

Single Step

Together we're happier

The magazine from Depression Alliance

The leading charity in England for people affected by depression

Winter 2015

Finding your Friends in Need

All over the country people are joining groups and developing friendships

Coping with community

An inside look at how a community deals with mental health

When mental health and addiction collide

Both sides of the dual diagnosis issue



DepressionAlliance



About us

Depression Alliance is the leading charity in the UK for everyone affected by depression. We bring people together to end the loneliness and isolation that so often comes with the condition.

Our support network is a friendly and easy way to share understanding, information and friendship through depression and recovery. We also campaign to end the stigma of depression and to raise awareness of what it means to live with it. It's vital that our friends, family, workplaces and communities are providing the right support to help people get better and stay well.

Join Depression Alliance

- Be part of our national body of people who live with depression
- Receive a free copy of **Single Step** every quarter
- Join our Friends in Need community at friendsinneed.co.uk
- Influence national developments on depression and be part of the movement to break the stigma
- Find a self help group in your area or set up a new one
- Access our unique online resource **What you should know about depression**, for symptoms treatments and therapies

Joining DA costs £2 a month by direct debit (or £24 a year) or £5 a year if you are unwaged or on benefits.

We'd love to hear from you!

We welcome contributions to **Single Step**. In the first instance, please submit your proposal for any item to our London office or by email to info@depressionalliance.org

Disclaimer

Depression Alliance has tried to ensure that the contents of this magazine are accurate. Depression Alliance takes no responsibility for the content of articles or adverts reproduced and this should not be taken as an endorsement of any kind.

Welcome to Single Step

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a Single Step

In this issue we have contributions from...



Shabena Abbas
Carer and community member



Alison Garcia
Mum, daughter, recovery worker



Tony Dikan
Cognitive Behavioural Therapist



Owen Raybould
Real food health coach



Maurice Mcleod
Deputy Editor

This issue

A Happy New Year from everybody here at Depression Alliance and welcome to our first Single Step magazine of 2015.

In this issue we're excited to be taking a closer look inside our growing Friends in Need community, where we speak to those who've met new local friends through the site and learn their tips and techniques for creating your own Friends in Need meet up. We also meet DA member Shabena, who shares her experience of depression within the Pakistani community in the West Midlands, and we hear some of the perks and pitfalls of managing the illness within a tightknit community amidst differing cultural beliefs.



As New Year's Resolutions start to wane, we look to our evolutionary past to reveal the benefits of the cave man diet, and if household clutter is getting you down take inspiration from our therapist Dr Tony Dikan, who helps DA member Lyn to take control of her home and her health.

Laura Sacha, laura@depressionalliance.org

KICKSTART APPEAL

Help us transform the public view of depression

For far too long ours has been an unfashionable cause. The monster we call depression has got away with destroying thousands of lives and our response has been – frankly – inadequate.

We want to change that.

If you can, please make a donation today of whatever you can spare to help us reach as many of those affected by depression as we can.

You can donate by logging into:
www.justgiving.com/depression-alliance-kickstart



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Thanks

Thank you so much to our volunteers across the country, without whose hard work and dedication we would not be able to offer the support, information and understanding that people affected by depression so urgently need and deserve.

Credits

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Our news

Get set for Depression Awareness Week 20–26 April

It's nearly that time of year again, and if you've never taken part in Depression Awareness Week now's a brilliant time to start. We'll have more details on the Depression Alliance website, Twitter and Facebook nearer the time, but you might like to:

- come to our hilarious Comedy for Depression in London on 23 April – tickets and details on our website soon.
- donate to our Kickstart appeal to help us continue our vital work and changing the way society views depression – as a member you'll have received a donation form in the post.
- join our Friends in Need community if you haven't already, to talk, meet and share support with others in your local area. It's free at friendsinneed.co.uk

Santas on the run

Thousands of Santas descended on London's Victoria Park on 7 December, for the 5k and 10k run to raise money for hundreds of worthy causes.

Thank you so much to our Depression Alliance runners who donned their Santa outfits and braved the winter cold to support our life-saving work. Runner Carlos said, "I know first-hand how debilitating depression and anxiety can be, so bringing more awareness to this treatable condition and removing the stigma surrounding it means a lot to me. The run itself was great fun, seeing hundreds of Santas warming up in unison with star jumps was hilarious."



Going up

YouTube vlogging star Zoella

launches #DontPanicButton to raise awareness of anxiety and panic attacks in young people.



Photo: flickr.com/photos/gageskiidmore/

Our Friends in Need community

grows, with more than 300 groups and meet ups across the country. friendsinneed.co.uk



Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary

General calls for the tackling of depression to be made a global priority.

Thousands join internet sensation

@StandUpAgainstDepression, supported by Depression Alliance.

Samaritans Twitter app Radar is

shut down in response to criticism from mental health and privacy campaigners.

Male suicide in Britain reaches

15 year high, according to latest figures from the charity CALM.

Going down

Friends in Need comes to West Berkshire

We're delighted to be launching a new Friends in Need network in West Berkshire, to support local people to maintain recovery, prevent relapse and to end the loneliness and isolation of depression.

The new network is the latest amongst our award-winning and innovative communities across West London, Croydon and East Berkshire. We know there's an urgent need for more social support all across the country so that everyone affected by depression can meet new friends and share in a range of fun and uplifting activities.

Friends in Need Coordinator Ansa Khan, the latest addition to Depression Alliance team, said, "If you or someone close to you has experienced depression, join and be a part of the network. Give me a call and I'll arrange a time to meet. Will you help us to help somebody else living locally? That's the magic of building a close and supportive community; our members take greater responsibility for their own wellbeing and help the next guy – it's that simple."

Speak to Ansa on 07908 265181 or email ansa@depressionalliance.org

Depression Alliance has moved

In November we packed up our boxes and moved to our new home in London, Euston.

