

Introduction

Welcome to the December edition of our mental health and wellbeing newsletter, the last of 2020.

“May you live in interesting times” is a well-known saying with no clear origin, seemingly a blessing, but in reality more of a curse - as interesting times are usually less stable or unsafe. The last year has been such a period: a pandemic with unprecedented impacts on all aspects of the lives of billions of people worldwide. The words “lockdown”, “tiers”, “restrictions”, and “symptoms” have become part of our everyday vocabulary, filling our TV screens, newspapers, and conversations.

For many people, it's been nine months of isolation, loneliness, and anxiety - but now hopefully with the promise of a vaccine in the near future, **people may see**

an end in sight. Hopefully this will bring a resumption of some aspects of what we consider normal life; however, what is certain is that the effects of the pandemic will stay with many people for a long time to come. These effects have been profound: whether this is the children and young people who have been dislocated from education, friendships, and outdoor activities - or people at the other end of their lives whose world has narrowed because of social hub closures, shielding, and restrictions on household mixing.

Fortunately, there has been a widespread acknowledgement around the world of the mental health impact of COVID-19, which has led to open discussion of the need for public health systems to **address the pandemic from a mental, as well as physical, health perspective**. In the UK, this was specifically acknowledged this week with the announcement of £500 million in extra funding for mental health services - we can hope that some of this money will be given to the voluntary sector, who have proven throughout the pandemic that they can react flexibly to meet challenges and develop innovative responses.

At a national level, Mind launched a coronavirus information hub, with resources offering advice on looking after your mental health during a pandemic - this received over 1.4 million views in its first four months. More locally, we extended our telephone support line to 7 nights a week, and have recently introduced a counselling service for those who are shielding - particularly those in lower-income areas of Bristol where people are less likely to access therapy due to prohibitive cost. **It is this mixture of large-scale national approaches and small local ones that may bring the widest benefit possible.**

As this year draws to a close, our efforts to extend support to as many people as we can continue. Our opening hours over the festive period will be posted on [our website](#) in the next few weeks, so do keep an eye out.

To end on a positive note, one of the clear consequences of the pandemic has been a greater readiness for many people to talk more openly about mental health. This greater openness will serve us well in the coming years.

Tom Hore, Director



Inside this issue



We'd love to hear what our supporters and regular readers think! Please fill out our newsletter survey [here!](#)

Introduction	1	Guest Blog: St Mungo's Bristol	7
A look back on 2020	<u>3-4</u>	Spotlight on SAD	8
Shielding Service - Extension	5	Wesport: Staying active this winter	9
Tricky x Bristol Mind launch	5	Recipes & Green and Growing	9
Fundraising Update	6	Stay in touch	10

A look back on 2020...

2020 has been a uniquely challenging year for almost everyone, as the world has faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, we've taken a look at 2020 to show you our highlights, from Bristol Mind and the wider world of mental health.



On "Blue Monday", the third Monday in January - often described as the "most depressing day of the year", we held a stall at the Galleries to remind people that depression can affect people on any day, and we're here to offer support all year round.

February 6th every year is Time to Talk day, one of the biggest days on the mental health calendar. As our director said in February's newsletter: "If you've been putting off opening up to someone you trust, or supporting someone you know is struggling, maybe make February 6th a significant day."

The first COVID-19 lockdown, in March, felt like it put many aspects of our lives on hold - but of course, there is no pause button for mental health issues. In our March newsletter, we highlighted the experience of hearing voices:

"I'd prefer not to hear voices, but I can live with them [...] my No.1 rule is never to act on anything the voices say unless I have considered it properly and decided that it is a good idea."

In April our focus stayed firmly on the response to COVID-19. We expanded our MindLine emotional support helpline to seven nights a week, thanks to the efforts of our staff and volunteers, we released our COVID-19 Fundraising Guide, and we shared our tips for looking after your wellbeing here, and on our YouTube Channel...

"You're living in the middle of a pandemic, so of course there are going to be bumps along the way. Forgive yourself for being imperfect and give it another try."



