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# The OCD Newsletter – 2023

<p><i>WHAT OCD IS</i></p> <p><b>Intrusive thoughts</b></p> <p><b>Magical thinking</b></p> <p><b>Compulsive rumination</b></p> <p><b>Overgeneralising</b></p> <p><b>Constant doubts</b></p> <p><b>Having to check things over and over</b></p> <p><b>Guilt</b></p> <p><b>Anxiety</b></p> <p><b>Recurrent images and urges</b></p>		<p><i>WHAT OCD IS NOT</i></p> <p><b>liking things tidy</b></p> <p><b>loving hand sanitiser</b></p> <p><b>Being superstitious</b></p> <p><b>Excitement over cleanliness</b></p> <p><b>Being pickey</b></p> <p><b>A choice or set preference</b></p>
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Picture taken from OCD-UK website ([ocduk.org/charlotte-OCD-awareness/](http://ocduk.org/charlotte-OCD-awareness/))

## Updates from the last newsletter

- ⇒ We are in the process of updating our OCD booklets, both the self-help guide and family and friends booklet. These will be available on the Cardiff and Vale NHS – OCD Intervention page in early 2023.
- ⇒ Update of the imagery research that took recruited from Cardiff and Vale OCD Services is later on in this newsletter.

### Will - Clinical Psychologist

Hello from Will! I am a clinical psychologist working in OCD Services. I have a long interest of helping people with anxiety disorders and I am also assisting Alice with the newsletter. I am always keen to learn more about the experiences of people with OCD and hope we can use this newsletter to give people with OCD a voice on this.



### Alice - Assistant Psychologist

Hello, my name is Alice and I am an assistant psychologist working within OCD Services. I started my role two years ago and really enjoy working with people who have OCD, in group and individual settings. I have put together this newsletter and I also run an OCD peer recovery group.



## Charity Boxing Match

A service user, Danny, within Cardiff and Vale OCD Services has decided to undertake a huge challenge – to compete in a charity boxing match! We interviewed Danny about his experience of OCD and why he made the decision to take part in the boxing match. You can see Danny in the picture below and read the interview on the next page.



**Danny, can you tell us about a little bit about your OCD and how long you've had this?**

I have had OCD for roughly 11 years having been diagnosed with the illness at the age of 11. I have fears of contamination and bad luck happening to myself and others so do compulsions/ safety behaviours to neutralise negative thoughts. It has affected me physically as well as mentally and has controlled my life for a long time.

**Can you tell us what you are currently doing to raise mental health awareness, but also as part of challenging your OCD?**

I have an Instagram account where I try to raise awareness of mine and other's problems (@mhstoryofdanny). I have recently signed up to a White collar Boxing event to raise money for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Mind Mental Health Charity. Training camp is twice a week and has pushed me to achieve more than I ever thought it could.

**If people want to support your fundraising project or to come to watch the event, what should they do?**

Links are as follows;

Fundraising: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/dannydono29>

Tickets: <http://www.whitecollarboxing.wales/>

**If people want to find out more about the boxing project and even join themselves next year, who should they contact?**

The event is run by the company "White Collar Boxing Wales" usually happens once every few months. All the information necessary is on the previous links above.

## TOP-UK Charity

The TOP-UK charity stands for; triumph over phobia. They support people with phobias, OCD and other anxiety conditions. One of the main things they do is run support groups, based on the principles of behavioural therapy. This involves practising things which may have previously been avoided. It helps people to face their fears, which often leads to a decrease in the fear itself. We spoke to a woman who has chosen to stay anonymous for the purpose of the newsletter, but has experienced taking part in the TOP-UK group.

### **What is the TOP-UK group? How is it ran?**

*Top uk run a weekly online support group, it is for people with OCD / anxiety and phobias, so they help with a variation of things. My group is every Monday but I think they may run other days for other parts of the UK, as I'm part of the Cardiff group, but we are not all from Cardiff. It's a small group with probably about 5/6 people with 2 group leaders. It varies each week on how many people attend due to people's schedules but most weeks the two leaders are there. It starts at 7pm and is between 1 hour to 1.5 hours one. Each week we go through each person and discuss how their week has been and to discuss any homework which has been set to see how you have got on, it also brings up any difficulties that you may have had that week and it can also just be a place to offload.*

### **What are the facilitators like?**

*They are really nice and supportive and do not judge. They have experience dealing with mental health and throughout the time talking to members in this group they have learnt more about OCD and are good at finding ways to help solve problems and work on homework to overcome anxiety.*

*The group leaders have experience in mental health and some leaders may have experience of OCD themselves, but they are not specialised in OCD – like yourself and the people who run the NHS therapy group.*

### **What aspects of the group have you found helpful?**

*I think the most helpful thing about the group is meeting the other members of the group as they are all going through it themselves and understand. It helps to see that it is not just you. It also helps to talk and open up about your experiences as they talk about theirs. Everyone in the group is supportive and often advise each other when they can. I also like that by attending a support group like this helps to keep you motivated to work on your OCD / anxiety.*

## **Volunteering with Dog's Trust Charity**

Drew has experience with volunteering with Dog's Trust, and fostering and adopting dogs. He has spoken to us about his involvement of this, alongside his experience of OCD.

