

S.I.S

SELF INJURY SUPPORT
IN NORTH CUMBRIA

Registered Charity No: 1106750

SIS News

Welcome to SIS News



Welcome to the Summer edition of SIS News, slightly less **packed than the last one!** Since it's the summer, on [page 7](#) I talk about some of the difficulties that those who self-harm face in the hot weather. I also give my thoughts on a conference I attended, and the BBC2 documentary about self-harm - **I'd love to hear other people's thoughts on it!**

In this issue you'll find out what we've been up to over the last few months - Ruth talks about our involvement with the Suicide Prevention Strategy on the [back page](#) - and our [training dates](#) for the rest of 2009.

As ever, please email us if you'd like to be added to the distribution list for this newsletter! We would also love to hear from you if you'd like something included in a future issue of SIS News - with an expanding distribution list it could be a good way to let people know about your organisation!

Mary Hillery

Trustee Changes!

Sadly we said goodbye to Sue Howard as a trustee. However, she is now **officially our minute secretary, and she's still very much involved with the organisation, so it's not really goodbye!**

We are very pleased to welcome Paul Wheelhouse and Mel Crawford to the board as new trustees. Paul is the Carlisle Diocese Youth Officer and Chaplain at Trinity Secondary School. Paul has a wife and 2 children, and is a school governor. Mel has worked in some form of education for most of her career and now delivers tenancy training in Carlisle's homeless hostels. Mel has two daughters, a Jack Russell and a rat. Her hobbies involve Vespa scooters, record collecting and DIY.

Other news is that Mary is now the Chair to the board of trustees. We are still looking for more trustees, so please contact us if you might be **interested, and we'll let you know what it involves!**

With thanks to our funders.

Issue 4

July-Sept 2009

Inside this
Issue:

[SIS Out and
About, and
Training Dates](#) [2](#)

[Notice Board](#) [3](#)

[Self-Harm
Conference](#) [4-5](#)

[Meera Syal - A
World of Pain
- BBC2
documentary](#) [6](#)

[Living with
Self-Injury -
in the summer](#) [7-8](#)

[Suicide
Prevention
Strategy](#) [8](#)

Contact Us:

Self-Injury Support
in North Cumbria
Ruth Lax
(Service Coordinator)
2 Lowthians Lane,
Carlisle,
Cumbria CA3 8JR
Tel:01228
525705/515500
www.sis-cumbria.co.uk
ruth@sis-cumbria.co.uk

the
Tudortrust



SIS Out and About with the Display Board!

On 9th May, Ruth, Steve and Mary attended the Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA) conference in Cockermouth. It was a very worthwhile day, particularly hearing speakers such as Professor John Ashton (North West Regional Director of Public Health and Regional Medical Officer), a great networking opportunity, and chance to bring our display board too!



Also in May, Helen attended the 'Carlisle College Health Fair 2009' for S.I.S with the display stand at the college. The students enjoyed the Fair and some students have said that they will be making changes in their lifestyle as a result. Helen said that there was a very positive atmosphere during the day.



One of our volunteers manned a stall at the recent Carers Week Information day (12th June) in the town centre of Carlisle, where we had a good stand alongside Mencap. As it was an particularly fine day there was lots of interest from passing public, a service user, other agencies and the new Mayor of Carlisle. As ever these events provide S.I.S with an excellent opportunity to have a shop window to advertise our service and raise awareness of self-harm at relatively little cost to the charity.

Look out for us out and about at future events!

Ruth & Mary

New Training Dates

Due to the continued success of the S.I.S training workshops, we have further dates arranged for the rest of 2009. These training days cost just £80 (including VAT) and include comprehensive training materials, refreshments and lunch. Courses run from 10am-4pm (refreshments from 9:30am).

Thursday 8th October - West Cumbria
Wednesday 28th October - Carlisle
Wednesday 25th November West Cumbria

We are also getting increasingly booked up for in-house training. Please contact Steve or Ruth on **01228 515500** if you're interested in arranging training, or if you wish to book a place on one of the dates above. We have recently carried out full day in-house training sessions in the west at the Lakes College, and for Action for Children, and have more to come in August and September!

