

THINKING OUT LOUD

A Newsletter from the RAF Mental Health Network



IN THIS EDITION

RAF High Wycombe
Mental Health Network

Eating Disorders
Awareness Week

Sport In Mind

Stress Awareness
Month 2021

Never miss a thing by
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Site [HERE](#)

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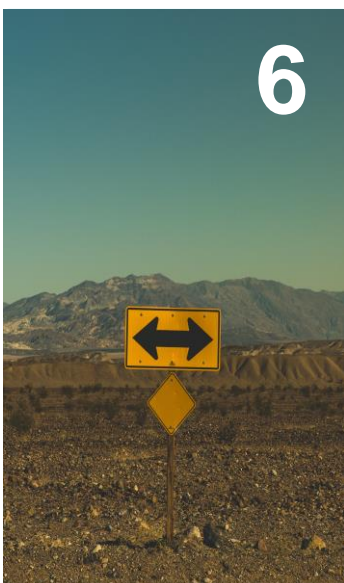
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EDITOR'S LETTER

This month marks Stress Awareness Month 2021, since stress awareness month 2020 a lot has changed and undoubtedly stress may have increased, I know it has for me, so it is now even more important to focus on our stress levels.



[Click here for resources](https://www.stress.org.uk)

Stress is a funny old business, it can affect people in many different ways and everyone has their own unique ways of dealing with it. According to the Mental health Foundation 74% of UK adults have felt so stressed at some point over the last year they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope.

Tips on what can you do for Stress Awareness Month from stress.org:

- 🔊 Talk about Stress and its effects – lets work together to reduce the stigma that is associated with stress by talking about the topic openly and freely with friends, family and colleagues.
- 🔊 Share your coping mechanisms – if something has worked for you why not share it. It might benefit someone you care about and in the meantime it might help you take your focus off your own challenges.
- 🔊 Be understanding to those who are stressed and anxious – we are all undoubtedly going to experience stress and anxiety in our lifetime so treat others going through it with compassion and empathy.
- 🔊 Look after yourself – we all need to think more about self –care. Take time out of your day to relax or do something that you enjoy. Don't forget to exercise and eat well, even when you feel too stressed as exercise is a great way to reduce stress.
- 🔊 The most crucial thing you can do when you are stressed or anxious is to make sure you are continuing to look after yourself. Make time to relax when you need to and learn to understand your limits and express those to the people around you.



I use many techniques to help with my stress levels but one of my favourites is to go for a walk, not your typical walk around a local park on a tarmacked route but in the wilderness, walking through nature where there is no set route, where I can get back to nature and reset my busy mind, the images above are taken on such walks and they are memories that last with me. So give it a go take yourself to the wild and bring your mind some calm.

Chris Nance

Editor

SPORT IN MIND: GEORGINA SMITH

Story Provided by RAF Sport

Sport can mean many things. For some it's all about winning or a means for fitness. But for some, it can be a lifeline and road to recovery.

For Sergeant Georgina Smith, it was exactly that. A lifeline and focus to take hold of her mental wellbeing.

In 2015, Georgi was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). It had a devastating effect on her life and wellbeing, changing how she lived and worked every day.

MS has serious physical implications, reducing strength and mobility for many, so doing nothing wasn't an option for an active Georgi. Georgi turned to sport and physical activity for a solution.

The charity Help for Heroes set a course for Georgi to not only return to exercise but to be able to excel and represent her country. The charity's sports rehabilitation course allowed Georgi to try a range of different sports including athletics, powerlifting and rowing. The course allowed Georgi to see which sports she enjoyed and more importantly, it gave Georgi an important part of her life back. It gave her the outlet to manage her mental health and take steps to recover some physical ability, particularly strength, which has been impacted by MS. In many ways, this started the next phase of Georgi's life. Igniting a passion for rowing and powerlifting allowed Georgi to continue her physical and mental rehabilitation back in the RAF at a station and sports association level. But it didn't stop there.

Georgi excelled and pushed herself beyond her limits. In 2019, Georgi's dedication to powerlifting saw her selected for the UK team, coming third in the World Powerlifting Championships in deadlift and becoming the first female captain at the Warrior Games in Florida, winning 6 medals; 2 silver and 4 bronze. Georgi found a new source of motivation by building her own support network amongst her sporting family. She couldn't possibly know how important that family would be.

