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Autumn



THE STAG

PROJECT:TALK's Quarterly Newsletter

FEATURED ITEMS

Celebrating achievements and sharing good news
from PROJECT:TALK



MFA Programme



Peer Support Groups



Black History Month at QMUL



Art for Mental Fitness

AUTUMN 21

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WELCOME

Welcome to our first ever edition of The Stag - PROJECT:TALK's Quarterly newsletter.

We're very excited to share with you the inspiring work happening across our network to make our communities a place where everyone can thrive. Of course, this wouldn't be possible without the work of every person who dedicates their time to supporting those around them - from our Ambassadors facilitating Support Groups, Society leaders, 1:1 peer support volunteers to Mental Fitness Instructors.

Highlights of Autumn have been:

- Welcoming two new University branches of PROJECT:TALK, our first ever sixth form team of Ambassadors
- Our partnership with Bristol SU to formally implement Peer Support with the help of many student led groups
- As always, our inspiring conversations with like-minded people to explore new ways to pioneering mental fitness.

We are so grateful and incredibly proud of all of the team. Together, we seriously are making a huge difference.

~ George, Director

AMBASSADOR OF THE SEASON

Olivia Hawkins

Ambassador of the Season recognises volunteers who have stood out in their efforts to pioneer mental fitness. In Autumn, we've had so much amazing work all over and so, it hasn't been an easy choice! Our first ever Ambassador of the Season goes to Olivia Hawkins, PhD Student at the University of Bristol. She has created a safe space where students who are grieving loved ones can join together weekly and share their experiences whilst being guided in art for wellbeing activities, kindly provided by students at City of Bristol College who have donated their time. We are so proud of work such as this and encourage you to do something for your community.



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OUR PIONEERING MENTAL FITNESS AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME

In September, we introduced our brand new Mental Fitness Ambassador Programme, unifying everyone who represents PROJECT:TALK in their own community (e.g. University). The programme is built to help increase visibility and variety of support. Through their work, Ambassadors become more confident in supporting those around them, gain further knowledge of support services available and also have access to a number of worthwhile volunteering opportunities.

Ultimately, our new Ambassadors are vitally important in driving change in the way we all view mental health by pioneering mental fitness in their own circles.

As part of the Programme, we want to ensure every Ambassador has the tools and confidence needed to support their peers safely and effectively. To date, we've trained over 90 Ambassadors from across the country with our bespoke TOOLS TO:TALK training package.

Some of our Ambassadors have volunteered to undertake specialist roles within their community - from leading our PROJECT:TALK university societies to providing 1:1 peer support, from managing peer support groups to delivering TOOLS TO:TALK training.

We are incredibly proud of each member of our growing team's commitment and enthusiasm for making their community a place where every person can thrive.



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HELLO TO CARDIFF UNI & CHOSEN HILL SIXTH FORM

Our network of PROJECT:TALK communities now spans into Wales, and our first ever school!

Our newest Society sits in South Wales. PROJECT:TALK Cardiff, led by Pip & team, recently joined our mission to make Cardiff University a great place for mental fitness.

Cardiff's main venture currently sits within the medical school. They've been working really hard with us for over a year to bring TOOLS TO:TALK training to their medical curriculum. After the success of the programme at Bristol Medical School, we crossed the Severn estuary to run a pilot session for 300 first year students at the beginning of this month. We were so impressed by the engagement in discussions and what's more, came away having learned loads ourselves from participants. We really look forward to working with PROJECT:TALK Cardiff as their offer continues to grow.

At Chosen Hill Sixth Form in Gloucestershire, the team of Ambassadors are exploring ways to make support more accessible for their peers as PROJECT:TALK support them to make the change they feel is so important.



GOODBYE TO SAM

Sam joined PROJECT:TALK Bristol as a TOOLS TO:TALK coordinator in September 2020. The team recognised that the already difficult transition to University life for new students was made even more challenging by the lockdown. With many students forced to self isolate in halls of residence just weeks after moving to Bristol, and a lack of opportunity to meet new people, Sam committed himself to pioneering PROJECT:TALK's Peer Support Scheme. Over 150 hours of support have now been provided by trained volunteers. Notable feedback stated that conversations with volunteers got many through a complex first year.

Sam became a valuable member of PROJECT:TALK CIC as our Peer Support Manager and has worked with Olivia at QMUL to implement the Peer Support Scheme there. Additionally, Sam has mentored Bristol's drugs (including Alcohol) support group, and LGBTQIA+ support group.

Sam leaves us to focus on his University degree. Whilst

he'll be missed, his work will continue to shine through with peer support being at the core of PROJECT:TALK's work. Thank you for everything you've done, Sam.



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RE-IMAGINING PEER SUPPORT

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

If we are to make mental fitness more accessible, it is essential that we diversify our definition of support. Whilst there is a clear place for professional services in supporting those experiencing difficulty, PROJECT:TALK understand that peoples' needs are unique and believe that we don't have to be professionals to talk about our mental health and support the mental fitness of those around us. We strive to pioneer a proactive, community focused approach to mental fitness where the people who know their needs best take the lead on developing new community support initiatives with the backing of PROJECT:TALK's team. Our model gives passionate individuals, many with their own experiences, a platform to turn their ideas into reality.

PROJECT:TALK have partnered with Bristol SU to raise the profile of peer led mental fitness support at the University of Bristol. Now an officially recognised form of student support, our network of student led groups is proving very effective. Peer led support serves as a 'baseline' level of support, for use in good times as well as tough ones. Those at the University can take advantage of Talk Club's weekly mental fitness workouts at the Clifton Lido, SASS (Sexual Assault Survivor Support) or even the UoB Grief, Terminal and Life Threatening Illness Support groups' therapeutic art sessions. All groups are advertised via a central point on our website, at projecttalk.org.uk/bristol-peer-support making it as easy as possible for those in need to find what works for them.

Over the coming months, we're looking to welcome more groups into our network at the University of Bristol, and introduce our re-imagined model for peer-led support to other communities. If this is something you'd like to be part of, get in touch.

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CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WITH PROJECT:TALK QMUL



At Queen Mary University of London, the team led by Zoe have been hard at work developing their offer & finding new ways to engage the QMUL community in conversation about mental fitness. The Peer Support Scheme pioneered by Olivia, has recruited and trained a team of volunteers ready to provide 1:1 peer support to students in need of a chat. Maroua, the Society's Vice President, tells us about their work during Black History Month.

“PROJECT:TALK QMUL has done a tremendous job during Black History Month, using different types of art to spread awareness on mental fitness. For example, we hosted an online class cooking class, featuring a Caribbean dish.

We also collaborated with the art society to host an art relaxation session with an Afro-Swedish contemporary artist.

Finally, we organized a big showcase to celebrate Black History Month through Music, Dance, and Spoken word.

PROJECT:TALK QMUL was successful in supporting its local Black community, celebrating black heritage and culture while pioneering mental fitness.

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- PEER SUPPORT LEAD @ UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
- EVENT ORGANISER
- IT & TECH ASSISTANT
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