### **Can you tell us a bit about your OCD and how long you've had this?**

*My name is Drew and I am aged 40 and have had OCD in one form or another ever since I can remember, I think it got a lot worse when I started High School and was a teenager. My main thing I do is count how many syllables in words and messages I see, hear or even say. I also have to do or perform certain actions an even number of times if possible, in multiple of 10. I also am a germaphobe and avoid touching things or wash, clean myself or things if I feel they have become contaminated. I struggled greatly with this during the pandemic. I also get a lot of unwanted or intrusive thoughts that have troubled me greatly and the more I try not to have or think them, those thoughts become trapped into having them in my head, certain subjects on TV or images I see or discussion even, trigger these and I have tried to avoid them in the past but that only makes it worse and I can get them without a reason also. I pray and have to say certain prayers again and again but it never gives me peace because the prayers become a form of OCD, rather than praying from the heart and letting it go. I worry bad things will happen to me or especially others because of me somehow and this has held me back during my life, from going out doing things and having a healthy relationship with friends, family and others.*

### **Can you tell us a bit about the Dog's Trust and your involvement with this?**

*I have been fostering dogs for quite a long time now, I fostered 3 dogs and adopted one of them with a charity in South Wales that has wound down its service now. The dog I adopted passed away sadly aged 12. I looked into fostering or volunteering again and saw that there were opportunities with Dogs Trust and that they had built and opened a new centre in Cardiff in the last year or two. I applied to volunteer at the centre and received group training and one-to-one training to walk dogs there. Then I also heard they were crying out for fosterers so I applied to foster dogs with them. Dogs Trust never put a healthy dog down and are a well-established and organised charity and I have received support with them. They came to my house to look around and check it was suitable and talked to me one on one about fostering and answered any questions I had and we discussed what I was looking for in fostering and what kind of dogs I would be able to foster. I have fostered a 2/3-year-old female dog name Dora who has now been successfully rehomed. I am now fostering my 2<sup>nd</sup> dog, a slightly older girl named Hayley. Some dogs may struggle in kennels and there may also be limited space in kennels for dogs they work with so are grateful for homes that are willing to support them by fostering.*

**Can you tell us about how you find working with the Dog's Trust has helped you with your OCD or in life more generally?**

*I have found having the company of a dog helpful and also challenging. When a dog trusts you and you become friends it's a beautiful thing. I don't feel alone in my own company with a dog around but also don't feel uncomfortable like I might around other people, I am free to be myself, the dog is not judging me or expecting me to behave in a certain way to please them, there is no pressure socially from them. I feel more confident going out and about with a dog. People interact with you differently and usually more positively. If people engage with you in conversation the dog is a magnificent ice breaker and you can build common ground with someone talking about the dogs age, breed, habits and behaviours. If the other person has a dog and the dogs meet and they get on it's a lovely thing to experience and you have someone you can say hello to every time you see them walking that dog. I have to make myself leave the house and I can expose myself to things I might avoid otherwise where there can be mud, dogs wee, picking up dogs mess and going near a bin, other people touching the dog etc. and can build it up slowly starting small. I can explore or walk different routes or places that I might normally avoid without having that dog. That focus being on the dog not me can also be helpful with my OCD, the dog helps me to have a routine and gives me purpose and responsibility to take care of it and helps me not to think about what's in my head or worry or focus on anxiety and negative thoughts/feelings as much. The dog needs me to comfort it and keep it company, feed it and water it and walk them. The dog might be nervous or lack some good manners or have difficult behaviour which can be challenging and take me out my comfort zone but it's rewarding seeing the dog grow in confidence and progress. I don't know how I would have made it through lockdown without having had my dog I owned at the time. going outside and having a positive experience with the dog can make your day and the dog greeting someone and you saying hello to someone you see whilst walking might make theirs.*

**If people are interested in volunteering with the Dog's Trust, what should they do and who is it best to contact?**

*Dogs Trust information can be found on their website <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk>*

*If you are interested in volunteering (they have many ways you can help at the centre not just walking dogs around) please do contact them; [Tabitha.buckle@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:Tabitha.buckle@dogstrust.org.uk).*

*If you are interested in fostering you can email [HFHcardiff@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:HFHcardiff@dogstrust.org.uk).*

*I hope this helps anyone interested in volunteering with dogs 😊.*

## **Running the half marathon for OCD-UK!**

Matt, who has recently been working on his OCD, decided to run the half-marathon to raise money for OCD-UK. OCD-UK is a charity that supports people who are experiencing OCD. They also run a yearly conference where they have expert clinicians and also experts by experience, to do talks with different themes. You can see videos of the 2022 conference by visiting their website.

