



University of Edinburgh Mental Health Awareness

By Eilidh Campbell; Iona Grant; Emma Lambert and Hana Nasser for Scottish Hockey's Lead the Way programme.

Everyone in the world has mental health and everyone's mental health will fluctuate at different points in their life. The University of Edinburgh's Women's Hockey Club has worked hard to create a safe space where members can feel comfortable to discuss their mental health. It is important to increase the awareness of mental health and break down the stigma surrounding it, by allowing conversations to be had in a safe and understanding environment. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a lot of uncertainty to people's lives, and this includes the impact on people's mental health. As a club we have implemented a range of support systems/services and activities to try and help our members deal with the difficult circumstance we are all facing. It is not about solving everyone's struggles, but providing an environment in which people feel comfortable, and giving them the facilities and opportunities to reach out for help if they need them.

What we have done

- 1. We implemented a Welfare and Inclusivity officer to our committee 2019 which has subsequently expanded to a welfare team this year and an executive position as of 2021.**

Initially, our welfare officer role existed as part of our charities role. However, with an ever growing need for mental health support and mental health awareness it was decided that this role needed to be a role in itself as it was too demanding in addition to another role. This year has been the first year that the welfare secretary has been its own position on committee and it has been BUSY. The role of our

welfare officer isn't to fix problems but it is a point of contact for members to receive support and information for those who need it. A large part of my role is to signpost people to appropriate services and promote services that are available. Furthermore, my role as welfare officer helps to bridge the gap towards seeking professional help. With a welfare officer, people can approach a face that they know and recognise and know are willing to help. I can signpost them to appropriate services that they may find useful or I can just lend an ear to listen. In my role I also direct captains or concerned friends to support and pass on the training and knowledge that I have received through this role to help other members in the club to help others. However, my role is not only for those who are struggling, it is very much necessary when I hear of nobody struggling at all. Everybody has mental health, and everybody will experience times where their circumstances cause their mental health to suffer. Regardless of peoples circumstance it is my role to ensure that everyone's well being is looked after which has been a particular concern this year. Encouraging self care, and reminding members to look after their wellbeing as a priority at university is a really fundamental part of my role as it is so easy to get wrapped up in the day's stresses and put your well-being second. Among others, topics surrounding mental health, sexuality and race are often overlooked and having a welfare and inclusivity officer within the club helps to ensure that minority groups feel supported. This role has opened up different training programmes to me such as gender based violence, mental health first aid and coping with stress. These sessions provided me with transferable skills that you can take forward and apply to a number of situations in life.

2. **People of Edinburgh** (Found on our Facebook Page - Edinburgh University Womens Hockey Club - <https://www.facebook.com/EUWHC> Instagram Page - <https://www.instagram.com/euwhc/>)

The People of Edinburgh was initiated by Hana Nasser, another member of the Lead the Way programme and EUWHC alumni. The initiative aims to break down

barriers surrounding mental health stigma, and open the conversation up about how sport and hockey can impact our health with members both past and present. This is what Hana wrote about the People of Edinburgh initiative:

“Sport related posts on instagram are always about the endpoint and never about the journey. Every athlete’s journeys have highs and lows and I think it’s really important to acknowledge and talk about these.”

“A lot of people suffer in silence and I was keen to provide a platform which will start a conversation around mental health and normalise these highs and lows. I put this idea together to create a space for individuals to share their journeys, either anonymously or with their name. I hope that people can read these posts, relate to them and offer them the boost they need to continue, or start, their journey and reap all the benefits sport provides to our mental health”

The People of Edinburgh campaign is now a component of our Welfare and Inclusivity officer committee role to help facilitate the break down of barriers and stigma surrounding mental health.

3. Move for the Mind

Move for the mind was an initiative set up by our Welfare, Charities, and club secretary. The aim behind it was to motivate everyone to get moving and get outside to help their mental health. We created a competitive dimension to it which helped a competitive group of girls clock up the kilometres to help their team win most ‘moved’ in a set period of time. Everyday was groundhog day in lockdown and it’s easy to succumb to the sofa, stay inside and not do anything which can be extremely detrimental to mental health, where people lack purpose and drive. This competition gave people a task of the day and a sense of community to take part in which had a beneficial impact on many members’ mental health. Many similar initiatives have been undertaken across clubs which is so great to see, but lockdown isn’t over yet so you still have the opportunity to get moving!

