

OutRight World Children's Day Event 2021

Thank you to everyone who joined us for this event, here is what we spoke about and the resources mentioned.

On the call we were joined by:

Sophia – Award winning mental health activist and campaigner, 20 years old

Ramis – Writer, photographer, podcaster, 19 years old

Sandy – Previous member of Welsh Youth Parliament, 18 years old

Dr Polly Walker – Child Health Specialist at UNICEF UK

Sarah Lancaster – Head of Safeguarding at UNICEF UK

We had a short **mindfulness moment**, to focus us. We paid attention to our breathing, acknowledging any thoughts or feelings we may have, and relaxed our muscles. You can practice these techniques using the guidance in your OutRight resources.

Cel Spellman, UNICEF UK High Profile Ambassador, then gave us a cheery welcome to World Children's Day. He spoke about how today is all about shining a light on children's rights. Cel recognized the importance of being able to feel safe to speak about how we feel and being compassionate to those around us, signing off with his usual "Peace and love!".

We then had a great **panel discussion**, starting with a question for **Sophia**. We asked **how she got started campaigning on mental health**. She explained how she started experiencing mental health difficulties at the end of primary school, and was taken into hospital in her teens. She realized she could use her voice and experiences of being in mental health different services to make meaningful change for other young people. Sophia did an assembly for her school and explained what happened and let others know that it's ok to ask for help and where to find it, at school and in her city. She reflected how she was scared about doing this talk, but afterwards everyone was supportive. From there, she joined **Think4Brum**, a youth steering group for **Forward Thinking Birmingham**, the youth mental health service offered by Birmingham Children's Hospital. In this role, she was involved in improving the service.

Next up, we asked **Ramis** about **what helps him support his mental health**. Ramis explained that **creativity** is really important to him. Alongside this, he does **meditation**. He explained

how you don't have to sit down in one position to do it, you can do it whilst walking, lying down. It's about being aware of your body, helping you identify what you're feeling. Also, he uses **gratefulness** – remembering what he has not what he doesn't have. **Exercise** is another important one for Ramis; Ramis loves football. Anything to get his body in touch with his mind, as they're so linked. He recommends asking your friends to play sport or go on a walk together, it gives space and an opportunity to talk to each other. He has been a **writer** since he was 12, starting with writing short stories, and has now published his first book! Anything he had going on mentally, he would transform this with his creative outlets to put a positive spin on it. He reflected that you don't have to be good at it, whether it be drawing or writing, and it can take many forms – you can be creative in science, in archery.

Sandy then spoke about **how she became a member of the Welsh Youth Parliament**. It was launched less than 6 months before Sandy came to the UK. Someone from the **Swansea Women's Asylum and Refugee Support Group** suggested she apply. The opportunity meant she could feed her and children's opinions in to the highest level of the Welsh Government. The main thing that inspired her to apply was to be able to represent young people she knew, specifically young refugees. She knew the issues they were going through and could speak on behalf of them.

Polly then told us about **what UNICEF does support the mental health of children around the world**. In emergencies and difficult settings, like war zones UNICEF creates spaces for children in these places to learn, play, reconnect and get support. Since the pandemic, we now have **mental health programmes** in 116 countries. UNICEF works hard to help children and young people can get the support they need in a crisis, including **training social workers and doctors** to provide support and **setting up helplines** for children to call. UNICEF also works with **parents and teachers** to help them understand young people's mental health. This helps reduce some harmful practices like **child marriage and physical discipline**, also **bullying** on and offline. Polly also talked about why UNICEF advocates for addressing the issue of **stigma**. Children often have a fear of being treated differently or bullied if they say how they feel, and that's rooted in stigma, based on negative beliefs about mental health. Polly believes that talking openly helps people to get the right support, and help others feel brave to speak out too.

Sarah talked about what someone could do **if they had a friend who was being bullied**. Sarah started by explaining how bullying can come in different forms, could be physical, emotional and that it's a hard situation to be in. It can make us feel unhappy, scared, not good enough. This all can have an impact on our mental health and wellbeing. If you do know someone being bullied, it's important to remember that **everyone is different** and reacts differently. There's **no right or wrong way** for someone to feel about something. It's important to **reach out** to them and let them know you're worried about them, there for them and want to help. They may not tell you what's happened right away, but **spend time with them** and do things

they enjoy with them. Ask them how you can help, how you can get through this together. Speak to a **trusted adult** - if you have **Place2Be** support at your school, it could be them that you speak to. Telling an adult how you're feeling can be hard. You could encourage them to **write or draw** how they feel. Sarah also noted that the person who is the bully may also need help and support too.

