

Men and mental health

how Parabl can help break down the barriers



Adam's story

My name is Adam and I'm 35 years old. I have had anxiety for as long as I can remember.

Of course, as a man, I didn't discuss this with anyone. No-one! No-one could see how I felt or what I thought. Men don't express their feelings. Men don't cry. We should be strong. We should be able to cope with everything.

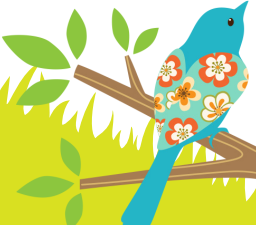

Because I didn't want to admit to myself I was struggling, it took me a few months to ring Parabl. But it was the best thing I ever did! They made me feel supported straight away. The telephone assessment — which I initially dreaded, for

fear of talking to someone — was honestly one of the best experiences of my life. It was the first time I felt able to be me. To be real. To talk about what I felt and thought without feeling less of a man.

Attending counselling initially made me feel anxious, but once I had completed my first session I knew it was right for me. I couldn't believe how comfortable I felt. Me — talking! Talking about my feelings! I would never have believed it.

I have now completed my counselling and I can't praise my counsellor enough. She was there with me throughout the whole process, never once judging me or making me feel stupid or silly. I have never felt so listened to in all my life.

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Parabl Talking Therapy service provides short-term therapeutic interventions for individuals facing common mental health difficulties or challenging life events which may impact their emotional well being

www.parabl.org.uk 0300 777 2257

Pleased to meet you...



MY NAME IS CHRISTINE and I have worked as an administrator at Parabl since 2014.

My main role is to take the initial referral from people calling our service. I am the first contact people who want to access Parabl will have. For the majority of people making that initial phone call, it can be very daunting — but I pride myself on answering every call as if it were my first.

I have spoken to a very diverse range of callers — some sad, some anxious and some funny, but every one of them looking for support. Mental health troubles can touch anyone's life in one way or another, mine included. I hope that I bring my own life experience to the service in an empathetic way, but the most valuable thing I can offer anybody who calls Parabl is to listen.

I am proud to be part of a much-needed and valuable service. I am part of a fantastic team of people.

The one thing I would like to do above all is to encourage people to seek the support they need. Let's get rid of the stigma surrounding mental health.

Make the phone call — it could be the call that makes the difference.

making the most of mindfulness

a newcomer's perspective



I HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN underwhelmed by an impersonal approach to depression... and commonly prescribed drugs tended to flat-line my emotional response to life. Surely there must be an alternative?

The Parabl eight-week mindfulness course offered an opportunity to develop a better understanding of the technique and to explore a wholly different approach to episodes of depression.

The course has a casual, group structure. Comments by others helped me broaden my understanding, and it was comforting to know that many had had similar experiences. Importantly, the group practice of the mindfulness exercises really brought the black-letter theory to life.

A couple of cathartic moments opened my eyes to some of my unhelpful behaviours and have put me on the path to a fundamentally different approach to problems — whether the challenges of winter and the onset of SAD, or in adjusting my response to harmful thought patterns before they have a negative effect on me.

All-in-all I now feel more positive, calmer and better-equipped to cope with life's challenges.

Before the course I read various articles on the web and borrowed a helpful text. This meant that I was familiar with many of the basic concepts and could use the course to deepen my understanding. I would recommend background reading as a highly valuable pre-course investment.

Where & When

MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE anxiety, low mood, stress, poor self-esteem, or worry. Coping with these emotions can affect people's self-confidence and create difficulties in their life.

Parabl groups are designed to help you understand what's going on, and make positive changes. Each course uses tried and tested Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approaches and are run by skilled and experienced facilitators.

What can I expect?

You'll be part of a small group of between eight and 12 people experiencing similar difficulties, and will learn together the skills that will enable you to take control of your life and pursue goals in a non-threatening, non-judgemental, friendly and informal atmosphere.

There are a wide range of courses run throughout North Wales.

