that web until the sun's warmth breaks through.

The web drops to the ground as we become more comfortable talking...and the space becomes open...the light reaches your eyes, and you look around to see you are not alone.

The realisation comes that mental health and wellbeing is just another component of being a living, breathing human being.

It's something we all experience; because everyone has mental health, as they do physical health.

A normalisation occurs, and that is a very powerful thing because it allows people to access the help and treatment that they really need.

Connie, 22

INTRODUCTION

Mental health difficulties among children and young people are common and can be both persistent and damaging.

However, as our *I AM WHOLE* research has revealed, these young people also have to battle with the stigma they experience as a result, which often exacerbates their symptoms and increases their suffering.

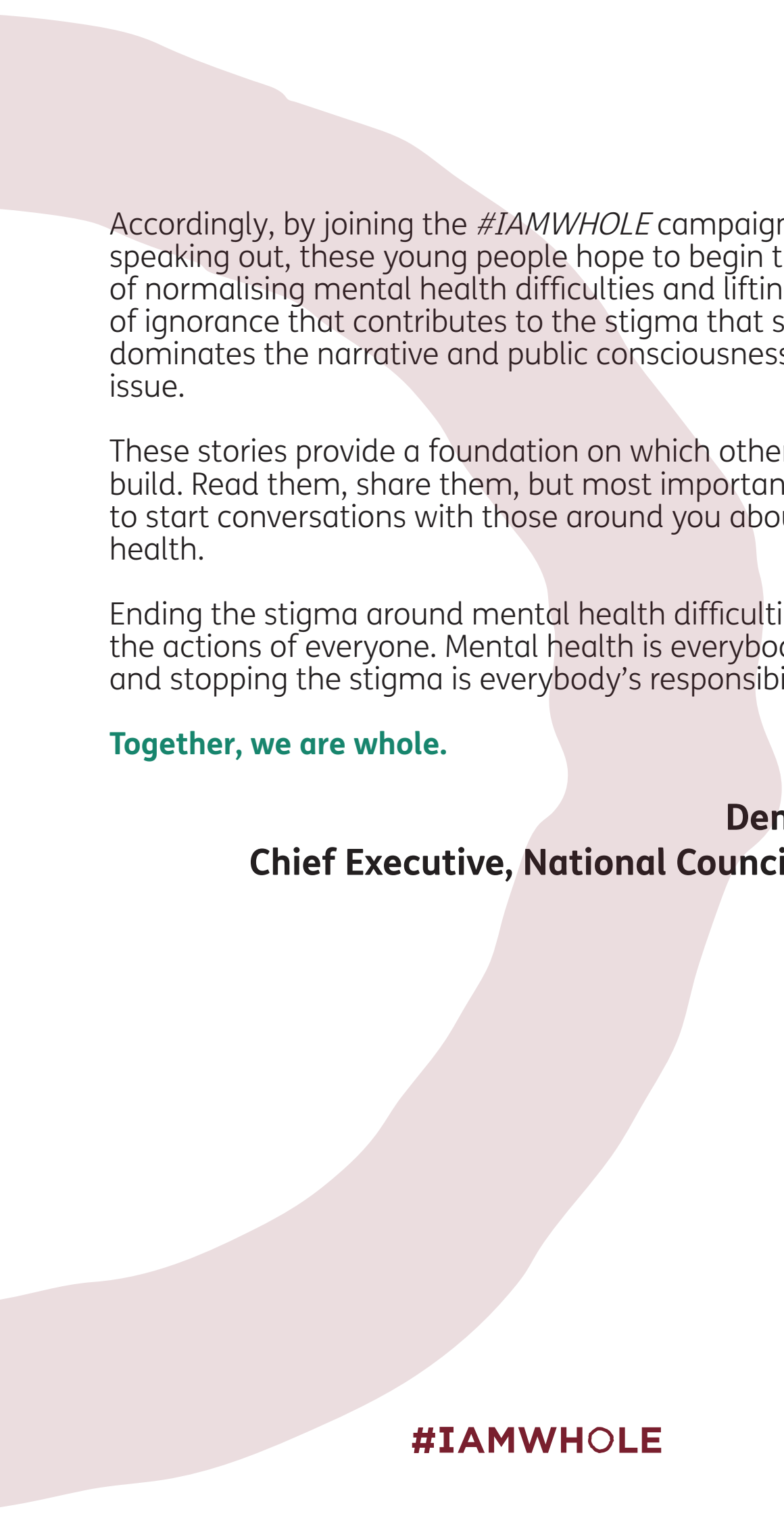
Crucially, this stigma is negatively impacting their willingness to speak out about their difficulties and access professional support.

Given that speaking out is often cited as the first step to recovery by so many young people, it is critical that we create a society in which they feel free and able to do so.

In order to achieve this, mental health difficulties must be normalised. Young people need to realise just how common they are, and that there is no shame attached to experiencing them.

To help facilitate this change, YMCA has been working to bring the voices of young people to the forefront by giving them the platform to share their experiences in their own words and help others around them.

This collection of stories illustrates just how varied young people's experiences with mental health can be. However, the young people who shared them are united in their desire to support those around them.



Accordingly, by joining the *#IAMWHOLE* campaign and speaking out, these young people hope to begin the process of normalising mental health difficulties and lifting the veil of ignorance that contributes to the stigma that so often dominates the narrative and public consciousness on the issue.

These stories provide a foundation on which others need to build. Read them, share them, but most importantly use them to start conversations with those around you about mental health.

Ending the stigma around mental health difficulties requires the actions of everyone. Mental health is everybody's business and stopping the stigma is everybody's responsibility.

Together, we are whole.

Denise Hatton
Chief Executive, National Council of YMCAs

Connie, 22, South East

“When I was just turned 16 I think, I developed an eating disorder. There was just stressful life events going on. I think it kind of starts from there.

I didn't have any treatment for about four years, yes, because I went into treatment when I was 20. So it was obviously tough but my eating disorder was something I was quite ashamed of so I didn't really tell anyone.

I know I had mentioned it to people and they've just been like 'well, you look fine,' and it's like yes, but that's not what it's about. It's a serious mental health disorder; it's nothing about my weight. I mean obviously it is like bound up in that but I think people think it is solely based around that and it's not. So it was difficult to get help for that reason.

I found it difficult to tell my parents because of the family history. My mum had Anorexia, we'd never known, she'd always tried to keep it hidden from us.

With my family I don't think it was about a shame thing because my mum was a mental health nurse so was always very open about like mental health, I literally think for her she didn't want us to know because she wanted to protect us.

My mum was obviously only ever supportive but it was more like I was worried about stressing her out.

It was awful, it stopped me going out completely, I struggled through school but I managed to get through A-levels fine. But you know I wasn't eating properly and I think it was disrupting my relationships because I think my friends knew, and yeah, it just made life difficult.

It was the only thing I thought about, with an eating disorder it just gets so bad. It's so difficult to explain but everything you do, you think of in terms of the eating disorder.

It worried me because I knew that staff noticed that I had self-harmed, especially at school. It was just so obvious to me but they didn't say anything and I was like this occurs all the time.

It's like going into A&E if you've self-harmed, I think that's one of the moments that people really experience stigma because they don't know what to say or do. Yeah, the self-harm thing, they definitely knew and they didn't say anything.

The uni were really good, I had an appointment with 'student life' and stuff and it was put on my notes so that tutors knew. They were just like really helpful, they helped me out with getting like extensions and stuff and like reasonable adjustments.

My GP was always really helpful and like was constantly contacting me. The thing is with eating disorders and probably a lot of other mental health there is such a high drop-out rate in treatment, people don't go back because they don't care about themselves.

Stigma stopped me from coming forward for so long because as I was wondering what people were going to think about me and I think people make assumptions as well. They don't really understand what's going on but they think they do. So when you do go to talk about it then they might say something and make it a whole lot worse.

One of the worst times I've experienced it was in the workplace rather than anywhere else. My manager told me to wear more make-up and I was like you 'know my problems are linked to self-esteem', it was just so insensitive. But I think again, that's not necessarily her being a bad person, I just think it's a lack of understanding and training in general.

I think a lot of people, even my own parents to an extent, find it hard to believe it's real. Their idea of mental illness is one of extremes rather than how Depression and Anxiety manifest themselves in most people's cases, which are still extremely debilitating and affect their lives massively.

I think also my parents didn't like to think about me in that kind of pain, it made them feel guilty – like it was their fault that I had become ill so they blamed themselves and didn't know how to react.

Peer-to-peer support is so important. If there is peer-to-peer stuff you can kind of see where people are in their journey. If we've all been through these experiences we might as well pool our knowledge together and help each other rather than having to all seek help on our own.

If I'd have known where to go for services and known it was OK to have this thing going on, then I could have nipped it in the bud at lot earlier than I did. But instead I was left with an eating disorder for six years, which is a long time. When you come out of it and look back, this ruined my life for so long. If I'd have known, if I'd have been educated, I really think it would have made a difference.”

Connie's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“I think it's easy to say but just remember that you will come out of the other side. I thought that there was no turning back, I thought I'm going to have this for life. I was 100% sure that I would never be able to make it. I think the most important thing is to take baby steps and to acknowledge them because it's so easy with mental health to spiral and only see the negatives. So I have to constantly keep a diary or keep notes of every positive thing that I can see, like actually I have come somewhere. Even if I've not binged for a day or like I've eaten two meals, like it's making a note of it as for me it's a massive thing.”

Tala, 21, Wales

“I discovered I had mental health difficulties when I was 12 or 13-years-old and that was due to the over-stress of bullying and not doing well in school.

Especially with my Depression, it took my family by surprise because they didn't know whether they could tell me stuff that's happened or tell me when a relative had died.

With my Anxiety it made school and work really hard because I was constantly stressed out about deadlines and not being able to get stuff done on time, and worrying about like, have I missed class. So it's those types of challenges I faced with my mental illness.

When people found out I had mental health problems, people started treating me like I was made of glass, like that I was fragile, that I could break any moment. There were some days where yes I do feel like that, but at most days I can handle it. I know my triggers; I know what I need to look out for and what I need to keep an eye on.

I didn't like the fact that when I tell people, for example, that I have clinical Depression, they are careful about me, they word stuff carefully, and they try to sugar-coat everything. It's not what I want. I want people to be blunt to me, I want people to be harsh to me. I don't want them to single me out because of my 'mentalness'.

I had a lot of support from my partner. She supported me when I discovered I had Depression. She's always there to give me a lending hand and she's always been really close. If I have one of my episodes, then she's always made sure that I'm fine afterwards or she gives me time and a breather and then check back with me in an hour to make sure everything's OK.

The other support I had was through my college where they got in a counsellor who I connected with really well and he's helped me through understanding a few difficulties I had. He was pretty much a good friend to me through that – that was in my second year of college.

There is a lot of stigma around it. With mental health, sometimes people say that they are making it up, that it's not there or they're just being drama queens. Then if you've got the major ones like Schizophrenia and stuff like that, then you've got another stigma. You've got to beat it.

Especially around Schizophrenia, where if you have that then people will consider you dangerous and like you're unstable, when in fact you're not. Again with Depression, people who have a stigma around Depression saying that everyone that has Depression self-harms; that's not the case.

There's a lot of stigma around mental illness and I think we should get rid of it. Not everyone who has Anxiety is the same. Not everyone who has Bipolar is the same. So I think people should get rid of the stigma and actually talk to the people and find out their point of view. Because you know, I've talked to millions of people with Depression and they are the most nicest people I have come across before, so you know, it says something.

I would say more awareness to the whole mental health. It needs to be as common as physical health, like physical disability. Everyone's got to understand that like when someone says they have Anxiety or Depression, they should take it seriously. I think more people should, you know, be more aware of it and understand even if someone's got mental difficulties that does not mean that they are fragile or they can't handle certain stuff. But they can, it's just you know, we shouldn't treat them like they aren't able to do stuff. But yes, that's all I wanted to say on it."

Lorraine, 18, Yorkshire and Humber

"I've been under CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] since I was six years old. I'm not quite sure why, all I know is that I was diagnosed with Epilepsy at six and at around the same time I was also diagnosed with ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] symptoms, but the doctors didn't actually give me an official diagnosis, they didn't know what it was.

I've had loads of different types of therapy, I've had everything you can think of which were to do with mental health.

I've been in care since I was four years old, so obviously like, I don't remember much. Lately I've been having flashbacks but I don't know if it's false memory or not. So I'm not going by it.

Basically I got brought into care because my dad abusing me and my mum didn't speak up for me, she didn't phone social services. But luckily someone on my estate did. It got to a point where someone did phone them because they were concerned.

Since I've lived with my foster carer, I call her mum because she's been the only mum I've ever known, and I still live with her now.

With school it hasn't altered anything, but it has caused a bit of difficulty because I've always had anger issues but the school always thought I had educational difficulties but I didn't. They got that mixed up with the fact I had mental health issues.

So basically they were saying that I needed support and someone to sit next to me in school and do me work for me when I didn't. So that kind of annoyed me because I had to put up with that for three years.

I couldn't do owt about it, I tried, I tried saying to my mum you need to tell 'um I don't need this help, I only need support for me emotions but no-one were listening.

Sometimes I can control it, sometimes it will escalate, other times it will just shoot straight up and I can't control it.

With my anger issues it's always been home based, whenever I have anger outbursts it's always been at home and I'm trying to figure out why it is. I know I can't control it sometimes, so I don't get why it doesn't happen in public, at college or at school. I don't get why it always happens at home.

I'm not sure, I'm trying figure out why I suffer from them still. 12 years on and I am still trying to figure it out.