"For me, exercise is absolutely key in helping me manage my mental health. If I don't run regularly, my depression really takes hold, so I make sure to get out and do it even if I really don't feel like it."

The theme of Mental Health Awareness Week this year (May 18th - 24th) was Kindness, so we asked you to get involved and to share the ways you're kind to yourselves.

Volunteers' Week, from June 1st - 7th, was an opportunity for us to thank our dedicated volunteers and really show off the work that they do. We heard from volunteers across all of our services, from the Information Service to MindLine Trans+, about why volunteering was important to them.



Women Without Borders, our support group for refugee women, stopped meeting in person due to the pandemic. In June we told you how the team had continued to support the members.

“they redesigned their activity to provide weekly support over the phone, to check in on members’ wellbeing, and crucially, to share the latest NHS and government information—translating this into Arabic and Somali where required.”

Over the Summer Bristol Mind was delighted to announce our two new ambassadors, Herbie Kane and Briony May Williams. They have done valuable work in raising the profile of Bristol Mind - we’re so glad to have them on board!



Summer 2020 sparked widespread discussion about how we treat minority groups within our communities. In July, we celebrated Pride with features from Bristol Pride and Kiki, and in August we highlighted the valuable work of our BME Advocacy and Hate Crime projects:

August also brought cause for celebration, as our MindLine Trans+ Crowdfunder raised over £8,000 - paving the way for a third night of operation in 2021!

“By having a specific BAME service, we can ensure those groups who are over-represented, marginalised, and excluded have a voice”



World Mental Health Day, on October 10th, saw the re-launch of our Mentally Healthy Universities project:

“It’s perhaps never been a tougher time to be in higher education - and therefore never a more important time to support students and university staff.”

As the nights started to draw in, we doubled down and launched two new services to support some of the most vulnerable in our society: the Shielded Counselling Service, which you can read more about on [page 5](#), and our Refugee Counselling Project.

...and what’s next? We’ll be publishing our Christmas opening hours on our website in the next few weeks, so keep your eyes peeled.

Counselling

Bristol Mind is currently providing a **free counselling service** to individuals shielding as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

for individuals shielding due to the pandemic

UPDATE - please note that this service has been **extended until 31st March 2021**. Subject to availability, we will be taking referrals until 31st Jan 2021.

We are primarily looking to provide this service to those in the Bristol wards/areas stated below, and those identified as higher risk, such as BAME residents and older individuals:

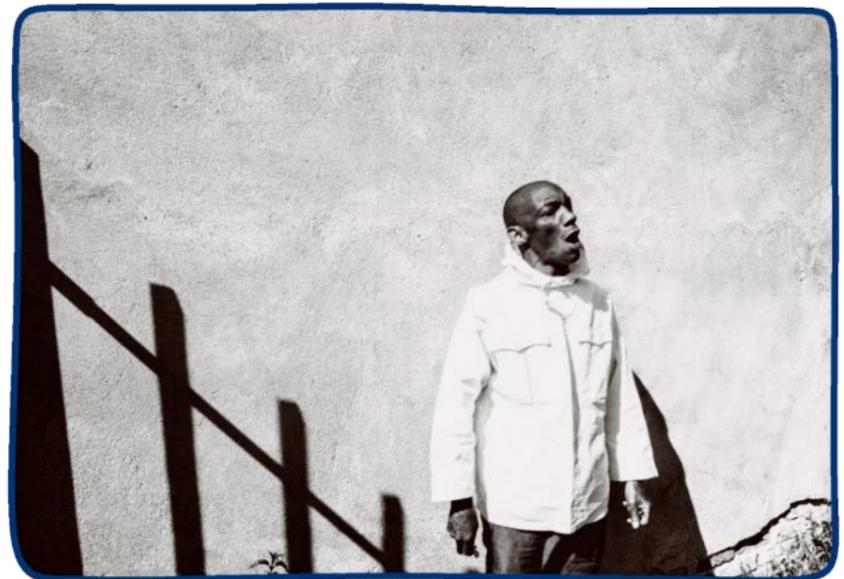
Avonmouth	Filwood	Lawrence Hill	Southmead
Barton Hill	Hartcliffe & Withywood	Lawrence Weston	St Paul's
East Hillfields	Knowle West	Lockleaze	Whitchurch Park

If you are interested in this service, please contact counselling@bristolmind.org.uk for a registration form. For this service we are accepting either self-referrals, referrals from family members, or referrals from agencies.

