



Cumbria, Northumberland,  
Tyne and Wear  
NHS Foundation Trust

# A Month of Hope

#InspiringHope



10<sup>th</sup> September - 10<sup>th</sup> October  
2020



Caring | Discovering | Growing | **Together**

The world has been experiencing the unprecedented impact of the global health emergency. This has also impacted on the mental health of millions of people. We know that the levels of anxiety, fear, isolation, social distancing and restrictions, uncertainty and emotional distress experienced have become widespread as the world struggles to bring the virus under control and to find solutions.

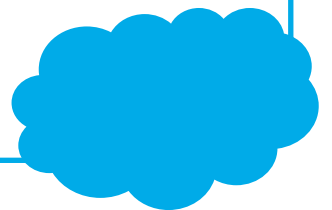
No one knows what it is that prevents someone from taking their own life, when they are in a dark place, feeling helpless and hopeless. It could be a quote, a poem, a picture, a conversation...

10 September 2020 marked World Suicide Prevention Day and 10 October 2020 World Mental Health Day. CNTW wanted to mark these two important days by having a month of inspiring messages in between.

Throughout the Month of Hope, service users, carers and staff shared quotes, poems, advice, pictures and personal stories which were shared across social media using the hashtag;

**#InspiringHope**

Now, all of these contributions have been collated into this short booklet. Thank you to all who contributed and shared throughout the month of hope.



I suffer from mental health problems and have for many, many years. I practise mindfulness but not in the way of sitting meditating. I do 10 minutes of mindful movements each morning. This helps slow my thoughts down, spending a few minutes in my garden in the morning, either taking 3 slow breaths or dead heading the dahlias.

I journal at the end of the day, this helps to get things out of my head before I go to bed. I have learned to accept the anxiety, no longer fighting it. I acknowledge its presence, concentrating to the part of my body I feel it then re-focus on what I was doing beforehand.

I have read the book by Mark Williams – Mindfulness finding peace in a frantic world. It is my bible. It explains why we feel the way we do and how to change it. It has been a lifesaver. I know there are hundreds of books out there but this is definitely my top 1.

Respond rather than react.

Accept instead of fighting.

These are just small things that make a big difference to me.

“Fitness and well-being start in your head, not in the gym!”

“Be a better you!”





## John Greenleaf Whittier

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.  
Life is strange with its twists and turns  
As every one of us sometimes learns  
And many a failure comes about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out;  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow—  
You may succeed with another blow.  
Success if failure turned inside out—  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell just how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.



When lockdown started I was just coming out of a really bad episode of depression, I was near the end of my course of treatment with ECT but because of this, and still partly due to the depression, my thinking was jumbled. I didn't fully comprehend what was happening in the country. I was just at the point in my recovery where I was ready to start going out and normalising again and all of a sudden couldn't do that. I was stuck in the house other than one hour a day when we were allowed to get fresh air/ exercise. I was sleeping on the sofa because I had no other way to fill my time, I tried TV and reading but still had no concentration, I tried adult colouring books but that wasn't for me. I knew in my heart I had to be careful just sitting around all day that I didn't slip back into a deep depression.

I returned to work just as lockdown was easing a little but felt so lost after six months away from my job. The team seemed to be filled with new staff and because of COVID was certainly filled with new procedures and processes. I still wasn't 100% but I made the effort to get up each morning and go in. I'm glad I did now as I feel part of the team again and my mental health, praise God, is stable.

When I was ill I struggled to get out of bed, I wasn't even remembering to drink (I take lithium so this is extra important). I was utterly disabled by my depression. I didn't want to be here at all but didn't even have the energy to consider suicide. If I could have fallen asleep with the promise of not waking then I would have chosen this. I'm back now working as a busy CPN, I'm functioning as part of my family and friendship circle. I laugh again. Please take hope from my story, it can and does get better, you can and will live again. Keep on keeping on, it's a bumpy journey but one which CAN be travelled even when you don't understand the route.

"Believe in yourself.  
Anything is possible!"