Sophia then spoke about her **mental health campaigning and advocacy**. She thinks youth voice is really important, and that young people like her need to have a say in the things that impact them. Sophia was involved in the roll out of a **mental health peer support programme** in Birmingham schools. Sophia and the other young people all have lived experience of mental health problems. They would go and talk in schools about the topic and their experience. The idea was that the earlier we reach children in schools are struggling, the better. Sophia explained that you feel there is hope if there is someone a little bit older than you who is coping who can talk to you. Sophia trained and interviewed these peers supports for the programme.

We then spoke about **Ramis'** experience as an **Asian man** struggling with mental health, which he reflected on when he was featured on a **BBC Sounds podcast**. As a child he was told he was a sensitive child, told he was "too in touch with his emotions". It got to the point he thought there was something "wrong" with him making him feel isolated because he didn't feel like a "proper man". He now understands that there is nothing wrong with that, that there is no pride in bottling your feelings up to appear a "macho man". There is also **no shame in being sensitive** and talking about your emotions. He enjoys talking about his emotions, recognising that it's not a feminine trait to do so, it's a **human trait** to do it. Regardless of who you are, where you're from, regardless of your gender, you can be whoever you want to be – and you should be that person! The more you aren't that person, the more damaging it is to yourself and your personality. There is **no box to tick based on your identity** of who you should be. Ramis thinks that the world needs people who are going to transform and adapt, we need people who know how to communicate. "We can do amazing things if we can communicate and show our emotions!".

We then spoke to **Sandy** again about her time as a member of the **Welsh Youth Parliament**, where she worked on youth mental health. She felt **empowered** to make change, working with other young people. Back when she joined, she didn't know much about mental health issues, until she had a friend who was struggling and was missing school. Sandy realised she should could represent her friends, some who didn't speak English so well, to **advocate** for them in parliament.

Polly then gave us a great example of what **work UNICEF does for children's mental health**. Around the world children, particularly girls, can be **pulled out of school**, which could be for financial reasons, to work at home or in paid jobs. For children this is acutely **stressful**. Girls

who **marry** too young can become **mothers** before they're ready, they can be bullied by their partners because they don't have powers to communicate their needs as well. This can cause **depression**. A UNICEF project in **Nepal**, funded by David Beckham, supports girls with a **life skills programme**. The programme helps them learn how to problem solve, communicate effectively, support self-esteem and deal with emotions. UNICEF also works with **doctors and mental health workers** in the community, who reach children in schools, community centres and digitally.

We then went back to **Sarah** for the last of our questions, before handing over to the audience. Sarah talked about **what someone could do if their friend was being sent videos online that were upsetting them**, giving them nightmares, making they feel scared. She explained that being online can be great to connect us, but it can also harm our mental health and wellbeing. Sarah said that if this happens to you, you should **block the account** or wherever its coming from, and **tell a trusted adult** what's happening and how it makes you feel. Lots of things can make talking about our feelings scary, but it's very important. If you're not comfortable going to a trusted adult, you can talk to **Childline** or other organisations out there. Going forward, think about your **settings** on social media. Ask you parent to help you set up the right controls so you don't receive those sorts of messages.

We then **handed over to our audience**, we had quite a few questions and couldn't cover them all during the event, but we have tried our best to answer them all here!

First up, **Polly** explained **what mental health is**. Mental health is something that everyone has – just like physical health. Sometimes we feel well, and sometimes we don't. We think of mental health as a positive state of mind, when we have **emotional wellbeing** and when we can **realise our abilities**. It's how we think, feel and behave, and this changes. When our mental health is good, we might enjoy being around other people and feel able to take on challenges and new experiences. But when our mental health is not so good, we can find it much harder to cope. Mental health is a spectrum, and we all move along it over time.

The **links** between **children's rights** and their **mental health** are covered in Activity 1 in the OutRight resources. **Article 24** of the UNCRC has a clear link to children's mental health. It states that healthcare for children should be as good as possible and that they have the right to access information on staying safe and healthy. This covers both their mental and physical health, which are closely intertwined.

We then asked our **youth mental health advocates** **how they got involved** in the OutRight campaign. UNICEF UK had seen **Sophia's** campaigning work online and reached out. Sophia explained how she really believes in our work and was so pleased to take part. She juggled the opportunity with university, her activism and wanted to give back. For **Ramis**, UNICEF UK had heard his BBC podcast and contacted him to get involved. His BBC podcast came about when they heard his own podcast, RAMtalks, that he started a couple of years ago. He said

that seeing how other youth advocates are changing the narrative on mental health is really inspiring. UNICEF came across **Sandy's** work with the Welsh Youth Parliament and contacted her through them.

Someone in the audience asked what **World Children's Day** is about. We celebrate on 20th November because that's when the UN General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on the Rights of the Child** in 1959, and when the UN General Assembly adopted the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** in 1989.