My mum knows that mental health issues isn't my fault, she knows that. She knows that when it's got beyond my control I can't help that. So she's supportive like when going to my doctors she'll come with me, she'll give me that support.

I have seen some people treat people with mental health issues in horrible ways and call them horrible things. But then I have seen other people also who understand. So I think it all depends.

I didn't talk about going to CAMHS, I didn't talk about it that much because I didn't think it were relevant. Because you are doing the research, I'm gonna tell you the truth. Well it's been awful.

When I was younger, obviously I remember what therapy I had, but I don't remember how bad or how good it was, so I can't say much about that.

But when I were 15, I went through a very bad phase when actually I tried to commit suicide and my mum tried to take me into CAMHS and I was put on a waiting list.

Instead they ended up transferred me to a hospital, but I didn't need to be in a hospital, I needed to see someone at CAMHS. But then I was waiting for two more years after that until I was put back into CAMHS.

But now recently I've left child services because I'm 18 and I had an appointment for adult services in November now they've sent me letter saying they've changed it to January.

It's been moved to January and to be honest I've been struggling and I was really looking forward to this appointment in November and to find out it's moved to January. So now when it comes to December they'll probably move it again.

There have been good bits, but the last four years it's just gone downhill. I have been to the doctors once since I've left child services but they really didn't do much, all they did was give me some contact numbers, they didn't offer me any proper support.

The thing is though, I'm new to adult services. I just can't nip down to clinic which is where my CAMHS is based, I can't just go down there and say I need to speak to somebody because I'm not part of their services anymore.

The system, CAMHS, I just think that they need to make sure that they don't just book appointments like every 18 months because at the end of day, during that 18 months owt could happen. Like with me I struggle quite a lot, it'd be easier to ring someone up and say right I need to talk to you like something's happened and get reassurance. Instead of having to wait and it just builds up and all of a sudden it bursts.

Dexter, 17, London

"I'm a 17 year old guy who faces mental health issues and hasn't always had the easiest path in life. As a transgendered male, I often still get referred to as female, but I would never change or hide myself again because of other people.

Probably from about the age of eight onwards a lot of things happened, there were a lot of very dramatic changes in my life in regards to losing people, moving, relationships, things just took a very, very drastic turn. But no-one really took into consideration how it mentally affected me.

As I was going through like primary school and secondary school I got bullied a lot. I started suffering from really bad Social Anxiety as well as symptoms of Depression. I was bullied through most of my school life before moving.

In the end I was in Year 8 when my mum took me to the doctors cos I kept breaking down crying. I'd started to self-harm by this point.

I was diagnosed with Depression, which didn't go down well with the family where I was living. Even if they said they accepted it, I knew deep down they wanted me to be 'normal'. My grandparents were always there for me though, no matter what I knew they'd stand beside me.

Since then I have been diagnosed with Depression, Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Dissociative Identity Disorder and PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. It was a long process for anybody to actually come to terms with that I do suffer from quite severe mental health and it's not an easy thing.

Everything just becomes so much more extreme. The littlest of things become a battle. It just stops you being able to live. Especially when people don't understand. It is very hard to make people see that I don't want to be like this, I would give me left arm to not have to deal with the things I have to deal with.

I got put on medication when I was 13 I think, they put me on anti-depressants.

It was only when I moved to London when I was 15 and I started going through CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services]. My dad was an absolute angel and managed to get me into CAMHS which my mum hadn't really wanted to do. I think she wanted to try and handle it within the family.

When I moved to London, they changed me to different medication. Since then it's been changed numerous times and I'm now on a multitude of different medications. You could probably shake me and I'd sound like a pill bottle. It gets me through life, and we have decreased them a huge amount already, so I guess I can live with it.

People are scared of what they don't understand. It's why bullying happens. It's why stigmas are created about people. It's why barriers are put up and walls are put up between cities and countries.

It needs to be explained that mental health is something that everyone will come across in their life. Whether it's through themselves, someone they know, or by complete chance. Everyone's going to come across it at some point in some variation.

It's not all about Depression and Anxiety, there's Bi-Polar, there's Schizophrenia, there's Multiple Personality Disorder, there's Borderline Personality Disorder, there's Dissociative Identity Disorder, there's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, you know the complex PTSD. There's so many different things which are still frowned upon because they are mental health, but not everyone thinks mental health is. That's the problem that needs to be addressed.

Everything becomes a blur. I can sit in classroom and one minute I'm in the classroom, the next I'm not. It made school life very hard for me due to flashbacks and panic attacks. Before the meds I was on now I didn't really know where I was, I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know who I was the whole time. I wasn't able to concentrate.

My old school weren't the best, but the school I'm at now have been brilliant. When I arrived at the school I said to them 'I have mental health issues and I'm learning how to deal with that' and they were like 'OK, we will try and support you with it'. It was a learning process for everyone, for the people in my class, for the teachers, for myself. It was just a massive learning curve.

The position I'm in now is a position I'd never thought I'd get to. I never thought I'd be this old. I never thought I'd get to the age of 17."

Dexter's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Don't be scared. Never be scared. No matter what the hell is going through your head, no matter what you see, not matter what you've been through, you are standing here today. And the fact that you are standing here today is what matters. You can go through hell, but the bravest and strongest people I know are the people who have carried on when all they've wanted to do is give up. You feel like you are going to give up sometimes, but don't. You've got this far, you can go the whole bloody way.

The boy with anger issues gives the warmest hugs. The girl who cries everyday writes the best poems. The boy who's got cuts up his arms is the one that will take the blade away from you and say 'you don't need to do that anymore.' People aren't what you automatically think they are, they are not a label. With mental health, they are just people dealing with things.

Hope is so much stronger than fear. You've got to remember that it is always darkest just before the dawn. So it doesn't matter how dark or crap life gets, there is always going to be a reason to keep going. It's just about finding that reason."

Charlie, 22, South West

"I've just started my first year of my PhD. Throughout university I had been struggling with stress and Anxiety but I was the kind of person just to put my head down and not think about it too much. Just keep battling through with it. I saw that almost as a sign of weakness and just tried to battle on through it, as opposed to just talking to someone about it.

Then in my third year of university, around the third term, all the work piled up and it got to breaking point I guess. I'd always struggled with stress, but I got to the point in the third year where I got a complete mental block with everything. That level of stress just kind of builds up.

At university you are there for your brain, that's how I feel, so as soon as things started affecting how I was thinking, it occurred to me I actually needed to deal with the stresses, rather than this back and forth and seeing it as a weakness. I tried to hide it a bit from the people on my course and my flat mates and stuff like that.

The only people that I really opened up about it to initially were my parents. By the time it got to Christmas they realised that it was affecting me. I guess they'd normally seen me as quite a bubbly person, so I think it was quite a big, dramatic change.

It was almost like a weight off my shoulders talking to them. I guess it's quite a strange thing, I'd been hiding it for such a long time, so when I actually spoke about it, I was like 'why haven't I done that before'.

Opening up with people around me was a kind of gradual thing but it got better relatively quickly. I went from not thinking I was going to be able to do my exams to still doing my exams at Christmas, which was pretty good as far as I was concerned.

Yes, that was a pretty tough time but by the time I got to my summer exams in June I was like a different person, it was a different kind of feeling to how I was. It was a really positive experience.

It is a big thing for universities. There are obviously a lot of really intelligent people at university but sometimes it surprises me that someone who I think is much cleverer than myself, and a lot of people, will be very naïve about what mental health problems are.

Before I had experienced mental health difficulties myself I was probably one of the naïve people, which is a hard thing to accept. There were probably people around me at points in my life that I could have treated better had I had this experience before.

It's like quite a complex thing, my initial feelings towards mental health were that it could just be fixed by putting a smile on your face, being happy and bubbly and telling jokes and things like that. But it is a level deeper than that and I now understand.

Because of how I'd felt before, it was terrifying initially just to admit that I did have to go and talk to people and there was something that needed to be sorted out.

I think it's a tough one, because you can't get everyone to start going out and talking to everyone but obviously starting off early and allowing people to understand at school.

As far as like health education, I was never taught much about mental illness, that's obviously one thing to do. As just an awareness thing, there are such powerful tools like social media. You make one powerful viral video about how people feel, just kind of turn it on its head.

Say to people look, we know that a lot of people feel this way about mental health and think that it's just people not trying hard enough and it is a weakness. But there are these amazing people, like loads of celebrities, and I'm a physicist, so loads of really famous physicists that struggle with their mental health.

It's getting people aware that some of the greatest people have really struggled with it and overcome it, because it is something you can overcome. Just from my experience, I wasn't aware of it as much as I should have been, which affected me in two ways. It affected me in a sense that I wasn't really prepared for what happened and also I wasn't prepared for how to treat other people who it was happening to.

Charlie's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“Talk. Talk to the people that are closest to you, the people that you want to know about how you feel. That's the first step, wanting someone to know and then talking to them. It's quite a lonely feeling. Convince yourself that you're not the only one who felt the way you are feeling now and that you have felt well in the past and you will feel like that again in the future. I think that's important.”

Louise, 17, South East

“We moved to here when I was four years-old. I live with my parents and my younger brother and it's all very very normal. There is nothing extraordinary, very normal, very nuclear.

When I was about 14 I started to have panic attacks. Then when I was 16 I became depressed.

If I was in a little bit of distress, I would start to cry. Then I would just cry more and more until my breathing become really laboured. Then I couldn't really breathe and I'd fall down and I'd choke for a bit. It would take a long time to regain my breath and my body would be so tired it would take me about another day to get back to myself.

So they kind of stopped but then I was really sad instead. I didn't know I was depressed. It's more of a numbness than anything, you don't really realise what's going on.

The first time I got support was when I started at Sixth Form College because the student services there were really good.

My counselling was email counselling. So I would write as many emails as I like each week and then my email counsellor would write back one on a Friday. That was really helpful for me as it's easier for me to sort of write down what I'm feeling, and write down how things are. It helps me to get it across better.

So I would write to him loads, honestly 2,000 words a week, and he would write back but he'd kind of also include links to like self-help websites and things I could practice.

It was a really good service, I don't think it would work for everyone but for me I like to write and I'm quite creative in that way it worked. It's really good for people who would close up if they were talking to someone face-to-face. Also you have the time to type out what you're feeling which is kind of therapeutic in itself I think.

Eventually I stopped having panic attacks and I'm okay. I'd say it's been about six months, I'm not feeling unwell anymore.

I didn't tell people at the beginning, you don't want to burden people and you don't want people to sort of start screening you. You don't want to be the kind of person who just brings all their problems. You don't want anyone to think you are no fun.

I was actually quite isolated, I stopped talking to people, I stopped going to college and I stopped seeing friends. So I was all by myself quite a lot. But then I found, if you chat to people then they chat to you about the stuff that they've been through or they're going through. Everyone has stuff, so it helps, so I do and I continue to.

With myself and stigma, I think I stigmatised myself. I don't know if that makes any sense but it was me thinking I am crazy and there's something wrong with me. Like there is something wrong with my personality and I'm always going to be crazy, my brain doesn't work. I don't know where that came from but I thought that I am flawed and I'm always going to be mental. But I'm not.

You are so sort of confused about what's going on with you because you're looking around at everyone else and you can't really see why you're struggling so much when nothing is wrong in your life and you're physically well. I thought I was crazy and I'd never not be so problematic.

I think what needs to be sort of said more is that every single human being on the planet experience some sort of period of difficulty in their lives. It's literally just part of being a human being, we're such complex people we are bound to go a bit wrong sometimes, it's just part of humanity and having emotions, it's fine."

Louise's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“Although it feels like it’s never going to end, it is just like a phase of your time that’s going to be so difficult, but you’re not always going to feel like you feel. Definitely getting across that it’s so common; I think that would help people. Although it won’t make it any easier, if people knew that it was going to end and also that a load of people feel like how they feel, I think that would help.

It takes a lot of practice and hard effort to get yourself out of mental health difficulties. It’s not just a kind of wait for it to pass. You have to work really hard to get up and get dressed, work really hard to eat food. You have to put in effort and trial and error loads of things, but you will feel better in the end. But you can’t just sit there and wait for it to pass; you’ve got to do everything you can to help yourself.”

Andrea, 16, Wales

“I live with my mum, dad and siblings and I’m a young carer, so I look after my dad with quite a few mental problems himself.

Throughout my life I’ve suffered from Depression, Anxiety and an eating disorder. I find it really hard with my dad having mental issues as well, we clash so it’s kind of hard to handle it and keep on a good path about it.

My dad has Schizophrenia and Depression, like he’s got a split personality and stuff, so we are kind of similar. We kind of clash in that kind of way, and it gets quite difficult at home. Through his Depression I kind of compared him to myself and that’s how I registered that maybe I needed to seek help about it.

In Year 6 I realised I started having an eating disorder and I was referred to CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services]. It was quite strange because I was only young. I think also because I was so young I didn’t really understand it properly and the doctors didn’t explain it to me properly.

School is very difficult for me. It’s hard because I find it really difficult to concentrate. Throughout all of high school and primary I’ve experienced really bad bullying, so school was always a negative place for me to be at.

With school it’s kind of affected me majorly. I could have been achieving higher grades and doing more activities within the school but because of my mental health I find that some days I just can’t do anything. I just don’t want to talk to no one, I don’t want to do no work, so that kind of knocks me down in school.

I think it also makes me very unsociable because some days you just don't want to see no one, just shut away from everything. So I think it affects me as a person as well, because it knocks your confidence a lot. Then you're like too nervous and unconfident to go out or try new things and kind of just live your life really.