Notice board



If you read our last newsletter you'll know that our website

www.sis-cumbria.co.uk is up and running—we've had nearly 1000 visitors so far! But you might not know that we also have a



Facebook Group - anyone is welcome to join to show their support to SIS. Log in on Facebook and search for "Self-Injury Support Cumbria" to find it!



Cumbria Partnership Direct was launched in June - this is a helpline provided by NHS Direct offering reassurance and advice to anyone concerned about mental health issues, learning difficulties or drug and alcohol issues.



Support Group Feedback

Helen has been co-facilitating a self-harm support group in Maryport, and this is what some of the service users have said when they were asked what their main reason was for attending the group. I'm sure you'll agree that it's all really positive!

To express and learn about myself and other people in our group . The leaders are superb, easy to talk to, safe, friendly.

I attend because we chat and it helps me immensely to talk about things and meeting new people.

I get to interact with other people if there was no group I would be sat in the house by myself

To meet other people who have/are experiencing the same things as me

To benefit from talking to others in the same situation. Being able to talk about the way I feel and not being judged.

Win a Car and Support SIS at the same time!

SIS is taking part in a raffle organised by everyclick (a search engine which raises money for charity) for small charities with a Fiat 500 as the prize! Tickets cost £2 each and 95.2% of the money from tickets goes to the charity. To find out more about the raffle visit www.everyclick.com/using-everyclick/charity-car-draw or go straight to

www.everyclick.com/charities/car-draw-pre-entry?cid=244&cn=Self+Injury+Support+in+North+Cumbria to buy tickets and support SIS with the chance of winning a new car! The closing date for buying tickets is 21st August.



Self-Harm in Children and Young People Conference



On 4th June I was fortunate to be able to attend a conference in Glasgow on behalf of SI S.

It was a day jam-packed with presentations from the likes of Nigel Henderson, Chief Executive of Penumbra (Scottish Mental health charity - www.penumbra.org.uk), Professor Stephen Platt (University of Edinburgh) talking in general about self-harm and how the terminology **used to describe it has changed over the years, and Rory O'Connor** (University of Stirling) discussing current research and risk factors for self-harm. I did feel that this part of the day tended to misrepresent self-harm by over-emphasising its link to suicidal behaviour. I can only say again and again - it is NOT self-harm which leads to suicide, it is emotional distress which leads to both self-harm and suicide.

A presentation from Nathan Young, a Penumbra service user was a breath of fresh air. I have met Nathan before at various self-harm events in Scotland, but never heard him speak. He gave an excellent talk about his personal experience of self-harm and how harm-minimisation had helped him. Chris Holley, Consultant Nurse from South Staffordshire healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, spoke next about harm-minimisation - she was at the centre of the debate when harm-minimisation hit the headlines several years ago, She talked about the importance of care plans in in-patient settings, and how vital it is that all professionals involved agree with the care plan.



Following lunch there were three short presentations - Dr Chris Williams (Senior lecturer in Psychiatry, University of Glasgow) who set up the Internet based self-help programme "Living Life to the Full" (www.livinglifetothefull.com) spoke about CBT approaches that can be used with self-harm, and some really useful booklets which he has created. It was quite funny listening to Chris speak having used the

LLTTF modules myself and hearing him speak on that!

Maria Naranjo spoke about Penumbra and in particular the self-harm training which the organisation offers.



Peter Copeland (Training Officer for Lifelink, Glasgow) spoke about Lifelink's services (they specialise in self-harm but are also a crisis intervention service - more can be found at www.lifelink.org.uk)

Since SIS is developing school-based work I was particularly interested to hear the presentations from Wendy Kinnin (Service Manager, East Renfrewshire & West Dunbarshire Youth Counselling Services) and Ruth Donnelly (Senior Mental Health Improvement Officer, Positive Mental Attitudes Programme, Glasgow) about school based interventions, and dealing with self-harming behaviour in a school setting. Wendy talked about how much more likely young people are to access help when it is actually delivered in the schools. Ruth talked particularly about teaching young people about self-harm in PSHE lessons, and the lesson plans/curriculum packs which are provided by 'Positive Mental Attitudes' - www.positivementalattitudes.org.uk The point was made that self-harm needs to be talked about and information provided (as it is for bullying), and that talking about self-harm does not lead to self-harm.