Our new office has room to house our growing team and we're really grateful for your patience during the transfer of our phones, email and postal services.

Our new address is Depression Alliance, 9 Woburn Walk, London WC1H 0JE. You can still reach us on 020 7407 7584 or at reception@depressionalliance.org

Kickstart appeal transforms public view of depression

Have you donated to our Kickstart appeal yet? If you have, thank you – you're helping to transform the way the way society views depression, and how we tackle it. Every 12 minutes in this country someone commits suicide, but with your support we'll reach a thousand times more people than we are now.

Our Kickstart appeal will fund more life-saving groups across the country, and with TV adverts, posters in GP surgeries and out on the streets we'll make sure Friends in Need reaches everyone affected by the monster we call depression. If you've already donated thank you so much for making a difference. Government and businesses are starting to take depression seriously and with your support our voice will be heard.

To donate now please go to JustGiving.com or you can donate by post to Depression Alliance, 9 Woburn Walk, London WC1H 0JE.

In brief

The British Beard and Moustache championships, held last September in Bath, raised nearly £3,000 for Depression Alliance in their annual competition to find the finest whiskers in the land. Lee Cottier who won first place in the business class category said, "This was the first time I've grown a beard, but I recklessly decided to jump in at the deep end and now I'm a British Beard Champion."



The London Waterloo selfhelp group raised over £800 for Depression Alliance in October in memory of their much loved facilitator Trevor Milstead, who sadly passed away. Group member Amit said, "He is deeply missed – he had a huge impact on many people's lives through his kindness and listening."

The West London Friends in Need network enjoyed an exclusive behind the scenes tour of Kensington Palace, in November, with members dressing up in traditional Georgian costume for a private guided tour of the historical royal palace. Member Roy said "I had a great time meeting new friends, getting more knowledgeable and seeing a gorgeous house, and I'm really happy about getting out more."

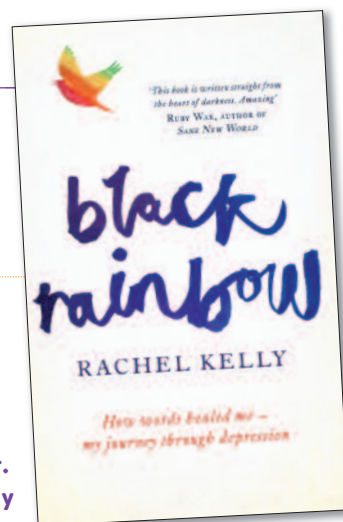
Behind the Smile, the powerful new collection of poems from writer Stan Frith, has raised an incredible £12,000 for Depression Alliance and caught the attention of Stephen Fry, who described it on Twitter as 'beautiful.' After losing his son Jason to depression, Depression Alliance Appeal Board member Stan decided to donate 100 per cent of the profits from his book to our life-saving work, and commented, "Had we been aware of Depression Alliance years earlier, there's a strong possibility that the devastating loss of Jason might have been avoided."

The Depression Alliance YourSpace group in Cheltenham held a local Tea and Talk session to mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October to get local people talking about depression and to raise awareness of their group. Group facilitator Ruth said "It was a great morning with a good turnout and we made some great links with other local groups."

Have your say

Last issue, we asked you to send in the words that help you through the darkness.

The first 100 responses won a free copy of *Black Rainbow: How Words Healed Me* by Rachel Kelly. This is a powerful and compelling memoir from the former Times journalist and author. Rachel wanted to support the life-saving work of Depression Alliance and so she generously donated the copies for our members to read. Responses to Black Rainbow give away:



Do what makes you happy, be with who makes you smile, laugh as much as you breathe, love as long as you live.
Carla

You can make it through today, you have a 100 per cent record of making it through the days so far.

Lynsey

Feel the fear and do it anyway.
Lisa

Depression doesn't define you.

Elaine

Harsh words crush the spirit, kind words lift the soul.

Susan

Perhaps the butterfly is proof that you can go through a whole lot of darkness and become something beautiful.
Eleanor

This too shall pass.
Clare

I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.

Sara-Jane

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.
Alison

Being strong is not about being perfect... it's about carrying on despite your flaws.
Jacqueline

The cure for anything is salt water – tears, sweat, or the sea.
Kimberley

Worrying is like praying for what you don't want.
Sarah

You have felt like this before, it won't always be like this, I accept the way I am feeling for now.

Julie

A smile is a curve that sets everything straight.
Steve

Anything silly and loud really – it's hard not to laugh when your five year old is trying to twerk.
Clare



Good deed feed

Small acts of kindness and support can make a big difference to the way we feel, so let's celebrate them and say thank you.

Email laura@depressionalliance.org to say thank you to someone special in our next issue.

Thank you to my penfriend **Pat**, we support each other every day and we're there for each other when the darkness is bad. You have been an inspiration to me to hold on to life.

Elizabeth

Thank you to my wife to be **Becka**. Right from the start you have been my rock, helping me through my darkest and hardest hours. If it weren't for you I don't know if I would be here today.

Sara-Jane

Thank you to **Trevor**, who facilitated the Waterloo self-help group with such kindness. You've had a huge impact on people's lives and you are missed.

Anon

Liz, when no one else understood, you were there with a soft shoulder and an open mind.

Oliver

Thank you **Liz** for all the time and personal effort you put in to making our group day at Kensington Palace so splendidly memorable and special.

Susan

Thank you to **The Insurance Charities**. Your support and kindness restored my Faith. Your example of kindness is one I will now always follow.

John

Finding your Friends in Need

Our Friends in Need community is growing from strength to strength. All over the country groups are forming and friendships are developing. Maurice Mcleod talks to members about their groups. friendsinneed.co.uk



Legendary Doors frontman Jim Morrison once said: “A friend is someone who gives you total freedom to be yourself.”

Good friends who understand depression can be a life-line.

