



**‘Mental Health Day’  
Report of the Lewisham People’s  
Parliament May 18th 2021**

**This report is written in plain English**

## **The Lewisham People's Parliament**

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.

### **Background to this report**

The subject of mental health has come up a lot in our regular zoom groups and phone calls with people with learning disabilities since the Covid pandemic started in March 2020.

We were hearing that people were isolated, anxious, bored and frightened by the effects of the virus on their lives.

The Lewisham People's Parliament reps decided that it would be a good subject to talk about in a large group. After talking, we chose to do something new for the People's Parliament project.

We decided to hold an all-day event where we could talk about different mental health issues. Then we would have a Parliament meeting at the end to ask what people with learning disabilities had to say about mental health and what they thought could be done better.

We had some planning meetings with psychologists from the South London & Maudsley Mental Health in Learning Disabilities Team. Together we planned a day with three interactive workshops, followed by a People's Parliament meeting.

This was the plan for the day:

Session 1 Workshop on Mental and physical health

Session 2 Workshop on Anxiety

Session 3 Workshop on Low mood

Session 4 People's Parliament on mental health

A flyer was produced which was sent out in advance to people with learning disabilities and their supporters across Lewisham:

**Mental health day May 18th**

Join us on Zoom on May 18<sup>th</sup>  
9.30 – 4.30 to talk about mental health.

We will have 4 different sessions with psychologists to learn and talk about mental health.

We will do workshops on what mental health is, anxiety and feeling down.

Tell us what you think needs to change about mental health services at a People's Parliament at the end of the afternoon.

For the zoom code email [martin.Stitchman@lsup.org.uk](mailto:martin.Stitchman@lsup.org.uk)

Flyer for Mental health Day

## Mental Health Day on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021



Ifeoma Orjiekwe - People's Parliament rep

The mental health day was held on Zoom and was chaired by People's Parliament rep Ifeoma. **35** different people with learning disabilities joined the Zoom meetings at various times on the day.

Ifeoma explained what the meeting was about. She said that it is important to talk about mental health. She said that for her 'good mental health was a state of wellbeing'.

Ifeoma explained the ground rules for the day and went through the timetable of what would happen. She also said we would be having some zoom polls to ask what people thought of the different workshops.

Before we started the first workshop, Ifeoma asked everyone to join her in a minute of relaxation and meditation. She asked everyone to breathe and relax and be kind to themselves.

### **Summary of the workshops**

Each workshop was introduced by Ifeoma and led by a student psychologist on placement with either South London and Maudsley NHS trust or Lewisham Speaking Up. All of the workshops were also supported by Dr Annabel Head or Dr Nina Melunsky from the Lewisham Mental Health in Learning Disability Team.

All of the workshops were interactive and used pictures, videos, breakout groups and practical exercises. People with learning disabilities were encouraged to join in and share their thoughts on mental health.

### **Session 1 Workshop on Mental and physical health**

The first session was led by Bethany Johnson, a student psychologist on placement with Lewisham Speaking Up.

This first workshop talked about these questions:

- What is mental health?
- What does good mental health look like?
- How are mental and physical health linked and what are the links?
- Why aren't mental health problems always recognised in people with learning disabilities?

People had a chance to talk about how things like diet, sleep and exercise can have an effect on mental health. People also talked about how your life experiences can have a long term effect on your mental health.

## What is mental health?



Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing.



It affects how we think, feel and act.

Slide from workshop 1 mental and physical health

### Session 2 Workshop on Anxiety

The second session was led by Leng Song, a trainee psychologist on placement at South London and Maudsley NHS trust.

The second workshop talked about these questions:

- What is anxiety?
- What makes you feel anxious?
- Where might you feel anxiety in your body?
- What might anxiety look like for us?
- How can you feel calmer?

This workshop had lots of chances for people to talk about anxiety. This was a subject that came up again and again when we asked people what they wanted to talk about at the Mental Health Day. There were also some chances to practice things that would help us to feel calmer.

