

Susannah's story

Susannah Page has both personal and family experience of mental health services. For the past year she has been a part of the CRN: Mental health Young Person's Advisory Group which advises researchers interested in mental health research.

Susannah got involved in research as a way to further understand mental health problems and to do something proactive in response to her own diagnosis and lack of available treatment and support.

Susannah Page (pictured) is 22 and from Nottingham. In 2011 she was given a mental health diagnosis after several years of being refused treatment. She had difficulty accessing mental health services because of physical impairments. Some people with physical impairments, who also need mental health support needs, have tended to be overlooked.

At the same time Susannah's mum was in a psychiatric hospital, being treated for severe depression and she too lacked the right treatment and support.

During this time Susannah got involved in research via the CRN: 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. She also wanted to become more proactive in making sure other people would have access to better treatment and care in mental health services.

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/carers perspective in mental health research and to identify and share good practice in service user and carer involvement.

Susannah said:

"I chose to get involved because I thought it would be a really good way of getting my point of view across and maybe to help others who have been in a similar situation to me. I essentially felt lost in the gap between child services and adult services and this was a very frustrating time for me.

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proposals. We get involved in so many different things and I find it all very interesting. I'm hoping it will also help when I come to getting a job further down the line.

"Being part of the Young Peoples Advisory Group has definitely made me more aware of different mental health issues and how these can be dealt with. But it's more than that I feel like it's enabled me to develop personally and I'm much more confident now. I couldn't believe how much more work there really needs to be done to make mental health research and services more effective.

"I also think it's really important to have your personal story heard - it shows that there are real issues and gives the general public a better understanding into various illnesses and the different research that is happening. There are many issues that need to be addressed and talked about in mental health - people shouldn't feel ashamed to come forward and discuss these openly.

"I feel we've already proven ourselves as a group, with a lot of researchers, that actually we come up with a lot of ideas that maybe carers or health professionals might not have thought about as part of the research process - I think it's so important that we as a group, and young people, continue to be a part of that process.

"One of our contributions was to be involved in 'Depression: Asking the right questions', a priority setting exercise supported by the charity MQ Transforming Mental Health and the James Lind Alliance, which has been one of the biggest studies for including the opinions of young people.

"We've also taken part in a Department of Health initiative to collect up to date national statistics on the prevalence of mental health issues amongst young people in the UK - it's all very exciting!

"We're now preparing for our 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's a lot of issues that need to be discussed at the event. Some of the key ones are making sure that people don't get lost in the system, where young people who need help and support from mental health services find that they no longer have help and support at a time when they really need it.

"So when they reach 16 or 17 they no longer have support because the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, or CAMHS as we call it, ends. They are too young or not ill enough for Adult Mental Health Services, or AMHS, which don't start until the person reaches 18 - this is what happened to me and it's a very difficult thing to deal with.

"The event is about raising awareness of these issues and making sure young people don't fall between the gap. It's about getting our foot in the door and showing people that we're here, we're important and these problems need to be dealt with.

"I'll be presenting on the day in front of 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.

"I'll also be taking part in the 'Psychiatrist's Couch' session where we'll be asking direct questions to the Chief Executive of the NIHR Clinical Research Network, Sir Iain Chalmers (Coordinator at the James Lind Initiative) and Professor Til Wykes (NIHR Clinical Research Network: Mental Health Theme Director). So it will be very interesting to hear their thoughts about current issues that are high on the mental health research agenda.

"I just hope the event raises awareness of the need for research for young peoples mental health. There may be some areas in the country where it is doing well but I know there are some areas where help is nonexistent. So this really needs to be addressed longer term.

"It's also important to promote the Young Person's Advisory Group itself and to give other people, who may not have heard of us, the opportunity to get in contact with us."

"My family have definitely seen that being part of this group and our activities has changed me in a very positive way. And I'm very passionate about it all now. My interest in mental health research just keeps growing and growing."

www.crn.nihr.ac.uk/mentalhealth

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