Please note that our general 'Meeting Minds' counselling service is not free but is low cost, and is self-referral only

Tricky launches project with Bristol Mind

Tricky has today announced the first step in a new fundraising effort to raise money and awareness surrounding mental health in his hometown of Bristol, by launching for sale a deluxe notebook set from his webshop, with all profits from the release being donated to Bristol Mind. Tricky's team said: "The fundraising effort is a close-to-home initiative supporting the brilliant work the local mental health charity conducts, from advocacy to mental health awareness training, to free helplines and counselling."

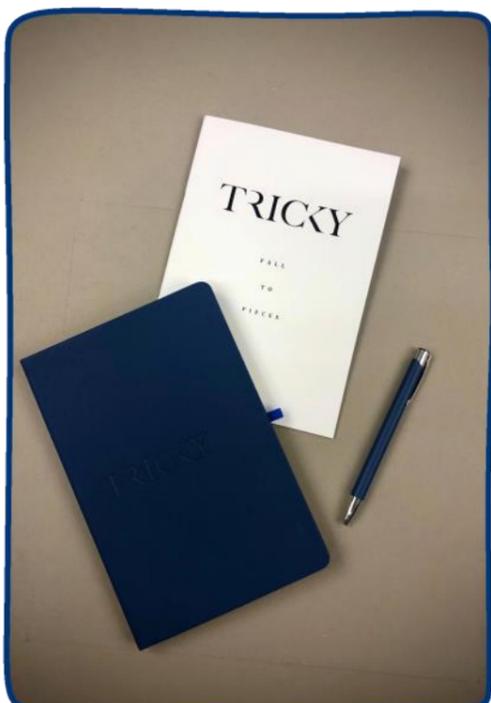


Here at Bristol Mind, we're very grateful for Tricky's contribution in raising awareness and helping to fund our services. The more people can talk openly about mental health, the easier it will be for people to seek and get the support they need.

The set features an A5 notebook and accompanying pen, plus lyrics booklet drawing a line from Tricky's recent acclaimed album "Fall To Pieces" to the new initiative. Ten editions of the set will be sent at random to customers containing original hand-written lyrics sheets from the album recording process.

The set is available to pre-order now from shop.trickysite.com.

You can listen to the album, Fall To Pieces, [here](#).



Fundraising Update

Leilah King, Fundraising & Networking Coordinator

Thank you!

We wanted to say a massive thank you to all our fundraisers who have supported us over 2020. It has been an incredibly challenging year - which has made the fundraising efforts even more impressive and humbling. This year, we're particularly grateful to HP Enterprise, who raised over £13,000, and ARAG, who raised £10,000. Without the support of our corporate partners, community fundraisers, and grant-giving bodies, we wouldn't be able to provide our vital services.

Here, we've collected a few quotes from our wonderful fundraisers, and from people in the Bristol Community you have helped us to reach. Thank you so much from everyone at Bristol Mind!

"You help me. You listen. I feel calm now."

"I am very grateful for the services, especially now, when many services have a long waiting list"

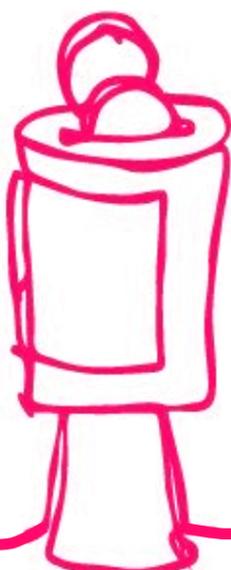
"I am deeply grateful to you for all your support with my son being in hospitals for long periods of time."

