



🏠 [www.notalone.uk](http://www.notalone.uk)  
✉ [hello@notalone.uk](mailto:hello@notalone.uk)  
📷 @NotAloneCollective  
✂ @Not\_Alone\_Co  
📍 Exhibition @ Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life - ML5 1QD

10 October 2023

An open letter to:

**Political representatives, regulators, organisations and workers responsible for the provision of mental health services in Scotland**

Subject:

**World Mental Health Day 2023  
Mental health, society and the need for a revolution**

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival launched on 4th October and the theme this year is 'revolution'. In response we formed a grassroots collective in Lanarkshire to co-produce projects based on our lived-experiences of using services in the area. We are a diverse group of individuals who hope to use this opportunity to platform voices that are often silenced and dismissed by oppression and discrimination. Raising widespread awareness that we are not alone in navigating negative and harmful journeys through mental health and welfare services and calling on you to publicly acknowledge this reality on World Mental Health Day.

Last week was Challenge Poverty Week which is a theme consistently explored by our members as having a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Navigating the welfare system, inhumane assessments by the DWP and enduring social stigma perpetuated by politicians and the media creates additional pressures on already vulnerable members of society. Increasingly mental health services are having to shoulder the burden of such societal ills, which it does by placing responsibility for poor health outcomes within individuals. Meaning that wider changes do not have to be made by employers, institutions or governments to improve the conditions truly responsible for the ongoing pandemic of mental ill health. The academies of psychology and psychiatry are well positioned to fulfil this role of 'soft policing' the public as they have historically been complicit in upholding social norms for the benefit of those in positions of power. Not to meaningfully support every-day people by campaigning on their behalf for a more fair and equal society.

Given the many deaths caused as a direct result of Department of Work and Pensions behaviours and decisions, we welcome responsibility for Adult Disability Payments being moved over to the Scottish Government and hope that other welfare benefits are due to follow. The recent release of the Core Mental Health Standards and local initiatives drawing from lived-experience are positive steps forward but they are already too late to undo the past or prevent the current harms being endured by service users. Lack of funding for services creating pressures on staff is undoubtedly taking its toll but systemic issues unrelated to this must be addressed urgently, not in a gradual rollout as policy documentation suggests. For example, the National Transforming Psychological Trauma Framework launched in 2017 and senior mental health practitioners are still continuing to claim that it is 'optional' to allow them to continue implementing outdated and harmful practices based on their own professional interests. That is if they are aware the Framework exists at all. The principles it outlines, those in the Core Standards and in local initiatives relate to respecting general human rights and providing basic person-centred care.

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Which should be welcomed by healthcare professionals and already commonplace practices based on the conditions of their relevant regulatory body memberships. But from our collective experiences, the findings of the independent 'Trust and Respect' investigation in Tayside and co-creation projects with service users (such as those by the Scottish Recovery Network), this is not the case whatsoever. In addition, it is also Domestic Violence Awareness Month but when women turn to mental health or justice services for support they are victim-blamed and shamed by stigma that is propped up by incredibly outdated therapies. Professional interests remain paramount over policies and service user needs, regardless of any cost to their wellbeing and recovery. We call on you to use your position of power to change this reality.

Although NHS Scotland practitioners should be consulting the evidence-based matrices when formulating mental health care these are also not commonly used in practice. And many options listed therein have had their efficacy demonstrated as weak, short-lived or dwindling in comparison to newer forms of treatment which are being withheld even when they are available. With practitioners clinging dogmatically onto ideologies because their career depends on their continued use and waves of students being indoctrinated into the same belief systems it is going to be an almost impossible feat to turn the ship in such a hostile tide. Even though this would lead to much less people drowning by creating practical systemic changes, meaningful forms of social inclusion and support, and access to the right care at the right time. The Joshi Project for example is an incentive we are hoping will take root and spread throughout Scotland as it is based on the Trieste Model of mental health care. Designated as a true gold standard by the World Health Organisation, the individual health, community welfare and economic benefits of such a service is indisputable.

