



USER VOICE AND PARTICIPATION

# Children's Mental Health Week 3rd - 9th February 2020

An interview with Freya,  
CAMHS Youth Advisor



# Children's Mental Health Week

This year children's mental health week will take place **3rd - 9th February 2020**. Set up by children's mental health charity Place2Be, this week shines a spotlight on the importance of children and young peoples mental health.

This years theme is Find Your Brave.



# Find Your Brave

**CAMHS Youth Advisors (CYA)** is a network of children and young people with experience of accessing emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Surrey.

CYA ensures children and young people have their voices heard to positively change and influence the services they access or have accessed. Freya recently opened **Surrey County Council's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Market Event** sharing her story and what she hoped future mental health services will look like for children and young people.

We asked **Freya** a few questions for Children's Mental Health Week!

# Children's Mental Health Week

Presenting to a large room of people is pretty nerve-wracking for most people but you stepped up to the mark! How did you feel when you were invited to present?

When I was first asked to speak at the launch event I was **really excited!** It felt like such a big opportunity, and a **chance to really make a difference in mental health services.** I'm so grateful for all the opportunities I've had in my life, but speaking at the EWMH launch event felt like a particularly big one!

I thought a lot about what I wanted to say to get my message across. It felt like quite a lot of pressure at first, because I sort of felt like I was being nominated 'mental health spokesperson' for all of the children and young people in Surrey, and I wanted to make sure I didn't miss anything out. In the end though, I realised that people wouldn't really care too much about hearing a perfectly polished, perfectly worded speech. I decided that I really just wanted to stand up and speak as Freya, because what sort of representative would I be if I wasn't speaking from the heart? The point of me being asked to open the EWMH event was to get across the voice of the 'young person', and **I can't speak for everyone in Surrey, but I can speak for me and hope that my experiences were enough to make people think.**

I don't think I realised at the time quite how **amazing an opportunity** it was, and that the things I said would then be used in a piece of policy. Looking back on it now, I think if I'd known beforehand what a big event it was going to be, I probably would have been a bit more worried about what I had to say, and whether it was enough to make the difference that needs to happen.

Feedback from the event was **really positive** though and **I'm so excited about all the changes** that have been happening to make mental health services more accessible to people who need them. I always love speaking at events like this, because the room is always full of **so many inspirational professionals,** and it really gives me **hope for the future of services,** and I definitely felt that at the launch event.

**WE'RE PROUD  
TO SUPPORT**



#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek

# Children's Mental Health Week

It's Children's Mental Health Awareness Week this week. It's difficult to choose I expect but what three things do you think would make the biggest difference to children and young people in Surrey who are experiencing mental health difficulties?

This really is a difficult one! I guess I'd say probably the top 3 things that would make a difference though would be:

**Tip top 1: Opportunities to do things outside of school** that we can get a sense of achievement from that don't involve numbers/grades/academic success. For me a big one was gymnastics, because I could see how my skills progressed because of my hard work, rather than my ability to remember a load of facts and write them down on an exam paper. I completely get that the education system is what it is for the moment, and so we have to work with that, but if there's a way to get a sense of achievement that doesn't have anything to do with school work I think that would be great.

**Tip top 2:** Remembering that, actually, **life can be really difficult sometimes, but there are ways to cope** with it. Having skills to deal with difficult situations built into schoolwork or PSHE sessions could help people to know how to handle the things life can throw at us.

**Tip top 3:** The third one is I think one of the most important for me, and that's **hearing stories of other people** who have struggled. The first person I properly felt able to open up to had shared her experiences of mental health difficulties, and so it made me feel like she understood, and like I wasn't on my own. Hearing how she struggled, but managed to get better and be happier really gave me hope. Mental illness can be really isolating, and so hearing stories of people who have not only gone through it, but also come out the other side, is so so powerful and can make a massive difference.