"Battle together  
stronger"

"Mirror, mirror on  
the wall"

# Suffering

I suffer from anxiety  
I've suffered for many long years.  
The feelings are very intense to me  
They're horrible! Nobody cares!  
My mind works twenty four hours a day  
Thinking of horrible things  
Death and destruction, hurt and disease  
And all the terror it brings  
That's my main problem, the thoughts in my head  
The worry and stress I endure  
Forget them for only an hour a day  
And you're on your way to a cure  
Relaxation is easily said, it's not so easy to do  
Especially when you're so wound up, hyperventilating too!  
Calm yourself down, pick yourself up  
Your nerves will soon relax  
Keep this up for as long as you can  
And you're certainly on the right tracks!  
I used to suffer, all day long  
Dizzy, my head in a spin  
But relaxation takes over my mind  
And calmness soon sets in  
So next time you're worried and 'think' you can't breathe  
Here's my advice to you...  
Sort it or suffer, it isn't that hard  
In fact, it's quite easy to do!

© Sue Curtis 1994

I would like to share that when we were in deepest lockdown, I spent most of my spare time in the garden. Though small, It had become overgrown and out of control. It was a project I shared with one of my children, and it helped us both overcome our anxiety , stresses and fears. We were also supported by colleagues, friends and neighbours sharing plants and seeds. We are now enjoying eating the fruit and veg we have been growing, so it's a positive outcome.



After I attempted suicide, something I never thought I would do, the days after didn't seem real. It was an incredibly strange feeling. There were several things that helped me through those dark times though, exercise is a big one, outside in the fresh air, cycling or running allows me to switch off from life, like hitting reset and just enjoy my time in the great outdoors.

Reading is another massive boost for me. Just focusing on the words on the pages, taking it all in and enjoying the story (has to be a good book). Also, mindfulness. This is something I have heard lots about, but to be honest never really focused on it. However after the events over the summer I was encouraged and thought I would give it a try and it made a difference.

When the thoughts would rush into my head and overwhelm, being able to focus on what's going on around me, the feel of the ground, the wind on my skin, the smell of the leaves in the woods, it makes a difference and calms me. Finally, the big factor for me is Family and my dog Alfie (Mr Alfs). They are my motivation in a dark time. Being able to see them after work or spend the days with them on the weekend is something that motivates me when I find life tough.

I have worked for the trust for 19 years, and in health and social care in total for 25. I was initially one of the first activity co-ordinators, delivering a programme of learning and leisure activities at the Tranwell Unit. I was in the same role delivering leisure and learning activities on the personality disorder unit at Bamburgh Clinic for 8 years and now I work as part of the secure services, delivering programmes of learning in English, maths, IT, Employability, Peer Mentoring, Volunteering and so-on, across Northgate and St. Nicholas hospital sites.

My interest of using my love of writing in health care came in the 90's when I worked as a volunteer and health activist trying to get more localised cancer services and better cancer support services. On a campaign as part of the UK Breast Cancer Coalition I worked with a local writer, Julia Darling for a short while and whom I later met when she was delivering a course for health workers on how to use creative writing and the arts as ways to engage with patients in health care called; Words That Heal.

My main love and what inspires me, has always been in supporting people to develop their own voices and skills; creative writing is what helps me with my own mental health and in the pandemic and enforced lockdown, as a key worker having to work, it has been my writing, faith, allotment and music that has kept me being able to focus and help others in my care; at home and work, to also cope.

**I**ce  
**N**ice and smooth it seals,  
**S**oothes,  
**P**ours  
**I**nto my mind  
**R**eleasing  
**I**sotopes,  
**N**udging thoughts of;  
**G**olden Slumber  
  
**H**olding close  
**O**ptimism,  
**P**romises,  
**E**urythmic dreams...

*Louise Charlton, 2020*





“Who will help me? - Professionals will help give advice and guidance...it’s up to oneself to put it into practice.”

I struggled with mental illness for a very long time. I allowed it to control my life, until I decided enough was enough. I reflected, found myself and started a process of healing and growing. I learned to manage the dark days. I learned to manage my mental illness by doing four things: meditating, reading on spirituality, practicing gratitude and finally self care.