I went through a stage of self-harm. I couldn't work out why I was self-harming and then looking more into it I saw about how people with Depression might self-harm. I kind of just looked at all the symptoms and stuff like that and I kind of thought that maybe this was the category I fall under.

It was scary seeking help because I didn't want to be judged about it, but I knew I had to tell someone before I got too bad. Telling people, like I told the doctors, meant I got referred to CAMHS for the second time. At first it was OK, but what I found is after a few sessions they just kind of told me not to come back basically, like you're fine now. For a while that was ok but then it all comes back.

I've been quite closed about it because I don't want people to see me differently. The people who do know about it kind of, it's hard to explain, they're just more protective over what they say. They just don't want to offend you or anything like that, and it makes you feel a bit stupid because I'm normal like everyone else. People have to be more sensitive towards me and it just makes me feel small really.

Because I had previously told the school about my eating disorder, some teachers only made it worse, like telling me like how to lose weight and stuff like that, so they were helping me towards the eating disorder. One of my schools just suggested that I moved to a different school because they don't really offer much support. If anything they find it the easier way out to stop all the hassle, which is kind of upsetting because you would expect a school to do more to help.

I came to the decision not to tell them anymore about mental health so I kind of kept it away from my school because I don't want them to get involved with it because they haven't helped in the past.

It's not talked about in schools at all which is kind of difficult because it makes people not want to speak up about mental health, because they think if you're not supposed to speak about it in school, you're not supposed to speak about it at all.

It's one of those things we just don't talk about and I think it should be talked about more so people know that there are places where you can get help and people to talk to.

I think people need to be more educated about mental health and know how to handle it. I think a lot of people don't understand it because it is so complex and there are so many different parts to mental health. People don't understand what it is, so I think in schools it needs to be explained."

Chloe, 23, London

“I have been suffering with mental health my entire life but it was undiagnosed until about two years ago. I have always felt very different to other people and the way I would deal with things.

So the last two to three years I have been trying to sort of get my head around things, trying to realise that, you know, actually, there is the way I deal with things and the way I have been isn't really me, it is something that is much bigger. It's an illness I guess.

I think I define myself by my mental health issues and it's not who I am and I think I have started to come to the conclusion of that. It is just sometimes that I am not very well.

I think while I was so young and no one else really noticed it or understood, they just thought ‘well she is a troubled child’ sort of thing. It was unnoticed until I got to around 14 and I started self-harming. And then when I was about 18 I eventually went to see a doctor and they told me ‘oh you have Depression and Anxiety’.

I got to 20 and I just thought, ‘no, this is something much bigger’. I went and got myself diagnosed and it turns out that I am emotionally and behaviourally unstable which is classed as a Borderline Personality Disorder.

It was, it still is quite hard to get my head around it. Because you know this isn't something that I have just picked up in recent years, I have been doing this stuff my entire life so, kind of made me look at my life as a whole and try to pick out what pieces are me and what pieces aren't me.

It has damaged my self-worth because I would also sit there often and think ‘why did no one see this happening to me?’. I didn't even know what was happening to me, like someone could have stopped this.

It was hard, I mean I didn't want to go to the doctors, I was absolutely terrified of going because I knew at this stage things weren't right, I would be up all night screaming and shouting, arguing with like my boyfriend at the time and self-harming and taking overdoses.

It was like an intervention I guess, I ended up with my mum and my nan coming with me. I just remember not really doing much talking, just sitting in there crying, and they sort of explained everything to the doctor and then he prescribed me sleeping tablets and anti-depressants.

I found at that point in my life I was just, I didn't really know what to do, I was so confused. I'd take the medication and the medication used to make me worse. I was on it for about three years and then I took myself off of it because it just, it made me feel more abnormal than what I already did feel.

I just recently started group therapy. On Tuesday when I went, I kind of was the one that needed to speak out about a dark stage that I have been going through and it was a really new experience to sort of share that with a group of people. It was nice to just sort of know that the people in the group supported me and they wanted to help me too as much as I have been trying to help them. So it was a new intense but nice experience.

I think the more people that share their stories the better, because I think more people than we even know go through this stuff, they just don't speak out about it because of the stigmatisation.

I remember there was one time, I wasn't at A&E for myself, I was actually up there for a friend of mine and I don't know, even though it wasn't towards me, I still felt the sting of it.

There was a nurse and I think the person I was with felt too ashamed and embarrassed to say that they self-harmed, so he kind of made up some story. By the time we got round to seeing the doctor, we could then hear this nurse sitting around talking with other people mentioning the story and she was saying things like 'oh why do people have to lie about this sort of stuff?' and 'what is the point in cutting yourself?'. Really just sort of talking down about the whole situation.

I felt like this is something that I go through and if people that are here to help us can't even understand that then who the hell is going to help us?

On social media and stuff like again, it is not just directed towards me, but that you see stories on social media about people with mental health and stuff, and some of the comments and stuff that people put up are just so, they just seem so clueless.

It just upsets me because I am someone that struggles everyday with this stuff and I struggle communicating with people about how this affects me and how it makes me feel."

Chloe's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Just hold on, just hang on in there, there is light at the end of the tunnel, you just need to keep pushing yourself, get help from a doctor. If you don't want to take medication by all means don't take it but try and seek some help, some sort of help that will help you, like counselling or psychology or something. Because having someone to talk to and just someone that isn't in, you are not in a personal relationship with, it really, really helps to just have someone, just to have a confidant that you can just turn to and just lay everything out on, it really helps, just hang on in there."

Destiny, 17, East Midlands

"I'm in college doing Childcare. I am looking to go to university after and becoming an Oncology Nurse.

I've not had the best life to be fair. I got bullied in school in like Year 9 and then I started self-harming and just like getting really depressed and like cutting everyone off and trying to kill myself and that. Obviously I was under CAHMS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] to obviously try and help with my self-harming and that.

I was sitting in my garden with a family friend and he was just asking me how school was and everything. He was trying to talk to me and that because he could see that something was bothering me. I started telling him about it and that and obviously he told my parents.

I just felt like, because I told them, they were worried about me like more than myself. I just felt a bit like I don't know, a bit guilty, like it was my fault because they were having to take time out of their day-to-day life to come to appointments with me and that.

I didn't really get on with CAHMS at all; I was only there for a short amount because they signed me off because I missed an appointment. I just didn't find that they helped. After that, it just kind of got a bit too much, I tried killing myself and that; I did end up dropping out of school in Year 9.

I don't think I have got enough support because there is not really much my hostel can do, and obviously I've not got social services anymore, I don't really talk to my family, so there's nothing I've really got.

My social life, I didn't even really have one. I would just stay in my room and I don't know, just sit there. I didn't really like have many friends.

I don't know, I just didn't really do anything because obviously if I went out I used to think that everyone would be looking at me and laughing at me, just looking at my arms and my scars and mocking me. It just knocked back my confidence a bit.

When I was getting bullied it weren't like one or two people, it was like 10 to 20 girls smashing my head off walls and like just constantly calling me names. I just didn't want to go back there.

Obviously I used to get called like a 'freak' and that because I have got scars. They'd just look at me like I am a bit, like something they have got stuck on the bottom of their shoe or something.

I am not too sure, I think people just need to understand how important mental health is and like, nobody really realises how much damage they are doing until the person that they are bullying does end up taking their life. And then it's too late.

I think it would have been a lot better like if they had more people that people can go to and talk to.”

Destiny's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“If you think that you are at rock bottom, then just carry on pushing, because if you are at rock bottom then the only way you can go is up.”

Louis, 19, South East

“My dad was a drug abusing alcoholic, and he used to abuse me when I was younger, he used to abuse my mum and in turn it made my mum turn to alcohol to cope and suppress the feelings that she got from that type of stuff. She was what I was told is a functioning alcoholic.

I currently suffer from Depression, Anxiety, Social Anxiety and Vasovagal Syncope. Vasovagal Syncope is a form of Epilepsy but what it is that it is Epilepsy with a trigger, it is not an Epilepsy with flashing lights or anything like that, my Epilepsy trigger is stress, it can be anything.

I blame my past for that, because I think my body has been too stressed for too long and now doesn't know what to do with it, so it blanks me out so I don't have to deal with it and it can recover.

I turned to self-harming when I was 13. I didn't want to tell anyone because I didn't want to be the person ‘oh he cuts himself’, ‘oh he wants to die of suicide’ or something, no I didn't want to do that.

I didn't want to go to school in case someone questioned something, saw something or heard something. I didn't want to be questioned.

I watched a girl be beaten up in school because they found out that she has Schizophrenia. As she went into the cubicle, one guy went in and kicked open the door and they all just rushed in and laid into her, and they all ran away laughing as she is like bleeding. I felt so helpless because I wasn't that big in Year 7, I was five foot nothing, do you know what I mean. So me versus six foot Year 11's and six of them, I am not going to be able to do anything. I just had to stand there.

So yeah, stigma does happen and that is one of the things I was worried about. What if they find out that I have got Depression? Or what if someone finds out that I have got mental illnesses? I was like 'I can't go and tell the counsellor that I have got this stuff because what if it goes on a record and the record is left out on someone's desk or something in the offices and someone sees it?'.

I don't think people are educated in mental illness. I am not saying they need to know the ins and outs of it, I mean they need to know what Depression is. I didn't know what Depression was until I had it and then I had to kind of research it myself.

Even then the doctor didn't explain it to me, they just said 'you have low moods'; I was like 'yeah, I have always had low moods'. I just Google'd it myself, but if I didn't have it, I wouldn't have heard of it.

You want to get them about Year 9, Year 10 roughly. You don't need to explain the ins and outs of it, just say, roughly go over certain parts of mental illnesses, whether it be like Depression and ask people what they know about it. So you get a class you say 'Depression, what is Depression?', 'what happens when you have depression?' and see what they know.

Get rid of some of the myths that are out there, like 'all depressed people want to kill themselves'. That is not true. If people were more like 'oh James has Depression, he looks a bit sad, maybe we should go and sit with him for a bit' that would brighten that guy's day more than a counsellor ever could.

I don't know, I just think that people need to be more educated. That is what I am saying, I just think it should be taught in school. Even if it is like one or two lessons in the whole year, like two hours of just education about mental health in like maybe a PSE [Personal and Social Education] or PSHE [Personal, Social and Health Education], I can't remember what it is called, one of them kind of like life lessons, you know what I mean? It wouldn't do any damage to them; it would just inform them about what is actually going on."

Louis' advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"The advice I would give to anyone struggling with mental health would be that no matter how hard, or how crappy things get, and trust me, I know it gets bad, but the one thing I would say is don't give up because all that you are giving up on is the chance of it getting better."

Megan, 17, Wales

“My mum was a single parent, I am an only child and sometimes things are difficult.

I hated school so much. My teachers were not fair and would not let me do my own thing in art. One teacher told me I was too dumb to do an art course. I have just finished my first year in college and got a distinction. I didn't receive any support at school but college were better and encouraged me.

I often feel stressed, anxious and depressed. My mum and other family members are not aware of how I feel because I do not tell them. The only people I talk to are the art therapist and a youth worker. I can tell them anything.

My friends can't help because I don't really tell them anything. I don't want to be judged by them or treated any differently. I am just starting to trust one or two people.

The only real support I have had about my stress and being anxious is the staff at the YMCA. I get a lot out of the support from the YMCA and don't feel I need anything else.”

Megan's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“If a friend felt like me I would tell them to ‘try not to worry about what people think and talk about your feelings’.”

Faith, 16, East

“My family they originate from Kenya, but I've lived here all my life. I live on a council estate, which is yeah – OK, sometimes.

I've just finished Year 11. I'm probably going to go to college, if I get good grades I will probably go to a grammar school.

If it very difficult for my friends to find services to help them, especially because of their age. It is difficult dealing with it, apparently all their parents have to just deal with it and try to take care of it by themselves. In my opinion, they are not really the right people to go to.

People always say ‘it's just a phase’, or ‘it's just something to do with the personality’, or ‘oh they just want attention’, which I find really upsetting – they are really struggling.

Who is best placed? Maybe counsellors or something, it's just not that easy to get one around here.

So many people wanted to go to just this one counsellor, they just couldn't handle it. They were just juggling between so many different people they tried to rush people out so not really necessarily caring about what they are actually going through. They were just trying to get down through the numbers, just to say that they've seen a counsellor. Not necessarily solving the problem.

Depression and Anxiety are probably the only things I have dealt with round here. School only cater for trying to get the best grades out of people, not really caring about their wellbeing. They care more about grades then checking to see if they are alright. It's the pressure to do so many assignments or get things handed in time or giving them so many big things that they can't really function as a person. Most teachers just see us all as robots to get one task done and go straight on to another; it just causes so much stress.

I sort of just had to juggle taking care of myself as well as taking care of my friends too. I was mainly focussed on taking care of them, it interfered in school work, it was really difficult to deal with it.

I think if there is no one else who is actually going to help them, I feel obliged to help them otherwise they're just not going to find someone. I just gave them a shoulder to cry on. I just said 'hey, if you want to talk to me it's fine, just anytime, just let it out'. That was the best I could do.

I am not really trained in that sort of field; I was just a kid then. I really didn't know what to do. I didn't know if to ask for help for that person, so it was really difficult to know what do I do. Do I just hug them and say 'everything is going to be alright', when it really isn't going to be? It's just difficult.

Now I can tell them about it, because now I have a better insight into it, but then not many people know about it which is a scary thing.

It could be down to culture or just saying 'just get over it', people automatically assume that oh if someone has Anxiety or Depression, 'oh yeah they are doing it for attention, just leave them'. That's the thing that really bugs me."