In contrast, practitioner dogmatism, stigmas and predisposition towards gatekeeping access to care is highlighted throughout our work. Our hopes for the resources we are offering via our website is to assist others in navigating this unnecessarily harmful terrain and to protect them from being traumatised (or re-traumatised). This is something that no-one seeking help should have to be expected to consider, never mind cope with. Too often people are finding themselves up against and beaten down by the collective defensive of professionals in positions of power. A power that is so absolute that it has the ability to dismiss, decline support and avoid any accountability for mistakes or harm, including deaths by neglect. By the very nature of mental health practices these professionals are granted the authority to deem individuals as unreliable, irrational and not to be believed. For reasons unfathomable considering the intended purpose of their role, they are being continuously permitted to abuse their power over already vulnerable people. This is assisted by NHS Scotland only recording waiting list data and not measuring any other key performance indicators, as was identified by the recent Audit Scotland report. A fact that must be remedied at once in order to bring services into adherence with their duty of care obligations.

It is currently Black History Month and Hate Crime Awareness Week begins on the 14th October and so we would also like to draw attention to mental health services, ideologies and treatments that continue to silence and oppress minorities, as per their historical purpose. This includes the discrimination of black and minority ethnic communities by pathologising their experiences of distress and attempts to protest against maltreatment. Although poor mental wellbeing is rife within these communities (an inevitability considering social factors alone), they are the least likely to be helped by mental health services. Notably due to practitioners' lack of interest/training in non-white culture or lived-experiences, within a workforce that does not reflect the diversity of the population it serves. The health implications of enduring adversity are intergenerational, with mothers giving birth to lower weight babies as a result. People are being murdered for just being themselves and yet we have a Prime Minister and Home Secretary who scapegoat minorities and preach hate to deflect from their own failures by stirring up populist support.

The growing neurodiversity movement demonstrates a further major flaw in how we view and approach 'mental health'. Diverse minds and bodies are barely accommodated in our society or health services. For example, autistic therapists have admitted they do not reveal this diagnosis to their own colleagues due to the levels of stigma present. Many people are also harmed because they are being forced to fit into traditional and rigid boxes, and to be grateful for the opportunity. Practitioners, services and institutions have little genuine interest in listening to or learning from them and most service user involvement is a 'tick box' exercise. This widespread failure to uphold human rights within health services has united mental health and physical disability advocates under the same banner of 'nothing about us without us'.

More funding for services will not rectify problems such as these and they are not exclusive to the NHS, to Scotland or the UK. The foundations of mental health science and ideology have historically been flawed and entirely entwined with the dominant culture and norms of the time, not the best interests of those suffering and in need of meaningful support. Our healthcare provisions may not be as influenced by pharmaceutical companies as other nations but our prevailing neoliberal/capitalist ideals are have suffocated the mental health field. Most evident by its ethos of individualism and focus on 'self help'. While some academics and clinical professionals are tireless in their campaign for systemic shifts to occur, change is not coming fast or loud enough from within the responsible 'psy' institutions themselves; The authority, facade and platitudes they have built have become too big to fail, and to change them now would inevitably create a very different society.

We call on you to truly listen to the experiences of citizens and service users, and act to protect them because being able to access a good standard of healthcare and social supports in three, five or ten years will come far too late for some.

Here are some of the ways we are doing what we can to raise awareness, offer support and provoke change:



### **Arts Exhibition**

Our exhibition 'Truth to Power' is part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival under their theme of 'revolution'. We would welcome your time and consideration of the issues addressed by the pieces. Individual members of our collective remain anonymous (due to stigma and potential health and welfare repercussions directed towards minority groups and dissenting voices) but each piece includes an artist statement and we can arrange for a spokesperson to be present.



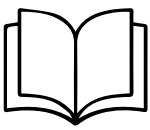
### **Website and Resources**

Our website is a culmination of lived-experience advice, academic and clinical research, and a critical reflection on the current status quo within the field of mental health. We have provided summaries of common mental health treatments (including their potential harms) and professional standards because this is not provided to service users when they access NHS support. A simplified worksheet to identify needs using the BioPsychoSocial model of health is also provided. The most significant resource is a page explaining how harm can and does occur within mental health services; Most people will only consider extreme cases of lives lost at in-patient facilities or when individuals are denied access to appropriate care. They are not aware that the same dynamics are at play when they are denied informed consent, when therapies train them to self-police because services are being used to maintain an oppressive status quo, or when they experience stigma and discrimination by medical or therapy professionals.