4. Isolation Motivation

Whilst 'Move for the Mind' was a great initiative benefiting the mental health of the majority of members in our club, where people were not at all motivated to exercise, or inhibited by injury or weather, it did not capture them as well. The isolation motivation initiative allowed people to share different hobbies, skills or talents they were doing which helped create a portfolio of different past times people could try out. These included jewellery making, juggling, crochet and making your own clothes!! We also allowed members to post recommendations for good books and tv programmes. This gave people who were not motivated by or couldn't take part in exercising other ideas to pass the time throughout lockdown.

5. Team based activities

With lockdown and social distancing being a main theme of our 2020/21 season, we have moved many of our activities online. We have replaced our usual training sessions to zoom workouts, where we do a variety of home workouts including HIIT, strength, yoga and Zumba! The aim of these workouts is to give people more structure and routine, while also continuing to keep up fitness. Exercising is so important for people's mental health and so encouraging people to attend these workouts can be very beneficial, and gives us a chance to interact with our team. We also hold online socials every two weeks, we have done a number of activities such as; bake-offs, cook-alongs, cocktail making nights, pub quizzes, book clubs, netflix parties and many more. This has been important in getting to know each other better, which is especially important for our new members and also gives an opportunity to see who is engaging. Another initiative we started was 'families' that were created within teams. The aim of 'families' was to have smaller groups to provide an outlet, where people may feel more comfortable speaking. We also used these to provide support for people who were self-isolating, such as delivering shopping and medicines. We found that families helped to get more involved and an opportunity to lean on people for support when it was needed. Although we

often did these activities within our teams, we sometimes combined teams, providing an opportunity to interact with other members of the club.

Key Driver

- We are fortunate, as university students, to be in an environment that is becoming increasingly open in discussing mental health and how it can impact people, in very different ways and to different degrees. However, we believe this conversation can go even further. Our key driver has been our members and committee members who have noticed a need for extra support and safe spaces, and have found themselves on a platform to provide this, by starting initiatives and support systems. Being in a hockey club is like being part of a community, and we found that we could use this to our advantage, and use our team mates, coaches and officials to help provide a safe and open e
- In terms of mental health, members can be too scared or intimidated to seek professional help, or admit they need to go to counselling but they feel they need to tell someone. Implementing the welfare role facilitates these conversations to be had and creates a point of contact for club members who need to talk to someone. It differentiates from a captain as it is someone who has gone for the role, someone who is interested and understands difficulties faced. This person is not expected to solve problems but to direct and promote the services available. It is to encourage people to talk about issues regarding their wellbeing and their mental health, and that it is an accepted and welcome part of the club.
- In terms of diversity, the welfare and inclusivity officer helps to support minority groups and make them feel included and welcome in the club and help support members

Impact on People

The most important part of all these initiatives is to help and support people. We conducted a survey

(<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1sebexZF9j4GzWGZYP3CeENJu9IKO0Y0PS92TNuW-jSw/edit>) in order to try to learn more about the impact on people. We had some very

positive responses which highlights the importance of raising awareness. Our main aim with People of Edinburgh is to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. In doing this many of our members have said that as well as finding comfort in reading them, writing their own is a great way to express their feelings:

- 'The people of Edinburgh initiative has been really interesting to follow, and has reassured me that if I were to have a problem that EUWHC would be there!'
- 'It's reassuring that other people are going through it too and that also hockey did help them loads.'
- People of Edinburgh, I appreciate reading everyone's responses, and found righting my own really beneficial.
- 'Makes your emotions feel more valid And shows you're not alone.'

Having a welfare officer is important in providing a point of contact if a member is in need of a chat, or someone to direct that person to the help you need. Many people commented that although they themselves may not need help it is reassuring to know there is someone there if your needs change:

- "Comforting knowing someone is there to chat!"
- "The fact that there is a club welfare officer shows how great the club has been at supporting the mental health of its members."
- "Doesn't make asking for support intimidating."
- "Our welfare secretaries over the last couple of years have been phenomenal in promoting a healthy wellbeing environment throughout the club."
- "Creates a great environment for sharing."
- "Create more visibility for mental health issues and help to tackle the stigma surrounding them."

- “I think it’s so important to realise that pretty much everyone has stuff going on with their lives that you probably don’t know about and it’s nice that the club and People of Edinburgh provides a space where people feel comfortable and valued enough to share their experiences.”
- “The posts on IG/Facebook are very helpful in signposting helplines, and support systems”

Creating club challenges, and regular online workouts and socials has been a great way to keep connections going and help create a routine and structure to people’s days, especially important during these uncertain times.

