

# Sarah's story

Sarah Ward suffers from depression. For the past year she has been a part of the SCRN: Mental health Young Person's Advisory Group which advises researchers interested in mental health research.

Sarah got involved in research as a way to further understand mental health problems and to do something proactive in response to her condition. She also got involved to proactively contribute to promoting better services and treatments for the mental health sector.

Sarah Ward (pictured) is 18 and from Kent. In 2012 she was diagnosed with depression and has had difficulties with other issues, such as self-harm, since 2009.

During this time Sarah got involved in research via the SCRN: Mental health Young Person's Advisory Group. Her aim was to better understand her condition and other mental health problems and to meet other young people who had been through similar experiences.

The main objectives of the group are to act as the main point of contact for researchers seeking service user and carer advice on studies relating to young people, promote the young service user/carer perspective in mental health research and to identify and share good practice in service user and carer involvement.

Sarah said:

"I first got involved with the group in February 2014. I was already volunteering for the anti stigma campaign with [Time to Change](#) and they sent information to me about the Young Person's Advisory Group and how I could get involved. I applied and got into the group which was fantastic news!

"I've had personal experiences of mental health myself as well as seeing my friends and family go through similar situations. It's really important to recognise it more. I don't think it's as recognised as much as physical health. There needs to be changes made with the mental health system and I'm very keen to push this forward and be a part of that.

"The members of the group meet up every six to eight weeks and researchers come in and talk to us about their research proposals. As a group we offer



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advice and look at the language used in the proposals to make sure that it's user friendly and understandable from a young persons perspective.

"We recently had to beta test a new recovery package or 'app' - that will be used in a clinical setting between a therapist and persons recovering from schizophrenia. That was really interesting.

"Being part of the group has definitely encouraged me to pursue a career in psychology and it's helped immensely with my knowledge and understanding of research. There are so many stages that go into the research process (such as ethics and funding). It's very complex and rigorous, which is a good thing, but it's also very enlightening and enjoyable.

"It's definitely benefitted me being part of the group, aside from supporting me with my career choice it's expanded my knowledge of mental health issues in general.

"It's a pleasure to be able to pass this knowledge onto other people. For example, if a friend is suffering from a particular issue that I may have discussed with the group previously, then I'm able to give advice and recommendations on how to get the best help or treatment. It feels very empowering and makes me happy to be able to help others in similar situations.

"You get to learn so much on a wide variety of mental health issues. Even if you don't want to pursue a career in mental health or psychology you can gain so much experience by being part of a group like this. Mental health is so relatable to general daily life and I think most people can benefit from a better understanding of mental health research and services.

"Patient stories (like mine) can really change what the general public thinks about mental health and their understanding of different mental health issues. If young people are starting to experience these problems and they're not quite sure what's going on, it's important to let them know they're not alone.

"When I first had difficulties I read the [Time to Change](#) blogs and people's personal stories . It really helped me to know that I wasn't alone, that other people are going through the same thing I was, and more importantly, that I could get help.

"Our group is now preparing for it's big showcase event "Young People ReThinking Mental Health Research" on the 29 January. The event will be held in the British Library, and will provide a great opportunity to encourage researchers and members of the health sector to work with us in the future."

"There are many key issues to tackle with mental health at the event, but initially, I believe stigma is still a large problem. I think it's particularly bad for young people in terms of playground bullying and teacher discrimination - that's really a key priority for the group and for myself, personally, to highlight.

"The event is about collaborating and highlighting key issues with an audience made up of mental health researchers, people who work in patient and public

involvement, young people with an interest in mental health and third sector representatives.

"We'll have speeches and presentations from varying professionals, interviews with others, and a quiz 'What do you know about Young People's Mental Health?' where we will test the audience on current mental health statistics and look at why we need more research into young people's mental health. I'll be helping to run the quiz on the day.

"It's very important to challenge thoughts and perceptions of mental health and an event like this is the perfect place to do so. We need to look at current issues and misconceptions and think about how we can break down these barriers for better mental health research and services.

"It's a great opportunity for young people to gather together and offer our perspective to the right audience. We do a lot of work helping and supporting researchers and if there's any other projects we can tap into - we're more than happy to do so!

"I hope the event will help raise awareness of key issues particularly the stigma that surrounds mental health and I hope researchers will spread the gospel of the group. We'd love to collaborate on other research projects which are really interesting and will further my understanding even more.

"Mental health affects young people as well as adults. If you don't involve young people then there's no way that research or the research process will relate to them. It's paramount that we continue to promote and raise awareness in the way that we do."

Sarah also volunteers with a local, youth-led mental health awareness charity called [SAFE](#) that works to raise awareness of mental health in young people and tell them about support available. [SAFE](#) works in selected schools in Maidstone and in the community.

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