**Where might we feel anxiety in our body?**

Headache

Fast heartbeat

Breathe faster

Feel hot and sweaty

Feel tense - tummy hurts/butterflies in your stomach

Screen shot from workshop 2 anxiety

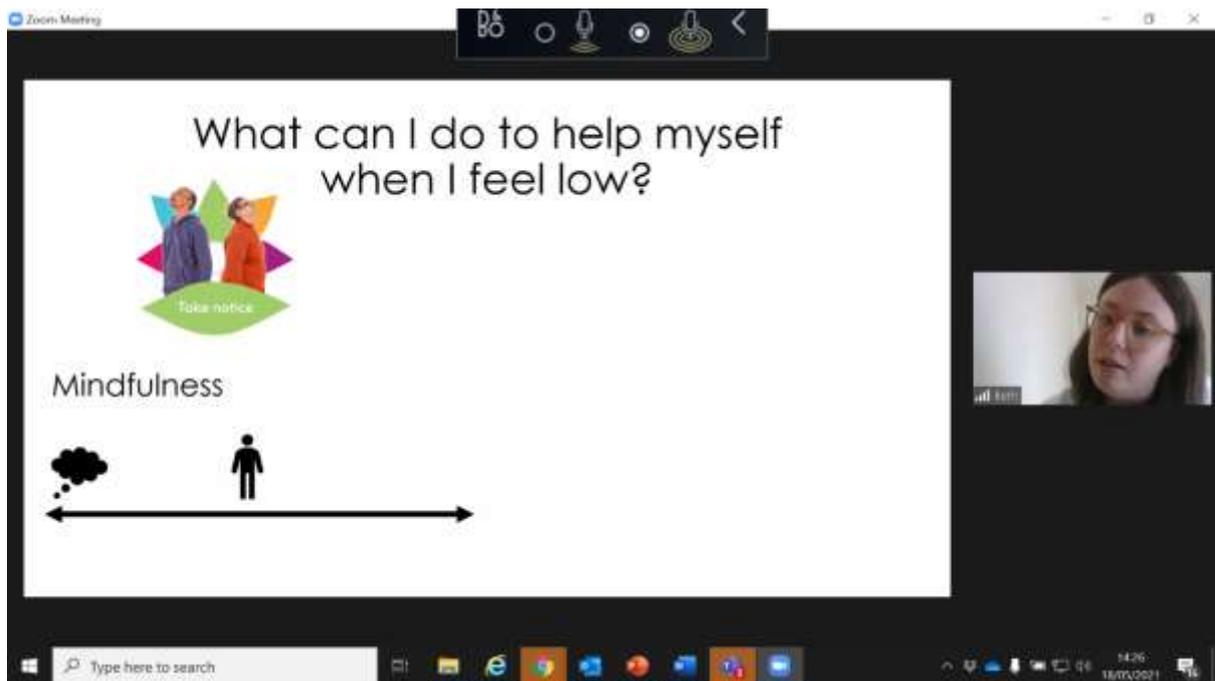
### Session 3 Workshop on Low mood

The third session was led by Beth Nicholson, a trainee psychologist on placement at South London and Maudsley NHS trust.

The third workshop talked about these questions:

- What is low mood?
- How do we know we're feeling low?
- What do we feel when we are low?
- What do we do when we are low?
- What can we do to help ourselves?
- Where can I get help?

This session also had lots of chances to talk about feeling low. This was the second big subject that came up when we were planning the Mental Health Day. There were lots of practical ideas about things to help when you are feeling low.



Screen shot from workshop 3 low mood

## **The People's Parliament on Mental Health**

The final session of the day was a chance for people with learning disabilities to talk about mental health and what they had to say on the subject.

Our chairperson, Ifeoma, shared some of her thoughts on the day and why it is good to make time and a safe space for people with learning disabilities to talk about mental health. She said that although it can be a difficult subject, it is very important to talk about how you are feeling.

Ifeoma introduced Dr Nina Melunsky and Beth Nicholson from the Mental Health in Learning Disabilities Team. They did a presentation on the services that are available for mental health support.

We heard about where to get help and the type of services that people can go to if they feel they need help with their mental health.

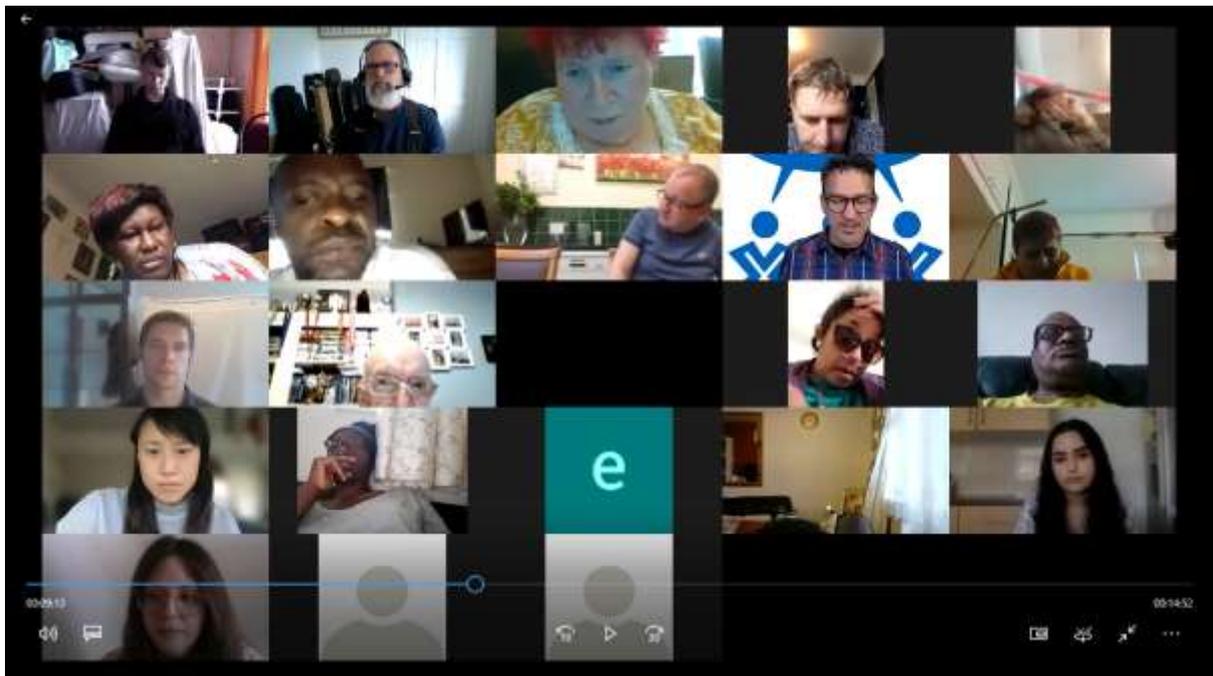
We then did some breakout sessions on Zoom.

