

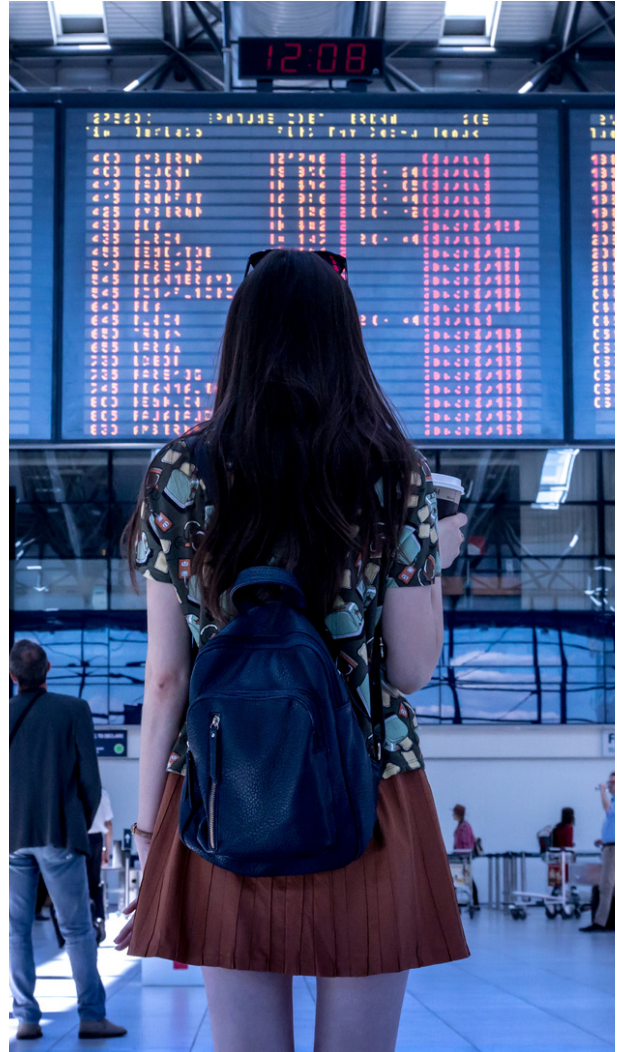
SATURDAY 11TH NOV 2023

With Lavinia Donling

ROMAN KEMP RAISING AWARENESS

Roman Kemp has launched a program raising awareness of young people's plights in gaining access to mental health services. He feels very strongly that every school should be offering mental health services. Whilst this is to be applauded, I am pretty sure you do not have to go far to speak with a young person to find out what is available at their school. Most schools have counseling, but there is usually a lengthy waiting list. More and more schools have places to go to when it gets too much where there is support, and there is generally a Pastoral Lead with most, if not all, secondary schools. Some primary schools even have their own therapy dog. What is the need then for Roman to insist we need care in every school, when clearly there is something being provided? I know when I worked in

Surrey, each of the five areas had their own dedicated mental health nurse going into schools to provide one to two hours a month liaison work. There are many charities and after school clubs up and down the country providing support, with much of it in and around mental health support with the likes of Bridging the Gap in Derby, and Bridging the Gap together in Weston-Super-Mare. I do feel though that looking after our mental health starts in the home environment. Whilst many of us are blasé about this, as we are about our physical health, it only comes to our attention when it becomes a problem. Parents know their children better than anyone, and it is very much looking out for one another in the family with regards to our mental health. Poor sleep, poor appetite, seeking reassurance, withdrawing from family activities, looking sad, withdrawn or unhappy, are clues that something really is not right. There may be bigger clues such as food restriction, not being able to sleep at night, running away, stealing money or alcohol, self-harming, increasing detentions or exclusions, and endless complaints from school.



For some parents, their children take increasing risks to suggest they are really struggling with their life on a daily basis. Young people refusing to get dressed, begging to not be taken to school, threatening to cut or kill themselves using a knife from the kitchen, attempting to jump out of a car en route to school, attempting to jump from a 1st floor window or roof, attempting to strangle or hang themselves, scratching their skin or face till it bleeds, cutting their legs, arms, thighs or torso. The list is endless and sometimes parents are unaware of these actions until it becomes a crisis. Invariably, many of these parents have attempted to be referred to CAMHS, and, for some parents, many times, but often the referrals are rejected with the reasons given that their child 'does not meet the threshold', or that 'it is not a mental health issue', or 'this is a school issue'. Even when I worked in CAMHS, my colleagues reasoning never seemed consistent with each clinician and collectively right up to managerial level. My stance was every referral needed measured consideration - if it was anything to do with neuro-diversity, I would always make a further appointment with them and screen them to point them in the right direction of the likes of the National Autistic Society, and other specialist charities knowing it would be 'flat no' from CAMHS.

However, if the risk was high with a young person being in so much distress of self-harming or suicidal attempts, regardless of whether they were presenting as neuro-diverse, then I would add them to the list where they would be continued to be monitored until an assessment appointment became available, often trying to do it myself, although my colleagues in my last job often handed these cases over to me. Some young people were still discharged, and there was a very nasty rumour amongst parents that suggested a back door entry to CAMHS was to go through A&E. This raised expectations that only had parents even more frustrated and worried, as, more often than not, young people would be seen by A&E and referred to CAMHS who would then discharge. It is frustrating for all concerned, I am sure, but the fear around trying to keep your child alive can sometimes be overwhelming, or leaving parents resigned to nothing changing and hoping their vigilance keeps their child alive. Some of you, especially those of you who live in Devon, may have read in the news recently of Tifa who ended her life in her bedroom a couple of weeks ago. Tifa was neuro-diverse, with her Mum an active advocate in raising awareness around PDA, but with several rejections by CAMHS. This is hard, because Tifa, was not in mainstream education, but she suffered with poor mental health. PDA is crippling anxiety on top of other anxieties. It is important to remember this, because we need to be able to understand a baseline of our child's mental health, as well as when they experience general anxiety to then understand the increased anxiety as they become unwell. Sometimes, this is really hard to consider, especially if we do not understand, know or appreciate how our own mental health presents.

This weekend is Remembrance Sunday where we reflect on those Veterans and those who lost their lives to war served to protect our country. It would appear that some people do not support this, if the news is to be believed, but, for many associated with the three military services in the UK, this is an important date on the calendar every year. We have lost many Veterans to the World Wars now, but this should not stop us remembering how the challenging those times were in trying to survive from others who felt it was their right to invade. Fighting with weapons has never been on my



agenda, and I get very distressed, due to my Autism, when there is screaming, shouting, fighting, and distress going on either on tv or real life, so I cannot begin to imagine what it must be like for those Veterans who had to endure this when they were out fighting to serve and protect our nation, or other friendly nations that we are showing allegiance to. I honestly believe that the individuals involved in those times must have been overwhelmingly challenged with their mental health, and surely will have long term effects on their daily living.

P R E P A R I N G F O R W I N T E R

This week, the weather is due to turn. John informed me that today is supposed to be the last day of sunshine for some days. I have been out in the garden all day, sorting the leaves into piles, weeding in preparation for our roses (that we brought down from Wales) to be planted, rearranging flower boxes in preparation for the writing shack, filling all the birdfeeders, and finishing off the painting of the podcast studio (one of the new microphones arrived today, which is exciting). All of these activities have given me time to think and process with the coming week. There is so much to be done with regards to raising awareness around our mental health, and it needs thinking time. Being out in the sunshine in autumn is lovely, even though the leaves are being dropped in preparation for winter.



So, have a lovely weekend everyone!

Lavinia