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Sharing their stories helps young people to feel more understood

Zoe Butler Third-year adult nursing student. University of Cumbria

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My passion for improving mental health services started after a young woman I knew took her own life. She was part of a theatre group I volunteered for, and the distress experienced by fellow members prompted me to take action.

I contacted mental health services and talked to young people about their experiences. This made me aware of the deep feelings of misunderstanding they had, especially from peers and health professionals.

After gaining consent, I documented their experiences and developed focus groups, enabling those who engage with mental health services to share their stories with their peers. Members could also ask questions and explore what it means to maintain good mental health.

I collaborated with a local writer and the youth members to write and film 40 monologues, and after much campaigning, the project received funding from local charity the Sir John Fisher Foundation. This enabled us to produce a DVD, distributed to every school in Cumbria, to help raise awareness about mental illness.

It has been used in my university to educate nursing students about mental health issues. The aim is to help them challenge negative attitudes and adopt a more considered approach when caring for people.

Undertaking this project helped me to understand the meaning of holistic care, and the importance of considering a patient or service user's wishes, needs and fears. It also helped me to develop the ability to communicate with consideration, compassion and empathy, allowing clients and patients to feel comfortable disclosing what can sometimes be difficult narratives.

This project arose from my passion to motivate and inspire the promotion of excellence in learning environments, practice and the wider population. It has shown me what is possible when you empower those you care for, and I have developed a deep-seated desire to continuously seek new ventures and opportunities where I can promote good practice. I have also learned not to be bound by my own specific field and to be committed to providing high-quality care to everyone.