Margaret McCathie gave a truly inspirational talk about her personal journey from being suicidal to now being a laughter therapist - having been inspired by and working with American doctor Patch Adams (whose life - admittedly quite a few details changed - was made into a film starring Robin Williams). We were told to go around the room smiling at and hugging people - now normally I would want to hide under the table at such a point, but somehow it didn't seem that awkward - perhaps Margaret's bright purple wig helped. Margaret showed us a hilarious YouTube film which was basically about laughter. The whole presentation was uplifting, and so positive. It also prompted me to finally buy the film "Patch Adams" which I'd been meaning to watch for ages - I would highly recommend it if you fancy an uplifting film.



The day ended with a talk from Emma Hogg (Head of Population Mental Health Branch, Mental Health Division, Scottish Government). She spoke in particular about the "Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: Policy and Action Plan 2009-2011" (which can be [downloaded](#) from the Internet for those who are interested), and the National Self-Harm Advisory Group which is being set up in Scotland. I always find it so positive that the Scottish Government seem to get so involved with mental health, and with self-harm. However, I'm always left feeling quite miserable that there isn't similar engagement in England.

The day as a whole was hugely positive, although a lot of sitting and listening rather than interacting. Although I did get to ask some questions and make some comments, I was left with so much more I wanted to and ask - as usual a day just isn't long enough!

Mary

Meera Syal: A World of Pain

Some of you will have seen the BBC 2 documentary **"A World of Pain"** by Meera Syal shown on 4th June at 9pm. While clearly it is positive that self-harm is being talked about (and Meera did so sympathetically), and that it is getting out into the open, I was a bit uncomfortable with certain aspects of the programme, and so were other people I spoke to who self-harm.



Personally I felt it was completely unnecessary to show a YouTube film including someone's self-harm injuries, and this was echoed by what others said on the Internet forum which I frequent: *"Showing that youtube video completely gave out the wrong idea. It sort of made it look like people were, not proud of self harming, but not as reserved about it as most people are. It gave the impression that people who SI want other people to see, when this isn't really the case (least not with me anyway, I do everything I can to cover up)."*

A number of people were quite upset by the images shown (some felt that they couldn't watch it as it either upset them or made them feel the urge to self-harm), not just the YouTube film, but also the imagery of razor blades, blood and scars, and felt that it was quite sensationalist at times. I realise of course that the programme wasn't really being aimed at people who self-harm, so perhaps this is why they felt the need to show such images.

I was disappointed with how the film tended to reinforce stereotypes of self-harm as being something which predominantly affects teenaged girls. I realise that the focus of the programme was on young South Asian women and that is fair enough due to Meera's background, however it should have been made clear throughout that self-harm affects all different types of people (and men shouldn't have just been added as an afterthought right at the end). Reinforcing stereotypes just makes it harder for people who don't fit the stereotypes to seek help, which is a point I like to go on about in our SIS training sessions!

Part of this focus on young South Asian women was due to the fact that Meera Syal is the patron of the Newham Asian Women's Project which focuses on domestic violence but also specialises in mental health, including self-harm in particular. For those who would like to find out more about the charity and the excellent work which it carries out, visit www.nawp.org

Hopefully (despite the concerns of myself and some others who self-harm) some good has come out of the programme in that the issue of self-harm is being addressed (and in a prime spot on TV), and I heard the next day that SIS had had a referral as a direct result of someone watching it, so that has got to be a good thing! As one of my friends said *"I think the actual documentary part of the programme was actually quite good. Obviously it didn't cover everything possible about self-harm due to time constraints, but generally it did quite well."*

Mary

Living with Self-Injury - in the Summer

For many people who self-harm (particularly those who cut or burn themselves in visible areas such as the arms and legs), living with scars is something which they struggle with on a daily basis. While lots of people look forward to the summer months, for many people who self-harm, the added pressure of covering their scars in the hot weather can make them dread it.