Grace, Youth Campaigns Officer, then spoke about **how settings can make the most of the campaign**, how student leaders can promote OutRight in the school and how the information about the campaign can be shared. She said anyone can email us with any specific questions about the resources. Always remember there's no one way to run OutRight, please **adapt** it to your age group and type. There are guides on talking to **local media** and your **MP or Councilors** so those in your area can hear about what you're doing. **Polly** explained that **emotional literacy and celebrating diversity** is important. The OutRight materials can also help explain children's mental health to **parents**.

What is the best way to share information about the campaign with our school? OutRight looks different in every setting that takes part and we encourage you to use what works best for you and the children and young people you work with. Some settings share all the campaign materials with their **Student Council**, or **Rights Respecting Steering Group** and those children and young people champion the campaign across the school. Other settings run the campaign just with that Student Council or Rights Respecting Steering Group. Another great way to start is via a **whole school assembly**. Or make use of the video message from Cel Spellman and PowerPoint presentation that's easily shared virtually if you aren't able to meet in-person. Given the strong link to the pastoral work in schools, talk to **form tutors and year heads** about getting involved. Link OutRight activities to what you're doing already on mental health and wellbeing, e.g. check-in activities. You could use a focus on **Article 29** of the UNCRC, about a child or young person's right to an education that helps their mind, body and talents be the best they can, to start things off. Thinking about what makes us feel positive, and what doesn't, could be a good place to begin.

Our audience asked what **advice** we have for someone dealing with **stress and anxiety**. **Sophia** explained how she can relate to this, and reinforced that we are **stronger than we think we are**, and are capable of amazing things. The first step of **putting yourself first** is to ask for help through talking to someone. Sophia would **write letters** to teachers as she found this less scary than speaking to them about her struggles. Small steps each day can help how you feel good too, like meditating, it can change your outlook. She sends her love and reassured everyone that she knows how hard this can feel.

If you are feeling anxious or stressed you could try practicing some **mindfulness** techniques.

When you start to feel anxious, try to ground yourself and focus on the world around you. Think about your breathing, the sounds you can hear, feel your feet on the ground and concentrate on how it feels. Take some deep breaths, and with each breath out imagine you are blowing away those things that are making you anxious.

Think about your **support network** and **write or draw** who helps to make you feel safe and happy and who you can speak to when you start to feel stressed or anxious. Write down the things that make you feel anxious or stressed and look at what steps you can take to try and deal with these. Try to focus on **positive outcomes** and **things you can control**, think about who you could speak to, to help you and support you.

We then spoke about **supporting a friend if they are being bullied – specifically about their mental health**. Sarah said its really important to be able to speak up about this and explain how you're feeling. She reminded the audience that you're in control of **how much you want to tell** someone, **who** you tell and **how** you tell them. She said that bullying is never your fault and things can get better.

Also, the person bullying you may not understand mental health. You could speak to your school or teacher and ask them to **teach about mental health** more, so everyone understands what it is and how to support each other. Sarah mentioned that 15-19 November was **Tolerance and Respect Week** which is about being kind to each other and recognising we all have our own struggles and that it's important to support each other.

If the bullying is taking place at school, you could talk to your teacher or pastoral lead, school counsellor or welfare officer. Let them know what is happening and how you are feeling, you could write it down if it is easier. Talk to them about things you think may help or things you feel would support you in managing this situation. You may also feel comfortable speaking to the person that is bullying you directly about how it is making you feel and ask them to stop. You could ask a teacher or another school staff member to support you in having this conversation and making a safe space for this. The important thing to remember is that you do not have to cope with this on your own, there are lots of people and other organisations that can support you.

Can you tell us more about UNICEF? UNICEF is the world's leading organisation working for children and their rights. We work to build a better world for children, and focus on the children who need the most help. For example, we help to keep children safe when emergencies such as earthquakes and wars affect them and their families.

UNICEF began in 1946 after the end of World War II: we helped make life better and safer for children living in Europe after the war. These days, we work in more than 190 countries to protect children everywhere and help them to have the best start in life.

What one thing do you think schools can do to promote positive mental health? What can schools do to raise awareness about this in the community?

There are lots of things schools can do to prioritise children and young people's mental health in-school, and to raise awareness in the community. **Activity 5: Talking about Mental Health** includes a number of activities for different ages that encourage children and young people to talk about mental health. **Activities 6 and 7** will also help groups raise awareness about the work they are doing, and remove stigma, with the wider community.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the event on 19 November and to all of you taking part in OutRight! As always, please **share** what you're doing with us via outright@unicef.org.uk or on Twitter at [@UNICEFUK_Action](https://twitter.com/UNICEFUK_Action).

You can find out more about some of the resources mentioned during the webinar, here:

Ramis' podcast [RAMtalks](#)

More [information](#) on World Children's Day

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly [website](#)

Scottish Youth Parliament [website](#)

UK Youth Parliament [website](#)

Welsh Youth Parliament [website](#)

Think4Brum [website](#)

Place2Be [website](#)

Childline contact [page](#)

Psychological First Aid [video](#)