Faith's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Say something, tell someone. There is no point really crying in silence. I know it sounds a bit cliché; everybody says it, 'oh everything is going to be okay', but seriously just go out and ask for help. The worst thing that could happen is that they could say no, but they will show you another place where you can actually get help. It won't be much of a hassle, plus it can help you, even if it does just a tiny bit."

Chelsea, 20, North West

“I had a really like bad family background so I’ve been through counselling and stuff like that.

I’m in college and I did Health and Social Care Level 3 last year and it was a struggle ‘cos my health deteriorated and I got diagnosed with Depression and Anxiety and stuff like that.

I think it was like two years ago, I was in college and I was having little breakdowns and I started self-harming and stuff and the safeguarding officer at the college sent me to the doctors and then it went on from there.

She just asked me questions like ‘are you feeling OK?’ and ‘what drove you to that?’ and stuff, and cos like it was exam times so it was pressured and I felt really like closed in and stuff and panicked and like I couldn’t handle stuff. So I was telling her and she offered to go to the doctors and ring up and stuff and then the doctors put me on medication and she helped me through.

College wanted to know straight away what happened at the doctors and stuff so they just took down the medication I was on and just kept an eye on me.

I told the YMCA. They helped me through it, working with me like once a week and they said if I need to go there they’ll support me with college and stuff.

It was mainly at night and stuff when I was alone and stuff. I have a boyfriend and like he supported me through it and he understood.

My family didn’t know, because they didn’t like me to be on the tablets. They didn’t really understand and stuff. My mum knows now, not about the Depression, just about the Anxiety and stuff.

It’s just some of them don’t understand and they just think you’re too young to have this and you shouldn’t take the tablets, but I just wanted to get better.

I kind of like shut people out so they felt like they had done something, but it weren’t the case of that; it was me not wanting to speak to anybody. I didn’t know how to handle it or anything. They just stopped talking to me or if they knew I had Anxiety they just didn’t come around me as much.

They don’t understand on how Anxiety impacts on everything, they think that it’s not a real thing and that you can do normal things and stuff, which you can’t. They think you’ve gone a bit insane and stuff and it’s just all in your head and there is nothing wrong with you.

It just made it worse. I just got more upset and sad because people thought that I was just not right in the head and stuff like that. I'm like proper paranoid and stuff so I didn't really want to tell anybody or anything like that.

Even though you always seem happy it's not like it's not there. We just need to make people more aware in like early in school and stuff so people know that it's an issue and stuff like that.

I think we should like start saying in schools that this is what it is, even though people may seem happy, inside, they may not be.

I've had counselling and stuff like that and I'm getting back into college so I've got my mentoring session and I've got the YMCA and they've got a new project out so that helps me a lot. It's the wellbeing project; it makes people aware of like people's Anxiety and trying to do something about it.

Once you leave CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] when you're 16 there's nothing in between to stop it. You get transferred to the adult's one but the adults treat you totally differently once you turn like 18 or 16 or whatever the age is. We try and make the point that we need something for people who are overage but are not an adult yet but there's nothing out there for them.

I use social media but I don't really post anything on it, it's just to stay in contact with friends, I just use Facebook, Snapchat and stuff like that.

I have to be really careful about what I post or something like that in case people see it and start calling me out on it, you know, social media is like a really bad thing because if you post something anyone can comment on it and it'll probably just make my Anxiety even worse, or if I get like bullied on it or something.

I experienced cyber bullying when I was in school so I don't really go on it as much now, it's just to see what everybody is up to and contact people if I need them."

Chelsea's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"You're not alone, there are other people that are suffering like exactly the same things are you. It's not you on your own, there's nothing wrong with you, and everybody is experiencing it, so you shouldn't be ashamed of the way you are."

Ellis, 15, South East

“When I first knew I had mental health was probably around Year 7 I guess, so I was around 12 or 13 years of age.

Just low moods, low self-esteem, just getting upset over the littlest things and just in general not feeling great and not feeling myself.

It affected school work massively because I was losing concentration. I was just so distracted about things about myself and how insecure I am, and all the stuff that’s going wrong with me.

It affects your confidence so much you know. If you look confident then you feel confident and I didn’t look confident at all. It just brought everything around me down, it brings a cloud over your head and you’re stuck and it just keeps raining.

You see all these things on telly about friendships and relationships getting along and people being happy on social media; Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook. All that you see is everyone enjoying themselves. Social media is such a big part of our childhood at the moment now because of these phones and all these laptops and stuff like that. It’s hard to see other people living like that and you think ‘why am I not like that?’ and ‘why am I so different?’.

At that point in time I didn’t really have any friends myself so it was hard to talk to other people. Me personally, I don’t really like talking to people about it, I just don’t feel like people understand what’s going on or they don’t know how to help me really. I didn’t really find it helped, I thought it put a little bit more stress on me and made me anxious for how people would, not judge me, but see me in a different kind of view.

As I said, I don’t like talking about it; there is a time and a place for it. When you’re not down or you’re not low, you don’t know what to say because you don’t know what you’re feeling. It’s a whole different emotion to when you’re actually in that zone. And when you actually need a person or you need them people they’re not there for you, they are not able to aid you in anyway.

Sometimes you can sit in your bedroom at nine, 10, 11 o’clock at night and you’re sitting there and you don’t know what to do with yourself. Because you know you are feeling low, you know how you can punish yourself by feeling that way if you get down, but then there’s no one you feel you can talk to.

There is a massive stigma about it, I’ve set up a Facebook page about stigma about mental health and I’ve had lots of support through the local community.

With the stigma about it, we were handing out leaflets one day and this old lady; she must have been around 70s or 80s. I offered her a leaflet and she was like 'oh, what a whole load of rubbish' and that stigma of that lady not understanding what's going on and how big in our communities and our nation and the effect it's having.

It just needs to be told to younger people who when they grow up can teach their kids, and they can teach their kids, to teach their kids, to teach their kids. So there isn't that stigma around it that it's fake and it's not real.

It's not spoke about as much as it should be; it's something that I feel schools brush under the carpet. It's something they don't really want to talk about because you know it just puts more stress on the schools and they've got to get more money in to help all these kids.

If you can build that relationship with someone and then tell them how you're feeling. It's a big opener if the person you are talking to is kind of feeling the same way as you are. You're like 'oh, I'm not the only one actually, I'm not that different, I'm just suffering with an illness that can and can't be treated'. You just feel that relationship building between the two or a group of people and it makes you more relaxed and allows you to talk to each other; you know piggy-back on each other, which is good."

Ellis' advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Don't give up. Don't ever give up. Giving up is the worst thing that you can do. If you feel like you are feeling that rubbish and that low, just think, there is always someone there for you. No matter who it is, there is family that love you, there are friends that love you, there is all sorts. There is light at the end of the tunnel. It does take a long time, it's like getting a job that you really want, it doesn't happen just like that, it takes time and effort and you've got to work through it and you've got to try and be positive. Treat every day as it is and get through that day and everything will be okay in the end."

Felix, 15, East

"I find school OK, I quite enjoy it, it's interesting every day particularly now I'm doing my GCSEs it's mostly things I want to be doing. I will probably go on to do something in computer science. Computing and electronics are my favourite two subjects really.

I was having issues around my sexuality which I'm okay with now. I've always been okay with myself really, but I wasn't sure how other people would react so it's that caused the Anxiety I guess.

I guess I always was different, it sounds odd, everyone says they are different. Like I always had troubles sort of fitting in.

I think people treated me differently, they still do, but you get used to it. Everyone needs someone to sort of make fun of, well not everyone, I'm the most amazing person.

I don't know, maybe I sort of misjudged how much it impacted me but like at the time I didn't feel particularly bad about it. Maybe looking back, but at the time I was quite unphased at the top-level anyway which I'm glad about really.

When this was happening, I had a friend who was 16. I spoke to him about a lot of things. It was really him and some other friends that encouraged me to go to my parents.

Around sort of, when was it? Around the start of Year 8, quite young, that's when thought I ready to go to my parents and talk about it, and so I did. Eventually you have to, sooner rather than later. And I guess that's why I did.

They were cool with it and asked if there was anything they could do to help, so they spoke to the school and arranged for me to see the counsellor. It was quite emotional, but it went well, I guess, I can't really remember it that well. Maybe I chose not to.

I saw a counsellor in Year 8. The school already had a situation in place with a counsellor. I don't think they do anymore. I got to speak to them. I didn't actually find them particularly useful though. I had them to speak to, but we didn't really go very deep into any issues and it felt quite superficial. Maybe I wasn't comfortable enough to open up with a stranger at that point.

I think I had it once every two weeks on a Tuesday, which was good because I missed PE [Physical Education], I never liked PE. But aside from missing PE, it wasn't at the time that helpful but maybe it was a wasted opportunity from me, but I think I still gained something from it.

Sort of the fact that knowing there was someone to speak to and sort of, I could...I'm not really sure. It just seems like thinking back it was helpful; it's difficult to say without living another life without it.

I can't say there weren't enough resources of anything because it's such a personal struggle. You can give all the help in the world but at the end of the day it's what you're doing yourself.

Now, everything is really quite OK in my life I could say. I don't really have any problems. What does sometimes sadden me is the number of people I talk to who do suffer from these problems.

When you're in that position it feels like you're the only person who has that, the world wouldn't understand. It's being afraid to sort of let someone else into that space so that they get how you're feeling.

I've seen it from myself a bit, but also from other people. For lots of people, it is very difficult to sort of prepare yourself to let someone else understand, even if you know they can help you and you know that it's the right thing to do.

But then at the same time you sort of say 'do it another day', 'do it tomorrow', 'wait a bit', 'go to sleep now'. It's getting to that point of saying I'm going to do it now.

It was my friends encouraging me, people that I trusted and admired, they said that was the thing I should do, that it would be OK and they really gave me the confidence.

It's got to come from someone you already trust I think and putting like an older person or someone else into that position, it's difficult for them to earn that.

That's why I'm very honoured to be for lots of people in their position of trust - that they can speak to me but unfortunately I can't always do everything."

Felix's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"It's the same one thing that has been said too many times and it doesn't work, it's not that good, but it's the best you can offer - it gets better. That is really is the prevailing message of hope. It's difficult because when the ball is in your court there is only so much you can do, it's just the best message I can offer."

Kayley, 16, Yorkshire and Humber

"Personally I have gone through quite a few issues. I was bullied, since I can remember, I must have been, well even when I started primary school, I had people picking on me but it never really hit me until I was around 12 or 13.

To be honest, a few of us were very similar, we all came from the same school and we've always experienced problems and the school didn't want to help us. We were all kind of beat-down kids with nothing to really do about it.

Not so much that it were like the only school in the area that bullying happened, it were more that the school wasn't willing to do anything about it to ruin their reputation.

The bullying was all verbal; I was never once hit by anyone or beat up. It was people telling me that I wasn't good enough, I wasn't talented, I wasn't smart enough to be in the classes I was in. One I heard frequently was that I was too fat to be considered pretty or good looking or anything.

At the time I didn't respond, I just sat away and looked at myself and thought they are right. I was told to kill myself and that's what really really drove it in.

I started losing sleep and I were getting around one hour a sleep a day and I still do now. I started having really low moods, and when I didn't have low moods, I didn't feel anything at all. I started feeling really scared to go out in public.

One night I just couldn't sleep and went into my mum's bedroom crying and told her I couldn't go back to the school I was at. She took me out of school the next day and we applied for a new school.

I were talking to my youth worker and she said we could put you on the list, they'll be a waiting list but you can, you know it's a way you can get counselling for free. I don't think it worked for me, I could see how it could help someone, but personally I didn't really find it helpful. I feel like because I already had such low self-esteem that someone telling me that things were going to be fine and get better it just didn't reassure me.

I always had that voice in the back of my head saying that things were bad and they were going to stay bad.

The school didn't really offer any help, my mum explained the situation and they were like 'yes we understand' but other than that, we didn't hear anything else from them. They don't really know what to do when someone is struggling.

Obviously if I'd gone outside a bit more and talked to more people I feel like I'd have had that reassurance that other people were there for me. But I chose to stay inside instead.

I feel like it's something that I can kind just can be very upfront about now. I can just tell people that I don't sleep and sometimes I'm really sad, but at end of day that's what I am now.

But I'm still very uncomfortable going out into situations where there's lots of people but I'm not so uncomfortable speaking and talking to people and things. It's more when I'm asked to do something that's a physical activity – I don't have the self-esteem to do that.

I've just done my GCSEs and after finding them easy and not really struggling with them, even with limited amounts of sleep, I kind of proved myself to myself.

Since leaving school I've been doing a lot better and I haven't been struggling as much, so it can be situational. It can be overcome. I'm doing music at college this September. I've been waiting to go to college since I was 11.

I want to be a music therapist because music really helped me when I were going through certain situations. I started going to a youth club where we play music every Friday and it kind of brought me out of my shell and it made me feel a lot more comfortable around people.”

Kayley’s advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“It is alright to be in that situation, it’s really common. So many people do, but so many people are scared. Don’t be afraid to tell people that you are struggling because more often than not people are willing to open their arms and invite you in and help you and be supportive. Even if they’re not that good at it, they’ll try.”

Daisy, 15, South East

“As my parents separated in 2010, me, my mum and brother moved over from a small village in Spain.

My dad now lives in Scotland with his girlfriend and her two daughters. I rarely see him because of the distance but in 2013 I managed travel up there during Easter and then again in the summer. The Easter me and my brother visited, that is when I first remember experiencing negative thoughts around food but I didn’t necessarily act on them. I wasn’t actively restricting but I would feel guilty over eating ‘too much’ or ‘unhealthy’.