Spirituality is something I hold very close to my heart and I am forever grateful that such practice has helped me. I started off by meditating everyday morning and night for 10 minutes. I would listen to healing frequencies and made a safe and comfortable space to open my mind into. The headspace and calm apps are truly remarkable (I would recommend downloading!). After practicing meditation for numerous weeks, I began increasing the duration of my meditation and since lockdown I have continued to practice more and more- now I meditate morning and night for 1 hour! Meditation allows me to see inside of my mind. It makes me aware of what I am thinking, how I am feeling and allows me to let go of any negative energy that I may be manifesting. This is my go to for when I feel low in mood. Afterwards, I feel a sense of stillness and at one with every aspect of my life.

At the beginning of lockdown I challenged myself to start reading more, specifically on spirituality and self help books. I found the time to read my favourite book cover to cover - Stillness Speaks by Eckhart Tolle. This book gave me guidance on all areas of my life. It gave me a new outlook which in turn, significantly increased my quality of life. I am currently reading The Power of Now.

One simple way of boosting my happiness is practicing gratitude. We often forget to be thankful for the things that we take for granted. Every night after I meditate, I think of three things that I am grateful for and write it in my journal- it can be the smallest of things. For example, today I am thankful for my family to be here with me, all healthy and happy. I am thankful for my partner showing me unconditional support and love, I am thankful for my sister saving me one her lovely homemade cookies (super yum). Practicing gratitude was very important to me in lockdown. COVID-19 has brought so much devastation to us. I am grateful for the NHS and staff who provided the uppermost care to our service users and saved thousands of lives. To those who we tragically lost, we will never forget. I am grateful to have my family and friends who stayed safe and remained healthy. I am grateful that my friend who tested positive for COVID-19 that she is back to her former health and is with us today.



A simple method that has always helped me through my dark days is my self care check list. On days where I feel low in mood, emotional, anxious, dissociated, irritable etc I find it difficult to think clearly. By having my self care check list on hand it ensures I am doing everything I need to be doing. Here is an example:

- Get out of bed and make it.
- Clean/tidy bedroom.
- Light candles.
- Use aromatherapy oils.
- Drink atleast 8 glasses of water a day.
- Eat 3 healthy meals, try and avoid processed foods.
- Go for a long walk in nature.
- Have a shower/bath and use favourite products.
- Treat yourself to some chocolate (releases endorphins!)
- Check in with your family and friends.
- Express yourself creatively through writing, painting, drawing etc.
- Meditate.
- Practice gratitude.
- Read a book.
- Focus your mind on something you love whether it be a hobby, your education (in my case researching topics to support my learning for my nursing degree).
- Stay off social media and switch off your phone for a few hours.
- Set boundaries with people.
- Remind yourself it's okay not to be okay.





## Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.

And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

*Max Ehrmann, 1927*



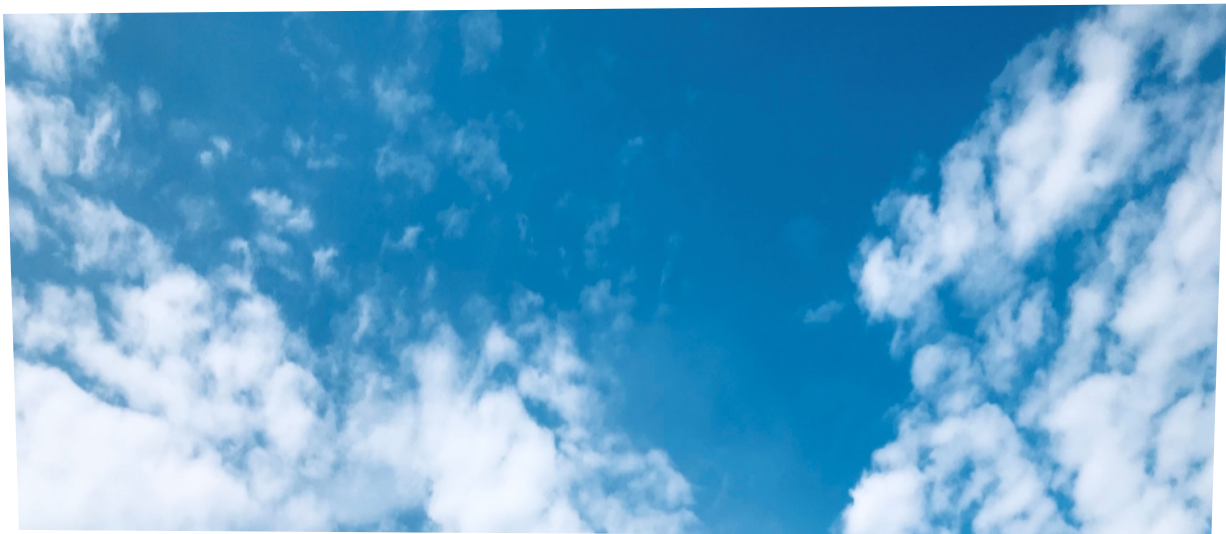
For the past 2 years I've been really poorly with depression and other issues one being addiction to prescribed drugs to try to self medicate in desperation. I endured medical withdrawal in hospital, and had several suicide attempts, one being where I walked out of a outpatient Ect session to end my life. I had no idea I had done this.