We think ‘Mr Mojo Risin’ would have approved of our Friends in Need community, which has now grown to 8,000 users in over 300 groups all over the country.

We reveal some things to each other we may not want others to know, or that we are embarrassed to admit to family or friends.

Friends in Need groups are a great way for people affected by depression to meet either online or in their local area. The groups are free to join and are an excellent place to share support and develop friendships.

Starting out

Sometimes getting started is the hardest part so if you’d like to join or form a group, where do you begin?

Carol, one of the founders of the Liverpool Liberators last summer, said:

“I was looking for some sort of self help group (around depression) for myself and came across the Depression Alliance website.

“I couldn’t believe there wasn’t anything set up in Merseyside so I registered for Friends in Need and started asking if anybody else was interested. This was in the beginning of August.

Amanda from the Oxford Friends in Need group said:

“I moved to Oxford from Bristol in April this year. In Bristol I was involved in working within mental health and also volunteered for some charities too. Once I got to Oxford I wanted to see if there was a support group that I could get involved with helping in, however I couldn’t find any.

“As I have had a history of depression myself, I contacted Depression Alliance and asked them to offer some advice on starting up a support group in Oxford. They directed me to Friends in Need.

“On the Friends in Need site, I was shown a group that had already been set up. Others were asking whether there was a group in Oxford.”

First meet

Once you have joined the Friends in Need site, and found others in your area who would like to meet up, it’s time to arrange your first meeting.

Carol, from Liverpool Libs said:

“As it was, we had Saturday mornings free so we arranged our first meet.

“First of all we chose a central venue with good transport links.

“As soon as a few of us were interested we went straight for the first meet, we thought it might be good to start small, then try to build it up.

“Four to six people turned up which felt quite positive. One person had attended a couple of other ‘meets’ from The Social Anxiety UK site.

“We agreed certain things on our first meet: We thought it would be nice to meet at a different place each week, we kept to coffee, tea and soft drinks for the first few weeks till we

Tips for success

Laura Sacha, our Communication Coordinator, had the following five tips for creating successful FiN get-togethers:

- 1 Getting your group description right.** Share a little about yourself and keep things friendly and fun. Be specific about your venue and include the postcode so the group will appear on the map.
- 2 Setting the date.** Choose a date yourself and invite people along, rather than trying to negotiate a time that will suit everyone. If someone can’t make this one there’s always next time.
- 3 Post friendly messages.** Post in your group as often as you can to let people know that your group is active and is there to answer any questions
- 4 Post after your meet up.** Even if it was quiet, let people know what the venue was like and keep things positive, to encourage people along next time.
- 5 Be patient.** It can take time, so keep trying and remember to use the buttons on FiN to invite all users from your local area.

got to know each other a little better and agreed to respect each other’s preferences be it alcohol free, unsuitable venues, etc”

Amanda Oxford FiN:

“Initially I tried to arrange a meet up time on the website but this was unsuccessful. I was advised by Depression Alliance to just post a time and date and turn up, and this time it worked as two people showed up.

"To begin with we met in coffee shops and then discussed what other activities we would like to do during future meet ups.

"Sometimes it takes a little patience because people are very nervous about meeting, and it may take a few tries before it comes together."

Afterwards

It's important to keep the momentum up once you have met. Having regular meetings gives the group time to gel and become part of people's lives.

Carol, Liverpool Libs:

"After our first meeting, we agreed by consensus to meet every week and stay in touch online in between. If people didn't or couldn't turn up we felt it important that a couple of us (founder members) committed to going at least till the group was established."

Amanda, Oxford FiN:

"We were meeting every few weeks but things have slowed down a bit recently and it has been harder to make contact with people."

Character

Your group will quickly develop its own way of working and its own character.

Carol, Liverpool Libs:

"We try to make it clear that every new member is welcome to 'the meet' but do not advertise widely as we like

people to introduce themselves a little and feel free to ask some questions online first.

"Although we are a Liverpool group we accept anyone who can get to our meets from outside the area.

"We are democratic. We respect confidentiality. If people just want to be known by their online identity that is fine. We reveal some things to each other we may not want others to know, or that we are embarrassed to admit to family or friends. If we are comfortable we swap emails or phone numbers but all information on what is happening is made available to others online.

"It helps with the feeling of isolation as we tend to understand each other's problems. We feel we can be honest.

"Our group is a great platform for sharing information. So far we have discussed medication, work issues, books, meditation, retreats, exercise, you name it. We try to stay away from politics and religion.

"It is healthier than staying at home and self-medicating with alcohol or other substances. We do have alcohol now but it is purely a social drink.

"We have a sense of humour (all be it a scouse one)."

Caroline, also from Liverpool Libs agreed. She said:

"I believe the group members have a very strong and unique

connection, another group member described it as 'being part of something special'.

"I feel totally at ease within the group and we are warm and welcoming towards everyone who attends.

"Personally I feel stronger in my daily life knowing I have a good support network behind me. The group vibe is positive, we don't spend all of our time together talking about our problems like the stereotypical self help group.

"As well as mental health issues we support each other and offer practical advice with regard to life's general challenges like unemployment, job searches /applications /interviews, housing issues etc."

Perseverance

It might be slow going... at the start, but with perseverance you can develop a group which really helps its members.

Carol, Liverpool Libs:

"In the short time that Libs has been active, we've seen some group members really progressing in their recovery and gaining the confidence to open up and connect with people."



Coping with community

Communities can be a massive source of support but sometimes they can be vehicles for stigma and repression. Shabena Abbas shares her experiences.



I am a British Pakistani woman in my early 30s and have suffered from depression for almost a decade.

When communities work well, they are places to find support and understanding but in my experience of dealing with depression, being from the Pakistani community brought with it more challenges than benefits.

Higher rates

South Asian women living in the UK have higher rates of depression, self-harm and suicide than the general population. This is particularly true for women from Pakistani backgrounds like mine.

