

E-mail press release title:

New national campaign to tackle depression in young Scots

*****Embargo: not for broadcast or publication until 00.01hrs Monday 4 June 2007*****

Depression Alliance Scotland
Press Release
1 June 2007

New national campaign to tackle depression in young Scots

National Depression Week 4-10 June 2007

A new national campaign has been launched today (4 June 2007) with the aim of encouraging young adults with depression throughout Scotland to seek help rather than suffering in silence and, in some cases, becoming severely depressed and taking their lives.

The campaign, '*Look OK...Feel Crap?*', was developed by Depression Alliance Scotland (DAS) and was launched to coincide with the start of National Depression Week. The campaign seeks to tap into the feelings of young adults who may be feeling very withdrawn, anxious or low and who are finding it difficult to cope with life, but who feel unable to ask for help due to public expectations that they should be functioning normally due to their outward appearance of being okay.

It has been estimated that as many as 1 in 10 young adults in Scotland experience depression, anxiety or other related emotional health problems. Such young adults can be hard to reach, as they can find it difficult to recognise and seek help for mental health problems for fears of what their friends and peers might think or say. They also may not connect with health messages or services which they believe are aimed at "other people". Often, there is no single cause of depression in young adults and contributing factors can include parental divorce, being bullied or alienated whilst at school, relationship or money worries, starting a new job, coming to terms with their sexuality, adapting to life as a young parent or difficulty settling in at College or University and worrying about exams. In the case of students, there has recently been an increase in the number of students reporting greater symptoms of mental ill-health when compared to non-students of the same age.

The campaign follows work undertaken by DAS with young adults from across Scotland which has shown that young adults can be put off from seeking help by what they see as medical labels, such as "depression", and by the stigma often associated with a lack of public awareness regarding depression and other forms of common emotional health problems. As such it seeks to tap into the overwhelming feeling of "looking okay, but feeling really crap" reported by young adults with depression. Posters and postcards in support of the campaign will carry different images portraying a young male and a young female, intended to appeal to different target groups, and will be distributed throughout Scotland to health centres, Colleges and Universities, large employers and also distributed at some football and rugby grounds. The campaign material will refer young adults to the DAS, and other mental health, helplines (DAS – 0845 123 23 20; Samaritans 0845 7 909090; Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87; and SANeline 0845 767 8000), and to DAS and Living Life to the Full websites (www.dascot.org; www.livinglifetothefull.com).

Ilena Day, Chief Executive, Depression Alliance Scotland, said,

"At an emotional level, many young adults find it hard to describe accurately how they feel when they are experiencing depression or other common emotional health problems. They may feel withdrawn, can often experience feelings of guilt and low self-esteem and can feel very inadequate or that they have somehow failed to cope with life pressures, particularly when comparing themselves with others. They can believe that others are judging them or would not understand, because they might appear to be functioning well on the outside, and their feelings can intensify and worsen. This can act as a barrier to their seeking help.

“By tapping into the feelings that young adults have when experiencing depression we hope to be able to reach young adults, encourage them to seek help and to improve their quality of life or, in some cases, save their lives.

“We believe that young adults are more likely to respond to the use of everyday language such as “feeling really crap” than if we were to ask them if they are depressed. This is not to say that everyone feeling crap is, or will be, depressed, but we can point them in the direction of self-help resources including our websites and self-help groups where they can choose to access support in line with their individual needs.”

Douglas age 28, who experienced depression as a young adult, said,

“I first experienced depression when I was 17 and had started at university. I started feeling very low and miserable, and I became withdrawn and really felt things were falling apart.

“It was completely debilitating, because I didn’t really know what was happening to me or what was wrong. I think everyone does experience episodes of low mood at some stage but feeling low all the time and being unable to lift your mood up again is really frightening.

“I felt guilty and confused, because all I had wanted for years was to go to University, but now I was there, I was feeling really crap. Everyone else my age seemed to be so positive and full of energy and enjoying life, something that made me feel completely isolated and lonely. I felt that everyone expected me, as someone with my whole life ahead of me, to be full of life and happy and that no-one would understand why I was depressed when I couldn’t really identify a reason for feeling the way I did.

“I saw my GP, and I was fortunate in that she was sympathetic and reassuring. Over a period of time I got back to my old self. Although I’ve suffered relapses since then, my advice to other young people experiencing depression and low mood is please don’t suffer on your own. Talk to someone and accept that depression is something many other people your age will also be experiencing. Go to your GP, or if that seems too difficult, ring one of the helplines, and take whatever help is available and suits you best.”

Eileen age 31, who first experienced depression at 17 said,

“When I was seventeen, I became extremely unhappy. My self-esteem plummeted and I found it increasingly difficult to concentrate; sometimes nodding off at school. When I started skipping school and became more and more withdrawn, my parents became very concerned and encouraged me to visit my Doctor, who diagnosed depression and prescribed anti-depressants.

“Eventually, I recovered and slowly built my confidence back up. At times I did feel like giving up completely, resigning myself to the assumption that I’d always be depressed but I am glad I got help.

“My parents never tired of reminding me that I was a valuable person, that I didn’t deserve to suffer and that I would eventually recover. They encouraged me to talk about my feelings, providing a shoulder to cry on whenever I needed it. They also helped me discover new hobbies, giving me much-needed activity and less time to over-think.

“Although I would never have believed it possible six or seven years ago, today I am well and content and have been for several years. Whilst I would never want to repeat my experiences, they have helped me gain self-awareness and insight and taught me never to take my life for granted. My advice to anyone feeling how I did is to reach out for help today and not to suffer in silence”

Robin Harper MSP, and Rector of the University of Aberdeen, said,

“Depression in young adults is most certainly more prevalent than anyone could possibly imagine but because it is not always obvious many people hide how they are feeling, so the

fact that they are feeling dreadful and in pain often passes unnoticed. To know that thousands of young adults are suffering in silence is to know that the work of Depression Alliance Scotland is extremely important, and they deserve all the support they can get in their efforts to provide the supports that young adults so desperately need”

ENDS

Contact: Ilena Day on 0131 623 7113

Notes to Editors

Photographic requests: High resolution colour images of the new campaign materials can be obtained for reproduction in news items and articles by contacting Ilena Day on the above number.

Depression Alliance Scotland (DAS) is an independent charity and is the only Scottish charity dedicated to improving the diagnosis and treatment of depression, challenging the stigma associated with this misunderstood illness and offering information and support to those affected by, and working with, depression. DAS receives financial support from the Scottish Executive, health board funding and charitable trusts.

Visit our website at www.dascot.org