

S.I.S

SELF INJURY SUPPORT
IN NORTH CUMBRIA

Registered Charity No: 1106750

SIS News

Welcome to SIS News

Welcome to the 1st anniversary edition of SIS News, how time flies! It's been a fantastic year for Self Injury Support in North Cumbria, I've enjoyed keeping you all informed about what we've been up to, and I look forward to the year ahead.



In this issue we're pleased to share with you the personal story of Hannah (one of our new volunteers) and how she has overcome self-harm - I'm sure you'll agree that it's inspirational hearing from someone who has overcome self-harm. In addition to this I talk about a website and messageboard which I have found invaluable during my own struggles with self-harm.

I hope that you continue to enjoy reading our newsletter, and remember to sign up to the distribution list if you haven't done so already!

Mary Hillery

We Still Need Your Help!

Searching for new trustees seems to be a never-ending exercise for all charities, but we particularly seem to be struggling at the moment. Unfortunately Mel (whose arrival we announced in issue 4) has had to leave the board after only a short time, due to family commitments.

As I said in the first issue of SIS News, all you need is a bit of time to spare, the ability to travel to Carlisle for trustee meetings (which are currently once every two months on a Tuesday afternoon), a desire to improve services for people who self-harm in North Cumbria, and most importantly enthusiasm! We hope to get people from a wide variety of different backgrounds. Please get in touch if you think you might be interested, and perhaps come along to our next meeting to get more of an idea of what the role entails! Without trustees the charity simply cannot exist.

With thanks to our funders.

Issue 5

Oct-Dec 2009

Inside this
Issue:

[Training
Update, and
Dates](#) 2

[Notice Board](#) 3

[Self-Harm -
Hannah's
Story](#) 4-5

[Self-Harm on
the Internet](#) 6-7

[SIS - What
we're all
about!](#) 8

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the
Tudortrust



Training Update!



Since the last newsletter and after our June/July training sessions things have been fairly quiet on the training front with it being summer. However, on the **27th August, Ruth Helen and myself headed off for a day's training at Cedar House School in Kirkby Lonsdale.** Although outside the area which we offer our counselling services (postcodes beginning with CA only) we were happy to deliver the training which was part of a staff training day, although it was quite different from **in-house training which we'd done previously.**

We gave similar presentations in the morning and afternoon sessions to groups of staff, about 70 in total! I was slightly apprehensive about the day, knowing that the school deals with children often with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. I wondered how my personal experience of self-harm could possibly be relevant. However, the day reinforced what I did really already know, that since it is emotional distress which is behind self-harm, **it doesn't really matter that my personal experiences might be different (or similar) to someone else's. It doesn't matter what age I started self-harming, or what background I come from, the emotional distress is the key.**

I really enjoyed the day's training (and the positive feedback suggested that it went down well!), and look forward to getting out and about delivering training to other schools in Cumbria. I really feel that we have a lot to offer to schools in terms of the knowledge, experience and information which we can share, and I know that the training of school staff will in turn lead to helping young people in schools who are struggling with self-harm.

Training Dates

Due to the continued success of the SIS training workshops, we have further dates arranged for the rest of 2009 (dates for 2010 will be published in due course). 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).

Wednesday 28th October - Warwick Mill, Carlisle
Wednesday 25th November - Washington Hotel, Workington

We are also available to deliver in-house training sessions to groups both large and small. 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.**

Notice board

Submitting Articles

If you've got something that you'd like included in SIS News, please get in touch. Here are some ideas:

- Information about local or national services relating to self-harm and other mental health issues.
- Poems, creative writing, or pictures created by people who have experience of self-harm and live in Cumbria (these can be anonymous).
- Tips for dealing with emotional distress.
- News of events (local or national) which might be of interest to our readers - bearing in mind that the newsletter is quarterly.
- Letters in response to articles in SIS News.

If you write an article please try to keep it under 500 words for one page, or under 1000 words for a double page article. Articles may be edited as necessary, and will not be included if inappropriate. Send any submissions by email, or post us hand-written documents (contact details on the front page). We look forward to hearing from you!

World Mental Health Day is on 10th October 2009 - SIS featured on BBC Radio Cumbria on 7th October! To find out more about this annual event, visit - www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/wmhd/

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SELF INJURY SUPPORT
IN NORTH CUMBRIA

**Self Injury Support in North Cumbria
Annual Report & Accounts**

Covering the period
from 1st June 2008 to 31st May 2009

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The Fundraising Trust
LIFE BY FUNDING

AGM, Annual Report and Accounts!

The SIS AGM is taking place on Tuesday 20th October. At the AGM we will be launching the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st May 2009. This document (see picture on left) will shortly be available to download from our website, and hard copies available from the SIS office.

Self-Harm - Hannah's Story

Hannah is one of SIS's newest volunteers, and she has kindly agreed to share with us her inspirational story of how she struggled with self-harm, and how she has managed to overcome it. It's important to remember that everyone's experiences are different, and also that for many people self-harm is something that they continue throughout their lives. However, Hannah's story gives hope that people can and do break free from self-harm.



