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NEWS

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## Health in Mind launches mental health community support campaign

Exclusive by Tia Byer



Gina first sought professional support when she became depressed after losing her job due to a chronic illness

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**TOMORROW** marks the official launch of the campaign **Our Community**, led by Scottish mental health and wellbeing charity **Health in Mind**.

The charity aims to raise awareness about the importance of community-led support. **Our Community** will feature a digital portrait exhibition as well as testimonials from people across Scotland about their struggles with mental health.

Chief executive of Health in Mind, Wendy Bates, describes the campaign as a way "to remind people of the strength that can be found when we come together". In praising Scotland's display of compassion during Covid-19, Wendy asserts the importance of launching the campaign now. "Now more than ever, support from, and within, our communities is vital as we continue to fight against Covid-19 and live within the restrictions that it has brought", she claims.

"Knowing that there are people there who will understand and listen, as we work to understand life as it is now, is so important", the chief executive continued. For Wendy, the sense of support and comfort a community brings is instrumental in fostering better mental wellbeing.

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She stated that despite the ways social distancing measures have redefined the physical appearance of a community, Health in Mind remains optimistic about the nation's resilience. "A sense of community and a sense of belonging is more than stepping into a building or meeting someone in person," explains Wendy.

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"Of course, we all miss that terribly but until that returns, we need to hold our community together in different ways and not only just hold it together but develop and strengthen it", she continues.

Through acts of kindness, such as reaching out to a friend or offering to do a neighbour's shopping when they are isolating, we can help ease the alienation that often accompanies feelings of anxiety and depression.

Partnering with Fishtales, Health in Mind hopes to remind Scotland of the importance of prioritising personal and collective wellbeing. Fishtales is the organisation responsible for Humans of Edinburgh, a project first established in 2014 which celebrates the diversity of the city's residents. The collaborative digital campaign Our Community aims to capture a likewise honest depiction of Scotland's mental health struggles.

Oliver Buchanan from Humans of Edinburgh said: "We are happy to be involved in such a powerful campaign." He continues: "Mental health is a topic that is close to our hearts at Fishtales, and we are really pleased to partner with Health in Mind on this campaign."

To emphasize accessibility, the campaign uses the visual media of photography.

Bates said: "The team wanted to use simple images of people in our community and use their own words to tell us about their experience and their story."

She adds that the campaign can be replicated "through all communities in Scotland by encouraging everybody to take a photo and share a little bit about their own experience". By encouraging communication, Our Community fosters collective mental health support.

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One such individual to share their story is Gina. Gina first sought professional support when she became depressed after losing her job due to a chronic illness. "I knew I needed help, but I wasn't sure how to get it ... I went online, and just Googled mental health support", she said. After giving Health in Mind a go, Gina soon discovered the power of sharing.

She continues: "Through talking, and support, you learn, it is ok to be who you are. It is about community and feeling like there are people in the same boat and if you're with people who you can identify with, then you can feel included", Gina explains.

Similarly, for Health in Mind fundraiser David experiences of mental health struggles in childhood drove him to help others who are suffering. He explains: "This is me trying to give something back, in the hope that somebody gets the support that I wish I had."

In talking about mental health, we help de-stigmatize the very natural struggle. Our Community will be launching tomorrow with the prerogative to create a safe space for the act of sharing.

As Bates accurately demonstrates, by "being open about how we are feeling about our mental health and wellbeing opens a door and, in a sense, it gives permission for others to do the same building the support of an understanding community".

*To find out more about Health in Mind, and to view the digital portrait exhibition and testimonials, visit: [www.health-in-mind.org.uk](http://www.health-in-mind.org.uk)*