Press Pack

Our Time
Helping young people affected by parental mental illness
Overview

What is Our Time?

Our Time is a registered charity providing interventions to children and young people whose parents have a mental illness. We help to increase their resilience and reduce their risk of developing mental health problems later in life.

At a key national conference, Keeping the Family in Mind, a group of young people gave an impassioned speech about their experience of caring for a parent with a mental illness. Our Time (originally The Kidtime Foundation) is the result of their plea for change and visibility. Registered in 2012, we remain committed to campaigning and lobbying for their cause.

Why does Our Time matter?

In an average classroom, eight children have a parent with a mental illness.[2] Typically, these students keep quiet for fear of being ostracised. Often withdrawn, anxious and unable to concentrate, they remain hidden due to the stigma around mental illness. Numbering at nearly 3.4 million, with the potential to rise to 4.5 million by 2021,[3] this group is amongst the most vulnerable and neglected in the country, receiving little attention or support.

Parental mental illness is one of the 10 most powerful sources of toxic stress in young people and part of the cause of problems such as substance misuse, behavioural issues, and neglect. Without help, these young people will become the patients of the future. Some 70% risk developing mental health problems themselves[4] at huge expense to the public purse.

Some 3 million children are projected to be at risk of developing a mental health issue by 2021. Experts say the potential cost to the UK government could amount to £180 billion.[3] All this is preventable. Evidence shows, with low-cost, timely intervention, young people can flourish.[5][6]

An estimated 3.4 million children in the UK live with a mentally ill parent. Without help 70% will develop mental health problems too.
Our Time’s Aims

“Being Seen and Heard”

Our Time wants children affected by parental mental illness to be seen and heard.

We want to identify and support young people affected by parental mental illness, and to inform and train educators and healthcare professionals so they can help too.

We also want this vulnerable group to have specific recognition, as they do in other countries. In Australia they are known as COPMI (children of parents with mental illness), and as ‘Young Relatives’ in most Nordic countries.

While the UK recognises the needs of young carers, it does not tackle the specific challenges experienced by children whose parents have a mental illness. Our Time wants to secure recognition for this ‘at risk’ group within public policy and funding frameworks by 2021.
Our Services

KidsTime Workshops

“At home you have to be an adult — look after mum, look after the house, give her medications — at Our Time’s workshops you’re having fun. You’re being looked after and you’re not looking after others.”[7]

These workshops are for families where a parent has a mental illness. KidsTime Workshops provide clear explanations of mental illness and treatments. Through discussions, drama, art, dance and other creative methods, the children are given freedom to talk about their concerns, have fun and foster positive relationships with their families. For parents, it’s a chance to learn how to communicate with their child about mental illness and to take pride in being a parent. Evaluation of the workshops show they diminish children’s anxiety and parental guilt, encourage discussion and playful interaction between parents and children.[8]

The ‘Who Cares?’ Programme

“The world is no longer such a dark and frightening place. I feel that Our Time has saved my life.”[9]

The ‘Who Cares?’ programme is a comprehensive resource for schools. It comprises a curriculum package, lesson plans and activities to increase understanding of mental illness, promote discussion, and reduce stigma in school age children.

The ‘Who Cares?’ programme is also a learning tool to help teachers and school staff identify and support young people affected by parental mental illness. It provides training and resources to enable staff to set up support systems and talk to young people without having to assume the role of counsellors or therapists.
Case Studies

Joel, 16, cares for his father, who has physical and mental health problems. He was helped through the ‘Who Cares?’ programme.

“I was 13 when Dad got ill. He had depression and chronic heart disease, and loads of other things. I had to cook every night, do dishes, clean up. I wasn’t able to concentrate on school work and had really bad grades. It was complicated because no one knew I was a carer. I didn’t have any school friends, and was on my own every day. Through the ‘Who Cares?’ programme I now recognise myself as a young carer, and that there are others like me. ‘Who Cares?’ has given me a voice. I opened up and told my stories to my peers who now understand what my life is like, and why I am sometimes worried. The world is no longer such a dark and frightening place. I feel that the ‘Who Cares?’ programme has saved my life.”

Esther*, attended Our Time’s KidsTime Workshops from the ages of 13 to 17. Her mother has a bipolar illness.

“The KidsTime Workshop was the first time anyone described my mum’s illness clearly to me. I realised why she was different and that I had nothing to be ashamed of. I also met other children with the same problems which made me feel we weren’t abnormal.

At home, I had to behave like an adult; we couldn’t run around or make a lot of noise and we had to always make sure Mum was okay. KidsTime was the one place I could be a child – I could play, have fun and laugh and I really needed that.

In my mid-teens I went through some bullying problems that led to rebellion. I stopped taking my education seriously and bunked off school. My English teacher talked to me and made me realise that I did care about being successful. I knuckled down and went to university, where I graduated in biomedical science before doing a master’s in psychological therapies. I now work in mental health.