"When I was younger I always felt a bit abnormal, I didn't know why but I had a feeling I wasn't worth that much, that I wasn't loved I didn't like myself at all, I really hated myself and I was a bit of a loner cos I didn't think I could trust people, I was confused at why I felt like that as well, to me I had no reason too, so I felt worse feeling that cos nothing bad had happened as far as I knew.

I have a lovely family, even though I've shut them out for so long, I've become quite independent from them, I couldn't talk to them cos I had no idea what was wrong, like I said earlier. This was throughout my teen years that I felt like that.

I was constantly feeling angry at everything and myself cos I felt I was just disappointing everyone, I remember feeling particularly angry one night, I didn't know how to make it go away **and I had heard of self harm previously so I thought I'd give it a try....sounds awful putting it** like that, but I didn't want to explode at everyone, I had to keep how I felt to myself.

The self harm worked, I felt something inside ease up at the pain and seeing the blood. I don't fully understand why I felt like that, even now but it really helped me carry on a bit longer. But soon after I was back to it, I was always careful to cut where I could hide it, I didn't want people to know or to think I was crazy. That carried on till about 16, but still I had a blank part of my memory, I knew something had happened but didn't know what.

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I believe there's a God, for me there has to be. so one night I decided to ask him what happened and instantly I knew, I was abused when I was 8 by a female of one of my church's, **I'm not gonna name names, not cos I'm scared or anything, it was a one off thing. I can't explain why I'm not gonna, it's not to protect her or anything like that it's just me personally.** Anyway back to the story, after I realised that I cried for hours, I was so gutted. It was nice knowing why I felt worthless, but that seemed to increase it as well. Just writing that now is making me feel a bit emotional. It just hurt so much and I was even more angry cos I thought God was meant to protect children.

The self harm increased, I was hugely addicted to it. I didn't feel human back then, I was just surviving on the inside, I was good at putting a mask on to look like everything was great. I was still angry at God but decided to go to a new church called Hebron after a friend invited me. I think that church saved me somehow, I felt the love and acceptance I needed. but I was still self harming loads even more than before and I slipped into rock bottom I didn't want to live at all, I felt like I was a burden on everyone else and I couldn't take life, so I tried to take my own. I really overdosed.....took everything I could find and hoped I wouldn't wake up in the morning.

Obviously I did, I was gutted but scared at the same time. I threw up a lot in the morning...was horrible. A close friend of mine took me to hospital and the gave me the all clear, had no liver damage or anything and I really should have died. Things started picking up a bit from there, I got in touch with borderline counselling service, **I've tried counselling before but it was crap basically. But this one was amazing, my counsellor was more like a best friend that I could talk to and not be judged, but be loved and supported as I dealt with the self harm.**

My counsellor was more like a best friend that I could talk to and not be judged, but be loved and supported as I dealt with the self harm.

The first lot of counselling was for the self harm, I didn't want to deal with the abuse then I was way too scared. I was there for about a year first time round, then went back when I was 18 to deal with the abuse and the feelings and emotions that go with it. It was the **hardest most painful thing I've ever done, but I knew I had to. I** couldn't go on living like I was and I had no one else to talk to about **the abuse. it was hard, but it was the best thing I've ever done, I've** came out of it a better person and determined to be there for people who have been through abuse and self harm as a friend who loves them and cares about them.

I better wrap up on the God thing, even though I was really hurt and I **felt like he just left me, but he hadn't. One of the best things I've** heard is that God goes to the darkest places with us, and now even though I feel pain from it cos the healing process is a journey I don't look down on what happened in a bad way, otherwise that will bring me down too and make me feel like it was my **fault, but I can use it to not only help others but to better myself. I'm grateful for who I am** now.

I know how it is being that addicted to self harm that ya can't see a way out of it, but there **is. There's always hope, and even though it hurts now, it won't hurt forever....it will pass :-)** "

Hannah Gollings



Self-Harm on the Internet

Quite a few years ago now there was a public outcry about pro-anorexia websites, and recently **(September 2009) they've been in the news again as these sites are growing in popularity with the** increased use of blogs and social networking sites. This takes me back to 2006 when I read an article about Internet sites encouraging self-harm.

The outcry about potentially dangerous websites (both for eating disorders and for more specific forms of self-injury such as cutting) is justified. Internet message boards are often unregulated and unmoderated. Some even encourage people to share photographs of themselves in the midst of anorexia, or graphic images and descriptions of self-injury. **Even worse, on YouTube it's not hard to** find videos of people actually during the act of self-injury, videos which are extremely shocking. These sites can be extremely dangerous, and every effort must be made to stop them, or remove dangerous images and films in order to protect the young and impressionable.

However, it must be remembered that there are good Internet sites too! For some people the Internet is the only place in which they can express themselves without being judged, and peer support can be invaluable. I understand that parents of young people will be concerned if their child is spending time on self-harm message boards, and they are right to worry. However, they need to **know that some sites are safe places which certainly don't encourage self-harm**, and offer a safe place for people to share experiences and hopefully move towards more positive emotional health.