There are a number of factors that might contribute to these high rates but anything which adds to stress is proven to have an impact on mental wellbeing.

The double whammy of stress from both racism and sexism is one such factor, with its daily slights and frustrations.

The average Pakistani woman in Britain is also likely to be living on a low income and in a densely populated area. Both of these have been shown to increase both stress and mental illness.

Despite living in heavily populated areas, Pakistani women often face social isolation as some social groups may not seem very welcoming. Most Pakistani women are Muslim and so for many pastimes such as drinking might be off limits.

It's important to take the good from communities while being bold enough to leave the bad.

All of these may well be true but for me, a bigger factor was the social stigma mental illness carries within my community itself.

Stigma

Like many migrant communities in the UK, the Pakistani community is fairly tight-knit.

This closeness provides support and understanding in what can sometimes be an unfamiliar and hostile environment. One of the downsides of this closeness though can be an increased level of social judgement.

Stigma about mental health issues can be a major barrier to people getting the help they need and there is evidence that this social conservatism can sometimes have a negative effect on mental health sufferers from Pakistani backgrounds.

I have witnessed first-hand the stigma and discrimination still associated with mental illnesses. It is now 2015 but ignorance about mental health is still prevalent, even among people born, bred and educated in the UK.

A woman who lives down the road from me approached me at a funeral and said accusingly, “you just cut yourself off”.

She was right though. I felt the trust I once had for my community was completely gone. I thought to myself, ‘If they cared they would have been there for me – no matter what’.

I just told her “I don’t trust anyone”.

The Mental Health Foundation found that suicide rates are low among Asian men and older people but high among young Asian women compared to their white counterparts.

I’m noticing that Pakistani women are starting to talk about it more. There is a slowly growing level of understanding. The men are still not likely to talk about mental illness and depression though.

My issues began

After university, I was escaping from an abusive relationship while being a full-time carer for my father and working full time. This is when I first experienced mental health issues.

I felt as though I couldn’t cope, it was a scary time. At first I didn’t know what to do or who to speak to.

My parents were both unwell and so I don’t think they realised the full extent of my depression. I didn’t feel like I could open up to them about my mental health issues because I didn’t want to burden them.

Eventually after speaking with my doctor, I started taking anti-depressants. When I saw a psychiatrist, I was told I had reactive depression. I didn’t know what this was but now I know this is usually short-term and is caused by a stressful life event or other external factors.

I was given counselling and CBT, although since this was on the NHS, there was a waiting list.

Criticism and Isolation

Along with the stigma, close communities can sometimes give people the

feeling they have the right to pass judgement. Some people feel they have a right to voice opinions on others, whether they know them or not, simply because they are part of the community. Gossip is rife and facts get distorted as they are passed around the community.

I’m noticing that Pakistani women are starting to talk about it more.

My experience was of a Pakistani community which responded with ignorance, shame, denial, criticism, judgements, and selfishness to mental health problems. With reactions like this it is easy for a person to become isolated or to feel victimised, vulnerable, and maybe even bullied.

Without getting the help needed, the road to recovery itself can seem bleak or non-existent.

Cultural beliefs

There are 1.6bn Muslims on the planet and it would be a mistake to assume a uniform response to mental health issues but among Britain’s Pakistani communities there are some cultural factors which make can make seeking help difficult.

There is no real term for ‘mental health’ in either Urdu or Punjabi.

If someone suffered with mental illness, many would believe that they were possessed by jinn (supernatural being), had been cursed or had been given the ‘evil eye’, were attention seeking, being lazy or even that they were being ‘tested by God’.

Professional help

One outcome of these beliefs is that when faced with a mental health issue, many people from Pakistani communities seek help from their religious leaders rather than from health professionals.

A study in the US, which spoke to 62 imams, found that 95 per cent said a significant amount of their time each week was spent counselling their congregation.

With no professional training support from religious leaders can be inconsistent.

Some sufferers are told to ‘stop feeling sorry for themselves’ or that their problems are ‘all in God’s hands’.

The value of community

Whatever your background, community is important. Having a network of people who love and understand you is proven to have a massive benefit to mental wellbeing.

There are many good people with Pakistani and other Asian cultures, who don’t judge or criticise. Instead, they listen. This makes such a huge difference.

These people are one in a million, and are very rare to find, so I am thankful to have come across a very few of them in my life.

Seeking out positive relationships can be a massive boost no matter who you are. It’s important to take the good from communities while being bold enough to leave the bad.

My previous self was confident, motivated and brave. I cannot say I feel like this at present. My self-esteem is low, but I do try and take small steps weekly to achieve goals.

The attitude of the community will change eventually. This change might be a few generations down the line, but I stay hopeful, I try to use my experience and wisdom to make the world I live in better.

To any Pakistani woman experiencing depression, I would say have hope, without it, life seems pointless. It won’t always be this way or feel this way, things change, so stay strong and positive. Look after yourself as you need to be well to do things and make the change. Communicate with others you trust, be creative. Be around young children/babies as they say the funniest things. Volunteer so you can meet others. Keep your sense of humour and laugh, but remember to treat yourself, you’re important.

Shabena Abbas

is from the West Midlands. She is keen on photography and the creative arts. She helps out at her local library and also volunteers for Rethink and a guide dog charity. Much of her time is taken up with caring her for her father though.

When mental health and addiction collide

Dealing with a mental illness is hard enough, doing it when fighting addiction can seem impossible. Alison Garcia has seen both sides of the dual diagnosis issue.



Four years ago, my mother committed suicide. She had been addicted to both alcohol and sleeping tablets and was suffering with depression.

If the various health services she was using – her GP, mental health workers, recovery workers – had been working more closely together, she would have received a lot more help and may even still be with us today.

These services needed to work in partnership to provide a holistic approach but instead they often contradicted each other or duplicated care.