Mindfulness

Conwy
Begins April 2016 | details TBC | induction, plus eight sessions
Venue: 3 Trinity Square, Llandudno

Denbighshire
Begins February 2016 | details TBC | induction, plus eight sessions
Venue: Station Court, Colwyn Bay

Gwynedd
Begins April/May 2016 | details and duration TBC
Venue: Caernarfon

Wrexham
Begins January 14, 2016 | 6.30pm to 9pm | six sessions
Venue: 3 Belmont Road, Wrexham

Ynys Môn
Begins April/May 2016 | details TBC
Venue: Llangefni

Coping With Life

Gwynedd — Assertiveness
Begins January 14, 2016 | 10am to 12 noon | seven sessions
Venue: Celtic Royal, Caernarfon

Gwynedd — Building Self Esteem
Begins April 21, 2016 | 10am to 12 noon | seven sessions
Venue: Celtic Royal, Caernarfon

Ynys Môn — Assertiveness
Begins January 13, 2016 | 10am to 12 noon | seven sessions
Venue: Bull Hotel, Llangefni

Ynys Môn — Building Self Esteem
Begins April 20, 2016 | 10am to 12 noon | seven sessions
Venue: Bull Hotel, Llangefni

Stress Management

Flintshire
Begins January 5, 2016 | 6pm to 8pm | seven sessions
Venue: Connah's Quay Town Hall

Flintshire
Begins February 10, 2016 | 6pm to 8pm | seven sessions
Venue: Bethel Chapel, New St, Mold

Wrexham
Begins January 18, 2016 | 6pm to 8pm | six sessions
Venue: St Mary's CC Club, Wrexham

Visit www.parabl.org for up-to-date group information or to find out more

Getting men talking: how to work smart



Phil Griffiths Tan y Maen

I HAVE A CONFESSION: I haven't been to the doctor for more than three years. I justify this by telling myself that I'm not broke and don't need fixing — but, being over 50 and working in healthcare, I should know better. GP practices offer a great deal of preventative care to men in my position, and I should take up the opportunity.

I know I am not alone. Take-up of physical and mental healthcare services by men is notoriously low.

The suicide rate in UK men aged between 40 and 44 is three-and-a-half times that of women, and almost double the equivalent rate in 1981. More than 4,500 men completed suicide in the UK in 2012, or just over 18 per 100,000. The figures for self-harm in the UK show even greater disparity, with only 2% of those seeking support for self-harm issues being male.

Barriers to men

The Parabl Talking Therapies Service currently sees two women for every male referral. This experience is common throughout mental health and emotional support services.

Given the rates of male suicide it's clearly not that men don't need the support available. But what is obvious is that there are barriers to men seeking support which do not apply to women. So can we identify some of these, and how can services like Parabl encourage more men to seek support when they are struggling?

I have one qualification to start this process: I am a man. So why don't I go to see the GP, or other support services, more often?

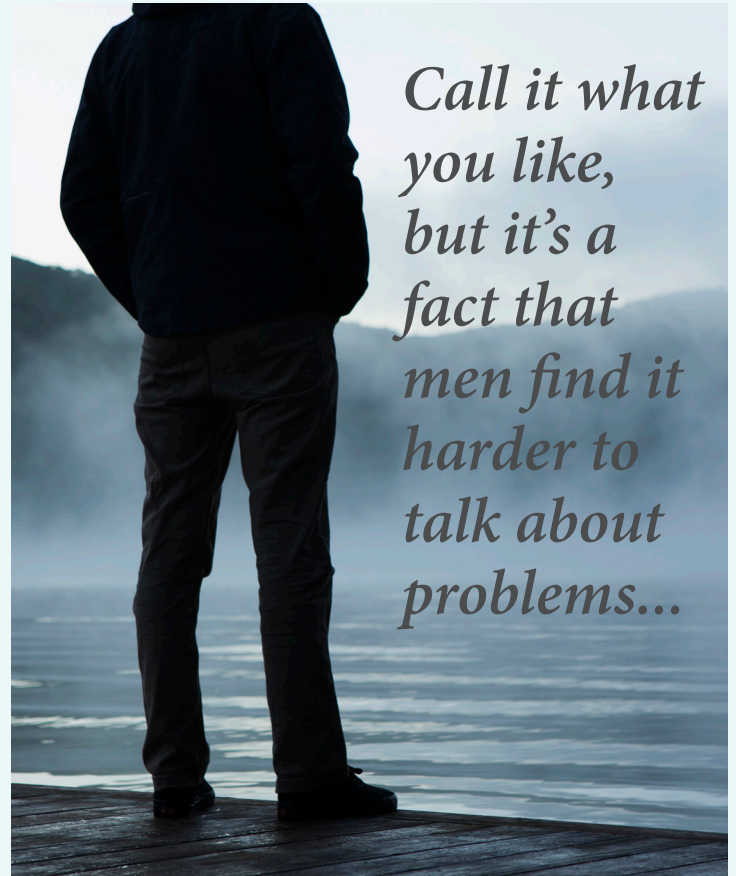
For me, it's a lack of convenience. I work most days, and surgeries and services don't tend to be open outside of these hours. If they were more readily available at a time to suit me then this would make engaging easier.