### **Why did you choose to raise money for OCD-UK?**

*I decided to run the Cardiff half marathon for OCD-UK as they're a great cause super close to my heart. As somebody who battles with OCD, I'm keen to bust the myths and misconceptions that surround it. OCD is not a disorder of the tidy, perfectionists and the quirky. It is a disorder of the thoughts and feelings, that can trap you into a never-ending vortex. Most people suffer silently, and this was my input to help eliminate the stigma of mental illness.*

### **How has it been starting to open up about your experience with OCD?**

*Finally getting the confidence to open up about having OCD was initially very challenging. I almost felt embarrassed to mention it, but I quickly came to realise the weight of it was in my head and eventually being able to talk with people about my ongoing therapy felt empowering and has massively aided me on my journey. I still battle OCD daily, but from where I was to where I am now feels nothing short of a miracle. My brain would try to torture me with every possible bad outcome, but now I can tell myself they are only thoughts and move on with my day.*

### **What would you say to others thinking about accessing support for their OCD?**

*For everybody out there struggling with OCD and considering therapy, I couldn't recommend it more. If you allow yourself to fully engage with CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy], you will absolutely reap the rewards.*

## Update on Imagery in OCD Research Study

Earlier this year, Dr Hannah Wedge, was completing the Clinical Psychology Doctorate Training, and as part of her research project she was investigating imagery in OCD. She recruited her participants from the OCD Services within Cardiff and Vale. Hannah is hoping to publish her findings within an academic journal and we will make sure that we add details of any updates in upcoming newsletters. However, in the meantime we thought it might be useful to briefly introduce the concept of imagery and how this can look in OCD:

### What is imagery?

*Imagery can be described as the pictures inside of our heads – for instance, if you were to imagine a chocolate cake, you would likely be able to have an image of a chocolate cake inside your head. You might be able to see what colour the icing is, and the decoration around it. Imagery can also involve our other senses; you might be able to experience the smell of the chocolate cake, how it tastes, or what it would feel like to get the icing on your fingers.*

### What does imagery look like in OCD?

*Examples of imagery in OCD may be rather than having intrusive thoughts in word forms, having images, for example, of you stabbing a loved one (something that people with OCD, at times, find particularly troubling). Another example, could be, having an image of you in hospital with COVID-19.*

*Images can come in visual format, but as discussed above, often integrate lots of the other senses, so you may not only see yourself in hospital, but also have an image of how this feels, what you can hear, and smell.*

### What do we know so far?

*Research looking into imagery in OCD is relatively limited. However, from initial findings, it seems that lots of people with OCD report images alongside (or in place of) verbal-based thoughts. It is hoped that knowing more about images may help with OCD treatment, and the experience of OCD more generally.*

### What next?

*We will aim to update the newsletter with any details of work that Hannah publishes. In the meantime, we would like to take the opportunity to thank the individuals who participated in this research and made this idea possible to be explored.*

## CBT for OCD Group

The Psychological Therapies Hub run a CBT for OCD group, led by qualified CBT therapists. This is for people with moderate OCD. There is at times, understandable anxiety around coming to a group. This could be due to not wanting to share aspects of mental health, perhaps because of worry about judgement from other group members. Generally, people find the groups a positive experience and find the peer support beneficial for recovery. Below are some quotes included from group members who took part in a group which ran in the second half of 2022.

The CBT for OCD group has been very informative and helpful giving me the understanding of how OCD works and how to deal with it practically and mentally in several different ways. The OCD staff are very approachable, understanding and always helpful to the group but will also spend time with you individually when needed. The group discussions were very helpful showing other people's similar experiences and how they confronted and dealt with them, with the advice and guidance from the excellent OCD staff as the course progressed. There was no pressure at all to discuss anything in the group if you didn't want to. – 2022 group member.

I had a very good experience with the CBT group for OCD. It was very informative and taught me about the various components that are a part of OCD, whilst teaching me essential skills to tackle it with ways to avoid any potential relapses. The instructors were fantastic and genuinely cared about all of us in the group and helped us all in so many different ways. – 2022 group member.

The course opened my eyes to how many people feel and experience the same things I do and it made me feel a lot less isolated.

I also had many revelations about how I process my thoughts and am able to deal with some things a lot better now. – 2022 group member.

## **Struggling with OCD?**

If you or someone close to you is experiencing symptoms of OCD, you can access help through your GP, charities (e.g. OCD-UK or OCD Action) or self-help books to find the right support to help you recover.

### **Useful websites:**

[www.ocduk.org](http://www.ocduk.org)

[www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

[www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/ocd-pathway](http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/ocd-pathway)

[www.topuk.org/](http://www.topuk.org/)

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

[www.stepiau.org](http://www.stepiau.org)

[www.cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)