Frustrating

I have now been a recovery worker at Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI), a social care and health charity which tackles addiction and other issues, for the last two years.

CRI works with individuals and families across England and Wales that are affected by drugs, alcohol, crime, homelessness, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour.

Despite all of this, I find it so frustrating when someone who is an addict of any kind comes into my work looking for assistance with mental health issues.

We have connections to all sorts of help they can get if they are homeless or being abused but we don't have any support at all if they are suffering any form of mental illness. We simply say 'go to the doctors'. We have no mental health workers to refer people to.

Working in the field it seemed like nine out of every ten people I saw with an addiction also had underlying depression or anxiety.

When you are in the place of darkness or suffering, reach out, explain how you feel and you will be surprised at how many people care or have had the same experience.

Whatever the actual figures, it's clear many people do not fit neatly into a box labelled either 'mental health issue' or 'addiction'.

Support

People need some sort of support but we have absolutely nowhere to signpost them to when they come to us for help. All we can do is forward them to their GP.

Lots of people find it hard to go to their GP about mental health issues especially if they are already an alcoholic or an addict.

Anxiety is part of my life and so I'm working on how to make it less destructive.

GPs are sometimes family friends or people that they see regularly around the community. Some people find it hard to be completely honest with their GP. People also worry about the implications of having their addictions or mental health issues recorded on their medical records.

Like many things these days, a large part of the problem is a funding issue. There simply are not the funds to supply or commission the services that these complex conditions require.

I find it really frustrating that the funding simply isn't there to help everyone that comes through the door.

If someone really wants help, it's there but they need to know how to look for it. Unfortunately working out who and how to ask is not easy and so many people never receive the support they need.

Advice

From personal experience of both sides of the issue, I would recommend using a number of tools to take back control of your life. Obviously different things will work for different people in different circumstances:

1 It's vital to talk. I have some amazing friends and family who allowed me the space to really tell them what I was going through. Some people don't have the support



network that I had though. This is where something like the Friends in Need network is really useful. When you are in the place of darkness or suffering, reach out, explain how you feel and you will be surprised at how many people care or have had the same experience.

2 Notice what makes you depressed and anxious and talk to someone non judgemental about it.

Be open and brutally honest about your flaws. I can't stress enough, that you need to find someone who won't judge you.

3 You need something more in your life than your addiction.

Whether it's social, educational, professional or just a hobby. I'm a massive believer in exercise, it gives you so many benefits in so many ways.

4 Planning for the future is a massive help.

I need things in the pipeline, things to strive toward, that's what helps me.

If you are not getting the support you need from your GP or other services, try looking online for organisations like Depression Alliance.

Personal

I also know personally how hard it can be to get support for mental illness even when it doesn't come burdened with an addiction issue.

I too had been depressed for a number of years but I had to have a break down before I could get help. This happened six years ago. Looking back, I think it was caused by a number of factors.

I've never been an addict as such myself but I've had seen addiction up close, both with my mother and other close relatives.

You could argue, I suppose, that at one stage, I was addicted to food. Between the ages of 21 and 26, I weighed almost 30st. I became much happier in myself and so, since then, I have lost over 16st.

I also suffer massively with anxiety. This is something though that I have had for a long time and will probably always have so I'm finding ways to deal with it. I'm learning to accept that anxiety is simply part of me.

Anxiety is part of my life and so I'm working on how to make it less destructive.

We have connections to all sorts of help they can get if they are homeless or being abused but we don't have any support at all if they are suffering any form of mental illness.

My husband is amazing. He has never suffered from anything himself but he has been a rock for me.

We have two lovely boys – aged three years and 18 months.

There was a critical moment, six years ago, when I was sitting in a hospital bed, looking at my husband's face after taking an overdose and I just thought:

"I can't put you through this again.

"I will do everything I can to make sure you don't have to go through this again."

In Scotland, the Co-morbidity of Substance Misuse and Mental Illness Collaborative study (which was understandably shortened to COSMIC1) concluded that:

- 75 per cent of users of drug services and 85 per cent of users of alcohol services were also experiencing mental health problems
- 30 per cent of the drug treatment population and over 50 per cent of those in treatment for alcoholism had mental health issues too
- 38 per cent of drug users with a psychiatric disorder were receiving no treatment at all for their mental health problem
- 44 per cent of mental health service users either reported drug use or were assessed to have used alcohol at hazardous or harmful levels in the past year.

I just remember thinking:
"This person is hurting so much and loves me so much I have to do everything I can to sort it out."

I'm lucky, I have two amazing children and a supportive husband.

Despite this, I still have anxiety every day. I try to use the techniques I've learned.

Alison Garcia

is a fundraiser for DA. She is also a recovery worker for Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI), helping people fighting addiction.



Ask the therapist

Putting your questions to those that know



"I find it very hard to throw anything away. I wouldn't describe myself as a hoarder but I feel like I'm drowning under a sea of clutter."

Tony Dikan
Cognitive Behavioural Therapist

I have become the Queen of Clutter. It has quietly crept up on me. It's bad enough when I'm reasonably well and coping with everyday life however when I 'fall off my perch' it overwhelms me and makes a bad bout of depression even worse.

Every so often I tackle the worst bits and have a good old sort out, a blitz even – especially if visitors are expected. The place looks and feels better afterwards and I feel more positive too. It never lasts though and pretty soon I'm back to square one. Lyn, Cornwall

First of all thank you for taking the time to write in and describe some of the difficulties that you have been having. In your longer letter you ask whether you are 'just a bit untidy' or whether you are developing a more serious problem with hoarding.

Those individuals with a severe hoarding problem can find their homes become very unpleasant with an increased risk of vermin infestation, fire, eviction and family conflict.

Under-recognised

Either way you are far from alone – I suspect many of us wish we were a bit tidier, and as for hoarding, current estimates suggest that up to one in 20 of the world's population is directly affected by hoarding tendencies. If that's an accurate figure it makes hoarding one of the most under-reported and under-recognised psychological problems that we are aware of.

