Welcome to our summer newsletter. This issue includes the newly released summary findings of our evaluation of peer support, and the launch of our new Right People, Right Questions project on young people's mental health – please take part in our short survey! We need to get as many different views as possible – please do complete it and send on the link to your connections. As well as hard work, summer also means a team away day at McPin: bringing our staff together to thank them for all their many efforts, and stimulate ideas for the coming year. We had a tour by an art historian who created a mental health based talk for us; it was inspiring, promoting reflection and hopefully energised us all. As always we would love to hear from you, including any concerns about mental health research or successes we can help promote.

Our news

Finding the right people to ask the right questions: new survey on young people's mental health

What do we really know about young people's mental health? We know it's a big issue. Around 1 in 10 young people have experienced a mental health difficulty. Around 75% of people with a mental health problem start developing it before the age of 18[1]. Only 1 in 4 young people actually get the help they need after being referred to services, and many don't seek help in the early phases when difficulties start to emerge. Youth mental health is getting more

RIGHT PEOPLE, RIGHT QUESTIONS

RESEARCH INTO YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

attention – for example the Sunday Times newspaper has an ongoing **Young Minds campaign**. This is all positive for raising awareness of the significance of the issue.

Despite this, our understanding of young people's mental health has huge gaps. One young person I spoke to likened it to listening to a nearly blank record with a few seconds of sound here and there. We don't have a good idea of why young people experience mental health problems. Worse we don't really know the best way to help young people when they do.

This needs to change. We need more investment in support for young people. We need to promote emotional wellbeing and good mental health in schools, and elsewhere. We need to better understand the impact of physical health problems on mental health. But to address any of these issues we need more research, otherwise we will continue to blunder in the dark. And, we need research that will truly address what's most important to young people by involving them.

As part of this effort, we have just launched a new initiative. The **right people** to ask the **right questions** about young people's mental health. We are following a way of working that was developed by the **James Lind Alliance**, which brings together different experts: service users, parents, guardians, clinicians, and researchers to produce a survey and then prioritise the resulting questions the public have about young people's mental health. We have called the project "**Right People, Right Questions"** and it is overseen by a steering group made up of young people, parents, researchers, clinicians, and funders. We need your help to make it a success!

Take part in our **national survey** entitled **Right People, Right Questions**, giving everyone interested in young people's mental health the chance to tell us what they want answers to from new research. We are specifically looking at questions relating to young people aged 11-25. It only takes 10 minutes to complete! We also hope you will share the **survey** with your contacts.

One thing we have put a lot of care and attention into is involving young people in the developing of **Right People, Right Questions**. We have a young people's advisory group with 10 members, and a virtual network of nearly 100 other young people. They have written and developed a video which will be launched shortly together about the project. It's been fantastic working with them all and they will be staying involved as we progress with **Right People, Right Questions**.

The result of the survey will be a list of the pressing research questions, which will be shared with funders and research teams so that future projects target these priorities. To use the record analogy, if the blanks in our knowledge really are so great then prioritising what we look at is a very important first step. There simply isn't enough money available to fund all the research that needs to happen all at once.

Whilst the project is led by the McPin Foundation we have been fortunate to have received funding support from range of organisations: MQ, The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust, The Matthew Elvidge Trust, and Mental Health Research UK. As well as this we have the support of a much wider network of organisations. There is more detail about the partners and how the process works on our website.

So your call is action is clear. Please do fill in the **survey**. Share it with other people you know.

If you have an enquiry about the project, our project co-ordinator **Lauren Evans** would be pleased to hear from you.

Finally, you can also show your support by following us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @youngpeopleMHQ.

1.   **https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people**

Thomas Kabir, Public Involvement in Research Manager
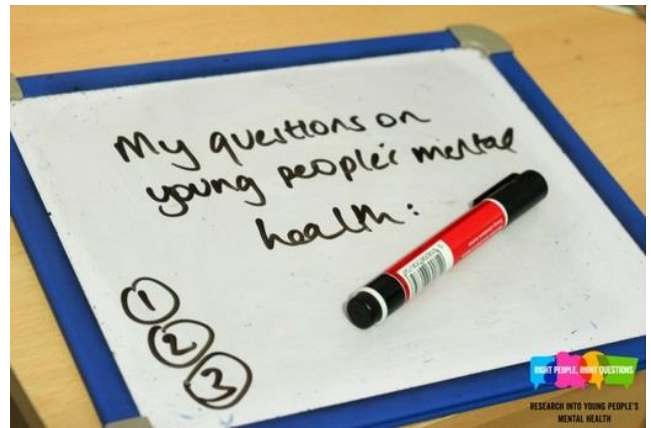
Research in the news

When we wrote our last 'Research in the News' update in early April the General Election was not even in prospect. It's fair to say that there has been a lot of news since. The jury is still out on the impact it will have on mental health research.

