

World Mental Health Day 2021: #DoOnething

Across the Excelcare Group this week, we have been encouraging residents and team members to share stories linked to times when someone has done one thing to help improve their wellbeing and mental health.

This is in aid of World Mental Health Day, which is observed on October 10th and this year, is all about doing one thing to improve your own or other people's mental health. A simple compliment or kind action can sometimes be enough to positively impact a person's mindset.

Stories from around the group have been published each day, to encourage people to be open and honest about their experiences, to help reduce the stigma that surrounds mental health and hopefully, help someone in the process.

To end the week with a smile, we have encouraged members of the Excelcare family to wear something yellow to work to brighten up the day and help to raise money for mental health charity, Mind.

Please see below for a wrap up of all the stories we have shared this week about real life, personal experiences.

WORLD
MENTAL
HEALTH
DAY



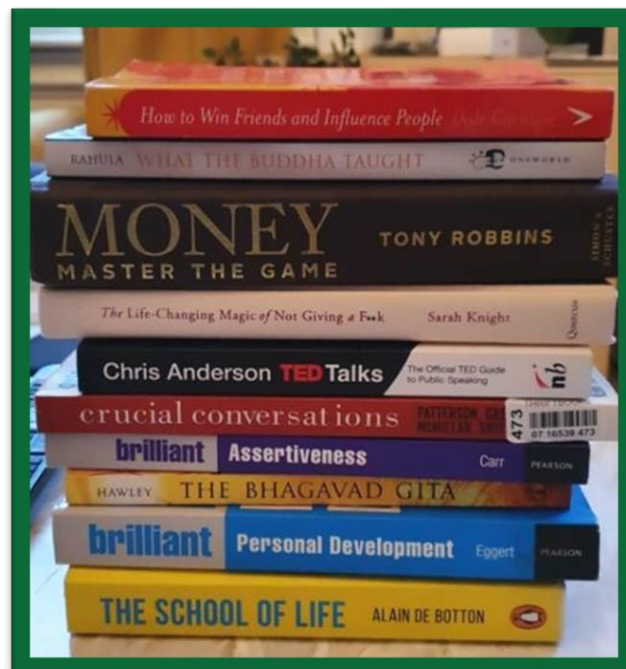
Cinthia's Story

"In 2015 I was going through a very difficult divorce. My relationship had been deteriorating for many years and I believed I had plenty of reasons to feel like a victim. I didn't realise it then, but I was living with strong levels of anxiety and a persistent depression. Realising that my friends and family weren't always available to listen to my dramas, I decided to go and make new friends, thinking that they would be able help me and sort my life, ultimately making me happy. Then something interesting happened... A new friend quickly realised that 'I had issues' and told me that I needed to look into SELF HELP!

I was honestly so hurt by that suggestion, as I did not think someone would say this to a person they cared about. In my mind then, good friends and family were there to help you and back you up no matter what! Also, there was a huge stigma around mental health and self-help, and I refused to believe that I was the one who was the problem.

I was initially closed by this idea, but a few days later, the thought of self-help came back to me in the middle of the night, so I went on YouTube to learn what self-help is about. From that day, my life simply turned around! I learned that self-help is not a lonely journey; you do get loads of people coming your way to help, but this time, it works because YOU are open to helping and healing your own wounds and you know where to look for. YOU TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HAPPINESS!

Here is a picture of my favourite books that I would highly recommend to anyone, even if you don't think you have 'issues' that need to be solved. You might be surprised with the new, happier, truer version of you that emerges, full of grace and potential!"



Lily's Story



"I have experienced Depression on and off for the last few years, so I try to be mindful of those around me and look out for when they are experiencing their own low moments.

"I noticed that the peak of the pandemic was particularly hard on the wellbeing and mental health of my team members at Castlemead, so I set up some wellbeing sessions for everyone. We used these sessions to share stories of our own situations, as well as tips and strategies that we thought might help others around us.

"The feedback that I received from my team was overwhelming, and the sessions brought about such a sense of togetherness. The pride I felt from bringing everyone together also helped with my own wellbeing

and gave me the positive lift that I needed.

"Sometimes you need to get out of your own head and into someone else's for a bit, and this was my perfect opportunity to see that for myself. At this time, feeling valued and helping others with their mental health became my medicine, and gave me a real sense of self-worth and appreciation."