It was the first night in our new house when I had a complete meltdown. I’d gotten back from ballet and sobbed to my mum that I’d eaten too much and I was going to get fat. My mum stayed up late with me that night adding up my calories and looking up nutritional information on the internet. That was the first major incident. At the time the possibility of an eating disorder was unthinkable. It was just something I had to do - eat as little as possible.

Life went on as usual and it wasn’t until the summer and I was back up in Scotland that things got serious. I’d been restricting my intake to the point where I was on the cusp of being underweight; by then I had learned to hide my obvious problems well. My dad soon noticed my strange eating habits and my problem with mirrors. I would be stuck in the bathroom body checking and end up really stressed out. His girlfriend had to cover up all the mirrors in the house with towels it was so bad. That was at my worst.

CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] are so stretched, they can deal with the patients physically at risk, but once you’re a healthy weight they don’t have the resources to deal with you anymore. What they don’t realise is that when you reach that point you need the support more than ever.

I think if they gave people suffering from eating disorders ongoing support to reach that point where 'the penny drops' - I have heard others call it - the recovery rates would increase immensely.

They also need to stick with people longer when they reach the healthy range instead of shoving them out the door. Just because the illness is manageable to a certain extent that by no stretch of the imagination equals recovered.

CAMHS have only recently just got on my case again and putting their foot down with me because I'm below a certain number. I've been making silly decisions for months and only now they take notice. Numbers are insignificant. It's a mental illness.

Over the couple years I've been at school there's been more than one triggering and unhelpful lesson. Last year in science the task was to work out your BMI [Body Mass Index] to see if you were overweight. I got extremely distressed and not even because it affected me, but I was furious for my friends.

Sir had three sets of bathroom scales out and made the class weigh themselves and work out their BMI. He picked out three people in the class and put their BMI on the board. In my opinion it was a humiliating and unnecessary lesson and benefited no one.

I went full on angry the minute he mentioned BMIs. Out of the classroom I went and called mum in hysterics. Even though it wasn't meant to make anyone feel bad, the school board is obviously too thick to realise there's many vulnerable teenagers that have to sit through that lesson. It's not the teachers fault because he was given a brief but I'm still tempted to start a campaign.

We don't realise just how many people are anxious about life in general. You look at someone and they seem to be totally sorted but you never know, they could be completely freaking out every minute of every day. People are always too quick to judge.

Now school isn't all bad; on the second day the new headmaster brought in Humanutopia. They are an organisation who runs workshops in work environments. It's all about realising your potential, respecting others, teamwork etc. The topic of bullying was a significant thing and it got highlighted how there's a social hierarchy and rivalry throughout the school when in reality we are all working towards the same goal. We were then given the opportunity to stand up and speak out about how others make us feel.

There was a girl who had gone through similar experiences as me and that was when I mustered up the courage to put myself out there. It was a bit of a shock and I surprised myself but taking off my 'mask' in front of my entire year and several teachers has definitely been a positive.

If was a comfort knowing someone could empathise and I have received no spiteful comments only crying students coming up to me and saying how they had no idea.

I think I've gotten much better at raising awareness. Instead of blowing up and getting frustrated by ignorance I can calmly rationalise they're unintentionally hurtful comments and guide them on a better way to word their thoughts. Something that small can make all the difference."

Yousuf, 24, East Midlands

"I'm living in the YMCA, been here for three months now. Me and my partner we fled violence in London and we came here. I managed to settle down here, rented out a house privately, me and my partner were working, everything was going great. Then, sort of, there would be stages where I would start thinking about everything that we have gone through and all the stuff that she had to go through because of the stuff I went through and it started building up.

Then it got to days where I couldn't be bothered getting up for work, and days I'd be at work and say to the manager I'm going for lunch and then not even go back. I lost my job, couldn't afford to pay rent so lost my house, became homeless and from there it was pretty much straight hit rock bottom.

Just before I got to the YMCA, I started to sort of realise that I was not being myself and obviously there is issues going on so I started sort of searching online, trying to see what would sort of match my symptoms. But first I didn't really know who to speak to, who to trust, because I went through a kind of rough patch.

I don't really trust people, so I find it hard to sort of speak to people about my issues because I don't know who is really going to pay attention and whose going to push me away sort of thing, so I just keep myself to myself.

When I noticed that it is starting to get worse, sleepless nights and thinking about things that I have gone through over and over again and just getting angry, so I thought you know, I would just seek advice from my doctor.

I finally opened up to the doctor and said, this is what is happening and he started telling me 'oh it is Depression and Anxiety'. To be honest at first when I went to the doctors, they weren't taking it serious, so I just sort of pushed myself away from them as well and then it started getting worse.

I thought that I need to speak to the doctors again, but I need to sort of let them know that it is getting worse and see what happens, so I gave it another shot, but they sort of pushed me away again. Then the third time I ended up going there again and they tried to sort of push me away again and I sort of lost it there and that is obviously when the doctors saw what I get like and that is when they took it serious.

Obviously I knew that I am not myself, and that it is getting worse. But no matter how much I told them in the first two stages they wouldn't really take it serious until I totally lost it and started saying to the doctors that well if they don't do nothing about it I ain't going home and you can't move me from there sort of thing and that is when they started taking it serious.

They offered me medication, they said 'we can put you onto some sleeping tablets and give you a two week supply, see how that works and review it after two weeks'. Obviously I went back after two weeks, the tablets that they gave me did nothing, so they put me on a higher dose, but then I refused to take the tablets. I was like, rather than just drugging myself up to try to get away from things I would rather just deal with the situation itself and try and overcome it, which is what I have been doing so far, it is going absolutely brilliant.

Once you get told as a teenager or a young person that you have got mental health issues, it is a big thing. The doctors and the NHS and people might not realise it, but for us, once you get labelled as having mental health issues trying to be able to tell someone else 'oh I have been told I have got mental health issues' is a really big thing and I don't think it is right to sort of label.

I think that is one of the things that sort of needs to stop because it is making things a lot worse, and I think that is one of the reasons why young people don't talk. Even in this hostel here, there's a lot of people who want to talk about it, but because of that label they have been given, it makes them feel like they are 'nutcases' or something."

Yousuf's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"The advice I would give them and what I have been given is just put down everything you feel in words, it helps. Because what I used to do is put down everything that made me sort of angry and then just rip it up, just shred everything and it is like you are just getting rid of it.

Then obviously just trying to keep active and keep your mind focused on doing other things, because the more time you spend sitting down doing nothing is the time when you start thinking and your Depression and Anxiety starts to build up on small things, it is always a good thing to actually get up and be active, the more proactive you are the less you will think about you know what you have gone through and what you are going through and it will give you time to sort of relax the mind."

Jack, 18, North West

“Mental health has been an issue with me that’s been at the forefront for quite a while because my best friend suffered with depression.

I think he would have been 14 at the time and I was 15. He used to get in his own head quite a lot; I think that is where it all started. It affected him in a way that he had very low self-esteem and he used to self-harm and it was quite hard for the both of us to combat it.

I’d never experienced it before and I didn’t know how to help him in a way that would be productive for the both of us.

It was something that we definitely spoke about in school. It was always highlighted in our school that you can, if you are suffering with any problems, you can go to these people or talk to somebody. We were very much encouraged to talk to somebody about our problems.

He used to come and talk to me, I think he felt like he couldn’t talk to anyone else because nobody else would listen to him and take him seriously - whereas I did. So we managed to talk through it and eventually I managed to talk him around to going to counselling through school.

It was definitely a positive experience for him, I think it was just another person he could just talk to and let out all his problems with. Me and him both work quite closely with the school counsellor now, she is lovely.

I think it is definitely a service that our school does very well with. I think it’s something that our school is fortunate to have and I think it is based on the fact the staff are so passionate about it. Our Head of Pastoral Care is so passionate about it, she really does strive to make sure that everything is the best it can be surrounding the topic.

I mean he’s completely fine now, we are stronger than ever, but it’s helping him through that which definitely got me inspired to help other young people now, especially in school as well.

I now take quite a big role in the pastoral care system so I am a Peer Mentor there, we run youth clubs and different things so that people can just come and talk to us – me and my best friend.

With mental health it is not so much a stigma portrayed very publically, I think it’s a stigma that’s in a way is very two faced. So people will say one thing but then say something else behind their back. It is very much like that.

I also think that the stigma is also generated by person who is suffering from the mental health issues. Obviously my friend said that he didn't feel like he could talk to anyone else because they would make fun of him and I would say 'you know that's not true'.

You definitely need just more people to talk about it and more advertising on what was on offer. I think it has to be someone that they trust, it can be anyone as long as they trust them and they feel that they aren't going to be judged or stigmatised.

For my friend it was me, but I've known other people where it's been members of staff in school or at St John it's been volunteers who used to work in our unit. It just depends on whether you trust them.

Our local council at the moment has done a project with our school but not sure if it's been done with other schools, whereby a couple of students receive training in mental health first aid and surrounding young people's mental health in order so that we can set up different support groups such as the one we've set up now for lower years. I think that is definitely a good starting point to let young people help young people."

Jack's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"I would just say that I think no matter how dark you feel or how deep the hole is you are in at the moment you will always get out and you need to find somebody to talk through your problems. Like I say, it can be anyone you trust as long as you trust them fully and you trust them to do what is right for you and you trust that they are going to listen to you and take on board what you say and do what's best for you so that you can get better."

Will, 20, South East

"Well in retrospect I always think that I have struggled with my mental health, but I didn't actually recognise it until maybe, when I started A-Levels. I started thinking 'I am enjoying all of this?' and 'I shouldn't still be feeling cranky'.

Cos I have Bipolar Type II at the moment, certainly the less severe type, it is bearable. I always just thought that I wasn't that strange and everyone else was just better at hiding how they felt, but retrospectively, no, that is not the case.

My doctor was really, really good. The only difficulty I had was navigating through the system, because you know it takes forever to get anywhere with a specialist. She didn't just whack me on meds, which I really appreciated. I mean I did end up on medication but that wasn't her first port of call, which I still appreciate.

My parents were really good, they are great and there is a history of Depression and all sorts in my family. Because for them, I am the first child, it was the first experience for them as well. They were out of their depth and I was out of my depth, so the doctor was a good place to go.

I didn't know what it was and my teachers didn't know what it was, I was just telling them exactly how I felt, that I had no energy, I was going to the doctor and kept them updated and said 'you know if you could put special consideration in or something'.

Like I think in all scenarios I had been having periods of just becoming more and more detached from reality, like I would often, pretty regularly feel like kind of my body was 10cm away from me, kind of like a shell or like a, yeah like a shell, like I was kind of slightly removed in some sort of other dimension.

It was weird, I still get it, but I know what it is and I know how to deal with it. But you know for someone who didn't know what it was, it was kind of scary and it was just weird, I didn't enjoy it.

Usually when I do experience it now I am just like 'yeah'. I am so used to it, I just go 'alright' and I get on with life. But the thing is I am on such good medication, it is strong, strong stuff.

I think the first thing I noticed is when I started taking anti-depressants was that it was like I had an extra brain you know, like I could think about things in like multiple levels. I could look at things more objectively, like stand back. I couldn't stand back before.

Before that I would respond, almost with no self-control, I just couldn't control it, and if I did, then I just felt even worse. But over time and having just taken the medication for over two years now, kind of over time that second person has just whoosh, melted back and it is now just one person.

I feel like for me and my experience the stigma has been around the medication rather than the actual illness. Like I know somebody with Bipolar Type II and they don't take any medicine because they feel that it is going to dull their personality and make them into a zombie, that is largely how most people view anti-depressants and mood stabilisers.

Well it is not, it is going to make you better, as long as you are on the right stuff you know, you have got to fiddle around to get it on the right dosage, and you do get weird horrible side effects but frankly, the side effects I would rather live with those than wanting to kill myself.

So yeah, I think, and I know there is a lot of oh you know, ‘have you taken your meds yet?’ you know just because you are expressing an emotion. ‘You haven’t taking your medication’. ‘Yes I freaking have, this is just called having emotions like a person’. Yeah so in my experience the stigma has been around the actual medication rather than the illness.

I think as far as poor mental health goes that I had a pretty decent experience. I am very fortunate to have good family, good friends and to have gone to a good college. If things had turned out differently, I don’t know.”

Will’s advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“I think to anybody and everybody, it doesn’t really matter your background, if you feel the way that you do then you do, it is about what you do with the feelings, you know, you could feel whatever you like, but at the end of the day, it is all about what you do with it. I think once you start understanding then you can get the help and whatever because you recognise that you need it.”

Seren, 13, Wales

“I’ve been diagnosed with kind of like a mild Depression and an eating disorder.

I don’t think I was the first one to realise I had mental health issues, I think it was my mum. She noticed, you know, the side-effects of an eating disorder like sunken eyes. I started to look like really unhealthy, I wasn’t eating at all. I wasn’t sleeping. Well I was sleeping quite a lot actually but I would sleep more in the day than in the nights.

So my mum kind of started taking matters into her own hands and started looking up on it. When she came up to me saying she thinks I have an eating disorder, I think it kind of triggered something. I kind of knew that something was wrong with me, but then that triggered me to pick out all of the little bad differences that I think about myself, that caused Depression, and then I started to self-harm quite a lot of the time.

It’s just; I was in quite a dark place really because I don’t think anyone understood. Because my dad’s parents didn’t break up, my mum’s parents didn’t split up, I kind of felt like I was the only one in that situation and therefore the only one I could rely on was me. I thought that I knew everything about everything. It was just a really confusing and dark time really. This was at 12.