However, this doesn't mean we should take it lightly. As you mentioned in your letter, sometimes being surrounded by clutter can make an episode of depression much worse. Those individuals with a severe hoarding problem can find their homes become very unpleasant with an increased risk of vermin infestation, fire, eviction and family conflict. Even at the mild end of the spectrum sufferers find that they are more likely to become socially isolated and less likely to invite guests to visit if they are worried about how messy their living space is. And as you state in your letter, it can undermine your self-confidence as you struggle to manage your own environment.

Arguments

Different attitudes to tidiness is a leading cause of tension in family homes and those who suffer from hoarding tendencies often highlight the fact that arguments with loved ones is one of the most difficult aspects of the problem.

It's very difficult to make an accurate judgement of whether you are suffering from what would be considered clinical hoarding without seeing your home. However from what you have said in your letter you might want to consider seeing your GP in the first instance and asking to be referred for a course of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) – this is the treatment recommended by research for this kind of problem. Research shows that half of all people with a clinical case of hoarding also suffer from depression and your GP may offer you CBT or medication for this.

Security

When you start working with a therapist they may well ask to see photographs of your home to assess the severity of your difficulties and will work with you to set some goals for clearing areas in manageable stages. They may also want to explore what your possessions mean to you. The reason that a lot of people find themselves hoarding is because it gives them a sense of security that they don't feel they otherwise have in their life. Quite often individuals will have strong beliefs about not wasting things and it may help to identify places that your old items can go to where they would be used would be helpful.

If you prefer self help there is an excellent book on the subject entitled *Buried in Treasures: help for compulsive acquiring* by Randy Frost and Gail Steketee.



If you have something you would like to ask one of our therapists email
Laura@depressionalliance.org

Tony Dikan

is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist based at the Bethlehem Royal Hospital in South London.

Palaeolithic diets



Eating 'like cave men' is a growing trend for both health and mental wellbeing.

Real food health coach Owen Raybould explains why looking at our past might be the key to a healthier future.

The Palaeolithic (or Paleo) diet has become popular in recent years and may be offering something more than a fad. It works for countless people trying to lose weight, but stories abound of recovery from other physical and psychological conditions as well. I can say it rescued my health and gave me back control of my life.

Within a short space of time, 'eating Paleo' cured the depression I suffered from for most of my adulthood. I've learned huge amounts about my own body, and about how to be healthy in the confusing modern food environment.

What is good nutrition?

I now work as a health coach. For the past few months, I have been delivering talks and courses to groups in both Depression Alliance and Mind. I believe the Paleo diet is the closest we've come to answering the question 'what is good nutrition?'

For most of our history as a species, humans were hunter gatherers who could only eat the foods that nature offered to them – meat, fish and eggs, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and seasonal fruit. In the Paleo movement we believe these are the most nutritious foods for our bodies. We eliminate other types of food where possible.

When we transitioned to farming around 10,000 years ago (less than five per cent of the human timeline), we introduced far more grains, dairy and legumes into our diet in the form of bread, cereals, beans, milk and other dairy products. Then, in the much more recent industrial era, we have begun to make and consume products totally alien to our bodies – junk foods such as biscuits, sweets and sugary drinks.

Food allergies

Take the 'agricultural era' foods – grains, legumes and dairy. We know many people have allergic reactions to these – think of celiac people who cannot eat gluten, or the lactose intolerant who can't eat dairy. We haven't had much time, evolutionarily speaking, to adapt to them.

Refined sugar causes adrenal fatigue, which has symptoms very similar to those of clinical depression. Eliminating refined sugar can really ease depression. Our ancestors ate sugar wherever they could find it, and we have inherited their love of it. The difference is, we're surrounded by the stuff in an unnatural form.

Dr Robert Lustig, a vocal campaigner against refined sugar in our diets, says it is damaging our health in many different ways. By only consuming natural forms of sugar – such as from roots (beetroots, garlic, yam etc) and fruits, you will have stable blood sugar and a more stable mood.

Changing your diet

Many people might find the prospect of such a huge change to their diet overwhelming. My approach was to gradually remove the 'unsuitables' from my diet over a period of a few weeks. So week one it was sugar, week two bread, and so on.

Paleo expert, Dr Tommy Wood has five tips for a health overhaul:

- 1 Eat more** (of the right foods). Calories are not the enemy.
- 2 Remove processed carbohydrates** (bread, pasta, cakes, sweets) from the diet. This is the biggest change you can make.
- 3 Eat real food.** Learn to cook a few things, or buy a slow cooker and fill it with veggies and some nice meat every day.



4 Exercise. You'll get the biggest improvement in body composition and health from brisk walks, and a couple of hours a week of moving something heavy (this may even just be your own bodyweight).

5 Sleep more.

There are many great things about the modern world, but we can still learn a lot about health by looking to our evolutionary past. In Paleo we imitate certain aspects of our ancient past. In archaeological finds dating from the Paleolithic period, we see many examples of powerfully built people with brain sizes that are larger than ours are today. We know that our Paleolithic ancestors were athletic, vital and very intelligent. As the writer and depression advocate Andrew Solomon rightly says: 'The opposite of depression is not happiness, but vitality.'

Owen Raybould

is a health coach with a passion for real food. He also teaches foraging and is a nature lover. He has launched a crowdfunding campaign for a project 'Nutrition for better mental health' which aims to deliver 40 dietary health sessions to support groups all over the country and promote good nutrition as a way of helping with depression.

Your reviews

Every issue we ask you to tell us what's on and what's out there...

If you fancy writing a review we'd love to hear from you, so get in touch today!

