

A Voice from Young people

Issue 1

Winter Edition: January 2014

Why are we doing this?

"To give, to give
back and to take
myself forward"

"Ways to help
improve the CAMHS
service for young
people using a
young person's
point of view"

"There is a gap
in the service
that is in need
of our voices-
we're filling
that gap"

What have we done?

- Theatre
Projects
- Employing
Staff
- Training
Staff
- Inpatient
Visit
- New Unit
- Conference

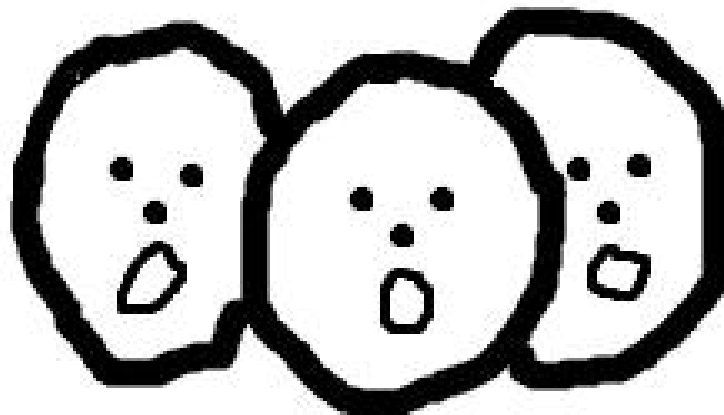
The voices
Orla Blakelock
Tumi Adepegba
Rashaun Pacquette

Who are we?

Hi! We're **Orla, Tumi** and **Rashaun** and we have written this newsletter together to tell you about the various projects we have done as Youth Advisors for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (**CAMHS**) in the last few years.

Whilst using CAMHS services, we each took part in theatre projects, and from there became involved in giving our opinions and advice about developing the service.

Read on to find out more!



I was invited by Jane Wilson, a CAMHS clinician to take part in a theatre research project to help a writer develop a play surrounding mental health with the Blue Elephant Theatre's Speak Out project. The play would tour around London giving people an insight to what it is like to have and deal with a mental disorder.

A group of CAMHS service users and myself gathered together and discussed what we thought would be important to get across with this play, we talked about our experience dealing with each of our conditions and how it has affected our everyday life, such as schooling, friendships and everyday experiences. The session was a wonderful expression of feeling and emotions where we all felt comfortable in talking about the trials and tribulation we had gone through to get to this point in our lives.

The Group had a small taster of some drama exercises which was entertaining and stimulating, I felt very honored to be involved in the process; I took away with me a wider understanding of myself and other mental disorders that can and has affected a wide range of young people.

I would **strongly recommend** that young people get involved and tell their side of the story because the only way we can move forward is by learning from our history. Speak Out is a great project that I hope continues in the future to widen peoples' minds on the outlook of mental health and other conditions.

Rashaun P.

My initial involvement in CAMHS was through a theatre workshop that I was invited to join. It was being run for 12-18 year olds who would meet once a week over a span of several weeks at the Young Vic. During the workshops, we would take part in a variety of activities most of them designed to ease us out of our comfort zones and allow us to get to know more about each other. We would

also read scripts that we could interpret and present in any way that we wanted.

At all points in the workshop, there was never any pressure on the participants to be professional actors - the **atmosphere was made comfortable enough to support both introverts and extroverts**, with the emphasis placed on simply being there with other people in your age bracket and in a similar situation and just enjoying yourself.

The 7 or 8 weeks of work (and a lot of fun) culminated in a play directed, produced and presented for the most part by us. It was an event which family and friends could attend and it was a lovely way to end the workshop. For us, the workshop had fostered a sense of community which, although brief, was incredibly important to us.

I can personally say that I learnt a lot from it, the most important being the realisation that I could in fact perform for a group of people without being constantly anxious about it and even go so far as to enjoy it. The workshop was a great medium through which we could communicate and express ourselves freely, and is something that should no doubt be supported further.

Tumi A.

A group of 14-18 year olds who had or were currently using Mental Health Services came together at the Young Vic Theatre. We did projects on a variety of things, including already existing plays and work devised entirely from our own minds.

It was **extremely empowering** and good for my confidence. At the time of the first workshop I was not long out of hospital and struggling to find my place in school, the Young Vic Theatre projects gave me a sense of belonging and grounding.

By the time I was 19, I took a peer support role which allowed me to reflect on and strengthen my perception of self.

Orla B.



I have been giving PowerPoint presentations to professionals of multi-disciplinary backgrounds on the Kings College London undergraduate staff training course, for the past four years. **I spoke about my experiences as a CAMHS user both inside and outside of hospital.** The professionals I presented to were there to get a perspective of care from a young person with first-hand experience.

The discussions I engaged in with them were candid and real, leaving them with a reminding message to **'remember the person'**. I think the mental health system has become clogged up with paperwork, and working with these committed professionals helped me forgive the bad experiences and take pride in how empowered it feels to be heard."

I have found that it is very important for professionals from a therapeutic discipline to have a natural ability to talk to people, and to listen; not to panic and attempt to find solutions, but to just be.

