Press Release: 7 February 2017

Liz Fraser: Your Mental Health

On February 7 2017, the Cambridge Union Society welcomed Headcase creator, writer, broadcaster and Clare graduate, Liz Fraser to speak about mental health.

Liz Fraser opened by saying how she often holds these events to talk to adults and young people about mental health. She highlighted how her talk is very much about YOU, the audience and the importance of interaction and talking to people. She discussed how she was a high achiever at school with the best grades, grade 8 music and an athlete. However, at the age of 15 she became miserable and realized that her comfortable school routine would not last forever. As a ‘geek’ at school, not in the ‘cool crowd’, she decided the best way to fit in would be to lose weight and soon became addicted to doing so. Her anorexia developed into bulimia and became even worse during her gap year. She discussed her trouble settling into Cambridge during her first term and after the Christmas holidays, in Lent term she tried to commit suicide due to extreme unhappiness.

Liz Fraser asked, “Who has mental health problems?” Replying that there is no type of mental health sufferer or reason for mental health. Headcase, founded two years ago tries to resolve “mental health wobbles” as most people experience them at some point in their life. One of her pledges is that every university student have a Headcase package which could be the pivot needed to help. She described the symptoms that we need to look out for, highlighting that physical and mental health are deeply connected. A change in character, physical pain caused by psychological stress, memory loss and difficulty sleeping are key warning signs to mental health issues. “We need to start accepting that when we look after our body we also need to look after our mind”.

Stress, experienced by many people, is a major cause of mental health and can come in the form of essays, deadlines or even light. When we push ourselves and have high expectations we become tired and stressed which can lead to panic and anxiety attacks. She highlighted how she had her first panic attack on a chair lift and then experienced many more due to her body being under so much stress that it went into ‘fight or flight’. She enforced that “You will not die from a panic attack.” However, she did have a nervous breakdown in which she lost everything in her life and was non responsive. The reason she is so focused on mental health is to prevent anyone from having one.

Fraser addressed Cambridge students saying, “you’re here because you’re good enough” and highlighted not to let stress create illusions. She said we must know who we are and what works for us. She ended by saying that “at the end of the day the only person who can decide whether to change is YOU”.

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For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc