

Editorial

Jerome Carson

Welcome to a new issue of *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*. We have nine exciting papers in this issue

The first paper is from Professor Alec Grant. As he points out, Alec has decades of experience supervising and mentoring in the exciting comparatively new field of autoethnography. It is an area I was introduced to by one of my students at the time, Robert Hurst, who is now a lecturing colleague. Alec points out that “Autoethnography connects the autobiographical and personal, with the cultural and social”. He says it aims for more emotional and human connection. “Importantly, it enables researchers, practitioners and readers to address and connect with what it feels like [...] to be alive and moving along lived through experiences”. His haunting description of “Dash meets Peg, Peg meets Dash [...]” may well be one of the most evocative pieces of autoethnographic writing ever penned. Hopefully this paper will persuade our readers to consider writing an autoethnographic account of their own. Collaborative autoethnography is another possibility. Alec ends with a checklist of 14 points for the neophyte autoethnographer to consider when writing a single-authored or collaborative piece.

The next paper addresses the important role of music in social projects and is authored by Professor Oscar Odena. In this paper, Oscar shows how music can be used as a tool to increase inclusion and improve wellbeing. He presents two case studies, one from Brazil, the other from Colombia. The Brazilian project, “Barrio de Juventude”, is based in the city of Criciuna. The project involves 1,500 children and young people, and loans instruments to young people, so they can practice at home. The second project uses “sound postcards” to depict the sounds of neighbourhoods, combined with life histories. Oscar suggests that both projects lead to improvements in both inclusion and well-being.

The third paper also has an international focus. It features the inventor of “Laughter Yoga”, Dr Madan Kataria from India, interviewed by Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky from Monaco and Ros Ben-Moshe from Australia. In the case study, Dr Kataria reminds us that as children we probably laughed 300–400 times a day. Clearly something most of us have forgotten! Frustrated by his own lack of success in business, Dr Kataria went to a local park and told people he wanted to start a “laughter club”. The group started off by telling jokes, until they ran out of jokes! Dr Kataria claimed he would find a breakthrough on “how to laugh without telling jokes”. He hit on the idea of getting people to laugh without humour or as he states, “We can fake it until we make it”. In a group setting he found that laughter was contagious. He then started creating laughter exercises. This was the start of “Laughter Yoga”, now a worldwide movement. Dr Kataria also speaks about the benefits for mental health. As he points out, “All the major chemicals we call happy hormones, dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins are released as a result of laughter. These are main chemicals which help change mood states”. Laughter releases them.

From laughter the mood changes to suicide and a short paper from Professor David Lester, one of the world’s leading “suicidologists”. David describes how coming across *Clues to Suicide*, by Edwin Schneidman and Norman Farberow, caught his attention while he was a student at Cambridge. Years later when asked what topic he would choose for his PhD studies, he chose suicide, “[...] because of that book”. He confesses that he has experienced depression and contemplated suicide himself on three occasions following

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breakups in romantic relationships. Since becoming an academic he has published over 3,000 papers. For several years he set out to read every single book and paper that had ever been written on the topic of suicide since 1897, the year that Durkheim's seminal text was published. He eventually stopped as the volume of papers was too great for him to read every one. He tells us he has published over 100 papers with his students. This is a fascinating brief account of a life spent researching suicide.

The fifth paper is from Angela Woods, Ben Hughes and Joanne Dickinson. It addresses the perennial problem of homelessness. Reviewing many of the estimates used to gauge the extent of the homelessness problem the authors suggest that "[...] the actual number of homeless and rough sleeping could be significantly greater than official figures suggest". People who are homeless are 50 times more likely to die from hepatitis C and 34 times more likely to have tuberculosis. They are also more likely to die from drug misuse and nine times more likely to take their own lives. The average age of death is 44 for men and 42 for women! In the paper, the authors share the work they are doing with the Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, Bolton Council and Urban Outreach, to try and achieve better co-ordination between agencies.

Moving from the needs of the homeless to the mental health needs of older men, Dr Barrie Green tells us about "The Lawnmower Appreciation Society". This is in the context of a number of similar initiatives to try and improve the mental health of men, such as "Men in Sheds" and "Andy's Man Club". The group Barrie describes "grew organically" from a local walking football group. As Barrie points out many of their members are retired and experiencing a diminishing social circle after finishing work. Barrie gives two examples of men, one a skilled footballer, who was now experiencing chronic depression and another man who broke down in the group when talking about his heart condition. As Barrie says, this second man was regarded as "the strong one" of the group. Seeing him weep Barrie notes, "It was as if a bomb had gone off in the room, proving that one should never make presumptions about others".

Paper seven is from Dr Melvin Bradley, a member of the journal's editorial board. Melvin runs a community mental health service. Every year he comes to talk to our final year Psychology students about the social construction of mental illness, the topic of this paper. As he comments, "My views about mental health are quite controversial. I mean I do not believe the brain chemistry and gene theories". This is especially interesting as Melvin trained as a chemist! In the paper he gives a scholarly overview of critical psychiatry, the service user movement, relativism, pluralism, social constructionism, language and the problem with medical models. While I have often held to the view that we do not actually know the causes of mental illness, Melvin is not so unsure. He states, "[...] we do know the main causes, they are societal and psychological and most likely not biological or medical and they are around us and with us every day".

The penultimate paper in this issue is from Lewis Coates. He shares his experience of life at a sixth form college. He eloquently describes the challenges facing 16- to 18-year-olds, which for him he stated as, "I was beginning to feel the sword of Damocles as always dangling just above my head". He felt he was forced into making the wrong choice of subject at university. This "calamitous" choice caused despair and led him to walk in front of a car. A meeting with the university counsellor "[...] changed his life". He was at last able to open up about all the stresses and pressures he had been under. He left university and returned to sixth form college and was able to take up a place studying Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University, a year later. Stress amongst sixth formers became the topic of his MSc and now his PhD. He ends his paper with a number of suggestions for sixth formers to manage this difficult stage of educational life.

The final paper in this issue is in the Remarkable Lives series, now curated by Robert Hurst. It features a wonderful narrative from Kirsty Lilley. Her ability to express herself through writing

is second to none. In the biography section of her paper, she makes the following comments about mental health services. “I have received little from traditional mental health services, instead finding comfort in friendships, allies, art, literature, spiritual explorations and my own desire to survive and make some sense of my life”. She goes on to give her description of what trust means to her. “Learning to trust is a vital investment in the future if we are to have any, free from the bitterness that cynicism brings and only the bravest of souls can take it by the hand and walk forward”. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find words to accurately portray the poetic beauty in Kirsty’s words.

One issue, nine papers covering a wide variety of topics. The first paper was from Professor Alec Grant. Fittingly the last paper was from Kirsty Lilley. It was Alec who introduced Kirsty to Robert and myself. The issue has come full circle.

Professor Jerome Carson
Editor-in-Chief