



**Seun Adekoya and Connor
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Press Officers, Michaelmas 2016

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Cambridge, 16 October 2016

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LIZ FRASER SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

On October 17th, the Cambridge Union was delighted to welcome Cambridge Alumna Liz Fraser to speak at the Cambridge Union. She said “all I want to talk about is how I was a student like you...and that’s all that’s important tonight. “Cindies was there when I was here...how long has that been?” she joked. Liz then jumped right in about Mental Health “a very unfortunate term”, people think “something is wrong with you” she said. She then asked the room “how many feel have never felt panic, depression, anxiety, stress or other in their lives” – the audience responded with three hands raised.

She then moved on to a discussion about Cambridge – “I came up in 1993, a brilliant year, for those of you who weren’t born” she said. “I don’t eat when I’m stressed” Liz said, it meant “I lost weight, I lost focus, it was hard to see...and I didn’t know I wasn’t ill”; she spoke about her experience with anorexia. “I remember, I walked up to the Senate House board, and didn’t see my name beside the 2:is, and I didn’t see my name.” “It turns out I was on the board across the Senate house for the really, really bad people” she joked.

She then spoke about the College system: “I thought I would know a lot of people...but you can literally disappear if you want.” “Cambridge can be very lonely; you can really hide” she said. This does not help mental health she argued “because you cannot see mental health”. She remembered her friends – “we literally had no idea” they said after realizing her illness. With mental illness Liz said, “in the end it comes down to you” – you need to tell people you need help. “The onus is on you to decide that you are not ok” she said. But, she said, “you will realize that Cambridge is not real life” and “you will get into the flow of things”. “Don’t be scared of life” she emphasized. “I’m 42 and I feel younger than I did at 19”.

She moved on to speak about how to deal with mental health. “Tell somebody!” she emphasized, “a friend, family, your college counsellor, GP or anyone else you feel comfortable with”. “You must step up to tell people about your mental health issues”. She said this is what led her to start Headspace “we are a website, and soon to be an app that will help demystify mental health”. She noted that there was still a good deal of misinformation around mental health, and she wanted to change this.

She was very interesting talking about how friends can help friends with mental health. “There are two schools of thought: one is to continue to be nice, and the other is to say ‘I’m out’”. She said the second method “carries high risk”, but “there will be a turning point”. One thought she had though was that “often with mental health, when you are getting better, you think you are better...but it will have its ups and downs” she said. She also said that “Cambridge is interesting, because you are both very protected and very vulnerable” you need, she emphasized “to run your own race”, “know yourself”. For those who have friends who are not helping with mental



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health issues, Fraser had this advice “if they won’t get it, they won’t get it, move on, find people who care”, which will take “knowing yourself”. She spoke about being thankful to her College, though, for actually acknowledging “there was a problem”. “Cambridge is very surreal and you must know that” she said, but thanked the College for paying attention. Responding to one questioner, she emphasized “there is help if you can get it, you can’t blame the world”. On the subject of medication, she said “if you need it, you need it” and said “I probably delayed a lot longer than I should have”. She reminded the audience again to “know yourself”. She ended by thanking the audience for their time and joining her for a hard hitting and poignant talk on mental health.

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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>
Monday, 17 October 2016