IT'S OK, TO NOT BE OK

A look at Ruby Wax's new mental health cafés
Hello, and welcome to another edition of Focus on Oakleaf! With the days getting warmer and the nights shorter, I hope that you are finding the time to get out and enjoy some sunshine. After all, a bit of sunlight does wonders for our mental health!

As I write this I can hardly believe that I have already been with Sussex Oakleaf for six months. How the time has flown! I have already met lots of you during my time here, and will be visiting services again soon, so will hopefully meet many more.

I was especially pleased to have met so many of our hard working staff and volunteers at our annual Wellbeing Day. It’s a great chance to enable all of our staff and volunteers to concentrate on their own wellbeing. It also provides us with a rare and very welcome opportunity to come together under one roof. Many thanks to everyone involved in making the day a success and do keep an eye out for more details of what we got up to in this issue.

Since the last issue of Focus on Oakleaf, we’ve been hard at work ensuring that Sussex Oakleaf continues to provide the quality mental health care that we have gained such a great reputation for. We are continually looking for new ways to improve our services and adapt to this ever changing world in which we live. Our annual client and volunteer survey have gone out and hopefully as many of you as possible have had the opportunity to feedback to us. I’m proud to lead an organisation with such an excellent track record of putting its clients first, and our annual surveys are just one of the ways that we do this.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Focus on Oakleaf as much as I have and I will look forward to seeing you soon!

Philippa Thompson - Chief Executive
@indepliving
www.fromtinyacorns.blog

The Summer Sun

Now that it’s the end of June
My garden plants are in full bloom
The bees are buzzing all around
There’s no more frost left on the ground
A warm wind blows through the trees
The summer sun fills me with ease
Mother nature at its best
The Summer season beats the rest.

Paul Clark - Volunteer
8 - 14 May 2017 was Mental Health Awareness Week across the UK. But why is it important that we work so hard to raise awareness of mental illness? Well, the answer is that if we begin to raise awareness we can begin to end the stigma that people suffer, and make it easier for people to talk about their problems. After all, it’s only by talking that we are able to take our first steps towards good mental health.

During Mental Health Awareness Week clients, staff and volunteers from across Sussex Oakleaf services got involved in celebrating and promoting the week. With a theme of ‘Surviving or Thriving?’ we thought about what it means to not just cope with a mental illness but to live our lives to the fullest, realising our ambitions and making the most of our opportunities.

Services celebrated the week in a variety of ways, from picnics to discussion groups. Staff manned stands in the local communities as part of our work to raise awareness of mental health issues.

However, raising mental health awareness isn’t just something for a week in May, it’s something we can all work at all year round!
We recently received a letter from one of our clients in Eastbourne. Tim wanted to let us know how proud he was that his daughter Joy, had recently run the Brighton Half Marathon in order to raise money to support Sussex Oakleaf’s vital services.

Money raised for Sussex Oakleaf, by people like Joy, goes towards helping all kinds of people who are struggling with their mental health. Mental Illness can affect any of us at any time. Its effects can be devastating and wide reaching. Donations, like the one from Joy, can truly make a difference in someone’s life.

If you would like to support us in our work then just visit our website and look for the Virgin Money Giving logo. Give whatever you can, and if you are feeling ambitious then why not follow in Joy’s footsteps and take part in a fundraising event? You can help people out and feel good about yourself at the same time!

Here’s what Joy had to say about her fundraising experience:

‘I felt really passionate about raising money for Sussex Oakleaf, because I’ve seen first-hand what a difference it has done in my Dad’s life. The support Sussex Oakleaf gives is tremendous! I admire my Dad’s will power and courage through the ups and downs of life. His attitude to life is refreshing, and Sussex Oakleaf plays a big part! I wanted to show my thanks by running the Brighton Half Marathon and I raised £382 for them. At mile nine, the run proved a challenge but I powered through and completed the run in two hours and nineteen minutes! Life is a struggle but with the right support it can be enjoyed!’

