

# Will's story

Will Stringer is training to be a mental health nurse. For the past year he has been a part of the CRN: Mental health Young Person's Advisory Group which advises researchers interested in mental health research.

Will got involved in research as a way to further understand mental health problems, to see how others have been affected by poor mental health services and to help find ways to improve them.

Will Stringer (pictured) is 24 and from Warrington. He has never been diagnosed with a mental health problem, but has personal experience of helping some family members with their mental health issues.

Will got involved in research via the CRN: Mental health Young Person's Advisory Group. His aim was to better understand different mental health conditions, and to meet other young people who had been through these 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/carers perspective in mental health research and to identify and share good practice in service user and carer involvement.

Will said:

"I chose to get involved because I'm currently training to become a mental health nurse, so I've always had a keen interest in the subject. Also some of my family members have suffered from mental health illnesses in the past so I have personal experience of what that's like and how difficult a situation it can be.

"I've also worked closely with other mental health organisations such as [State of Mind](#). We use sport, primarily rugby league, to access people to raise awareness of mental fitness and to promote well being. It's a good vehicle to access young men, who traditionally don't access health services. So we sign post where they can seek help and in the process try and break down the stigma of seeking help in young males.

"I really want to help to improve mental health research and services in my local area and I'm very passionate about doing everything I can to make that happen.



"So the Young People's Mental Health Advisory Group has meetings every 6-8 weeks and researchers come along to share their research proposals. We all see a current lack of understanding about mental health problems in the group and we believe that research could be a way to change this and to change attitudes.

"I really want to help to improve mental health research and services in my local area and I'm very passionate about doing everything I can to make that happen."

"I've met a lot of new friendly people and it's really opened my eyes to what people actually go through with different mental health issues and how they can change their situation in a positive way by sharing and reflecting with others who have gone through a similar situation.

"The only way that mental health research and services will improve is by people coming forward like us, so that we can have open discussions and think about ways of improving current research and services.

"I think it's really a fulfilling experience, and that's really important to me, to be part of a group like this, whether you have suffered from mental health in the past, or like me you're training to become a research professional, I think it can benefit anyone - from all walks of life.

"Stigma is a big issue with mental health and when people share their stories, or they're involved in patient campaigns like 'patient stories' it really starts to reduce the stigma, and makes difficult conversations seem more open and transparent. Mental health shouldn't be swept under the carpet - it needs to be an open discussion.

"The group is 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."

"We'll have the opportunity to discuss topics high on the mental health research agenda such as stigma, particularly with young males. This is an area I've worked and been involved in, in the past, and I know that young men really struggle to come forward with different mental health illnesses - particularly in light of macho stereotyping.

"There are also other issues that need to be discussed at the event. One these is making sure that young people do not suffer when they leave the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, or CAMHS.

"So if there are any children suffering with mental health issues, they'll go and see their GP and then they'll be referred to the CAMHS service in their local area. But once a young person turns 16 or 17 they're no longer eligible for CAMHS and sometimes they are too young or not ill enough for Adult Mental Health Services, or AMHS.

"A young person can be forgotten, with the transition between the two. That can really lead to some traumatic events for the service user because they may have had the same nurse from age 10 to 16, for example, and they've become familiar, and really opened up to that person over a long period of time. Then the treatment or therapy is simply taken away.

"This is a huge concern for mental health research and services and part of the event will raise this issue so that we can focus on better research and services for the future.

"For Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, or CAMHS, to be improved it's not good enough to only have adult representation (such as professors and politicians) around the table discussing what should be done. They need young people like us, with our insight and knowledge, to feed into this process and share experiences.

"A key aspect of my nurse training is that all care needs to be patient centered with better patient focussed outcomes - and it will never be patient centered if only adults feed into the process. This is where we need to focus our efforts going forwards.

"At the event itself I'll be part of a staged debate entitled 'Boys don't cry' which looks at the issues surrounding young males and macho stereotyping and whether men are psychologically tougher than women.

"I'll also be helping to run the 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.

"To be honest I'm just very happy to be involved. I hope first and foremost that we can raise awareness of mental health issues, to reduce the stigma that surrounds it and to really improve mental health research and services in general.

"But it's also important to promote the Young Person's Advisory Group itself - to say we're here, and what we're involved with and if anyone is interested in getting involved in research into mental health they can come and talk to us directly, everyone is welcome."

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[www.crn.nihr.ac.uk/mentalhealth](http://www.crn.nihr.ac.uk/mentalhealth)

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