Orla B.

Last summer I was asked to join a youth advisory group for CAMHS, we went through a short presentation learning about what we were aiming to achieve by joining, and some of the experience we would encounter. Through joining the young advisors I was able to take part in a youth panel.

For a day I accompanied professionals in deciding what candidate would suit a particular job. My first youth panel was a nervous heart throbbing time, I was consumed by so many thoughts, like was I qualified, I had no experience, and what could I bring to this panel? I was reassured by the panel members that I was more than qualified due to the fact of just my experience with being a user of the service.

Once I had interviewed one candidate it was easy to mark and score the rest, **I found it a real eye opening experience to see the process of**

selecting a professional to go forth and work within the CAMHS service.

The candidates were very pleased to see that the young people were having involvement on the panel, we were also told by the other panel members it was nice to have our opinions and input.

My first panel was a success and I left feeling I had given someone who was hard working, well rounded and kind natured the job; luckily we were also able to give our second choice a similar job as well.

My second panel was a different experience since it was an all youth panel, we had to watch a presentation the candidates had prepared beforehand, the panel was completely in our control; it felt so strange having control over something so important. After a long day both adult and youth panel were able to come together and discuss what we thought about each person's performance; surprisingly we came to the same conclusion about who delivered the best throughout the day.

I found the all youth panel very different and more difficult because we had to go on what we knew as a service user and what feeling the candidate gave off. I felt in control which changed my perspective on how much of an impact we as a youth panel have. I had a wonderful session to be part of and would love to do it again; **I would recommend that more young people get involved** because having more than just one or two people who have used the service on a panel can really influence the type of people that come into CAMHS.

Rashaun P.

Visit to Inpatient Unit

I went onto an adolescent ward to talk to the young people there about my journey as an adolescent and how my bi-polar diagnosis has impacted on me growing up. We spoke about self-harm, transition into school and the general difficulties and anxieties of life.

It was a very trusting and invaluable experience for all involved. **If when I was in hospital, if I had a role model come in and talk about how life gets better, I would have really appreciated it.**

Orla B.



Development of a New Unit

This December my mother and I were asked to join a group of staff to include a service user and Carer's point of view. The NHS doesn't supply a Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) for adolescence although the private sector does provide a few. The amount of time a patient stays in one can be up to 80 days or more, which isolates them from their families and communities; which the NHS is trying to avoid.

The team consists of a wide range of mental health professionals from different sectors such as head teachers, staff from Woodland House Adolescence Mental Health Hospital, ward managers, and staff from the supported discharge service (SDS) etc. We are hoping to create a temporary unit on one of the four London sites to get the system up and running; then on the Maudsley site which would be a more of a permanent placement.

I found being surrounded by medical professionals very daunting, but they were all helpful in making my mother and I feel welcomed. **I was able to give my opinion and experience while being involved with CAMHS, the SDS team and also being an inpatient at Woodland House. They seemed keen in including me in making decisions on what this project would need and how they should keep the patient entertained, educated and treated.**

I have only been with the team for a short period of time but can tell this project would help the mental help service develop dearly. I am looking forward in continuing the buildup and designing of this project and helping as much as I can in the future.

Rashaun P.

Talking at a Conference

Late last year, I had the pleasure of addressing an interdisciplinary audience of professionals working in the mental health services. The topic of my address was patient and public involvement in mental health services and I briefly described what I myself had been involved in up until that point. The following is a transcript of my talk:

'Hi all, I am a youth advisor for CAMHS in the South London and Maudsley area and I will be spending a few minutes talking about my recent experience on a recruitment panel. I understand that user involvement is an integral part of the functioning of any social organisation and I am very happy to see and be part of its expansion.

I was recently part of a recruitment panel with 3 professionals at the Christopher Wren House. The position was for a band 7 practitioner for a completely new role that would be based in Croydon. I was very well briefed beforehand so I knew exactly what the format of the day would be.



Throughout the entire process, I can honestly say that I felt like an essential part of the panel – after every interview (there were 7 in total) the three specialists who were really lovely (one of whom is here today but I'm not just saying that) would discuss the candidate we'd just seen before arriving at any conclusions. I was a very active part of this.

I was actually a little surprised at the extent of my participation; I was able to ask the candidates questions that I had prepared and probe them for further development of their answers.

*What I learned from this personally was a **real insight** – a behind the scenes look, if you will – at the rigorous process involved in choosing the right person for the job. What I hope the specialist got from this is the value that should be placed on having a substantial youth input into important decisions such as this.*

*All in all, it was a **very enjoyable experience** for me, and I hope for the specialists as well. I sincerely hope that this is something that is continued and expanded on.'*

Tumi A.

How you can get involved

If you are interested in becoming a **Youth Advisor** or simply finding out more information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact:

Marianne Caitane
CAMHS Patient and Public Involvement Facilitator

Email: Marianne.caitane@slam.nhs.uk

Tele: 020 3049 8265

Thank you for reading!

**Please look out for our next newsletter in
the **SPRING!****