During the General Election we saw all the main parties include separate sections on mental health in their manifestos. This was a first. It reflects the growing profile of the issue in the public arena, given a boost this spring by the Heads Together campaign, and the consensus that the current situation isn't good enough. No political party can now safely ignore mental health.

Even better from our point of view was that the Conservative and Liberal Democrats included specific commitments on boosting mental health research in their manifestos, again a first for a general election.

The McPin Foundation joined with the rest of the Alliance of Mental Health Research Funders to write to all the parties setting out our manifesto for the change that is needed in mental health research. We want to ensure that everyone affected by mental health problems has timely access to help that is based on the best available evidence. We want to ensure that other areas of Government policy take account of the growing evidence of the impact they have on people's mental wellbeing. **You can read the open letter here**.

With the election over we now wait to see if words in the manifesto will be turned into action. The Government announced in the Queen's Speech that it intends to publish proposals for changing mental health legislation. Actual reform appears to be several years off however.

As a **recent report by the Mental Health Alliance** (of which McPin is a member) showed there is plenty of evidence that the current system is not fit for purpose, but there remains a lot of uncertainty about the causes and possible solutions. Hopefully the Government will take the time to ensure that the new legislation is developed with the people who it will most affect, and to commission the necessary research so we have the necessary information needed to design a better system.
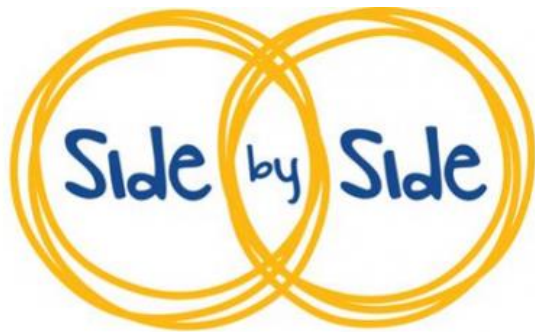
Of course any changes to legislation will only be as good as their implementation. This includes making sure that mental health services, and the other public and community services that people affected by mental health problems use, are good enough to minimise the need to use mental health legislation in the first place. Again more research and evidence that has the people affected at its heart is needed to re-design these services.

It will also be important that the mental health research world, and Government, does not become distracted by reforming legislation. Most of the people affected by mental health problems are never directly affected by the Mental Health Act. **The recent report from the Care Quality Commission** highlighted that many mental health services are struggling to provide high quality care. Without evidence based services, which are properly funded and staffed, new mental health legislation will make little difference even to the lives of the people who are subject to it.

An unfortunate side effect of the election was that the new Department of Health strategy for mental health research was delayed again. We now expect it to be published in the autumn. If the Government takes the opportunity of this pause to develop a strategy that will deliver the transformation of mental health research that is needed it will make a much larger difference to peoples' lives than any amendments to legislation.

Ian Bradshaw, Policy Manager

Hot off the press

Over the last 2 years the McPin foundation has been working with St Georges University of London and the London School of Economics to **evaluate the Side by Side programme of peer support**. Funded by the Big Lottery and delivered by a collaboration between Mind, Bipolar UK and a number of smaller organisations, it aimed to make peer support available to people across nine regions in England. Mind's aims for the programme were:

- build an evidence base for the effectiveness of one to one, group and online peer support
- promote the value of peer support to people with experience of mental health problems, service providers and commissioners
- improve the lives of people experiencing mental health problems across England through access to peer support.

We had aims as well. We wanted to:

- use the programme to build a team of people delivering what we term **peer research**, employing people with experience of mental health difficulties as researchers on the project
- learn with others how to deliver high quality co-produced research appropriate for evaluating peer support.

A reflection on how expertise from experience was used in the programme has been **written by the team**.

The McPin Foundation led the qualitative component of the evaluation. We interviewed a range of stakeholders including:

- people new to peer support
- people who had been involved in peer support for some time
- people involved in organising and delivering the Side by Side programme
- commissioners interested in funding peer support

Unsurprisingly, we found that peer support is done in many different ways. You can read what we found in **detail here**.