Thank you, Joy - we really appreciate you and your gift to Sussex Oakleaf.
Announced in March at London Book Fair, M&S Cafés will host fortnightly ‘talk-in’ sessions where people who are feeling ‘frazzled’ can meet to talk and share their personal stories in a safe, anonymous and non-judgmental environment.

11 M&S stores will be hosting Frazzled Cafe meetings over the next few months – with three in London alongside Brighton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Cambridge, Nottingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Canterbury and Norwich. More locations are set to be added throughout the year.

Taking place in M&S Cafés after hours and led by trained volunteer facilitators, Frazzled Cafe meetings are designed not just for the one-in-four Britons who will suffer a mental illness at some point, but for the four-in-four who are feeling frazzled and overwhelmed by the stresses of modern life.

Frazzled Cafe was successfully trialled in M&S offices and stores last year with the support of M&S as part of its Plan A eco and ethical initiative. The meetings are not therapy - their purpose is to provide a space where people can talk openly with others who understand how they are feeling - ‘a place where it’s ok, to not be ok’.

With the economic cost of mental health problems in the UK estimated at roughly £105 billion per year – equal to the entire National Health budget – and the UK rated the 7th highest nation in the Western world for prescribing antidepressants (four million annually), there is a pressing need for both identifying ways to help people cope with overwhelming stress and reducing the stigma that is attached to discussing mental health. Studies have proven that one of the best ways to beat stress is to share your feelings and research has also shown that peer-support groups can yield significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms, resulting in decreased hospitalisation, larger social support networks and enhanced self-esteem. Ruby Wax herself has come across thousands of people who wanted to talk and feel connected during her sell-out book tours and theatre shows for A Mindfulness Guide for the Frazzled and Sane New World over the past five years. This is what inspired her to create Frazzled Cafe.

Ruby Wax said: “We live in a time where to have a life crammed to the hilt is considered a success story. But with all this pressure, so many of us have nowhere to go to meet and talk about it. Frazzled Cafe is about people coming together to share their stories, calmly sitting together, stating their case and feeling validated as a result. Feeling heard, to me, has always been half the cure.”

Find out more at: www.frazzledcafe.org

Marks & Spencer has joined forces with number one bestselling author, comedian and leading mental health awareness campaigner Ruby Wax to launch Frazzled Cafe in M&S stores.

It’s OK, to not be OK
WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Mental health problems at work are all too common. In the UK, at least 1 in 6 workers are experiencing mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. With a few changes, it is possible to improve your wellbeing at work.

Mental health problems cost employers in the UK £30 billion a year through lost production, recruitment and absence - so why aren’t we doing more about it?

The answer is that all too often we are just not talking about it. For many, mental health is still a taboo subject and that needs to change. Many people feel scared and confused about confronting these issues at work. It often feels too personal, too deep and too complex. You might feel very happy to tell a colleague about a physical injury you’ve sustained, but when it comes to your mental health, where do you start? If you can’t talk about it, it may also prove equally difficult to listen.

The tide is beginning to turn, however, and many employers are now taking a far more proactive approach to maintaining their employee’s mental health and wellbeing. Finding the time to discuss difficulties with your line manager and creating a plan to look after your health can have a really positive impact on our ability to cope.

There is a wealth of resources online with advice and tips to look after yourself at work. A good place to start would be MIND’s website, where, amongst other things, they offer a guide template for a work place Wellbeing Action Plan. We’ve included a few tips on the next page for you to try next time your at work.

Remember, if you are struggling with your mental health, you can speak to one of our members of staff who may be able to offer you some support or point you in the right direction. It all starts with talking!
Workplace
Top Tips...

The New Economics Foundation has suggested 5 steps that we can take to improve our wellbeing. You can use these as a starting block to improving your wellbeing at work.

1 Connect
All relationships need to be nurtured in order to flourish, and our relationships with colleagues are no different. Spend time asking how someone’s weekend was, make the effort to speak to someone in person rather than via email. Take the time out to speak to a new member of staff. Remember, by connecting with others we are helping their wellbeing as well as our own.