Zoe's Story

"Back in 2006, I moved to Newport Pagnell to escape a very violent relationship. I will never go into the violent attacks I received but I will say the final straw was when he held my 10-year-old by the throat. I remember ringing my ex-husband, my mum and my brother to help me get out. The morning came and we had one hour to move everything I had into a van. I knew the neighbour would tell my partner that I was packing up a van. It was scary, but we did it.

"I had to pick up my child from school and tell her and her teachers we wouldn't be back, I lived in Manchester then, and my daughter screamed at me all the way to Milton Keynes. She said that I ruined her life by having her leave her friends and school behind. But I know that Moving to Milton Keynes was the best thing for me and my daughter.

"I have suffered years of Depression, Anxiety, and also fear because that relationship. For years I looked over my shoulder and even now the dark affects me. But I believe that everything happens for a reason. For example, my daughter is now a Mental Health Nurse Manager in Coventry at the age of 26 and I am the proudest mummy in the wide world. At the time, it was my manager and team members who pushed me to get help, and I did. I was diagnosed with Depression in 2008 and am proud to say that I have been taking antidepressants every day since to keep me on track.

"Without my Castlemead family, my daughter, and my god Beau, I dread to think where I would be today. So, I take this opportunity remind everyone that health is a massive issue, and one that should be approached with understanding and without judgement. We are no different to those who suffer from mental health conditions. And while people may not walk around with stickers on their heads, we can all recognise when someone is feeling low and in need of some help or a cuddle."

Hazel's Story

"Team members' wellbeing is vitally important now more than ever, having lived through COVID. Excelcare has been particularly proactive by training Mental Health First Aiders within our homes. We currently have 44 Mental Health First Aiders across the group and this number is increasing on a monthly basis with the objective that each home has a minimum of two Mental Health First Aiders.

"Every one of us has mental health and there is not health without mental health. The role of a Mental Health First Aider is to be a point of contact for a team member who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. This interaction could range from having an initial conversation, to supporting the person to get appropriate help.

"#DoOneThing! I love this hashtag as I try to 'Do One Thing' every day no matter how small, because you never know how it will impact another individual. The other day I was standing at the checkout and the person in front of me was having problems paying for the shopping. With a small child crying in the trolley, I could see that she was getting embarrassed and upset. The checkout assistant was informing her that her card wasn't working and that she would have to pay with an alternative card. She replied that she had left her handbag at home and only had this card. I offered to pay for her shopping (it wasn't a huge amount) and she started crying. The shopping was dealt with and I assisted her to her car and spent some time with her. She was a complete stranger, but as a Mental Health First Aider, I am here to support absolutely anyone, just as a physical first aider would be. You never know when or who will need your support, so if you can #DoOneThing today no matter how small, just think of the impact that your kindness will have on the individual."



Samantha's Story



"I'm an Irish mammy and that comes with a huge bag of guilt even before the child is born! I have been a single mammy now for almost 21 years – my youngest lad is 21 in December. There were times when the kids were younger that I felt like I wasn't doing a good job at being a mammy and also working, but I was trying to show them that we have to continue on no matter what life throws at us.

"When Ben was 18 months old, he was locked in the house by the nanny who lived with us and left alone all day, by himself. The other two children were in school. He was

found by my ex, who had gone to the house with Sien & Sean, to pick something up. It was evening time and they had to break in because they could hear him screaming. He was unwell due to dehydration, had cuts on his feet from trying to get himself out of the house, and he was terrified due to being left all alone all day.

"As you can imagine, as a working mammy this was literally my worst nightmare. I was in hotel management at that time, and I was floored. Following this, I was terrified to trust anyone with the kids and terrified that I couldn't provide for them at the same time. My Mam rang one night, a week or so after it happened, and she said that it would probably be good for me to go back to work. My answer to her (which at the time, I believed was completely rational) was 'Aaah I can't – my feet don't want to go outside.'

"After a while of course I had to return to work, so I went to Ireland and hired a police sergeants' daughter to come and take care of the children whilst I worked. But the fear stayed with me and I ended up having panic attacks as I drove to any place at all. This panic soon evolved into not being able to go on trains, then airplanes and soon my world had become very small.