The experiences of seeing sport impact lives also opened up Georgi's passion to help others, dedicating herself to helping those with disability in the armed forces. It was easy to focus on supporting other people's mental wellbeing, but harder to recognise it when she needed help herself.



2020 was an incredibly tough year for Georgi. Covid-19 and the need to isolate from her children increased life's pressures. With no sport to turn to for help, Georgi's mental health declined significantly resulting in trying to take her own life in October last year.

With the support of her friends, colleagues and input from RAF organisations, she managed to pick herself up and eventually move forward again. But there was one group that kept her going more than any other. Her sporting family - those in the powerlifting community had reached out and offered support which kept her away from the edge. While there was no opportunity for sport, there was the camaraderie and spirit that's formed of competition and working together for a common goal. The very essence of RAF Sport.

Looking back now on the last few years, to Georgi it is clear what sport has given her. It gave her routine, a focus to work towards, to get into healthy habits. It also gave her a way out of MS as Georgi now no longer uses medication to manage the disease and it gave her an extra family.

And while the last five years have completely turned Georgina's life upside down, Georgi is clear on the one single message she tells others.

“Focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do. Whether it's sport or a hobby, please dip your toe in. Give it a try and see what happens. It could save your life.”

RAF HIGH WYCOMBE MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

By Neil Crosthwaite

The High Wycombe Mental Health Network really started coming together towards the end of 2019 and after starting as a small group of core people committed to improving mental health and wellbeing for all personnel and dependants, as well as the surrounding community. We started running "Get-Togethers" on camp where people interested in the network could come and share ideas, but mainly so people from around the station could come and ask questions about mental health to people trained in mental health awareness. The idea was to be a group that could be approached when somebody didn't feel comfortable speaking to their CofC or the Medical Services and we could signpost and support accordingly. We really felt like we were making some progress.

Then it all changed. Everybody was stuck at home. We had a few head-scratching conversations between ourselves and were pretty much unanimous that we were now seemingly powerless to help anyone.

Fast forward 11 months and numerous lockdowns. We have adapted massively and are now, arguably, streets ahead of where we were. We have a yearly programme of webinars being delivered by the training team at Buckinghamshire MIND on a range of topics from "Supporting Someone's Mental Health" to "Understanding Anxiety". Our Get-Togethers have moved online (although we can't wait to get back out on some walks or the High Wycombe Cafe!), we have been running a virtual "Office" via ZOOM and we have a MS Teams site in which we constantly share resources, events and ideas.

On Friday 26 February, we had our first autonomous mental health awareness day, which incorporated a MIND webinar, a ZOOM office session and an Introduction to Mental Health First Aid. We have received some really good feedback on the back of that. Actually, there have been a number of opportunities that have materialised since the majority of people moved to working remotely that hopefully won't be lost as we head back towards "normality". Many other stations have been in touch and now are looking to approach their local MIND branch to see what they can organise in conjunction with them, akin to what we have been doing, which is fantastic.

However, I would say it hasn't all been plain-sailing and success. We know there will be a lot of people struggling, especially at the moment. Personally, I have spent quite a few hours looking at just my ugly mug in our ZOOM Office, so potentially those hours could be seen as completely wasted. But for anybody who is trying really hard to make a difference and sometimes feel like they are getting nowhere; every now and then when I am looking at my own face, somebody will dial in with no audio or video for a couple of minutes then disappear. I like to think that maybe that person feels a little bit better just knowing somebody was there. You never know how much difference you have made just by offering to help.



"I like to think that maybe that person feels a little bit better just knowing somebody was there. You never know how much difference you have made just by offering to help"

EATING DISORDERS AWARENESS WEEK 2021

Khym Pascoe is an ambassador for BEAT and was integral in organising a week of talks on the subject of Eating Disorders

To see these talks please
[Click Here](#)



“I craved control of something in my life and this was it.”