"We decided to support Bristol Mind in the years 2019 and 2020, following a company-wide vote. Our Head Office is based in Bristol, and we have over 100 staff working here who were really keen to support a local charity. Mental Health is a cause that many at our company felt really passionate about. We were really impressed by the hugely important work Bristol Mind do locally, particularly the support they provide via phonedlines and work with diverse communities and refugees . it's been a delight to raise money for a fantastic charity."

- Hannah Fraser, ARAG

"We decided to support Bristol Mind during 2020 because mental health issues can affect anyone, and this has become a very important and recognized topic in Hewlett Packard Enterprise in recent years. We were really impressed by the important work Bristol Mind do locally and particularly more recently, how they have responded to the increased demand due to COVID-19. We really enjoyed partnering with Brsistol Mind, and we are delighted with the overall total that we were able to raise."

- Suzanne Orr, Hewlett Packard Enterprise



"My caseworker from Bristol Mind has made my quality of life much better now. After seeing my caseworker with all my troubles and with my mental health, it has made me feel that I was listened to. I truly say with all my heart A VERY BIG THANK YOU for the hard work, patience, and the kindness shown to me in my time of need."



The Festive Season feels a bit different this year...

Linden Sherriff, South West Communications Coordinator, St Mungo's

Christmas is a time for many of us to celebrate, and while we'll all be experiencing it differently this year, there are some people for whom the winter months are always a particularly trying time. We asked Linden Sherriff, South West Communications Coordinator at St Mungo's, to give us an overview of their work with homeless people this festive season.

"The festive season feels a little different this year, and we are all facing new challenges. At St Mungo's in Bristol, we know that the winter is always hard for people sleeping rough, which is why our staff are still here, providing vital support to our clients when they need it most.

This year has been difficult for everyone that we support. In the six months from the announcement of the first lockdown, our teams in Bristol helped 457 people off the streets, and from communal shelters, into emergency hotel accommodation so that they could isolate safely. Our teams continue to provide support to people still in this accommodation, working with partners across the city to provide food, medication, and support with wellbeing.

This winter, we launched a new prevention service that provides rapid support for people who are at risk of rough sleeping or new to the streets. Our team work intensively with individuals to support them to find the best way to move towards a safe and secure home for good. That might be by helping them to keep their current accommodation, supporting them to access private rented or supported accommodation, or reconnecting them to accommodation in an area where they have friends or family.

Throughout this winter, our outreach team will still be working on the streets, supporting people who are rough sleeping. We are working closely with Bristol City Council and partners to prepare for the cold weather and the emergency life-saving response that is required for people rough sleeping. We urge members of the public to use either the Streetlink app or website to let us know if you see someone sleeping rough in Bristol, so that our outreach team can find them and offer support."

If you would like to find out more about the work of St Mungo's, and how you can get involved and help, please take a look at their website: <https://www.mungos.org/>

Spotlight on...

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a form of depression which people experience during particular seasons or times of year. There's a lot of research into SAD in winter, where it's often tied with the shorter daylight hours, but SAD can affect people during any season or time of the year.

We spoke to one of our supporters about their experiences of SAD:



“For me, I’ve always noticed it from November to February. For the last ten years, **as the nights start to get much longer and the cold weather and rain seep in**, I’ve found it hard to motivate myself. My energy levels start to dip, simple tasks feel increasingly difficult, and it really interferes with my ability to get on with life.

Working standard office hours in December, my commute starts before the sun is fully up, and I walk home in the dark. It can feel really difficult to get out of bed - like **darkness and gloom have settled over my whole life**, so there’s not much point in trying.

While I feel it every year, the severity definitely varies. I used to work evenings, which meant that I had the hours of daylight free - and being able to get out and make the most of those hours would always make things easier.

This year, with the COVID-19 lockdown, it’s been more difficult than usual: I don’t need to walk to work any more, which means that **when the weather’s bad I sometimes stay inside all day**. It feels like a sensible decision at the time, but the extra time indoors makes it easy to fall into a pattern of inactivity - and then I end up feeling much worse.