I think trying to stop these kind of hurricane feelings inside me was a challenge as well, because trying to overcome something so big, it takes over your teenage life.

I felt a bit helpless. I can remember feeling very alone and kind of stuck because I felt like no one was there.

I didn't want people to know. I kind of knew that something was wrong with me but I didn't want to pin point it because I knew that would just make me realise that something was wrong with me.

So the sooner my mum found out the quicker I kind of got really angry at myself because I've always expected to be someone that's top this and top that, like just perfect at everything. I normally don't reach those expectations that I set for myself and that does knock me back a lot.

If people found out I think that I would feel very exposed because people would know one of my darkest sides, and people are so used to seeing my best side. If they were to see a little part of me that wasn't OK, I think that would change their whole perspective on me as a person and I don't want that.

Only one teacher knows, and he's like a school counsellor. He doesn't come to the school to counsel, he comes to teach but he also helps. He's the only person who knows and he can tell when I'm having a bad day, so he always lets me step out for five minutes maybe just to talk about it and that does help a lot because maybe I don't get the feeling of being alone.

I think it would be good to have someone to teach us about the word 'acceptance', just someone to educate us on the good things in life. If you educate young people that it will get better then they'll start understanding more."

Seren's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"I would tell others to listen to people, don't lock yourself away. Don't try and cover yourself up with lies, don't try and rid yourself of all these bad things that are happening. You are who you are; just live your life as it goes. Take every step slowly and it's ok to trip up a few stairs. It's fine if you need someone to help you, by all means have that because if anything it makes things a lot easier for you."

Adam, 17, North West

“When I was in like Year 7 and Year 8, I basically just flipped out of nowhere and then went really quiet for a few months.

It felt very lonely I have to admit. It also affected me further on because Year 7 and 8 are obviously important for making mates and everything. I just stayed quiet and kept to myself.

It was generally because of the primary school experience I had and everything like that. I generally kept myself to myself just because I thought it was a better way of dealing with things and sorting my own things out.

It was when I first started at the youth club that I saw that people were in the back room and getting help. So the next time I went in I had a meeting and I spoke to one of the youth workers. That’s when I started speaking more about it. It opened my eyes a little bit to actually there is someone there to help when you need it and they actually do help in a way.

I went to the doctors once recently and it wasn’t very good I must admit. He basically said ‘try and act happier, smile more and come back in a few weeks and you’ll be fine’. I found it quite funny to be honest, because obviously I’ve gone there for a way to get help and they just shunted it off like it was an everyday thing.

Obviously because I isolated myself, my friends isolated themselves away from me because they thought ‘oh he doesn’t want to talk to anyone’ and ‘he doesn’t like talking’. It took me a few years to find a group of people that I felt comfortable around because I isolated myself earlier on in life.

Some people these days make quite a few jokes around it, like it’s nothing, but it does affect people. Others see it as a joke and they can have a laugh with it, but to another person it can be seen as really offensive. If they are going through it themselves, they can’t perk up and say anything about it.

Everyone who has had mental health will have gone through it at one point, especially at the age I’m at now because people see everything as a joke. I think with people at my age and maybe a bit younger – people joke about it and they don’t actually realise the severity of what it can do to someone.

Mental health needs to be, not put in your face, but needs to be brought up more during say Year 6 mainly I would say, because that’s when the transition starts for a lot of people and because it’s the new thing of going to high school. It’s like ‘oh God it’s going to be scary, I don’t know what to do’. Bringing it up then might help, but then following through up every year and maybe even when you leave school.

There is a stigma around it. I'm a very manly person and I can't bring my own emotions into it as then I'll be seen as someone soft. I think with someone who is a stronger person, it will be harder to bring it up in front of say friends or a close group of other lads like a football club or anything. It will be a lot harder to bring it up because you are a guy.

It's the same with girls as well. Because I know a few people who only speak to close friends about how they feel and they can't bring it up in front of others in case they get the mick taken out of them."

Adam's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"I would say go speak to your parents as soon as you realise something, even if it's the minor thing of you have a few bad days. Just go speak to them, because if you don't it can bottle up and bottle up until it gets to that point you don't know what to do with yourself anymore and it gets to that point where everything can go south really quickly. So if you speak to your parents they're there to help you, as any other parent would be. If you don't have chance to speak to your parents, go speak to someone in professional positions such as schools or youth clubs.

If you bottle it all up, it will go bad. But if you get it out, even if it is one-to-one, it's a better thing. Even if you can't speak to someone, do something you think that will help, which will get it out."

Veronica, 16, South East

"At the age of 14 my dancing got a bit more serious and I thought there's something I wasn't happy about and I didn't realise what it was. I tried to lose a little bit of weight and I started cutting down and limiting what I was eating.

I did lose quite a bit of weight and in a way I stopped realising that I was losing weight. I just wanted to find a different way of losing weight and I started making myself sick.

I developed Bulimia and as my weight dropped quite significantly, but I still didn't feel like I was losing weight.

Then I started starving myself and then I developed Anorexia. So I developed two eating disorders, which was a really difficult time.

I think I didn't actually understand it myself which was a very difficult thing. It wasn't until other people were noticing 'oh, you've lost a lot of weight' then realising it wasn't actually healthy, that there was something deeper.

Every morning I'd get up two hours before I had to and I'd do secret exercising in my bedroom. Then throughout the day I'd try and eat as little as possible and then I'd do the same before I went to bed. So I only got about five hours sleep, which I know is quite bad. It was a cycle of structured living I guess.

It was one of my really close friends who spoke to me about it and I sort of opened up for the first time to her.

Also it was my parents that were increasingly worried but they didn't actually know how to talk to me about it. My mum actually found text messages between me and my friend on my phone and that's when she was extremely worried and spoke to my school GP. That got me a referral for CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services].

I think at first it was very difficult and I didn't actually realise I had a problem. Because it was such like a thing that happened every day, I sort of got used to it and thought that's how everyone else was. I didn't really understand that it was something quite significantly bad for my health as well.

So it was quite difficult knowing that people knew about it because it was something that, at the time, I was really quite ashamed of, even though I thought it was normal at the same time. So it was quite difficult.

I think in particular my close family found it really difficult and really upsetting to watch it and not to be able to control what was going on. I think they also found it quite frustrating.

The one thing I really noticed was the isolation. I really isolated myself from my family, my friends and I didn't actually realise it until recovery that actually that I was sort of by myself 24/7. I was sort of blocking everyone else out.

I think what people also found very difficult is when it became very, very obvious I had an eating disorder, people would find it really difficult to eat in front of me and to talk about food and things. I could see that they all felt really uncomfortable sometimes in my company as a result of it.

I think it made it worse actually, because when I was in recovery I was sort of just re-familiarising myself with food and drink. So when people were feeling uncomfortable about it, it sort of made it worse because all I wanted really was a bit of normality and to get away from everything I was going through and everything that was going on in my head.

I just wanted people to be normal and just to be who they are and not have to act awkwardly around me because actually it makes things worse for me. It makes me think 'oh they don't want to be around me' and 'they think that I'm a different person because of it' when I'm not. I was always the same person that I had been.

I feel like I did have a lot of support, I think the bad thing is actually GPs don't know about mental health as well as they should do. I think they know more about the physical side. Often you have to go to your GP to get a diagnosis and referrals to things. You don't have to but normally it's the way.

Everyone should have a better understanding mental health. So that people know it's just an everyday thing and it's something that's completely normal. If you have a mental health issue or experience it doesn't mean that you're lower than anyone else. Everyone should be treated as an individual, you know, everyone is just a normal person.

People associate that if you have an eating disorder you have to be really thin and a lot of people don't actually know about other eating disorders, about you know Binge eating disorders and Bulimia. It's all about Anorexia. If other people understood it more they wouldn't be as judgemental.

I don't think it is very openly spoken about, I feel like it's very much something that is spoken about behind closed doors. People don't really feel comfortable talking about the sort of thing; they try and hide problems and things.

I think it's because people are ashamed and also scared of what someone might think and scared of people being judgemental about it. Thinking of you being lower than you are because of it."

Veronica's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"As soon as you experience it, don't feel like you're by yourself, don't feel like you're alone, don't feel like you can't talk to anyone. The sooner you talk to someone, the sooner you can receive treatment and help and then the sooner you recover and the more likely it will end as soon as possible. Battling mental health by yourself is a big and scary thing; no one should have to do it by themselves."

Michael, 22, North West

"I guess currently I'm just a university student doing Youth and Community work but I still face difficulties with mental health.

When I was about 14, I guess it started off with the girlfriend who was quite manipulative and controlling. It went on for a couple of years. It weren't a very a healthy relationship, so I ended it.

To make a very long story short, she basically bullied me and got the whole school to bully me. She accused me of being a stalker which then started me to go in a spiral down, to begin to hallucinate visually and through hearing.

It was about 15 when I started hearing and seeing things, but got really depressed at 14. They got that far that I started to believe that what I could see and hear were ghosts. Then I starting thinking I was psychic and it just got worse and worse and worse. I thought people on the TV were speaking to me.

I will always remember what my hallucination looked like. It was a girl, similar age. She used to stand there and stare at me. If I'm honest with you I thought she was the grim reaper because she had lilies on her dress. They say lilies represent death.

My dad believed all the rumours and he used to say stuff to me that would knock my confidence. I felt like I couldn't talk to him. I used to get into arguments with him and stuff like that and I just didn't want to go to school. The arguments went that far that I nearly become homeless.

The bullying got really bad; I had no friends and used to wander the corridors on me own. I would sit on my own in class. I just didn't want to go to school anymore but me dad forced me to.

Calling me 'schizo,' 'crazy,' 'depressing,' 'stalker' and just stuff like that. Things that actually do have a stigma towards them.

When I was 16 I went to a teacher and said the things I was hearing and seeing, and then they referred me to CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services].

The first time I went I got a doctor who was brilliant but discharged me because they didn't think I was severe enough to continue with treatment or whatever. The second time I went, I had some other people who kept going to and fro. I didn't have an appointment for six months. The third time I actually went back to be registered again and got the first doctor again. He could see how over the last 12 months I'd deteriorated. I didn't know what was real and what wasn't.

They recommended I went on medication, which I was very reluctant at first. I kept saying 'no, I don't need it, I'm fine'. After about a month of taking it I just realised I was an idiot. Basically I knew what reality felt like again.

The only two people that I didn't feel stigma from was me twin brother and me mum. Everyone else I felt judged or treated me differently.

Just so many things like not being invited to things and people wouldn't speak to me in case they thought I was going to go on about my problems. Just no one would ever speak to me.

When someone did speak to me and someone told them what was wrong with me, they just wouldn't speak to me again. You know, just not having anything to do with me. For a long time it was just me.

To do with the stigma, I'd say talk about mental health more, be open about it. You know like I always think of Morgan Freeman when people speak about this. Like if you want to stop racism, stop talking about it.

But for me, if you want to defeat the stigma, stop talking about the stigma, talk about mental health. Tell people what it is like to be depressed, to have Anxiety, to see things. Just talk about and plaster it everywhere like propaganda.

To do with the support, I think also just more groups for young people to meet other young people in similar situations. Like when I used to go CAMHS I used to just go in, I could see all the other young people, like people my age or slightly younger, just sitting there. They'd go in and leave, in and out, in and out. I never got told anything about groups I could go to where other young people in the same boat.

You know you're not alone then. I always thought that I was alone and no one was like how I felt or going through. Those sort of peer-to-peer sessions, you know if I had them sooner I probably would have recovered quicker."

Michael's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Sounds a bit cliché but keep fighting those demons. Make friends, mean what you say and don't be scared. Just keep going."

Mariam, 16, London

"I have got two friends who have suffered from mental health issues. One of best friends has severe Social Anxiety and bit of Depression. For example if we go out in public, I have to order for her, do all the talking for her, and even then going out is a bit of a struggle.

I think since the age of eight it's just got progressively worse. She doesn't really put herself out for things, there are loads of things she would love to do but feels like she can't.

For example, she wants to be a doctor, she really wants to go into medicine, but she is just so scared of like the patient contact. It's really affecting her life, she is thinking of working in labs rather than doing what she really wants to do.

Even at school she would be really quiet and just not really social. She will have days where she won't even come into school because she is feeling really down. She hasn't really done a lot about it because I think her parents are in denial.

I don't think I've ever talked about it at home really. At school I did it briefly in PSHE, but we just did Schizophrenia and really left everything else, with a bit on Depression too, but less than half an hour in total.

I think at school it would be particularly helpful, because there is a lot of stigma around mental health. For example drug and sex education is compulsory but mental health isn't at the moment.

I think mental health is portrayed wrongly, take Schizophrenia for example, I researched it. I thought it was mainly about split personalities and very violent people but actually symptoms include being withdrawn, hallucinations and feeling depressed more than the violence you associate with it.

I think it's because it's not normalised, there is like a taboo about it as no one talks about it. I think you associate straitjackets and prisons with mental health, they are the stereotypes.

I think it's really hard to empathise, like where people always tell them they need to 'get over it'. I think it's really hard to really explain how you are feeling. So it's hard to empathise. You can't really simulate it, but maybe describing what someone goes through and just trying to get people to understand.

Another thing, we always use it in every day vocabulary that 'oh I'm feeling depressed' and 'oh I'm a bit OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder] about that'. So I think it actually to educate people about what these conditions actually are and also having more support, like advertising it more and promoting it.

I find it harder when I can't really understand what she going through and she does snap and get moody. I think it's tested our friendship at times but overall I think it's made us stronger.