Scar Tissue is primarily a self-harm messageboard (it can be found at www.scar-tissue.net) which was set up years ago, but has evolved over time to be the community it is today. I personally joined the site about 2 years ago, which is why I want to sing its praises!

"I love seeing how many people come here and are thrilled by the support and understanding they receive. I wish I had had ST when I was younger, nobody understood self harm. Maybe if I had had great support like there is here, then I wouldn't still be self-harming. You feel so awful, thinking you are the only one in the world who is in that place, and while it's sad to know other people suffer too, it's also comforting to realise you aren't alone. I totally trust the admins and moderators to keep us all safe, we are all here because we need support and want to "get better". Self-harm is such a difficult topic, so hard to understand if you've never been there...having ST makes such a difference, it's somewhere we can all be ourselves without being judged or freaking people out!"

Some might think that Scar Tissue (or ST for short) is a bit of a strange name. The name represents how scars are very much an inherent part of self-injury for most people. As the website says, scars **"mean something to the person wearing them - whether that meaning is good or bad the scar is an important part of that person's identity. But perhaps most important of all, scar tissue is strong - stronger than the skin around it and the same goes for our members. Everyone on the**

board has gone through something in their life that's hurt them but they've dealt with it, come out the other side and are now supporting others. That takes strength."

There is a wealth of information about self-harm available on the main website for anyone to read, but the messageboard is only viewable by members in order to protect them. The messageboard is moderated by a dedicated group of people (who also self-harm) who ensure that the rules are upheld, and keep things under control. On the whole members do respect the rules (although occasionally problems do occur), and one another which is vital for the sense of community. While people do talk about self-harm and the things which lead them to hurt themselves there is a

*I love having people I can talk to who can understand my problems exactly, having a place where I don't have to be afraid of what I say because I know I'll never be judged. The people here are so nice, and know that when all I need is some TLC they'll give me *hugs* or just make me laugh. Its nice to have people who know that getting better is not about the solution, its about yourself and the support you get. ST is just a safe place, where everyone looks out for you and all want to come together to help each other get through the difficult times."*

strict rule of no graphic imagery, or anything which could be considered 'pro-self-harm'. Scar Tissue is about supporting people who self-harm, not about encouraging it. Members encourage one another to seek external help for their self-harm and their feelings.

There are specific sections on the forum to deal with different issues - Cutting, Burning, Eating

"When I first joined Scar Tissue, I was a bit scared of what would happen if I started posting. From my first post I discovered that it is a very welcome place, full of supportive people. I finally found a place where people understood that it's hard to stop, where I would still get support and understanding when I relapsed, and where I could still talk about things other then self harm and get that same support and understanding. There is always encouragement here to get better and to find different ways of dealing with problems."

Disorders, Drug and Alcohol addictions, DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder), and Abuse. Then there are the more light-hearted sections such as "laughter therapy", and the useful section where people share "Distraction techniques".

I'm not saying that Scar Tissue is the best self-harm forum, but it's the only one that I feel qualified to promote, and to recommend to anyone who self-harms. The peer support is so valuable, and it's certainly helped me to feel less alone.

*"I was a wreck when I first found this place. This has been the one sole constant in my life for the course of the last (almost) seven years. Literally *everything* else in my life has changed. Through the amazing commitment of the members here and support of this community I have been able to maintain recovery from self-injury for more than four and a half years. And I *do* give a large chunk of credit for that to this board. I don't think I could have done it without you. That means so much to me."*

Mary, with quotes kindly shared by Scar Tissue messageboard users

SIS - What we're all about!

You might have noticed that recently we updated our Mission and Vision. For those who don't know, here's a reminder of what Self Injury Support in North Cumbria is all about!

Our mission is to provide support to people in North Cumbria who self-harm and those who support or care for them, and to educate the public and associated professionals about self-harm.

Our vision is that all people in North Cumbria have a greater awareness and understanding of the issue of self-harm and that people who self-harm and those who support them are able to access the services of S.I.S

Going into more detail about what it is that we actually do, it has recently been decided to amend the aims and core values slightly, so here they are!

Aims:

- To provide (without charge to client) professionally qualified counselling and facilitated group support (within the BACP code of ethics) to those who self-harm in North Cumbria (postcodes beginning with CA).
- To provide support and information to those who support and care for people who self-harm in North Cumbria.
- To provide training for individuals, groups, organisations and professionals to enable people to understand self-harm and support those who self-harm.
- To increase awareness and understanding about self-harm through producing publications and resources designed to help those who self-harm, those supporting them, and to raise awareness among the general public.

To co-operate with statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies in order to improve support available for those who self-harm and those who care for them.

Core Values:

- Person-centred - providing support in a non-judgmental and non-directive environment, enabling clients to find their own solutions to their problems.
- Support - recognising that those who self-harm and those who care for them deserve help and support.
- Respect and Diversity - **respecting that everyone's experience of self-harm** is different.
- An understanding that self-harm is a way of coping with emotional distress.
- The importance of educating people about self-harm and dispelling the myths surrounding the issue.

Happy Christmas!

It seems very early talking about Christmas when it's only October (at the time of writing), but since this newsletter takes us up to the end of 2009, I'd just like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year on behalf of SIS!