The Anatomy of Melancholy – Opera

Text and direction: Finn Beames,
music: Benjamin Tassie
Testbed 1, Battersea

The Anatomy of Melancholy, was inspired by Robert Burton's 1621 medical text of the same name, which sought to find the symptoms, causes, and cures for 'melancholy' – clinical depression to you and me.

This production is a multi-media affair complete with live video feeds, film, and innovative lighting. It illustrates the difficulty of living with serious depression, as well as the affects of depression on family members. It does this through a 'chorus' of excellent singers who interact with a depressed young man, movingly portrayed by countertenor John Lattimore.

As well as playing with the ideas found in Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* also explores the most up-to-date research in molecular biology. The material was then workshopped. This means that people with lived experience were consulted in the making of the piece, and that in itself has to be a good thing.

As a dramatic representation of how a depressed person might feel, this opera had its points (and some beautiful singing – though I needed the libretto to fully understand what was going on). But in the end I felt that the lack of plot and character development made this work only a tentative essay into an extremely complex subject way beyond its scope. For me, it was something of a muddle but a very interesting muddle.

If you like your narrative straight this opera will not give you any clear story or clear answers, but it will stimulate you to ask a few pertinent questions.

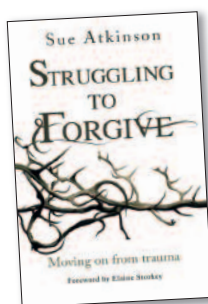
Sara, London

Struggling to Forgive: Moving On From Trauma

Sue Atkinson
Available on Amazon (£6.96)

Struggling to Forgive, is an exploration of what forgiveness means, what we do to forgive, and how to manage the effects of trauma when forgiveness doesn't come easily, is a hugely supportive read for those of us trying to move on from traumatic experiences and manage their impact on our mental health, whether the reader is of the Christian faith or not.

Through a mix of case examples, discussions of literature, interviews, and exploration of her own experiences, Atkinson unwaveringly addresses controversial ideas of 'weird Christian thinking'. She



discusses examples of people who have been highly traumatised and morally wronged, yet are expected to forgive unequivocally in the name of being a 'good Christian', even when this is inappropriate and detrimental to their mental health.

An invaluable read to support those of us struggling with the complexities of forgiveness, *Struggling to Forgive* helps unpick links between forgiveness, healing, empowerment and letting go, validating the struggle to move on from trauma while offering support in starting to free ourselves from the past, and take ownership over our own lives and future.

Beth, London

Zoella, Mind's vlogging ambassador

Available on YouTube

Zoella is a British vlogging YouTube wonder, who has recently been made an ambassador for Mind. With a YouTube audience of over 6.1 million viewers, and countless devoted readers of her blog, her reach is far and wide as she discusses hair, beauty, and life as a young woman.

What really makes Zoella shine is her innate passion to raise awareness of anxiety and panic attacks, which will undoubtedly help many of her followers both young and old. Her vlog in particular is both inspiring and informative as she discusses the reality of living with a mental illness.

Zoella has been criticised for being hypocritical in her vlogs. This is particularly the case in those which cover hair and beauty. I can not see though what harm can be done by highlighting that people suffering from anxiety are not alone, particularly when many of her followers are of a younger generation and look to her as a role model.

Her encouraging and enlightening message is delivered concisely and honestly, and I think many will admire her for doing so.

Jessica, London



Photo: flickr.com/photos/gageskidmore/

Technology time



Each issue we bring you a selection of online tools, apps and resources to help improve your wellbeing.

Maurice Mcleod
Deputy Editor

Samaritans Radar app cancelled following concerns

Back in October, with much fanfare, the Samaritans launched their Radar app which aimed to be a digital 'suicide watch' for young people.

The app was supposed to use key words and phrases to detect when people on Twitter appeared to be suicidal but by the first week of November it had been cancelled due to 'serious' concerns.

Users who signed up for the scheme were to receive email alerts when someone they followed tweeted the phrases. In practice, some said the app made those with mental health issues feel more vulnerable.

The Samaritans Radar app analysed Twitter accounts for phrases like 'tired of being alone', 'hate myself', 'depressed', 'help me' and 'need someone to talk to'.

While the app only monitored tweets that were publicly available, some users found the level of analysis unsettling.

Petition

A petition calling for Radar's closure, which got over 1,200 signatures, read:

"While this could be used legitimately by a friend to offer help, it also gives stalkers and bullies an opportunity to increase their levels of abuse at a time when their targets are especially down.

"Not everyone apparently wanting to help may be able to do so effectively or has the person's best interests at heart."

The Samaritans apologised to "anyone who has inadvertently been caused any distress".

"Following the broad range of feedback and advice Samaritans has received since the launch of the Samaritans Radar app on 29 October,



including the serious concerns raised by some people with mental health conditions using Twitter, we have made the decision to suspend the application at this time for further consideration," the charity's policy director, Joe Ferns, said in a statement.

"Our primary concern is for anyone who may be struggling to cope, including those with mental health conditions."

Privacy

Another concern was over data usage and privacy considerations.

Data protection experts raised concerns over the monitoring process.

Jon Baines, chairman of the National Association of Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officers, said he believed the app:

"had been released without adequate assessment of its impact on people's privacy".

Campaigner Adrian Short, who launched the petition said:

"The Samaritans has no legitimate purpose to collect this information, let alone to share it with other unknown and untrusted people without the subject's knowledge or consent."

Learning

Despite the suspension of the app, the Samaritans' Mr Ferns defended the charity's track record experimenting with new technology and said it would learn from the Radar experience.

"Samaritans has a history of innovating to meet the challenges of providing a safe, relevant and effective service to all those we exist to support and we will continue to do this and learn from the work we do," he said.

"We will use the time we have now to engage in further dialogue with a range of partners, including in the mental health sector and beyond in order to evaluate the feedback and get further input.

"We will also be testing a number of potential changes and adaptations to the app to make it as safe and effective as possible for both subscribers and their followers.

