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The Cambridge Union Society
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Press Release: 21 January 2016

THIS HOUSE BELIEVES WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

First Proposition: Dr Ahmed Hankir

Dr Ahmed Hankir, a Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry at Manchester University, starts his speech “some of you may be disengaged” in his enigmatic opening monologue. “I like to think there’s method in my madness” he explains. He argues that those with mental health issues should be shown the same level of empathy as those with other problems. Citing a medical study, he argues “Mental health stigma is worse than the illness itself [...] stigma is killing people!”

Second Proposition: Patricia Gianfrancesco

Patricia ‘Trisha’ Gianfrancesco, best known for her talk show ‘Trisha’, is also a mental health campaigner. She argues for the value of mental health first aid and suggests that it should be more widely taught. Trisha highlights the problem of referring to those with mental health issues as a ‘them’ - “there is no us and them. Trisha recalls the stark contrast between how she was treated when she had breast cancer compared to when she was suffering with mental health issues, demonstrating the very real and damaging stigma surrounding mental illness.

Third Proposition: Clarke Carlise

Clarke Carlise, former professional footballer and current ambassador for Mind and Kick It Out, reveals that his interest in mental health “stems from a suicide attempt at twenty-one years of age.” Having spent his footballing career “battling with depression”, he raises the point that “knowing that you’re being diagnosed with something is very different from being told and taught what it is and what to do about it. Looking to the future, Clarke emphasises the need to educate the next generation “so our leaders are informed” about mental health.

Fourth Proposition: Fiona Phillips

Fiona Phillips, a *Daily Mirror* columnist and former host of GMTV, supports multiple Alzheimer’s organisations after having lost both parents to the disease. She argues that “dementia is the biggest health crisis of the 21st century”. On mental illness more generally, she argues that testing at school and social media is making growing up very hard these days. She recalls the inappropriateness with which her son’s school dealt with his mental health issues. “It’s good to talk about this because it’s all around us” she argues, reassuring audience members that “if you do have a mental health issue, you really are not alone.”

Fifth Proposition: Amber Cowburn

Amber Cowburn is a founding trustee of The Invictus Trust. She describes coming up to Cambridge and being “horrified to find that this was a place where people weren’t really looking after their own mental health at all.” She criticizes mental health services in Cambridge as “woefully inadequate” as CUSU fails to provide effective welfare services. In Cambridge, “you’re being encouraged to burn out because you’re intelligent”. Amber argues that whilst Cambridge may be a place of great minds, when it comes to mental health care, “they are the dumbest of the dumb”. Her message to Cambridge students is that you don’t have to swap academic excellence for mental wellbeing.

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Sarah Hughes is the CEO of Mind in Cambridgeshire, a mental health charity which aims to tackle mental health stigma and promote positive mental health. Recounting her time visiting family in a mental health hospital as a child, Sarah recalls that “the screams I heard walking down that corridor always stayed with me”. She argues for the importance of making those with mental health issues “feel validated as a human being.” She says that “the final frontier is the issue around suicide”. She reassures, “you do not need to be...a psychiatrist to save someone’s life” - you just need to be passionate and available.

Seventh Proposition: Dr David Crepaz-Keay

Dr David Crepaz-Keay, Head of Empowerment and Social Inclusion at the Mental Health Foundation, states that “madness is part of my identity”, having grown up thinking and feeling things which weren’t apparent to anyone else. He argues that “no one can really be sure that the world that they’re perceiving is the same as everyone else”. Arguing that there is no such thing as objective reality, he warns that “to take someone’s view of the world and call it psychosis [...] is to squeeze the life out of them.” Addressing the audience, he hopes “you can be the kind of people who have it in your hearts and souls to help others when they need it.”

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

Thursday, 04 February 2016