



Report on Our Minds Matter conference on 12th July 2018

At an ambitious conference on 12th July, Our Minds Matter brought together NHS commissioners who buy mental health care, mental health professionals, faith leaders and others to investigate new approaches to mental health. The wide scope of the conference saw contributions from Helen Nellis - the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, MP Mohammed Yasin, Councillor Louise Jackson - the Portfolio Holder for Public Health as well as service users, practitioners and a psychiatrist.

Saleha Khanom, the project lead for Our Minds Matter in Bedford, welcomed everybody to the conference. Then Jill Gale the Mental Health Adviser at the University of Bedfordshire continued the welcome. Jill spoke about the diversity on campus and the advantages this brings. However, the transition into adulthood that comes with going to university brings mental health difficulties and the university approaches this by discussing medication, anxiety and how to use techniques such as relaxation openly. The reason for this is that feelings of crisis can overwhelm and result in suicide.

Helen Nellis, Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire gave the opening address. She started her address by giving the World Health Organisation definition of good mental health which is people are able to reach their 'own potential, can cope with ordinary life and can work fruitfully and make a contribution'. She praised the contribution of the royal family in raising the issue and said that within her own family a close relative had had bi-polar. She discussed the profile of mental health difficulties within the BME communities and said it is difficult to target – mental health problems can happen to anyone and everyone. She mentioned a lady she had met who said that as she'd got the 'olden Caribbean taboo', she had made it her mission to speak to as many in her community as she could. The lady said 'if we don't communicate then we will pass down the stigma'. Helen Nellis finished by quoting the Royal College of Psychiatrists document 'Spirituality and mental health, meaning and purpose'. It says that the aim of clinicians should be to support finding the 'best relationship with life and beyond. Life is a journey.' She felt this meant they are aligned with their own God.

The first welcoming speech was given by Julian Polhill, High Sheriff of Bedfordshire. He described the launch of Our minds Matter as being 'the right idea, in the right place at the right time' creating a United Nations of the mind. Councillor Louise Jackson gave a moving welcome speech in which she explored the impact a condition can have on someone and how they define themselves. Then Gail Dearing, Associate Director of Social Care, at ELFT mental health trust said that the person and what they need to achieve for their wellbeing must come first. She welcomed the Our Minds Matter approach in that it raised the question 'how do we understand that person' so that health services can better help them. The final speech was by Our Minds Matter Founder and Director– Jolel Miah. Jolel said that his vision was to start where service users are, creating a bond that helps them through

therapy. He also talked about communities taking responsibility for the environment that people live in, so that in 20 years' time we can hope that the stigma will be reduced. Instead of focusing on the symptoms and cognitive functions, he would like a new approach in which the mind, body and soul connection is acknowledged.

Satyin Taylor, Deputy Team Lead, Department of Spiritual, Religious Cultural Care, East London Foundation Trust gave the morning keynote speech. Satyin began his talk by suggesting that Gareth Southgate, who at that time had helped the country accept defeat in World Cup Football, was a role model of compassion. He described himself as a service user, avoider and provider. He highlighted the need for cultural humility in mental health services 'we cannot know everything and people don't always have the answers'. Sometimes what is needed is for professionals to 'rest with fear and take some time to listen'. For him, the role of mental health professionals in recovery is to help the service user build their own community and connections, so instead of isolation they have spiritual friendship. There is also a stage in recovery in which there is a transformational crisis, it is a matter of a new emerging, self rather than an emergency.

The morning finished with attendees dancing to music and song by the dementia group Music 4 Memory, in a session exploring loss, identity and acceptance. In the interval, attendees were able to watch a solo theatre piece by Elizabeth Howard entitled 'Breathe'.

After the lunch break, MP Mohammed Yasin, gave a message of support. He spoke about in-patient wards and the problem of travelling distance, for so many families. He recognised that there is still a shortfall in mental health funding and that if people do not get help, then the risk of suicide increases. Mohammed talked about his own experiences and the burden that is placed on women from the black and minority ethnic communities – the expectations of caring are very high.

Raj Kathane, Consultant Child and Adolescent and Family Psychiatrist gave the afternoon key note speech. He emphasised on the power of adopting practical meditative and relaxation routines in managing stress and difficult emotions. This was followed by a lived experience of recovery from anorexia. Before her experience of anorexia, Hannah had felt 'so comfortable, so safe, there wasn't place for a God' but the challenges of recovering from anorexia meant she had found a new self and her faith was a key part in having the courage to do that.

A practical session led by Pet Finden from the Nagarjuna Kadampa Meditation Centre explored mindfulness techniques. Then panel discussions discussed how the current system of focusing on symptoms rather than prevention leaves little space for a debate about how individuals can help themselves and how communities can support each other. The conference then closed.

Jolel Miah, Founder of the Our Minds Matter Charity said:

'It's great that we are talking about mental health and it is important that faith communities are not left behind. People from different backgrounds all have a part to play in reducing health inequalities. We can achieve this by building community resilience through health education and empowerment around mental health and wellbeing. We are grateful to everyone who came along to the conference on the day and to supporters encouraging a new way of talking about mental health.'

The conference was attended by a total of 80 individuals, including guest speakers and performers.