We were asked to identify the key principles of peer support. The varied contexts that the groups worked in across the nine regions meant that we had a very rich set of information and experience to work with, but this came with the challenge of ensuring we reflected the diversity we found. We achieved this through carrying out a lot of interviews – about 70 in total. From those we identified six core, interrelated values that are essential in creating a nurturing peer support environment. These values are:

1. Experience in common
2. Safety
3. Choice and Control
4. Two-way interactions
5. Human connection
6. Freedom to be oneself

The way these core values may be expressed in a particular group or place will, however, differ. It depends on a series of decisions that people organising a project may make when thinking about how they want to do their peer support. We found these decisions are:
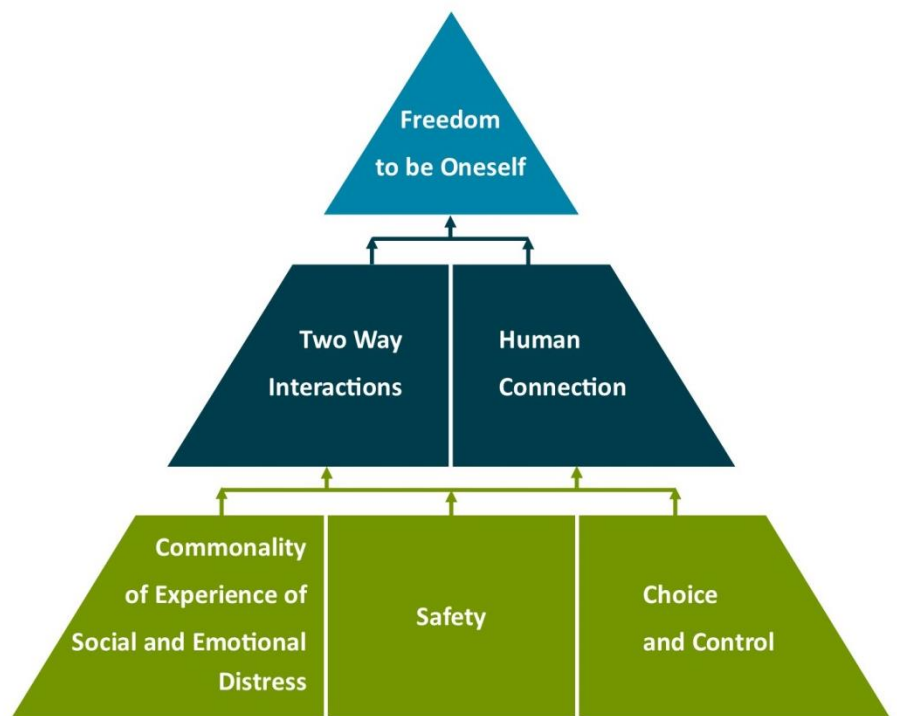
1. Facilitation – does the particular form of peer support need an official facilitator, who could play this role and what kind of training and support might they need?

2. Type of leadership – how should this peer support be led, through collective leadership by many or all members, by individual peers taking up paid or unpaid leadership positions, or by a larger organisation via a paid co-ordinator.

3. Focus of peer support sessions – all peer support will involve peers talking with, listening to and supporting each other. There are also a wide range of other activities that peers could do together including gardening, walking, arts activities, while doing this.

4. Membership Type – whether to limit membership of a particular form of peer support to people with a specific diagnosis or background, or keep it open to a wider community.

5.   Organisational support – some forms of peer support, or the people leading them, will be run through or supported by larger, possibly national, organisations or networks while others may be based in a specific place and involve a small number of people.

What is effective within a particular peer support setting, and which sort of peer support will suit particular individuals will depend on their needs and preferences. We are keen to hear from people interested in these findings. Do they resonate with your own experiences of giving and receiving peer support? The full evaluation report will be published in the autumn containing outcomes data, economic analysis, commissioner perspectives and a capacity building framework. We will let you know when it's available!

Rose Thompson, Senior Researcher

Opportunities

McPin is recruiting! We are currently looking for a new **trainee researcher** and **senior researcher**. You can find out more about both roles **here**!

The NCAAD Service User and Carer Reference Group are currently recruiting representatives to sit on the Service User and Carer Reference Group. You can find out more, including the person specification and application form, **here**.

Thank you

We have a number of staff moving on to new opportunities, who we would like to thank for all of their contributions to McPin, and we wish them all the very best. We would also like to thank everyone who has helped us launch our Right People, Right Questions project, particularly our young advisors. Finally, a mention to our riders that took part in the RideLondon100 event on 30th July. A huge congratulations to you all for your fundraising efforts – car boot sales included – and we hope you enjoyed the challenge!

Tell us how mental health research can be more relevant, accessible and useful

Get in touch at **contact@mcpin.org**

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