### **Research Survey**

During the festival we are also running a survey about experiences of using mental health services. This is a set of eleven questions that are taken from a domestic violence checklist provided by EVA Psychology as part of the NHS 'Survive and Thrive' course. Members noticed they were able to tick at least nine items based on their interactions with mental health professionals and so we are interested to identify if this is a reliable measure of abusive practices that are systemically pervasive. The responses we have received so far suggest that is the case and we can share our final report with you directly. If you know anyone who would be interested in contributing, paper copies of the survey are available at the exhibition or it can be accessed online via our website.



### **Collaborative Zine**

We are welcoming the wider community of lived-experience service users to submit to a 'revolution' zine, a form of self publishing for stories, arts and commentaries that has previously been harnessed by those in positions of powerlessness to raise awareness and provoke change. We can forward a paper copy to your office and significant NHS locations on its completion in the hope that these voices will not continue to be ignored or placated by consistent promises to do better in future. The ideologies and practices that lead to negative outcomes are historically systemic and breach fundamental human rights. There is no excuse for them to still be present within our services, discourse and society.

We hope that you will be able to make it along to our exhibition or take the time to review our resources to be able to comment fully on the themes raised. Connecting with others who share our mission and interests would also be greatly welcomed. If there is any further information, lived-experiences or resources that we can provide please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Most importantly, on this World Mental Health Day we call on you to use your position of power to make the professional, ethical, economic, social and systemic changes required to facilitate genuine mental wellbeing for all because lives are depending on you to do so. Raising awareness is meaningless without taking action.

**Regards,**

**Not Alone Collective**

## Selected Resources

**How Do Mental Health Services Cause Harm? - Not Alone Collective**  
<https://www.notalone.uk/get-help/what-causes-harm/>

**Transforming Psychological Trauma Framework - NES**  
<https://transformingpsychologicaltrauma.scot/>

**Mental Health Matrices - NES**  
<https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/our-work/matrix-a-guide-to-delivering-evidence-based-psychological-therapies-in-scotland/>

**Core Mental Health Standards - Scottish Government**  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/core-mental-health-standards/pages/1/>

**North Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Strategic Plan - North Lanarkshire Council**  
<https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/news/health-social-care-north-lanarkshire-launches-ambitious-three-year-strategic-commissioning-plan>

**Audit on Adult Mental Health Services - Audit Scotland**  
<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/news/access-to-mental-health-services-slow-and-complicated>

**Trust and Respect Report - Independent Inquiry Into Mental Health Services in Tayside**  
<https://independentinquiry.org/>

**Findings From Lanarkshire Lived-Experience Project - Scottish Recovery Network**  
<https://www.scottishrecovery.net/resources/moving-from-consultation-to-co-design/>

**The Joshi Project - Mark Smith**  
<https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/19382318.our-beautiful-daughter-abandoned-mental-health-services---fathers-mission/>

**DWP associated with adverse trends in mental health and deaths - Multiple**  
<https://jech.bmj.com/content/70/4/339>

**The Psychological Impact of Austerity - Multiple**  
<https://oro.open.ac.uk/62754/>

**Black, Asian and minority ethnic mental health statistics - Mental Health Foundation**  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-communities>

**Evidence of birth weights being affected by racial discrimination - Prof. Elyas Bakhtiari**  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827320303402#sec3>

**Killing of Brianna Ghey - 11 February 2023**  
<https://g.co/kgs/8PRHyB>

**Experiences of Autistic Therapists - Amelia Hill**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/03/clients-say-it-feels-like-weve-always-known-each-other-the-mental-health-experts-who-believe-their-autism-has-turbocharged-their-work>

**A Mentally Healthier Nation Report - Multiple**  
[https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/AMentallyHealthierNation\\_Digital.pdf](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/AMentallyHealthierNation_Digital.pdf)

**Power, Interest and Psychology - Dr David Smail**  
<https://g.co/kgs/DJfjKY>

**Mad World: The Politics of Mental Health - Micha Frazer-Carroll**  
<https://g.co/kgs/gRU6xS>

**How the Patriarchy Uses Women's Trauma Against Them - Dr Jessica Taylor**  
<https://g.co/kgs/GihdTw>