"We've learned that we must consult even more widely than we have done in the development of Samaritans Radar and we will continue to respect and better understand the diversity of existing communities and users."

Your letters & emails

Do you have something to get off your chest? A question or a tip to help other DA members?

We love getting your feedback so write or email your thoughts to Depression Alliance.

Stand up to loan sharks

At 17, I took out a loan of £250 to buy my first car. When I had paid back the loan, my lender told me I had additional interest to pay.

Over the years I paid a staggering £90,000 to the loan shark, all from an initial loan of £250. This had a hugely detrimental impact on me and my family. The loan shark attacked me in front of my children, I lost my home as I couldn't pay the mortgage and three jobs due to depression.

Aged 33, I suffered a stress-related heart attack. On more than one occasion, I have attempted suicide. Then, I spotted an article in the local paper and called the confidential hotline. From that point forwards I was supported and the loan shark was prosecuted and imprisoned.

I would tell anyone who is borrowing from a loan shark to be confident to stand up and speak out. Life is absolutely fantastic now. We don't have to worry about money anymore and I'm happier than I've ever been.

Mike, Leeds

Call the England Illegal Money Lending Team in confidence on 0300 555 2222. Lines are open 24/7.

Aroma and our moods

Is there any chance of an article about aroma and how scents can affect our moods?

I had an aromatherapy massage yonks ago, and I remember staggering out of the massage room in a completely 'away with the fairies' feeling, it was lovely.

Elizabeth, Sheffield

Thanks for your excellent idea Elizabeth, and you're right, scents can affect our moods and evoke powerful memories.

Our letter of the month wins a £15 voucher to spend in Marks & Spencer or Debenhams

Letter of the month

Save money, save lives

I know Mind and Sport England mean well with the £2m national sports scheme they've launched but I don't feel many people with mental health issues would be willing to participate in sustained sporting activity.

My nurse suggested I walk at least 30 minutes a day. I did this by putting it into my daily routine, by walking to the office every week day, through Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. I have become so addicted to this activity that some weekends, I stroll around Kensington for four to five hours, shopping and catching up with friends.

The Ramblers Association organises various walks all over the country, or one could join a walking group in your area. If organised walks are not for you, you can always start one with your friends.

15 years ago I experienced hyperventilation and for a long time, I had trouble breathing properly. I play no sports as such, but I am lucky to have the time to make the most of this hobby. I have made a saying that reflects this:

'Walking: Saves Money – Saves Lives.'

Robert, London

What a great motto. That's why groups like the Wellness Walks on Friends in Need are so valuable, because you can do it together and stick with it, but even if you're on your own, a bracing walk can help to lift your spirits and give you a sense of achievement.

Thank you

I have just finished reading my first copy of *Single Step* and I wanted to say a massive thank you. After eight months of recovery I have relapsed into my black hole again and have had to take time off work. I felt extremely angry at myself for 'failing' again and I've been in a bad place.

I can honestly say I loved the magazine and got fully into it. I have bookmarked all of the recommended sites, particularly those for free mindfulness resources, I have downloaded the suggested apps on iTunes which I can't wait to play with, I've ordered a copy of Stan Frith's book and I'm hoping to win a copy of Rachel Kelly's book. I haven't been this motivated and excited in a long time. I can't wait to send in my reviews and contributions for consideration and

get involved on Friends in Need to connect with people in my area, particularly a reading group as when I have concentration I love reading.

Sara-Jane, Tyne & Wear

We're so glad you're enjoying *Single Step* – the support from our members and the inspiring articles you share with us makes it all possible.

Contact us

We love hearing your ideas, suggestions and opinions and our Letter of the month will receive a £15 voucher to spend in Marks & Spencer or Debenhams. Write to:

Depression Alliance
9 Woburn Walk
London WC1H 0JE
info@depressionalliance.org



Friends in need

Together, let's end the
loneliness and isolation
of depression

A supportive community for people affected by
depression, brought to you by **Depression Alliance**
friendsinneed.co.uk



60 seconds with...

James Thomson Our Fundraising Manager



What does a Fundraising Manager do?

I'm here to raise the money that funds services like Friends in Need and local groups. Like most other charities.

Obviously my job is to make sure the money comes in but it is also about having a range of different kinds of fundraising. That's because different people like to support charity in different ways. Some love to get active and raise money through sponsorship. Others prefer to make a small monthly donation.

Why Depression Alliance?

I've suffered from depression for many years. It's ruined my life. I wish I had heard of Depression Alliance ten years ago: it would have made such a massive difference. The fact is, depression has been neglected as a cause and I want to play a part on changing that.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

The variety and the sense of achievement. I know if I do my job well then Depression Alliance will be able to help more people recover from depression. That's a fantastic reason for coming to work.

What are your wellbeing essentials?

It is important to connect with other people so I'm going to set up a group in Colchester where I live. I'm afraid I hate gyms but by making time for a regular walk I make sure I get exercise and appreciate the world around me.

What are you most looking forward to in 2015?

I'm excited about this year. We are raising the money that will allow us to get the wellbeing message out to everyone with depression.



Help us to change the story about depression

KICKSTART APPEAL

For far too long ours has been an unfashionable cause. The monster we call depression has got away with destroying thousands of lives and our response has been – frankly – inadequate. **We want to change that.**

We are launching an appeal that will transform the way society views depression; and how we tackle it. We are calling it the Kickstart appeal and we hope you will want to be part of it.

If you can, please make a donation today of whatever you can spare.

Since its launch a year ago our Friends in Need network already has gathered over 7,000 users, without any publicity.

The problem is there are around 6 million people affected by depression in the UK. We need your help to reach as many of them as we can.

We want to start more groups and publicise the ones we already have. We want to run TV adverts, drop leaflets, put posters in GP surgeries and get out on the streets.

All we need is the money to pay for it.

You can donate by logging into: www.justgiving.com/depression-alliance-kickstart