I think we need workshops at schools because I don't really know what is the right thing to say at times and I'm kind of just testing things out and getting things wrong. I think maybe people who are therapists talking to us and saying what you can do in situations.

I think teachers might not be in the best position as they won't be able to answer any of our questions. It might be expensive but in an ideal world having professionals and people who are trained and know more than the average teacher would, going around schools just visiting as a lecturer or someone to run a workshop.

Even just half a day or an hour, because that way they'd have more specialist knowledge and if they know more about it they might be better at explaining these issues and answering any questions than a normal PSHE [Personal, Social and Health Education] teacher who is more generalised I think.

I think they just need someone to talk to them, with my friend's Anxiety, she kind of liked that I knew so I could ease a bit of the pressure and I could do things to help like talking to her in public. If she didn't want to go out I would understand and we'd just stay at her house or my house.

At the same time I knew that something had to be done, so then I encouraged her to tell her parents and that is when she started getting therapy.

I think that is why she was kind of scared to speak out because she thought it would affect her life later on, job prospects and interviews. As she had them anxieties she thought it would make her less employable and affect her future prospects.

Mariam's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“Don't feel ashamed, don't feel embarrassed, don't ever question why it's you that's got this and why does everyone else not seem to have it. Just accept and embrace the fact that you've got this and reach out and get the help. Don't hide and just pray it will go away. Get the help, be honest with your friends and family, let them know because the more people you have there, the more support you will have and the easier it will be. Go out and get the help you need, people are going to be understanding.”

Emily, 19, Wales

“Well, I like to do a lot of art in my spare time and it really helps me clear my mind a bit. I'm doing an apprenticeship at YMCA with a painter and decorator.

I think it was about when I just turned 17. I was going through quite a rough patch with a lot of people I was hanging around with, just before college. No one really took me seriously, I was really just like a side person in the group, no one really like cared to be honest.

I think it was mostly because I was experimenting with different drugs and things, and that wasn't helping me, that was kind of being forced on myself a bit. It took me away from like thinking about my friends at the time, they weren't really treating me as well as I thought they were and it lowered my confidence a lot.

There's this one particular friend, he was the closest to me but he was also the 'horriblest' to me as well. Towards like the end of our friendship, well halfway through, I couldn't really speak to anyone else outside that group, I wasn't really allowed to.

I felt really trapped with myself because I couldn't speak to any of the people in that group about my problems because they'd tell me that they're his friends and I can't speak to them about it apparently, even though they told me they were my friends as well.

I just felt really lost in myself and really depressed all the time and hardly spoke to anyone. It was a really difficult time for me. I lost so much confidence and so much happiness with myself.

It really tore me apart in a way, like I didn't feel like myself and because of the drug abuse as well, that was taking me down a long road, like a really long road where I was just trapped and I didn't feel like I could get out of it.

I started failing college because of everything that was going on and I couldn't concentrate on anything. My work was being lost in college. I tried again to get back into it.

When it all ended with our friendship group, I tried speaking to people again but it was really difficult for me. I stayed in my house for a good like three to four weeks by myself.

I couldn't connect with anyone. The only person I had to actually talk to was myself, I talked to myself quite a lot from it. I didn't really feel that 'sane' but I didn't realise it until like, up until the end of the friendship break up. I just got so fed up in the end and I just cracked and couldn't do it anymore.

It's such a horrible feeling after you realise how much s**t had been piled up on top of me. I would be crying like to myself in a way, but not physical tears. I would just be really depressed and lonesome and really crying for like help, but in silence. I couldn't really get like any...I don't want to use 'attention' as the word...I don't like that word, in my head...I don't...it's difficult.

I reckon that there should be more confidence boosting things on, because a lot of people are shaken up like I was from being in a friendship group or a relationship like that and it will really bring you down.

I got no support. I reckon there should be classes, just like an hour session or something, just to make people realise that there are people out there who haven't got any confidence at all. You could be that person who is treating them like s**t. Just to make people who don't realise it themselves at the moment but they'll see it looking back at their actions, if you get what I mean. Like a reflection kind of class, if you get what I mean. Just to be happy with yourself but try to concentrate on your soul as well.

Apart from that, I reckon just try to be yourself and don't let anyone bring you down. I don't think there's really much you can do about people's positions. Everyone goes through different position in life – they could be worst, to bad, to good, to excellent - but you don't know what you're going to get out of life. That's what I reckon. All you got to do is keep yourself positive and think to yourself 'I'm going to make a better day of this, I'm going to make better year, or a better life out of what I already have', and actually try."

Emily's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"I would say that life really is all about learning. Life can be really really difficult, and that's the whole point of learning, a lot of things can be really really difficult. it can really bring you down to the point when your legs and arms are broken and you just got to keep pushing yourself to make yourself happy.

Talk to people a lot more, talk to someone who will actually listen and someone that will actually be there and care for you. Even if they don't see you all the time, like that doesn't matter, as long as you know they do actually care and they want to help you, that's all that really matters."

Amy, 19, North East

"I kind of grew up with quite a difficult childhood. I went through a hard time from when I was a baby. I never thought I would end up how I am now.

When I left school, I started slowly developing Depression, when I were about 16 or 17-years-old.

I think this year, the last year and this year, its hit us really bad - everything that went on. I think it were two years ago, I went through self-harming because I couldn't get over this lad and I couldn't understand why. The other reason was that I blocked all contact with my friends and stuff like that. I've started taking over-doses, started drinking a lot. It's changed us and affected us in so many ways.

Obviously I am now on anti-depressants and the mental health team are trying to help us really. I think of all these things that go around in my head every day. It's all stuck to us. So it's pretty hard to be honest.

I tried to get help. My mam didn't understand at first, she thought I was being silly. She was going through a mental breakdown as well when I first started going through Depression, she was blinded by the whole thing.

I couldn't explain it very well. I was trying to get help for about a year or so. Then, me mother couldn't do anything about it, because she didn't know what was going on inside of my head.

I tried going to the doctor again, and they explained it better. Then eventually I was put on anti-depressants.

Obviously I am getting help now. I use things to distract myself now. When I first went, I wasn't eating. I was really, really thin at one point. Just wasn't myself to be honest. I kept on having these breakdowns an' stuff like that. The doctor was telling me I wasn't underweight. But I didn't understand why I was having pains and stuff like that. Pains in my ribs when I was coughing and all of my clothes were basically hanging off us. Obviously the doctors over here, they obviously don't have a clue about weight and stuff like that.

Then I got myself up again, I started dating, started putting weight on. I got happy. I started going out with my mates and stuff like that, meeting new people. Going out, going out drinking, having a laugh and stuff like that.

Then I got really down again, but I didn't go through weight loss or anything like that. The second time I had a breakdown, I started to eat, I started over eating and worrying if I'd get too thin again. Started having flashbacks, started hearing voices in my head - not like properly - but imagining voices in my head. I used to look in the mirror a lot. I used to see blood and scratch the back of my head.

I was very close to self-harming, but I had stopped for a long time and then eventually I was put on anti-depressants and I went from there. I started getting better, getting myself up and stuff like that.

I still had my good and bad days, and then I recently had a mental breakdown this year.

To be honest I'm getting support that I've never had before, I want to tell people my experiences. I want a career helping people and going round the country and stuff like that. As the years are getting on I'm getting better at keeping happy."

Connor, 18, South East

"When I was I seven I started to go through domestic violence. I think it went on until just before my twelfth birthday, that is when we left. We ran away to a refuge.

It kind of changed everything, it was very hostile. At the beginning I had anger problems, so I found socialising very difficult and I found living with all those people very difficult.

It taught me how to socialise with people as people would come and go all the time. It also taught me other people's stories as well. You heard what other people went through and it kind of made you feel a bit more comfortable. It was having people around you that you could trust, it was very helpful.

The refuge put me through to CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services]; they were quite worried about my mental health. At the time they thought I was going to commit suicide.

I didn't really think that far ahead at the time, but I knew if the thought did occur I probably could have done it. I didn't really think of it at the time; think they kind of caught me at the early stages.

It wasn't the last time I felt like that. I have been Depressed and felt suicidal again later on in my life but the refuge was very supportive in that sense.

CAMHS took a while to be supportive, the first couple of months we didn't really hear much from them. When I did hear from them, I did get the help I definitely needed.

It was unfortunate though as when I moved out of the refuge, I moved into a house in another area, that was when everything started to change with CAMHS. It took CAMHS a while to get back to me again and the person I was with this time wasn't as good. It pretty much felt like I was starting all over again.

There is quite a bit of shortage on that kind of stuff and I think there is also a lot less freedom. When I was seeing CAMHS, especially the one in my new town, after a while I actually stopped wanting to see the person I kept seeing but they didn't give me the option to change that.

They kind of just cut me off all of the sudden; they didn't really give me much notice either. They said they were going to drop me two weeks before they did. I kind of relied on these people for like five years.

I think when I was going through it the second time around, I wasn't in the refuge so I didn't have all that support and actually you do feel quite isolated and that was the time that I did actually nearly kill myself. I was a lot closer to doing it.

It was only due to the friends I have now, that is the reason why I didn't. I think my friends were kind of there for me just at the right time really. They got me kind of hanging around with them before I was to do anything.

I knew one of the workers at the YMCA at the time, and they said if I ever needed to see anyone I could just drop in and speak. I think it was kind of the fact that it was that open, where I didn't have to see them like six times and have to wait to see someone and like being on a waiting list and what not, that was also quite nice. It works a bit more around you rather than around them.

Whilst I am going out and doing things with people and settled in finally I think I may as well make the most of it and I have never really lost that. It's been three years on now and I have never really lost those friends and I have never really felt that low since. In fact it's probably kept on going up really.

So you know it's weird, sometimes it's just worth waiting and sometimes something nice will come along. Suppose it's a positive way to look at it and it's probably how I'd look at things now if I ever felt that low again."

Connor's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"I think I'd probably say to never give up and to keep fighting. I suppose that's quite corny, just try and find a way to make yourself feel better and try and be positive. I think positivity has helped keep me up as well. If you think positive thoughts then your mental state is quite positive as well because you're always trying to look up for the best which kind of makes you feel better self-esteem-wise which can also contribute a lot to your mental health."

Kaylee, 21, Wales

"Everyone should tackle it and it should be done everywhere.

If somebody is being prejudice to people with mental health issues they should be stood up to and told 'what you're saying is wrong'.

You don't have to sit down and take the abuse for mental health and you shouldn't let it stand by either. Mental health is a very real thing and you should always stand up for it because they're not going to. Everyone who hears it can, and should, tackle it.

The YMCA is a great place to go to for mental health. Schools, places of work, everywhere – just everywhere should be a stigma-free zone.

School supported me into getting a counsellor and being discreet when I really needed it. Because I was in school and it was so embarrassing to know that people might find out about it when I wasn't ready to talk about it. I was barely ready to deal with it.

They supported me, they checked up on me and they made sure I never felt alone. I went through counselling and the teacher would quietly and casually ask me how I was doing and whether I was OK or not. And having my friends around just made me feel really normal and that was a really good part of the school, you know.

My best friend was there with me when I went to my form tutor for counselling for the first time, and she was a great support in coming with me and not being judgemental, just standing there with me.

My dad and my mum have also been great supporters with my step mother as well. Doctors have been really good to me too. They actually put me on a course for stress management that actually brought me to YMCA for the first time, and that was invaluable to me.

It was priceless because it was so helpful. And I didn't feel alone, I didn't feel judged, I just felt like things were finally OK.

They have definitely helped me overcome a lot. I am not the same person I was in the beginning, and I feel like they've given me a lot of the tools to overcome a lot of hurdles."

Kaylee's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Keep fighting, always keep fighting, because there will come a day when you get better. Seek help, always seek help, and if you're not ready for that, just keep fighting and find things that make you happy because there will come a day when you will laugh and realise 'oh, I'm happy' and that is the most wonderful feeling in the world and I hope that you find that. Don't stand by; never standby and watch it happen."

Sam, 17, London

"I'm at sixth form doing three subjects at the moment; Business, Psychology and Film. I used to do four subjects, it's a lot easier now that I've gone down to three.

When I was about 15-ish, when I was doing my GCSEs, I thought it was just like exam stress and just sort of ignored it. Worrying and thinking that I wasn't going to do well and basically feeling like GCSEs were the most important thing ever. And if I'm not going to do well like there wasn't anything else; there was just no point to anything really.

Then after my GCSEs it went away, and then recently when I was doing practical exams for my A-Levels, it came back again. And then because I do Psychology at school, we learnt about Depression and stuff, like we talk about the symptoms and everything. That was when I realised maybe it's a bit more, something else than just exam stress. Obviously I need to do something about it before it gets really bad.

If I didn't do Psychology, then now I probably still would've related how I'm feeling down to exams and nothing more serious.

That was when I told someone about it. I think it was my sister I told first of all. We were out at the time I told her, and then when we got home she told mum, and then my mum spoke to me about getting help and stuff.

When I told my sister, I was tired of it and because I'm close to her it wasn't too bad. But then talking to my mum about it, I'm not really close to her so didn't really know what to say.

I went to the doctors and then they wrote to CAMHS and then they passed me on to YMCA. I think at first they said it would take eight weeks I think, but it ended up being a lot quicker. CAMHS referred me straight to YMCA.

At first it was quite stressful, but once I told them and actually doing it wasn't. I liked the doctor asking me how I was feeling, it wasn't difficult to say.