People joined smaller groups where they were asked:

- What have you learned today?
- What do you think is important to say about mental health?
- What would you like to change about mental health services?

We were especially interested in the answers to the second two questions. We felt this would be a good way to find out what people with learning disabilities wanted to tell the people who are in charge of mental health services.

After the breakout sessions each group shared what they had talked about. This was recorded as a video so we could note down what people said.



Screen shot of the People's Parliament breakout groups feedback

This is what people with learning disabilities said **was important to say about mental health:**

- Don't be scared to talk about your mental health because it's about you
- It's important to reach out to others about your mental health

- It's good to have days like these because they help
- Sometimes you can't see an issue in yourself but someone else might notice something
- We didn't know there were so many different mental health services
- Anxiety has been a big problem because of Covid, not going out and being scared
- People need to know that mental health support is available if they need it – you are not alone
- You need to put your mental health first
- Don't bottle things up and don't be ashamed of feeling anxious or depressed
- We're all human, don't be afraid to ask for help with mental health
- It's important to know what makes you happy and to have a voice to tell other people that
- It was good to talk about how mental health affects us and what strategies people can use to deal with it
- I didn't know before about the learning disability mental health team

This is what people with learning disabilities said they would **like to change about mental health services**:

- To have more workshops about mental health
- More knowledge about how healthy eating and exercise can help your mental health
- More awareness about mental health services in general
- More easy read information about mental health
- More ways for people with learning disabilities to know about services
- Services to be more open
- It's hard to see your GP as the first place to talk about mental health. Appointments are often online or on the phone
- There should be shorter waiting times for talking therapies
- There should be a leaflet with all the contact details for mental health services

- More mental health services for people with autism and mild learning disabilities
- More understanding of different types of disabilities
- We want to feel more in control of talking about mental health
- More practical strategies that people can use for themselves to help with mental health
- We would like to have more mental health support. Sometimes you don't get enough sessions
- More funding for mental health services to reduce waiting times
- Mental health services should look at how they can reduce stigma and negative views of mental health problems

### **What Next?**

It is clear from this report that people with learning disabilities liked having the chance to speak about mental health. It is also clear that they would like more chances to speak about it.

People with learning disabilities felt it was important to feel more in control talking about mental health and to have a voice in telling others what makes them feel good.

They would like to have more accessible information about mental health services. People want more funding for mental health services so they don't have to wait so long to get help and they can have more sessions with a psychologist's help.

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- This report will be sent out to all learning disability services in Lewisham with the handouts from the mental health day
- The report will be sent to managers in mental health services, Lewisham Council and general NHS managers
- We will send the report to Lewisham Healthwatch and to our local Mind group

- We will ask South London and Maudsley NHS trust if they have an easy read leaflet about mental health services that can be sent to people with learning disabilities. If they don't have a leaflet we will ask them to make one
- We will ask South London and Maudsley NHS trust to work with Lewisham Speaking Up to have another Mental Health Day in 2022
- We will share this report with organisations like Learning Disability England and the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities to help them campaign for better mental health support for people with learning disabilities
- We will also share this report with national mental health charities like Mind, so they can hear what people with learning disabilities say about mental health

The Lewisham People's Parliament Reps will be happy to meet with any health or social care bosses to talk about this report.

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report contact Marsh Stitchman [martin.stitchman@lsup.org.uk](mailto:martin.stitchman@lsup.org.uk)

[www.lsup.org.uk](http://www.lsup.org.uk)

July 2021

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