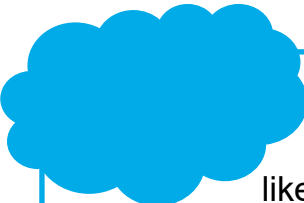
After a four month stay on a section 3 I was discharged home to my family. I could hardly move from my bed, I cried for weeks. But there is hope. I've been tremendously fortunate to have support from Jamie Eccles from CMHT at the beacon unit, he's been there every step of the way, even in my darkest moments of recovery. He's listened and supported me, when I've literally begged on my knees for more and more medication and when that didn't happen I attempted to leave my home and my children behind with the intent again to end my life.

Without Jamie's professionalism I don't think I would of made it through. He's arranged all kind of support for me and my family. My advice would be, don't give up, there is always hope. When you don't trust yourself, trust your professional and take any offers of help with both hands, no matter how difficult. I feel I'm finally free from my addiction. I no longer beg for medication changes, I no longer source my own medication and the depression is lifting. I have lived with 4 admissions totalling 13 months over two years, 33 ect sessions, bedside nursing and multiple medication changes but I can no longer make this my identity, I'm ready to break free.

"Positive thinking leads to positive things."

"You need to believe to achieve."





In 2004 I made a concerted effort in ending my own life. I do not say attempted suicide or committed suicide as it still and always will sound like a crime such as attempted homicide / fratricide / matricide or committed homicide / fratricide / matricide. Attempting or taking one's own life is due to that psych ache where everything hurts and is confused and is not a criminal act. At the time it is the only thing that makes any sense or made sense or as I like to say a logical decision made by an illogical frame of mind.

I have found that thinking about it is much like talking about it, it is and can be healthy to think about it just as it is to talk about it. I recognise when those thoughts are no longer healthy and they become invasive, loud, constant and repetitive, where there is no available space for alternative thoughts, when that occurs I am either reaching for my phone, yes the Crisis Team number is in my phone under Crisis Team or I am heading out the door to my G.P asking for help (it has been a few years now since I have had to do that).

There are a few things that have allowed me to be here doing what I am doing. I cannot say they will definitely work for or have meaning for everyone as someone's journey of recovery is personal to them with their aims and goals giving them purpose and meaning. What has helped me and continues to help me is;

- Realising I am just the same as everyone else prone to make mistakes fallible and human.
- I am not the only one who will or has felt or feels like this.
- Becoming comfortable with who I have now become
- Accepting offered help (as they say never look a gift horse in the mouth)
- Asking for help as loud and as much as I need to (no is not a justified answer)
- My WRAP Plan sounds like a line but I do have one and I use it always
- I practice what I preach it is not do as I say it is do as I do
- Having purpose in my life
- Recognising I do make a difference
- Asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of inner strength.

“Therapy - whatever you enjoy (drawing, writing, exercise, cooking, painting, gardening, knitting, sewing).”

“Think about your fuel!  
A structured balanced diet and water.”