But for many men there is another barrier — that the individual could be perceived as 'weak'. Am I willing to share the fact that I am struggling with life and show to others that I too am vulnerable? It is this which seems to be more difficult for men than it is for women. Call it cultural machismo, superman syndrome, or whatever you like: but it's a fact that men find it harder to talk about their problems than women.

Tackling the stigma

So what can we do as a society and as a sector to tackle this stigma?

- From a young age, we teach boys to believe that expressing their emotions is unmasculine. We need to overcome the idea that big boys don't cry, and must work with schools to show that boys don't need to be 'macho' to gain respect from others — male or female.



- We need to make services more male-friendly with more male workers and volunteers — so when men seek support they don't find a women-only environment and conclude that these services are not meant for them.
- We must examine the ways in which men receive informal support from other men — and get our message out through heart and stroke wards, working men's clubs, physical activity and sports clubs, pubs, courts, prisons and other areas of society where male involvement is high.
- Most importantly, we have to be proactive in recognising the signs of male distress — including drinking, drug taking, overeating, social withdrawal, aggression and risk-taking behaviours — and seize the opportunities to refer men to services which can support their needs.

Parabl has male assessors and counsellors, my own service employs male workers to run courses and take Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy sessions, and we have good links with organisations like Men's Sheds and Change Step for onward referrals.

Welsh deaths from suicide reached an all-time high in 2013, and to reduce that number will be a big challenge. But by working together — and working smarter — we can make our services more male-friendly and improve male mental health.



Andrea Hughes

RECENTLY, I WAS INVITED to deliver a presentation about Talking Heads by the six partners behind Parabl.

They were very warm and welcoming, and during our meeting I was able to give an overview of how the Talking Heads group was established in January 2014. Members — who are all service users and carers — meet on quarterly basis in a central venue. Since then, we have collaborated with the delivery partners to monitor and further develop Parabl, and have got involved in wide range of other work and activities.

Working together

We all joined the group to boost our own confidence and to make a difference — because we believe that we can fight against stigma and change the way mental health is perceived by working together. Our members come from a diverse range of backgrounds, deepening the knowledge and insight available to the group and the Parabl partners.

Our committed members have made valuable contributions and highlighted areas of need, such as the low number of males taking advantage of the service.

Talking Heads therefore hopes to expand its objectives — and I asked the partners about several future opportunities, including:

- developing presentations on behalf of Parabl;
- delivering presentations to external organisations to target particular groups, for example males;
- promoting the group more widely across North Wales;
- presenting our work during the final session of the various Parabl groups, and enabling continued involvement;
- helping more rural group members access support;
- including a service user or carer representing Talking Heads on steering groups, meetings or forums, and during engagement with health authorities and the Welsh Government;
- marketing the service by manning Parabl stalls at events and conferences; and,
- examining the potential of setting up Parabl service user feedback groups.

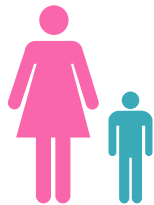
We hope this will be the start of a bright future for Talking Heads. For more information on our work, please contact 01745 816 711 or admin@unllais.co.uk.

How are we doing?

Since the project began in April 2013, Parabl has received more than **8,300** referrals. In the three months from July to September, we received **978** referrals. Of these:



841 were 'self referrals'



625 were female
353 were male



The average age was 41



"The support offered has been **invaluable** and has helped me at a very difficult time in my life."

"I think the service you have provided me with is **absolutely exemplary.**"

"A very welcome intervention at a time when **the smallest problem seemed to be gigantic.**"

"Having the time to discuss issues with **an impartial pair of ears** was both timely and very well appreciated."

Referrals by area

166 Conwy

150 Denbighshire

240 Flintshire

144 Gwynedd

191 Wrexham

87 Ynys Môn



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