I was 14 with an optimistic future, engrossed by sport and already representing my County at both Netball and Hockey. Externally I seemed happy, carefree. I had great friends, a loving family home but inwards found myself broken, crying for help. Eating disorders are commonly triggered by trauma but to this day I could never quite determine how mine started. Potentially the name calling of ‘thunder thighs’ by my peers at school or the recent separation of my parents shortly after my 14th birthday or perhaps a collection of both. The innate trigger for me was never important; and, although surviving was, I felt powerless, imprisoned by my own mind and unable to formulate any steps to recovery. This illness consumed me for 5 years of my life and stole precious teenage memories I will never regain. I craved control of something in my life and this was it.



Eating Disorders week was marked by the RAF Mental Health Network by hosting a series of events organised by Khym Pascoe. The week comprised of personnel from the force and from BEAT sharing experiences of their struggles with living with an eating disorder, these stories can be viewed using the link above.

Khym trained as a BEAT ambassador in August 2020 to equip herself to raise awareness on this subject which is a relatively misunderstood disorder to many. She has also created an Eating Disorders Awareness Network to help highlight the subject and to give sufferers and survivors a place to help one another or to seek solace from like-minded people. If you wish to be part of this network please contact Khym [HERE](#)

BEAT has a National Helpline open 365 days a year, they listen, provide an understanding of illnesses and offer support in taking positive steps towards recovery. It has been proven that the sooner someone starts treatment, the greater the chances of survival. Furthermore, BEAT extend this support to family and friends, equipping them with essential skills and advice to help their loved ones recover, whilst additionally looking after their own mental health.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:



ARE YOU GOING TO LET YOUR PAST DEFINE YOUR FUTURE?

By LCP

After joining the RAF at 16, I found myself in a Welfare Officer role 18 years later, in a position of huge responsibility, looking after the welfare of others. Personal experience, beliefs and values, training and education can prepare, but only you can account for mental health resilience. How full is your stress bucket?

After a particularly busy week, it got to Friday and the door knocked. Somebody needed my help and advice to signpost them to support. I spent 2 hours mainly listening, offering a tissue when needed and connected them with the specialist help that they required. Once complete, I walked the corridor looking for my boss to appraise them on the situation, but it soon became apparent that the Friday exodus had happened, and I was the last one in work. After I had locked the building I went to my car and used the 2-hour drive home to decompress the week. I poured myself a glass of wine that evening and was conscious that my mind was unusually whizzing, processing information, and going over the earlier conversation. The next morning, I was back into my usual routine of driving an hour to spend the weekend caring for my terminally ill Grandfather. By the time Sunday evening came and I got back to camp, I was exhausted. When Monday morning arrived, I felt that my bucket was overflowing. My home life needed focus, work needed focus and more importantly I needed focus.

A couple of weeks later my Grandfather passed away and I knew I had to ask for help. I knew that I had no capacity for anymore 'door knocks' on that Monday morning and I knew that however resilient I thought I could be, it was time to ask for help. I spoke to a friend and explained that I was struggling to find capacity and they recommended "Rock to Recovery". Their mission is to save and change the lives of those in our Armed Forces, our Veteran Community and their families who are affected by stress. Their approach is to inspire, coach and motivate towards a more positive future. What did I have to lose? It was a call that changed my life.

Later that week I had a three hour face-to-face coaching session. Within the first 15 minutes I had unravelled my life story. A life in the shadow of a Mum that took her own life when I was a year old, a Dad who went out to work to provide for me, and Grandparents that raised me until I joined the RAF at 16. I explained through tears that, since losing my Grandfather, I felt more alone than I ever had before. I tried to articulate how growing up without a Mum and how my feelings about suicide had ranged from anger, hate, sorrow, illness and forgiveness, had led me to feeling unloved.

The words that left the coach's mouth stick with me today; "are you going to let your past define your future?" We spent the rest of the session discussing the power of thought. How thinking about something from a different angle can change the power of the feeling, how the feeling of being alone does not actually mean I am alone, how feeling unloved does not mean I'm not loved. I drove away that day with the feeling that my stress bucket had been emptied; drained from the bottom created by an overspill from the top.

Are you going to let your past define your future?

USEFUL LINKS

[RAF Mental Health Network MS Teams Site](#)

[RAF Health And Well-Being Portal](#)

[RAF Families Federation](#)

[RAF Benevolent Fund](#)

[RAF Association](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Combat Stress](#)

[Togetherall](#)

[Mental Health UK](#)

[Campaign Against Living Miserably](#)

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your story?

Do you have an event
coming up?

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share? To be featured in
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