"That's when I discovered NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) & Hypnotherapy. These were able to shift my thinking, change my mindset and help me take back control of my world. After it helped me, I wanted to help other people, so I trained as an NLP & Hypnotherapy Practitioner whilst working for a large care home provider (Oh yes, I forgot to say I changed back to a care focused career whilst this was all happening! Lol) Later on, I trained as a business coach and Master NLP Practitioner and although life threw me even more major curve balls, I was able to get through them and achieve these qualifications.

"Mental health is everyone's business, and I am so happy we are talking about this as a group, because we care about everyone who works with us as well as the people who live with us. I would say, having not had a drink for 31 years, that you have to take things one day at a time. Focusing on one moment, one step, one day at a time, is key when we experience life situations. My takeaway would be – remember this is now – not tomorrow, not yesterday, not next week or last month – the only moment we have is now and if we focus on doing and being the best version of us right now, then we are doing the best we can – always."

Anonymous submission

"Many years ago, I had a miscarriage which was very difficult for me. I was bleeding for 4 months and had been in and out of hospital very frequently. I had a discussion with different doctors in the hospital and I remembered one of the doctor's response was 'if you had a miscarriage, you will have it, there is nothing much we can do.' There was the fear of going to the toilet and suddenly losing the baby. Until one day, I could not help nor stop it, I was experiencing contractions and I knew I was about to deliver the baby. The pain was just unbearable, and I was convinced by my family friend to go to the hospital. Whilst in the hospital, I begged for the doctor to save my baby. I knew the doctor's response... So it happened, the baby came out and the doctor was kind enough to ask me if I wanted to see the baby and so I did.

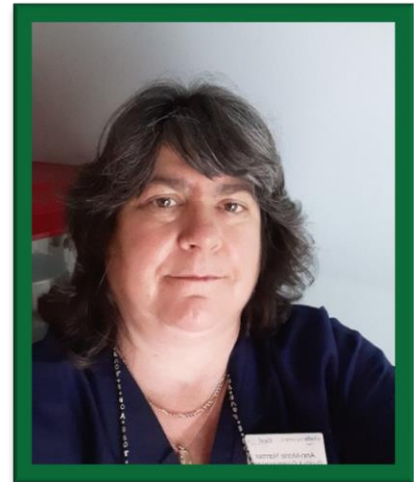
"I then decided to go home to my family as I felt I could not cope. My family's response to my experience was 'that's okay, you will be fine.' That only made me more angry, upset and furious. I felt like no one understood me until one of my mother's friends visited and spoke with me. He listened and allowed me to let go of all the pent-up anger, frustration, pain and grief. He gave me a bottle and just said throw it. Let go of all the pain, shout, scream, do anything you want to release what you currently feel...which helped. Then he said, the pain of that experience will never go, you will have to find a way and live with it. Every day I will have to learn and take even baby steps to move on. That person who sat and listened and allowed me to vent all my emotions helped me to reflect, think and let go of emotions which I needed. One friend of mine had a similar experience and said whenever you are reminded or suddenly become emotional, write down whatever you want and all that you want to say to your baby.

"I'm sharing this very personal story because we all have our own struggles however, there is always help around. It is okay not to be okay. It is okay to seek or ask for help. It is okay that there will be a time in your life that you are weak. We all have our struggles in different shapes and forms, but always remember there will always be people who are willing to help and listen. We also have to acknowledge within ourselves that we need help. 'Sometimes you don't realise your own strength until you come face to face with your greatest weakness.'"



Ann-Marie's Story

"Up until May 2010 I was both physically and mentally very well. I was Captain in the Territorial Army (as it was called back then). I ran a medical centre and prepared troops before and following deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In a very male orientated environment and as an officer I had to project a persona of being confident and in authority.



During a 2-week military exercise at Dartmoor, I contracted Meningococcal Meningitis which resulted in me being ventilated in ITU. Thankfully I survived and have physically made a great recovery. However, I have been left with some emotional and mental challenges. The biggest impact has been severe anxiety and feelings of vulnerability. Prior to joining Excelcare I would often sit in my car and cry before entering a care home. Why???? I could not tell you why I was feeling so anxious. If I woke up in the night, I would not be able to go back to sleep because of feeling so anxious. I would hang out of my bedroom window to get air into my lungs. My chest would feel tight, and it felt as though I could not breath. Again, I would not be able to tell you why I felt so anxious.