2 Be Active
Regular physical activity is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression across all age groups. When working why not try taking the stairs instead of the lift, go for a walk in your lunch break or get off the bus one stop early and walk the rest of the way.

3 Take Notice
Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing and savouring ‘the moment’ can help to reaffirm your life priorities. Why not get a plant for your workplace, visit a new place for lunch or have a ‘de-clutter’ day.

4 Keep Learning
Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. Why not learn something new today? Find out something about your colleagues, set up a book group or sign up for a course.

5 Give
Participation in social and community life has attracted a lot of attention in the field of wellbeing research. Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy. Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing.

Reclaim your lunch break...
Your lunch break is your time to relax and unwind. Use it to take a walk, read a book or spend some time away from your desk. Get some fresh air and eat something healthy to keep your brain active for the rest of the afternoon.

Make a to-do list...
At the end of each day, go over your list and write up one for the next day. When your thoughts are down on paper, you’ll find it easier not to think about work.

Wind down on the commute home...
Read a book or listen to your music. Set aside some time for yourself. Maybe try cycling part of your journey or getting off the bus one stop early to take a short-cut through a park or quiet streets. These little actions can really help you to switch off.

Ask for help...
If you feel your workload is spiralling out of control, take the opportunity to discuss it with your manager or supervisor. If you can’t resolve the problem of unrealistic goals, organisation problems or deadlines in this way, talk to your personnel department, trade union representative or other relevant members of staff.
Everyone got their fill of vitamins and exercise by pedalling for their very own smoothies. Thanks to Urban Smoothie Bikes for coming along!

Thank you to the Mid Sussex Wellbeing Team who provided health checks all day as well as advice about developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Taster sessions provided an opportunity to try activities like yoga, zumba and relaxation. Give it a try and see how it helps your wellbeing.

A choir was set up during the day, practicing and then performing for everyone. Singing is a great way to express yourself and to relax.

Everyone got creative with the range of arts and crafts available led by staff and volunteers from our arts groups. Getting creative is a great way to relax.

We were fortunate enough to have been visited by the Conscious Cake Company who brought along a delicious array of gluten & additive free cupcakes to enjoy.

Thank you to clients in Burgess Hill who supplied us with tasty treats made at their weekly cooking group. Some excellent cooking skills were on display.

The 2017 Sussex Oakleaf selfie competition showed off what a beautiful bunch we are! Take a look at a few entries below.
Did you know that over half of all mental health problems begin by the age of 14? In fact, nearly three quarters begin by the age of 24. Young people are disproportionately affected by mental illness.

Young Minds, a charity focussed on youth mental health, states that there is a mental health crisis in our classrooms. They think that the wellbeing of students is as important as academic success, and the education system should reflect this. They have started a campaign called ‘Wise Up to Wellbeing in Schools’ in order to ensure that the government is focusing on supporting young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

Young people face a unique set of challenges which can easily prompt mental illness. Whether it’s the pressure of exams, bullying, family problems or the difficulties of navigating their first relationships, young people definitely have a lot to deal with.

Sussex Oakleaf’s Children and Young People Champion, Mark Savage, says:

‘With 3 children in every classroom having a diagnosable mental health condition and with the growing pressures on young people today, more than ever we need to be doing more in schools, getting support early, educating young people on how to build resilience, and by doing so, breaking down the stigma associated with mental illness.’

Making sure that young people have access to the right kind of support can help to make a huge difference and help equip them with the tools they need to transition into adulthood.

Sussex Oakleaf have, for some time, employed a specialist support worker for young people in the Mid Sussex and Crawley areas. We are now expanding on this support with new Recovery Workers who will focus their support on those aged 16 - 25.

Clients accessing the service will be able to get specialist one to one support as well as access groups in order to meet other people their own age.

If you would like to find out more about our young persons service then why not get in touch. For Crawley - 01293 534782 and for Mid Sussex - 01444 416391.

Young Minds is a national charity helping young people with their mental health. As well as campaigning and providing information, they have a helpline set up to support parents concerned about their children’s mental health. If you would like to speak to them you can contact them on 0808 802 5544.
I’ve been playing football of all things! In tournaments, and on the Crawley Town FC pitch. It has made such a huge impact that I felt the need to share it.