Mum’s health is still up and down, but we are doing okay. Two things have got me to where I am: KidsTime Workshops and my teachers. With the right information and support, teachers have the power to make a difference to children like me.”
Rose*, 10, is a KidsTime Workshop participant. Her mother suffers from mental health difficulties.

“I do not think about my mum as having a mental illness but I know sometimes she can get very, very upset. I try to make her feel better but can’t always which makes me feel helpless and sad. I also try to help by looking after my brother and sister. I get so annoyed and emotional with the people who make my mum upset but just hurt inside because I know I can’t do anything about it. At KidsTime Workshops, I realised that I’m not the only child with that sort of problem and that other kids felt the same. At KidsTime Workshops, I love talking about mental illness because it helps me understand more about what it is and how it can affect people, like my mum. I also enjoy playing the games because they are fun and I get to know more about people. Most of all I enjoy the drama because when I’m older I would love to be an actress.”

John* 50 attends KidsTime Workshops with his 12-year-old daughter, Amy*. Amy’s mother, Jess*, has mental health difficulties.

“For the past 10 years, my wife has had a heart and lung condition that has led to depression, self-harm and binge drinking. We have had suicide attempts and she has been sectioned. Drew has never known a home life without that turmoil. At the age of nine, Amy’s teachers reported that she was becoming withdrawn and falling behind at school. It’s hard for any kid to come out and say: ‘My mum or dad has gone off the rails,’ so instead Amy was pushing herself into a corner and could no longer relate to her peers. But coming to KidsTime Workshops has enabled her to see that others are in similar situations and, although we have problems, we are working through them. That has given her confidence and now she is blossoming.”

If you would like to interview a young person affected by parental mental illness, please get in touch with the communications team at: media@ourtime.org.uk.

*Some names have been changed to protect identities
Facts and Figures

- An estimated 3.4 million children and young people in the UK live with a parent with a mental health issue. This figure is set to rise to 4.5 million by 2021. [3]
- In an average class — eight children (25%) have a parent with mental health problems. [2]
- Without intervention, 70% of children affected by parental mental illness are predicted to suffer from mental illness themselves. [4]
- Some 68% of women and 57% of men with mental illness are parents. [10]
- Up to 20% of women develop a mental illness during pregnancy or within a year of giving birth. [11]
- Over one-third of first-time fathers are concerned about their mental health. [12]
- One in four adults will experience a mental illness at some point each year. [13]
- Perinatal mental health problems cost the UK £8.1 billion each year. Nearly three-quarters of this cost relates to the impact on the child rather than the mother. [11]
- Parental mental illness is one of the 10 most powerful sources of toxic stress. [14]
- There is no statutory provision for children whose parents have ill mental health.
- Some four in five young carers go unidentified. [15]
- In the UK there is no recognised term for young people affected by parental mental illness and the government keeps no statistics about their numbers.
- Early intervention can mitigate the negative impact of parental mental illness.
- Between 2010-2017 there was a 40% real term cut in early intervention spending. [16]
- The total cost of late intervention is estimated at £17 billion per year. [17]
The presence of mental illness in a parent is known to negatively impact a child’s cognitive and language development, educational achievement, and social, emotional and behavioural development. It can lead to anxiety, a sense of personal blame and responsibility, and, in severe cases, neglect or abuse. These children are also at greater risk of bullying, a lower standard of living, and financial hardship. [3][19]

Research into adverse childhood experiences (known as ‘ACEs) identifies parental mental illness as one of the ten most powerful sources of toxic stress in young people. It is also the root cause of many other problems including substance misuse, behavioural issues, neglect and social isolation.

A recent World Health Organization review identified children affected by parental mental illness as being at 'high risk of experiencing family discord and psychiatric problems’. [20]

In July 2018, experts writing in BMJ Paediatric, reported that children whose parents suffer from depression are more likely to use health services including A&E. [21]

The Children’s Commissioner’s Vulnerability Report 2018 describes children affected by parental mental illness as having ‘complex needs’. Over 2 million children in England live in families with substantial complex needs, and of these, 1.6 million children have no established support. [2]

However, harm can be prevented or reduced through early interventions that build protective factors and resilience. International research identifies three protective factors that help:

- Knowing you are not alone
- Having a good explanation
- Having a trusted adult to talk to
Our Time’s interventions harness these protective factors and have been shown to increase understanding of mental illness, improve parent-child relationships, reduce feelings of fear, shame and isolation, and boost confidence. \[8\]

Perinatal mental health problems carry a total economic and social long-term cost to society of £8.1 billion for each one-year cohort of births in the UK. The cost to the public sector of perinatal mental health problems is five times the cost of improving services. \[11\]
Our Experts

Dr Alan Cooklin, Founder

“A thin line separates strange family behaviour from mental illness. Most approaches to working with parents with a mental health problem isolate the ill individual and take little account of the impact on other family members. This is changing and Our Time has been at the forefront of this movement.”