I find it helps to identify patterns like that, and to make an effort to break that cycle. It helps me to remember that self-care isn’t just having a bath, or snuggling further into the duvet to watch a rom-com; **sometimes self-care means taking ten minutes to do the washing up**, forcing yourself to go for a walk when you’d much rather stay in bed, or dragging yourself to the GP to ask for help - and it’s often the things that feel hardest which will make the biggest difference.”

Getting Help

- Mind have self-care tips and information about treatments for both Summer and Winter SAD on their website, [here](#).
- Some people who experience SAD in winter find light therapy helpful. Light therapy involves sitting next to a specially designed light box which simulates sunlight. Other people use a “light therapy alarm clock”, which simulates a sunrise. You can read more about light therapy from the [NHS](#).
- Because SAD is a type of depression, it’s generally recommended that it’s treated in the same way as non-seasonal depression. One of the first things we suggest for anyone experiencing a mental health problem is a [visit to the GP](#), who will be able to take you through treatment options - including talking therapies and medication. The treatment options you choose are personal to you, but the GP is a good place to start.



Keeping Active this Christmas



It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas! This year has been a year like no other, with us all facing restrictions on every aspect of our lives, including how we can be physically active.

Many of us have used this year as an opportunity to increase our activity levels, while others have used the time to relax. Either way, now is the perfect time to take a moment to reflect. Have you been as active as you wanted this year? What can you do to be active heading into 2021?

If you want to become more active this December, here are just a few ideas:

- Walking - wrap up warm and go outside for a walk, it can really help to boost your mood!
- Step tracking - apps such as Active 10 can help to make sure you walk for at least 10 minutes a day. You can also have competitions with your friends and family to see who can do the most steps each week.
- Active games with the family—games such as Twister can get you (and the kids!) up and moving
- Couch to Fitness—if you don't fancy running, but would like to start gently building your fitness, then this is for you! This 9-week at-home exercise plan is perfect for beginners as you can get fitter at your own pace. More information can be found [here](#).
- Dance around the house to Christmas music - it's Christmas, so why not!
- If you want a challenge when the year is up, you could join in with RED January - an initiative that encourages people to support their mental health by running every day in January. Find out more at <https://redtogether.co.uk>



Mulled Cranberry Punch

A delicious non-alcoholic winter warmer to get you in the festive spirit

Ingredients

- 1l cranberry juice drink
- 250ml orange juice
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 6 cloves
- 1/4 tsp grated nutmeg
- 1-2 small oranges, sliced
- A few whole cranberries

Method

1. Combine the juices, spices, and half of the orange slices in a saucepan. heat gently until just beginning to simmer, and keep at that level for fifteen minutes.
2. Pass through a sieve to remove the whole spices and orange slices.
3. Serve warm, garnished with the remaining orange slices and the cranberries.



Green and Growing - Growing Mustard Greens Indoors

The same plant that yields spicy seeds for the condiment, mustard greens are high in vitamins A and C, iron, and beta-carotene - and it can be grown easily all year round on a windowsill.

Buy seeds and plant them in enriched soil using small plastic containers - an empty yoghurt pot will work perfectly. The seeds should sprout within a few days, at which point you'll need to move each plant to its own container. Water regularly and remove weeds.

When it's time to harvest, pick the outer leaves to let the whole plant keep growing - and enjoy them in your salads, stir fries, and soups!



About Bristol Mind

Bristol Mind is a mental health charity for people in Bristol and surrounding areas. We promote wellbeing and recovery through a range of services. We recognize that each individual is a resource for their own recovery: many of our staff, volunteers, and trustees have themselves experienced the impact of emotional and mental distress.

Although affiliated to Mind the national charity, Bristol Mind is an independently registered and funded charity. If you would like further information on any of the services offered by Bristol Mind, please don't hesitate to get in touch, using the contact details below.

The information provided in this newsletter is for guidance only. You should contact a doctor or health professional if you need urgent help or medical advice. If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions about the newsletter, please email us at newsletter@bristolmind.org.uk

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