

Mental Health Awareness Week

Summary

Health & Wellbeing, Marketing and Student's Union staff delivered a Mental Health Awareness Week. It included a Health & Wellbeing fair, free hugs, Wellbeing workshops and film screenings.

The highlight was a sell-out evening event at which Ruby Wax joined Professor Jim Al-Khalili to talk about her own experiences. Afterwards, the Vice-Chancellor and the Students' Union Vice-President for Welfare signed an organisational pledge to tackle mental health discrimination.

Staff and students also took the opportunity to make a personal pledge on boards situated across campus. The week received overwhelmingly positive feedback on Social Media.

Aims/Objectives

We wanted to bring the university into line with other universities by signing the Time to Change organisational pledge to tackle mental health discrimination and stigma.

We wanted to do this in as high profile a manner as possible, so that it would be a meaningful act (demonstrating that the organisation has a commitment to delivering on this pledge), and so that the central message (awareness) would be impressed upon as many members of the university community as possible, with the aim that further activities we had planned (such as mental health awareness training for staff) would seem relevant and be well received.

What did you do?

Jim Al-Khalili conducts occasional interviews with well-known academics for the entertainment and inspiration of staff at the University (including Professor Brian Cox, David Attenborough and Dara O'briain). He had talked about inclusivity in an interview published in the university's internal magazine, and had offered his opinion that mental health was an area in which there was still a lot of work to be done. Mental Health Advisor contacted Jim Al-Khalili to ask if he would be prepared to therefore interview a future guest about their experiences of succeeding despite mental illness, and he said he would.

Mental Health Advisor spoke with Vice Chancellor about the Time to Change organisational pledge, with the suggestion that it take place on stage on the same evening as Jim's interview, and he agreed.

Marketing were contacted by Jim and the Vice Chancellor to ask if they could make the necessary arrangements, so they arranged a meeting with the Health & Wellbeing team to discuss plans.

6 months of discussion, planning and organising between Health & Wellbeing, Marketing and the Students Union finally led to a packed week of activities and publicity.

What was the context / background?

Increase in mental health difficulties expressed by student & staff populations, statistics about increase in demand for mental health support at universities, other activities tackling the same issue that were taking place across the sector, Health & Wellbeing's staff's experience that ignorance and stigma surrounding mental illness was acting as a barrier to co-ordinating effective, consistent multi-disciplinary support.

How was it organised and who was involved?

Three key teams of staff came together: Marketing, Health & Wellbeing, Student's Union.

They shared ideas and discussed how they could use their existing resources and influence.

The Time to Change campaign were contacted by Marketing and Student's Union, and both were required to submit written proposals for how they would deliver a pledge signing event, then demonstrate an organisational commitment to delivering on its aims. Health & Wellbeing staff were consulted by Marketing on the wording of these proposals.

Health & Wellbeing staff's main focus was on organising the Health & Wellbeing Fair. 32 internal and external organisations agreed to take part (including Catering, Surrey Sports Park, Police, local NHS services, drug awareness/support charities, Samaritans, domestic abuse services, cancer support and local pharmacy's). As well as inviting all these organisations, there was a lot of work involved around the logistics of organising an exhibition space, providing parking and directions and collecting meaningful feedback from attendees. They also put on extra free workshops throughout the week, offering such activities as art therapy, mindfulness, reiki healing and relaxation sessions.

The Student's Union recruited student volunteers and societies to help put on various activities around campus, including free hugs, screenings of films with mental health themes, awareness workshops and discussions.

University catering services agreed to put on special "healthy body, healthy mind" options throughout the week.

Marketing took the lead on publicity. A press release led to an article in the local newspaper, and the university's website, intranet and social media were used to promote activities.

What resources did you need?

4 nurses from Health & Wellbeing services who invested several hours per week each over 6 months, plus help from counsellors who provided workshops during the week.

Student's Union Vice President for Welfare, who also invested a similar amount of time to the nurses, plus around 10 student volunteers and society members who helped him throughout the week.

3 members of the Marketing team, plus all the resources they mobilised to put on the evening pledge signing event (selling tickets, booking 2 lecture theatres – one for the interview and another in which it was live streamed using audio visual equipment, providing catering for invited guests, etc.)

Posters, leaflets, flyers etc. handed out throughout the week.

Main financial resources needed were Ruby Wax's fees. This was partly recovered through ticket sales.

Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?

Feedback Questionnaires were filled in at most events, website analytics were used to see how popular related news items on the university website were, social media “likes” and views were measured.

Numeric data showed higher than usual levels of interest in online activities relating to the week and wellbeing provision at the university.

Qualitative feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Staff and students praised the university for putting on these events and felt that there should be more done to increase awareness of the issues addressed.

How did it draw on or contribute to a Healthy University Whole System Approach?

Organising the week brought together teams of staff that wouldn't have otherwise have spent so much time discussing the issues and how to address awareness. Collaborative relationships were formed amongst university services and some external services which have continued since.

Future Plans

An annual healthy university week will include an element of tackling mental health awareness.

Mental Health Awareness training for staff has started to be rolled out, and has proved to be very popular and well attended. This will continue for the foreseeable future.

Key Learning Points

Value of organising well in advance. Value of using existing resources in new creative ways. Familiarity with social media. Momentum gained as more services and staff get involved.

Thematic Categories (tick any that apply to your case study)

Method		Topic		Population Group	
Campaign / Event	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alcohol /Substance Misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	Built Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	Food / Healthy Eating	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wider Community	<input type="checkbox"/>
Policy / Procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whole System Approach	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical Activity / Active Transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Health	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Sustainable Development	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Contact Details

Name of Organisation	University of Surrey
Contact Name	Chris Ward, Mental Health Advisor
Email Address	c.j.ward@surrey.ac.uk
Links	http://www.surrey.ac.uk/features/jim-meets-ruby-wax-mental-health-awareness-week