- “I really enjoyed the move for the mind challenges we’ve done as a club in the first lockdown that gave me the perfect excuse to get out the house and have a bit of time to just forget everything and be outdoors”
- “Move for the mind, regular zoom workouts have also been really good in supporting my mental health!”
- “Zoom workouts have been great, really help motivate me to workout and give my day more structure.”
- “Workouts and move for the mind have been great over lockdown for keeping routine, seeing others doing something similar, and getting the endorphins flowing!!!”
- “Move for mind really gave me motivation to leave the house during lockdown 1, which was crucial for my mental health.”

What your club can do

1. **Consider creating a welfare officer position;** this person can become a distinct point of call, provide a safe environment to chat, and can direct people and promote relevant resources available. This can provide a step forward in making sure your club is as welcoming and inclusive to everyone regardless of their sexuality, race, ethnicity.

2. **Improve the awareness of mental health;** Open up the conversation. Everyone is impacted by mental health at different points and to differing degrees, but by encouraging people to share their experiences, if they feel comfortable doing so, is a great way to start the conversation.
3. **Don't assume;** make your club members aware of who around them they can contact if needed. We can often assume that members will know what to do, however it is important to ensure that everyone is aware of how they can reach out.
4. **Create support systems;** these may be within teams or as a whole but you could create small groups where people can chat and lean on each other for support if needed.
5. **During lockdown, encourage exercise and getting fresh air by creating team challenges;** exercising can have a very positive impact on people's mental health. By creating a challenge, this can provide motivation and is also a great way of bonding teams/clubs by working towards a common goal.

Impact for Club:

Our club has had a positive impact from all of these initiatives. We added our welfare role before the Covid-19 pandemic and we have found this role to be a huge asset to our club. We want these impacts to continue into the future, especially taking on the lessons we have learnt through this pandemic. We have made the decision to develop our single welfare role into a welfare committee, adding two new diversity reps.

We have also added in two first year reps who will help bridge the communication gap between new members and the rest of the club. This will help to improve our club environment and allow our members to get the most out of it.

Our aim is to continue our work to increase the awareness of mental health and how sports, such as hockey can positively impact it. We aim to create a club environment that can both succeed in the sport, allowing elite to recreational athletes to improve and perform, but also foster an environment where the sport can make a real change to people's lives.

- **Real benefit - now having diversity reps and first year reps - future aims and objectives (Post-covid), what has worked now that will carry on.**
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What the welfare role is

Having a welfare role within the club has massively improved our hockey community. It generates a network of support outside an individual's team and helps to unify the club as a whole. It gives all our club members direct contact for further information and support for their mental health.

Importantly, through sharing resources and facilitating conversations around mental health, and our People of Edinburgh campaign, we are improving our members' awareness of different mental health difficulties that individuals face. Members have commented on how this reminds them that we don't know what someone is going through and to always be sensitive and compassionate to those around them. Slowly starting to normalise these conversations has helped to encourage more people to talk about their own mental health and their experiences with their mental health- a further reminder to everyone that no one is suffering alone.

The welfare role has been absolutely essential in enabling this to happen through sharing resources, encouraging, initiating and enabling conversations about mental health and developing and expanding our people of Edinburgh campaign. Furthermore, having a welfare role has improved awareness of different difficulties faced by marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+ and BAME members. We have focused on dedicating time to celebrating and uplifting marginalised voices by celebrating Black History and LGBTQ+ history month. This has been a large task for one individual to take on, and as such a large club we recognised that aspects of this role were too much for one individual to take on, and carry out effectively. So we have expanded the welfare role into a welfare subcommittee consisting of 2 first year representative roles and 2 diversity representative roles.

We recognised that individuals whose first year in the club it was may struggle to approach a senior member with personal problems, and may find that they are more comfortable approaching someone who is in similar position to them. Furthermore, we thought that this would help to create a community within first year members to help them all get to know one another better.

Furthermore, making our club more inclusive and accessible to everyone is of paramount importance to us. We wanted to make sure we invest more time into uplifting and celebrating minority groups and are more sensitive to the difficulties that these individuals face. Consequently, we introduced 2 diversity representatives to work with our welfare security to ensure that all members in our clubs are having their needs met and that ALL of our members feel supported and welcome within our club.