Dr Alan Cooklin is a pioneering family psychiatrist with 50 years’ experience of supporting families affected by mental illness. He collaborated on Our Time’s workshop model to help children understand their parent’s illness, to feel less responsible for it, and less fearful of ‘catching’ it. His training film ‘Being Seen and Heard,’ is widely used by professionals and families as a resource to help them understand this issue.

Dympna Cunnane, CEO

“I am proud to lead Our Time so that children of parents with a mental illness have a voice and get the support they need. I am confident our approach is effective because it comes from talking to the children and families about what they find useful and our interventions are designed to be intelligent, compassionate and hopeful.”

A highly skilled executive coach, Dympna Cunnane combines organisational expertise with a background in psychology. She has over twenty years’ experience as a consultant to top level executives in international public and private sector companies.

With a BA in Psychology and Philosophy (University College Dublin), an MA in Psychology (Tavistock Institute London), a Post Graduate Diploma in Systems Thinking, as well as professional training in psychoanalysis (Jungian), Dympna is committed to developing resources to help young carers understand and cope with families where mental illness is an issue.
Claire Johnston, Chair

“Children of a parent with mental illness are astonishingly creative and courageous – taking on young carer roles which would defeat many an adult. But this is often at great expense as their chances to do well at school, build friendships and grow into well-balanced adults are diminished. I have seen first-hand the devastating impact on children’s lives.”

A director of nursing, working on NHS Mental Health and Community Trust boards for 15 years, Claire Johnston, has also worked in clinical and operational service roles in family and mental health and safeguarding. She is honorary clinical professor of nursing at Middlesex University’s Institute of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, and has been the National Adviser in Primary Care for the Royal College of Nursing.

Dr Leonard Fagin, Trustee

“As a consultant psychiatrist working for many years in deprived areas of east London, I was able to see the transgenerational impact of mental health in families. Helping children to develop resilience when having to cope and respond to parental mental illness offers an opportunity to break this cycle for future generations.”

Dr Leonard Fagin, a consultant psychiatrist and honorary senior lecturer at University College London, set up the Hackney Our Time Workshop and offers parental mental health supervision in Hackney Children and Young People’s Services. He is a recognised authority having authored books and papers on a wealth of mental health issues.

A full list of Our Time Experts can be found on our website.
**Our Patrons**

**Alastair Campbell**, British journalist, broadcaster, political aide and author.

“**As someone who has known mental illness, and now campaigns for better services and understanding for the mentally ill, I welcome and support Our Time. It is a great relief that this project can help children both learn about and make sense of their parent’s illness, and as a result hopefully increase their resilience and make them less vulnerable to future mental ill health.**”

**Ade Adepitan**, sportsman, actor and presenter. Ade was part of the Great Britain wheelchair basketball team to win gold at the 2005 Paralympic World Cup.

“**When I was a child my mum had a nervous breakdown. It was scary and confusing to see someone who was normally so strong, looking and feeling so vulnerable. It’s never easy to talk to your parents about these things, especially when you don’t even know what’s happening to them. Our Time helps to breakdown these barriers and gives families the confidence, and communication skills to talk openly in a safe space about mental health issues.**”
Our Time in the media

Please note, these refer to the charity by its previous name ‘The Kidstime Foundation’.

Sky News
*July 2018*

Health Check, BBC World Service
*March 2018*
[https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csvpyc](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csvpyc)

All in Mind, BBC Radio 4
*December 2017*
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09jdc7s](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09jdc7s)

Families not equipped for mental illness, Mental Health Today
*November 2017*
[https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/exclusive-interview-alastair-campbell-families-arent-equipped-for-mental-illness](https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/exclusive-interview-alastair-campbell-families-arent-equipped-for-mental-illness)

In their own words: the children of parents with mental illness, Guardian
*January 2015*

Caring for the Carers, Guardian
*December 2014*
Resources

You can download Our Time’s brand guidelines and logos from https://ourtime.org.uk/resource/branding.

Social Media

https://www.facebook.com/ourtimecharity
https://twitter.com/ourtimecharity
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCO7BfL73P6wwMyWtBN9MN0g

Contacts

Please contact our Media Team email media@ourtime.org.uk.
Press contacts:
Dymphna Cunnane, CEO: 07800 976778
Alan Cooklin, Founder: 07966 373256
References

1. Participant at the ‘Keeping the Family in Mind’ conference, 1999
2. Children’s Commissioner Vulnerability Report 2018
3. Ernst & Young, ‘Sizing the Problem – analysis by EY,’ commissioned by Our Time
5. Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, Public Health Wales, Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University, 2015
7. Our Time workshop participant
11. The costs of perinatal mental health problems, Centre for Mental Health and London School of Economics, 2014
12. Dads in distress, 2015, National Childbirth Trust
15. The support provided to Young Carers in England, Children’s Commissioner’s survey, December 2016
16. Turning the Tide, Children’s Society, 2017
17. The Cost of Late Intervention; Early Intervention Foundation analysis, 2016
18. Professor Mark Bellis, Director of Policy, Research and International Development in Public Health Wales.
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www.ourtime.org.uk