Well the first like sort of appointment, it was like how I'm feeling and stuff. Then the past, I think it's six sessions so far, just talking to like the same person, and talking about my personal problems and different ways of dealing with them. I started to realise that everything's not as bad as I think it is. The help I've received so far has been perfect.

I find it quite hard to concentrate sometimes, I just start thinking about stuff, I kind-of just go off like into my own world. Next thing you know the lesson is over. Once I can just start concentrating then everything will be fine. Things have been a lot better since I've started going to YMCA.

With like relationships, I've got a short-temper with people; they'll do something and I'll just completely overreact.

If you're not really close to someone then they're not going to open up to you and stuff.

I haven't really experienced any bullying or anything. With some people I try to explain it to them and they just don't really understand because they haven't been through it. Whereas other people that I've explained it to, they understand it a lot and want to help me and stuff. So I think it just depends on the type of person, how people are really.

I don't know what can be done, maybe just publicising it more and maybe getting the message across more. I don't know, more deeply I guess."

Sam's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

“I know it seems hard, but tell people you’re close to and they can help you get professional help. And even if you don’t have anyone you feel you can talk to, like family and friends, just try going to the doctor and like talk them through it. Things seem bad, but they might not be as bad as you think they are. And even if they are actually that bad, things won’t stay bad forever. There’s always a time when you’ll get through.”

Harmendeeep, 17, East Midlands

“I’m doing Level 2 Beauty at college. It’s just recently starting again, like I never used to have it as bad, but just in the past two months that it has actually started to get in, Anxiety and Depression.

I couldn’t sleep and feel anxious and get angry and just feel lonely and don’t see hope for anything. Then that kind of leads me to get panicked and I started shivering and get sweats and all that. It started getting to a point where I needed help.

I told my key worker here and another person who works here, and the doctors. That is when I got help from the counsellor. They gave me tablets. I stopped taking tablets for a little while because I felt it wasn’t helping, but I’m starting to take them again because they said it takes a while.

One time I am so happy and the second time when I am alone in my room it just gets to me and it is just, it is not right.

I don’t like to get offended by people’s words but I still do. I don’t try to, but it is hard.

I don’t know if they know what I am going through, but I’m not sure if I am going through Depression and Anxiety because I’m a bubbly person like 70%, but like I think they still judge me on the way that I am, or maybe that is the way that I feel.

I mostly get angry at myself more than at people, then when I do get angry and I don’t see hope in a ways, like, say like giving up and I don’t enjoy things from the bottom of my heart and it just don’t feel right. I want to feel the way that I used to.

I only told one of my mates and I am talking to this guy. Like, I am not an open person, like I don’t want to put my problems and my personal anxiety onto someone else, if they have their own issues to solve, not mine.

When most people are depressed, they don't want to do anything and they lock themselves from other people and that is when people start judging like, even like a small thing.

Sometimes when you are in that state, some people don't really bother doing anything with themselves, don't bother going anywhere, so people can be like 'why?', 'why is she doing this?' or 'why is he doing that?'.

One of my mates like, she is quite like me, hides it very well. But once we were just talking and she was telling me how she used to suffer from Depression and Anxiety and still does.

I think when you talk to someone when you are going through it they understand you more. They are careful of what they are saying and I think sometimes I can understand how other people are feeling. So I won't judge them cos everyone has their own things, like they be someone on the outside, but inside they be someone else."

Harmendeep's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Go see a doctor, talk to someone that you can, because sometimes opening up is a really good thing rather than keeping it within you. But also like, I would talk to myself like 'yeah we've got these problems but always try and think in a positive way, you can overcome Depression and Anxiety'."

David, 18, South East

"I am a full-time student, I'm still at college but started doing a degree. But I've also suffered with Depression and Anxiety and sometimes I find it a bit awkward to go out in public, especially on public transport.

It kind of all started when a family member passed away with lung cancer, I just got annoyed with people who wouldn't stop coughing, but then I came to realise it was something like PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Soon, I think a year ago, I realised that my mental health has been growing worse and I possibly thought it might be Depression and I might have to go on anti-depressants and it's been like that ever since.

I told my family, they all suffer from Depression as well. They can all relate to it and they've taken anti-depressants before. I'm a very lucky person to have such supportive friends and family.

I've had counselling from school to college for a few years now. I've had counselling throughout various summers as well, so I've had counselling for quite a while now. This time, I finally got CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] as well over the phone.

Accessing CBT has been quite troublesome in my area, like I've tried to pressure the doctor and my college to get it. I did get it in the end. But I understand that there are waiting times but it hasn't been easy to access in my case.

Usually, say if I'm really, really, stressed or if I'd come home with my Anxiety really high then I rarely speak to anyone, possibly for the rest of the day, and possibly for the rest of tomorrow. With studies or any other errands that I have to do then I procrastinate over them and I just lose the will to do it because of my health problems.

Counselling has allowed me to talk more about my problems. In terms of the academic side, I've spoken to my tutors time and time again to let them know how I'm getting on and they have been very supportive. Student finance, they've given me a DSA [Disabled Students' Allowance] assessment and I should hopefully receive extra support at college this time.

Well I feel that these days, mental health is becoming much more relevant with my generation. But again, I'm not sure where some people might stand with mental health. Within my area, like with my friends and family, they all know people who have had these problems and sometimes maybe in a joking sense it might seem uncanny to some people. But I feel that now, in our age, that there is a lot more acceptance towards mental health.

My friends haven't really treated me any differently, it's just that they kind of notice different aspects of me. They usually banter with each other but they usually keep it away from me, I think out of respect or just try not to cause any trouble.

I think with general members of the public, they may be a bit be curious around me, but if they know that I'm just really really anxious then they've usually been very accepting.

Again going back to my point, I think there's a lot of awareness with my generation. I'm not really sure to be honest. Sometimes I wonder if people are actually going through mental health difficulties, and some people who I talk to who I wouldn't have thought about it, when they said they had mental health difficulties, I was actually surprised to find out about that.

But that's my point of view, which I suppose can't answer much. But yeah, sometimes it might be difficult to see if someone is having mental health issues. They don't really talk about it, maybe it comes out once in a while, but it's not really a topic that comes up. I think awareness of it is quite profound.

With my college I received a lot of support, not just for mental health but for other things in life. I feel that, I mean with school, that could be lacking. I think they could follow what we do at college and try and maybe offer more support to students.

Well I mean, maybe one-to-one support, just giving students advice on who to call and where to go just if they're feeling down or something. Maybe give them pastoral support or week-to-week support or maybe like mentoring or something, just to see how they're doing and give them inspiration and motivation."

David's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"Well things do seem tough. But what helps is to try and look at yourself and just think... well I've grown to be a bit tough and analytical...well I think...I mean I'm going through a bad situation...now I'm going off on one, but just try to be keep going, that's all I can say."

Andy, 16, East

"I was born and raised Christian Protestant and all that, I can't knock it, it was a good upbringing. But the problem was is that I knew I was different to rest.

I was always the one who would go with the girls. I wasn't like one of the macho boys at my school, I was one of the ones who would go around with the girls and all that, like literally be like one of the girls, which is part of my identify.

What it is that I went to this seminar with my school about three years ago. We went to the South Bank Centre, all nice and everything. We went to this day about youth and all that, but I went to this seminar about these two recently transitioned transgenders. That seminar inspired me to think I've got to find out who I am. It was all about soul searching.

The problem was is that by the time I knew who I was, I starting gaining Depression once again. But thing was this time it was very hard to like show it, it was very hard to keep it away and everything.

Because I born and raised a Christian I got told being gay was a sin. If you're straight – yes, you're fine – but if you're anything else you are considered sinful and all that.

To be honest I knew I wasn't straight, yes I do fancy girls, but there was a little bit of me which thought you know what – I do fancy boys.

I told my friends because they were understanding and more accepting and because they weren't half as religious like I was, they didn't care, they were like you are who you are.

But the problem was my parents weren't for all that feminine stuff, they were like 'Andrew you are a boy, you live like a boy' kind of thing. There was me thinking if they find out they've got a gay son, they might disown me, you never know.

Eventually what it is that in April it got too much and my parents were like 'Andrew, you are on your phone too much' because I was talking to this boy. My mum and dad took my phone off me and I went bricking it, seriously, I was stressing so much and all that.

I went into tears, I broke down, I had to tell me parents 'you know what, mum, dad, I've had troubles with my sexuality for the last year or two'. I was bricking it, but my parents were like 'Andrew we love you no matter what'.

So I came out of that stress, I came out of that Anxiety, but even then it wasn't all over for me. I took me at least another month or two before I finally came out to the rest of my year group.

There were only a select few girls who knew and to be honest they treated me like as if I was their young brother and I love them to pieces for that. Eventually it was starting to come out bit by bit, people had seen me as the gay kid of the year group, yet I was always one for denial.

I'll be honest now, that was the Depression and Anxiety, but I don't have that no more because I am a lot more open.

People still do speculate, I have heard you are this, I have heard you are that, but what I've learnt over the past few months is that you shouldn't care, you should be happy with who you are.

LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] Anxiety and Depression is a lot more unheard of but the thing is though I want that message to be out there. It is alright to be whoever, to be honest haters got to hate, but just be happy.

I was in denial for so long. To be honest, I still don't trust many people. I am very cautious who I tell now because to be honest I haven't been successful with my relationships and I have only got a few select friends now.

I went to a counsellor, I had three counsellors in the space of two years. To be honest, I did enjoy the counselling and also the good thing about my school is that we actually had a sex clinic. So if you had questions on what not about sexuality and all that, there was a person to talk to.

I will say to some people who are feeling suicidal whether it be over their identity or anything, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

I've come through it, I am happy to be who I am, but the point is that you shouldn't end your life because you've got Depression or you're feeling worried or anything, because depending on what way you read it religiously, so people say you've only got one life. In that one life you've got to take every chance you've got."

Andy's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"My motto would be anyone can be anyone. With mental health, when it gets you, you know about it. But you've got to realise that mental health will hopefully be with you for just a short time and in that short time the damage it does to you, it does help you in the future. Live life to the full, Depression isn't nice, Anxiety isn't nice, but overcome them with the power of love and happiness and all that. That's all I can say really."

Toni, 25, North West

"I'm trained youth worker. I've worked at the YMCA for five or six months now.

A couple of years ago I got diagnosed with Anxiety and I ignored it. So I didn't go on any medication, I didn't get any help for it. I just kind of pushed it to the back of my mind and then all of a sudden I started getting these anger outbursts. I'd never really had them before, apart from the usual ones when people are teenagers.

I was just trying to get it out, I was lashing out, but I'd never hurt anyone. They were getting out of hand, so I was like right, I need to do something about this now. So I went to the doctors and they put me on medication. It either made me worse or didn't make any difference.

I took myself then off medication and I've not been on medication since March this year. But I went to get CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] for 12 weeks and that helped while I was having it, but now I'm not having it, it's not helping.

I went to my doctors; I thought I had Depression. I'd had Depression in the past and looking back on that I was sad all the time. Whereas now I could be fine for like five or six days in a row, then all of a sudden I am the lowest in the world.

Borderline Personality Disorder was the route I think I was looking at. But they were like 'there is nothing we can do, so there is no point in actually getting you diagnosed'. Which I thought was ridiculous. They then signposted me to a charity in charge of all mental health therapy in the area

I was 19 when I got diagnosed with Depression, so six years ago. I'd just moved out of my parents because there were six of us and my mum wanted me to move out as the house could only house five. So I thought I'll move out as the more independent one out of all of them.

Six or seven months into living on my own I just kind of fell apart. I don't even know what started it. I think it was just the whole transition from being totally dependent on someone with like cooking, cleaning and buying food, to then having to do it all myself.

I went to the doctors and they put me on medication but it sent me suicidal, so I didn't take it for very long. I'd never had a suicidal thought before, I was just really low. It was the thought of getting out of bed, not the thought of being alive, that made me sad.

I told them I was having suicidal thoughts and they said 'well, you need to stick it out'. It got to the point where I was looking for things to harm myself and I was like 'no, this is it' so I took myself straight of them. It's not worth it, it not worth waiting another three or four weeks having all these thoughts, when I could potentially do something stupid that I'm not in control of.

It is quite bizarre because people who have had Depression in my life have never really just snapped out of it and I completely snapped out of it.

People telling me to just smile and be happy and I'm like 'it's not as easy as that'. It's like a switch, sometimes it's on, sometimes it's off. I can't just force myself to be happy at all when my Anxiety is really high. They are just like 'why are you reacting like that to something so small'.

People need to know that mental health problems are here and they're not going away very fast. If someone close, or even someone who isn't close to you who is suffering with mental health, then they need to know almost what triggers that person if they are comfortable enough. I know that all triggers are different.

I think people should either be trained or have mental health awareness training. Or almost just like a study session on mental health awareness.

If people don't know about it, then they're not going to talk about it. They'll just think it's a floaty thing that no one really suffers from and everyone's just jumping on the bandwagon because it's the latest trend kind of thing.

I'm quite open about my mental health issues for awareness purposes, because you need to be. If you've got a mental health problem you can't hide away from it and expect that other people know exactly what's going on.

If my story can help one person battle through their mental health issues, then me sharing my story has worked."

Toni's advice to other young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health...

"The darkness doesn't have to be dark. You can be having the worst day but there is always one light in the dark. There is always someone going through a similar thing that you can talk to, whether it's someone older, the same age, or younger, there's always someone there to talk to. For want of a better word, force people to talk to other people. I went through years of not talking, just suffering."

Thank you to all of the young people who shared their stories as part of the research.

If you have experience of mental health difficulties, or are worried about someone else who does, please visit www.findgetgive.com for more information and advice.



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