One thing I really did learn was to be an excellent actress. As soon as I walked into a care home or meeting, I was able put on a cloak of confidence and no one would ever had guessed my feelings deep inside. I kept my feelings deeply hidden due to fear of ridicule and losing my job. My husband begged me to see my GP, which I did, and I was put on medication. My anxiety slowly started to ease, but it was still there haunting me at times. Still, I kept my anxiety a secret from my Line Manager. A colleague at my old job who had been with the company for 15 years experienced an episode of depression and eventually he was given no option but to leave the company. He felt so unsupported and not at all valued.

17 months ago, I joined Excelcare. This was an anxious time, as it would be for anyone joining a new company in the middle of a pandemic. However, I felt very welcome and slowly settled into my role. It was particularly difficult to really feel part of a team as I never saw any of my team members as we were all located in the various regions due to the pandemic. I would speak to my Line Manager, at the time once a week, for a general catch up, but I would never have shared that I experienced anxiety.

In June, this year, things changed. I came out of the Milton Keynes region and started meeting with my team members and our new Line Manager, Samantha. We started talking weekly via Teams and meeting face to face once a month. The sense of being part of a team that really cared about what they do was both reassuring and comforting. What was really profound was the sense of honesty between all the team members and Samantha. People did not appear to be afraid of asking questions; they admitted when they did not understand something and confessed when they did not get something right. My level of Anxiety has dramatically reduced as has my medication. I have now not hidden that fact that I have experienced anxiety in the past. I feel safe to honest and know that I will not be judged but totally understood and supported by Samantha and my team members. This is something that I value deeply."

Rebecca's Story



"So here goes..... I would like to share what has been one hell of a rollercoaster over the last 3 years. I had lost all self-belief and self-worth and hope within myself and I really didn't know who I was or where I was going in life. My marriage had fallen apart, I lost my dream home and my career was in turmoil. I was suffering and experiencing extreme anxiety and depression and could not see a way out. I was at breaking point.

"So, I made a drastic decision last Christmas to have a career break and slowly rebuild myself and find out really where I was going and what my journey was all about. It was the best decision I ever took and if I am honest with myself, it saved my life. During the first couple of months of my break I decided to keep my mind active and started writing a little blog about

anxiety and depression which I posted on social media. The response was overwhelming and so were the lovely comments that people put about my posts and blogs. They said they found the positive quotes and stories uplifting and inspiring! One thing that has really shone through is that everyone is fighting their own battles. Mental Health is something I'm extremely passionate about and should definitely be spoken about more. I look back where I was 10 months ago at Christmas time, and I am a completely different person to who I am now.

"Taking that on board, I took on a new challenge to push myself and started back in my career journey as a trainer, something new and something I have never done before. There is still a huge stigma around mental health, that's why I jumped at the chance in my new role of becoming a Mental Health first-aider, so I could help and support others with their mental health.

"People don't fake a mental illness; they fake being ok." Often, the biggest fear is being a burden - which I can relate to. So, if someone does reach out please don't dismiss it for attention seeking - it's actually because they really need help.

"Be kind to yourself. I understand we have such busy lives but please do try and take 5 minutes each day to think of all the things that make you smile to give yourself a bit of light relief to all the stresses and strains of everyday life."

Residents of Primrose Croft Care Home

The people living at Primrose Croft also got involved in the discussion about mental health and what things help to boost their wellbeing and make them feel more at ease. These were the answers they gave:

Josephine

“Prayer”

Nina

“Music & her family”

Molly

“Talking to her friends”

Gwen

“Music”

June

“Her friend Josephine”



Honouring World Mental Health Day throughout the week has not only encouraged people to speak about the times they have faced challenges, but also allowed everyone to embrace these moments and show how far they have come.

There is a lot of emotion in these stories, but also heart-warming moments, each demonstrating how turning to someone or doing one small thing can help to overcome personal challenges.

Although this week has come to an end, we will continue to encourage everyone across the Excelcare family to be open about their personal challenges, and work to ensure that our team members always feel like they have someone to talk to.

Mental Health First-Aiders around the family will be a driving force in ensuring this happens, and that everyone has the support that they require.

