

Over 100 people celebrate SPN's largest study day yet



On Tuesday 18 March over 120 delegates, speakers, artists and helpers took part in SPN's largest study day yet, sharing ideas, information and inspiration about perinatal mental health approaches in Manchester.

The event, the third national Parental Mental Health and Child Welfare event since the start of last year, brought together people with a host of different perspectives to hear from Kate Billingham and Elaine Hanzak. Kate, Programme Director of the (Department of Health) Health-led Parenting and First Years of Life programme, talked eloquently about their new [Child Health Promotion Programme](#). This builds on the strong evidence surrounding the importance of healthy neurological development in the first two years of life and works across departments and service delivery systems to promote the idea of 'progressive universalism' in supporting families.

Mother, author and survivor Elaine Hanzak then spoke passionately and with humour about disintegration and rebuilding after postnatal depression ('Displaying bizarre behaviour' diagnosis - from a man wearing sandals and socks in December?), including acknowledging the loss of those who haven't made it through, and the importance of connecting new mothers who are struggling.

After a break, energised delegates then exchanged experiences and ideas in workshops, including hearing about young fathers being engaged in a supportive role (e.g. strapping on a quilt to feel the weight of pregnancy, being allowed to voice their own anxieties about fatherhood with other young men), or trying a 'trust walk' guiding and being guided by a nonseeing partner for five minutes (it felt like more, believe me!) in a session on FWA's Newpin services working with new families therapeutically and practically in a centre environment.

Most sessions included mothers or fathers, and in the afternoon three young asylum seeker mothers joined the coordinator and supporting psychiatrist from an innovative Merseyside group attached to a church where the young women can find a safe haven and shared space to gain confidence in this country whilst trying to recover from harrowing experiences in their countries of origin.

The chill-out room next to the main auditorium hosted a moving and beautiful exhibition of paintings, photos and poems contributed by women from around Nottinghamshire on the theme of motherhood and infancy, brought together by Susan Macknight and Diane Wright of 'PATCH', a new group for parents who have had the experience of separation from their children.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with comments including:

"I felt that Elaine Hanzak's personal account was so valuable and not to be missed. Kate Billingham should be 'cloned' to allow her knowledge and expertise to be shared everywhere"

"Inspired me to improve present practice having heard what others are doing"

"Fantastic and should be annual"

"An inspirational day with lots of food for thought, positive opportunities for networking"

"Hopefully the beginning of a culture of learning and developing within and between adult and infant mental health services"

SPN will be writing up a full report of the day's proceedings which will be available online by the end of May. We will also be sending delegates contact information for those who expressed an interest in similar areas of concern, and welcome contributions for the website on any of these.

Vicky Nicholls
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