Whether people cover their scars or not depends on a number of factors:

- Whether people know about their self-harm - **if people don't know about the self-harm** then it is very likely to be hidden
- How old or faded their scars are, or if they have recent injuries (of course very recent injuries should always be dressed appropriately), and whether self-harming is happening currently (it can be easier to explain something that happened in the past)
- Where they are e.g. work, school, a social situation
- Who they are with - whether with a group of people, or on their own
- Whether they are happy or willing to answer questions or not about their injuries or scars

One of the first signs that a person might be self-harming can be that they are hiding their arms and legs or avoiding situations (such as swimming or PE lessons at school) where the body is more visible. Of course there are any number of reasons why a person might be covering themselves up (such as poor self-esteem and body image, or a skin condition), so assumptions should never be made that someone is self-harming, but it is worth bearing in mind if there are concerns.


It is a fact of life that people ask questions (sometimes without even thinking, but sometimes out of malice) so those who self-harm do need to be prepared for this - whether to simply say **that they don't want to talk about it, or to be honest and say that they hurt themselves (with or without elaborating further)**. Many people who self-harm feel forced to make excuses (such as **'the cat did it'**), **but while this can solve the problem in the short-term**, in the long run making excuses or lies can make things even more difficult. It does also very much depend upon the situation such as whether the person asking the question is a friend or a complete stranger. **And at the end of the day, many people might ask what business it is of a stranger where someone's scars are from?**

Even when people do know about someone's self-harm, they might not want the whole world knowing about it (and the possibility of facing questions from strangers, or new acquaintances particularly when in a new job), and the decision of whether or not to cover still needs to be made. Then there is also an issue for people when others think that they have stopped self-harming, and they might have returned to it. It is important to remember that self-harm is something that people can return to in times of stress or distress (and it can be an issue which **comes and goes throughout a person's life**). **I know from personal experience that a person who has self-harmed in the past can feel immense shame and guilt if they begin to self-harm again,**

and it can sometimes be even harder telling people for a second or a third or fourth time, as they feel **that they don't want to let those who care for them down.**

There are various ways that people can cover scars depending on where they are on the body - scars on wrists can be covered by bracelets, wristbands or watches. Lightweight long-sleeved cotton tops **and shirts can cover arms, and don't always draw attention, or a T-shirt over a thin long sleeves top.** Alternatively, elasticated bandages can be used on problem areas. If the person is going to a formal event, then gloves, shrugs and pashminas can be used to hide scars.



Then there is the option of skin camouflage make up which can be of benefit to those with any sort of scars (which have healed) - find out more at  **BritishRedCross** www.redcross.org.uk/standard.asp?id=89410 or www.skincamouflagenetwork.org.uk

Some people who self-harm choose to do so in areas which are easier to cover, particularly at this time of the year. On the one hand this can be beneficial as less attention is drawn to any injuries, but on the other hand it can lead to self-harm becoming more secretive and people not getting help for their emotional distress as it appears on the outside that they are fine.

Often scars seem worse to the individual who self-harms than they do to others, and people can be surprised at the lack of questions or attention their scars are given. Also, for many people having scars on show (particularly when the self-harm is something which happened in the past), can be empowering.

For those who have recently started self-harming, perhaps the summer months and the thought of having to cover up can be a good opportunity to tell someone about their self-harm?

Whatever those who self-harm decide, it is up to the individual, and people should feel comfortable with whatever choices they make.

Mary

Suicide Prevention Strategy

S.I.S is currently contributing to a Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan for Cumbria, Intelligence Task Group - whose aims are to ensure the intelligence which is available from a range of sources is collated and disseminated in such a way as to assist the process of preventing avoidable loss of life through suicide.

More specifically we have been involved in the multi agency group tasked with developing a single risk assessment tool to ensure that all people with mental health problems and those at risk of suicide, especially people who self harm are identified and diagnosed early and have equitable access to services that meet their health, social and material needs.

Also the Training and Awareness task group whose aim is to agree an outline training and awareness strategy for presentation to the Suicide Prevention Reference Group and the key agencies and groups concerned with suicide prevention in Cumbria.

Ruth