I play for the mighty Crawley Old Girls (COGs). We are about 70 strong, of all shapes, sizes and ages. The group was started by a local ‘old girl’ with the help of the Crawley Town Community Foundation. The aim of the group is for women to come together to have fun, gain friends and play a bit of football. We have appeared on Sky Sports, BBC’s Inside Out, Radio 4 Women’s Hour and BBC Radio London as well as in several editions of the Crawley Observer and Crawley Town’s match day programme. We’ve won awards such as Crawley Community Award for Group Achievement and the FA’s #WeCanPlay Participation Award. We’ve also been visited by FA Lionesses Karen Carney and Jordan Nobbs, the Crawley MP and Minister for Sport Tracey Crouch.

All very impressive, but the main thing that I have got from taking part doesn’t get recognised in a certificate or a medal.

A few years ago, I could never have gone outside of a comfort zone, to mix with people that I didn’t know, to play football. That is exactly what I do now.

To begin with, I needed to hold someone’s hand to get there, but no longer. Through the immense buzz that is felt each week and the great friendships that are developing, I go on my own and cannot wait to get there. It is giving me the confidence to enjoy myself and not worry about what others think.

It is true, all that stuff that keyworkers and text books say, exercise does make you feel good. I would urge anyone to take the exercise pill to improve physical and mental wellbeing, especially if it is with like-minded people. Maybe at the beginning, a walk round the block or walking up the stairs instead of the lift is all you can do, but that’s ok. It can develop into more. If anyone wants to join us then please do. If anyone wants to start up another team in another area that would be amazing – maybe we can arrange a friendly!

Positive endorphins, I’ve had a lot these the past few months...

By Alison McMullen - OCC Member
'A dog is man’s best friend,' said a beaming Richard, walking beside me along with his lovely dog, Tara - a gentle and mature Boxer.

As we walked and talked in the sunny Crawley park, Richard spoke of his admiration for Tara, expressing how Tara helps with his own mental health. Richard suffers from panic attacks but having Tara really helps. When he is with his dog he feels much calmer and as a result suffers from fewer panic attacks.

A panic attack is a terrifying experience for anybody and can be debilitating for the many people who suffer from them. Although short-lived, panic attacks can come on suddenly with no warning and leave you feeling anxious about them returning.

I am lucky enough to have a dog in my own life and so I can certainly understand how Richard feels. A dog or cat, or in fact any pet, can bring unconditional love into our lives - a relationship based on trust and no judgement. Having a pet can help us with structure and routine. Regular walks are as good for your dog as they are for you. They can help with exercise and also socialising, as you meet other dog walkers. This relationship fosters responsibility and can help reduce stress and loneliness, anxiety and depression. Plus, I think we have all experienced the calming and soothing effects of having a cat purring on your lap or hugging your dog. Pets really are an excellent remedy for feeling anxious and worried.

It was easy to see the positive impact Tara and Richard have on each other's lives and to have such a meaningful relationship is not only a unique experience, but an absolute joy.
Sussex Oakleaf provides a range of support services to people with mental health needs, those with a personality disorder and individuals at risk of homelessness.

We empower people and also promote independence by providing recovery focussed community wellbeing services, residential care, peer mentoring, housing support and volunteering opportunities.

**Get in touch:**

**General Enquiries**  
☎ 01444 459517

**Eastbourne**  
☎ 01323 430203

**North Wealden**  
☎ 01825 766528

**South Wealden**  
☎ 01323 849524

**Crawley**  
☎ 01293 534782

**Mid Sussex**  
☎ 01444 416391

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**Useful Contacts**

**NHS Direct:** 111

**Sussex Mental Health Line:** 0300 5000 101

**Mind:** 0300 123 3393  
Email: info@mind.org.uk

**Samaritans:** 116 123  
Email: jo@samaritans.org.uk

**Shelter:** 0808 800 444

**Citizens Advice:** 03444 111 444

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