# Children's Mental Health Week

## How important is it to have a Children's Mental Health Awareness week?

Raising awareness of mental health is **so** important. It helps people be able to recognise difficulties within themselves as well as in the people around them, and know more about what to do when they notice struggles. I think it's even more important to **raise awareness of mental health for young people** because a lot of the time people can minimise the stresses they face. **Recognising signs and symptoms early can make such a difference**, and so by raising awareness we can help young people to get support before difficulties escalate, and so young people can experience positive mental health and hopefully carry that into their adult lives too.

It's a really good start having Children's Mental Health Awareness Week, but I wish it could be every week! I really hope that this week can spark some interesting conversations and get people talking about children's mental health, but I hope even more that the conversations keep going even once the week is up.



**'Everyone has mental health!'**

## Do you have any top tips to get people talking about mental health?

**Top tip 1:** I think it's also really important that people **share their own experiences** (if they feel able to!). Even one person talking about their experiences can really normalise it for all the other people around them, so makes it so much easier for everyone to open up. Never underestimate the difference one person can make.

**Top tip 2:** Making people aware of **how to respond if someone tells them they're struggling with their mental health**. This is even more important when talking about children's mental health, because the way an adult responds can have such a massive impact on how/if they talk to other people in the future.

**Top tip 3:** Remembering that **everyone has mental health!** Mental health doesn't always mean mental illness. You can feel sad without having depression, you can be anxious without having anxiety, and all emotions are okay emotions. If people can speak their feelings out loud, and recognise them for what they are (including happiness!), mental health can become much more normalised.

# Children's Mental Health Week

Do you have any top tips for being brave?

**Tip number 1:** I think for me, it's really important to remember that being **brave isn't about not being afraid**. It's about being afraid and doing it anyway. One of my favourite lines in a song is: **'hope is so much stronger than fear'** and that's really powerful for me. It's about remembering that as long as you have hope for something, you can push through the fear just enough to get it done.

**Tip number 2:** It's important to remember that being brave doesn't always have to be jumping straight into doing something terrifying. Often the bravest thing you can do is **ask for help**, and say "the thought of this really scares me. Please will you help me be able to do it?" Bravery doesn't have to mean doing something no matter what. It can mean adapting the scary thing to make it more doable, it can mean getting someone to support you in doing it, and bravery can also be knowing when to say enough is enough. I think one of the bravest things I've ever been able to do is ask for help, and know when I need to take some time just to look after myself. Society so often tells us that we have to push through no matter what, and actually knowing (and saying) when you need a time out is a really brave thing to do when society tells you not to.

**Tip number 3:** Another thing for me is **finding powerful role models**. I'm so lucky to have some incredible friends who inspire me every day with their courage and kindness. I aspire to be the sort of person that they are, and that really carries me through. When I'm not sure if I can do something, I try and think about making them proud. Often, even if I don't feel able to be brave for myself, I can be brave for other people, so thinking about them really helps. There are also some celebrities at the moment who I really look up to, in particular Jameela Jamil and Lucy Spraggan. They both used difficult things from their past to make a difference to other people who are struggling, and they inspire me to try my hardest to do the same.

I wish someone could tell me how to be brave if I'm honest, and I don't think I'd really consider myself a brave person. I'm just very determined. I think the desire for something will begin to outweigh the fear enough that you can do it afraid.

*'Hope is so much stronger than fear'*



# Children's Mental Health Week



You're now at University. What are your plans for the future (if you have any plans?)

That's a very big question! I've got a few ideas of what sort of career I might want to go into, but the main thing I want to do is **help people**. I've had so many incredible adults in my life, but I'm really aware that lots of young people aren't that lucky. I think my main goal is to be the type adult for someone else that I've had in my life.

I'd also love to be able to **make a difference** from a higher level in terms of policy-making and governmental work, but I know that's a really difficult field to get into, so I'd probably have to work my way up! It's something I'm really passionate about because I know how important it is, so I'd say that's probably the ultimate goal career-wise.

**FIND YOUR  
BRAVE**

#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek



*The User Voice and Participation Team would like to say a huge thankyou to Freya!*



USER VOICE AND PARTICIPATION

For more information about [CYA](#) or [The User Voice and Participation Team](#) please contact us at [user.voice@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:user.voice@surreycc.gov.uk)