

BEHIND THE GREEN

Jami Glover

Behind the Green (2023) is an on-going project that aims to explore the impact that NHS students' training has on their mental health. This project instalment focuses on the mental health and experiences of three student paramedics.

Presented alongside dialogue from the models, this project means to start a conversation about the importance of talking about one's mental wellbeing. It also provides advice from the students on how they cope with their training affecting their mental health.

Mental health is a predominant theme in my practice. My objective is to help irradiate the stigma of discussing our mental health and the effects it has on individuals. This theme stems from my own personal experiences which began to translate into my work both visually and conceptually.

Joshua
3rd Year Student Paramedic



Why did you decide to follow this career path?

I decided to follow this career path as I wanted to make a difference in the world and help people who are suffering. The idea of sitting at a desk job, 9-5, Monday to Friday, doing the same thing whilst people are in dire need of help just didn't sit well with me. I also liked the sound of the unpredictability of the job role, and the high acute intense moments that you can come across.

Have your experiences in your training influenced how you view your future career?

Yes. Nothing is as it seems. Before I started my placement and this degree, I always thought it would be intense encounters and high adrenaline situations. However, the reality is that there is a lot of boring paperwork, a lot of jobs that don't need an ambulance, and there have been shifts where I felt I have not done anything helpful, even though it is out of my control. The long hospital waits whilst hearing the radio go off stating that someone is dying does make it feel like you are useless sometimes.

To what extent has your training impacted your mental health?

My mental health has been impacted massively by my training. Not being able to see my friends or loved ones due to the hours I have placement, the long night shifts or the very early starts at 6 in the morning without time to get breakfast sometimes all plays on your mental health. And that's not even including the actual stuff you see on placement, the jobs where you must be the one to announce the death of a beloved father, or the jobs where you take someone's dear friend into hospital knowing full well that person is not leaving again.



Do you feel that your mental health is taken seriously by staff on your course and placements?

I feel that my mental health is taken very seriously by my current and previous mentors. However, since the NHS is such a large organisation, it is hard to feel like you are cared for by anyone other than the people in the truck. As for the staff on the course, again I feel that they personally care about my mental health, but it's hard to feel really cared for, as again you're just a tiny part of something much bigger.

How often does your mental health dip after any difficult experiences on placements?

I have not had too many bad experiences as I feel like most of the time, I can just deal with it and not be affected badly. However, when those times have come, I can instantly notice as my mental health drops drastically. But thankfully it is not often. I feel like to do this training, you can't let it get to you that often, otherwise you're just going to have a shit time.

Do you have ways of maintaining good mental health when it has been affected by these experiences?

I like to be left alone or spend time with the people I care about the most, however it tends to be that these moments do not last as you have another shift coming up and can't go for a nice drink or have a late-night watching movie with your partner. So, you take the moments you can to enjoy yourself and, in my case, enjoy spending the little time you have by yourself or with your partner.



Kim
2nd Year Student Paramedic



Why did you decide to follow this career path?

To be honest my family actually chose it for me and I just went along with it.

Have your experiences in your training influenced how you view your future career?

Absolutely, we have such a good program at Brighton we're the only uni left on the UK that do placement and uni together rather than block placements. We get so stuck in which I didn't expect but it's such a good course because you are really doing skills and talking to patients as we will be when we qualify. No 2 days are the same and we experience this from now. I honestly didn't think I'd enjoy this course and job but I've really fallen in love with it.

To what extent has your training impacted your mental health?

It's obviously a hard course, we're training to save lives so we do learn a lot and have to recall it all in the real world but we're all in the same boat and I can't complain because I know others who have been really affected negatively mentally by this course and its load. On the other hand, others have said it's improved their mental health and going on shift makes their day better.



Do you feel that your mental health is taken seriously by staff on your course and placements?

Definitely. My personal tutor is very on top of things keeping up with his personal students and asking us about how we're finding it and if I had any worries, I know I can go to him and receive advice and help. I also have worked with all types of ambulance staff, and the ones I've worked with have all been lovely and again would be people I would talk to if I had struggles with my mental health.

How often does your mental health dip after any difficult experiences on placements?

It's a common experience because we really see people at the lowest of low so I think as long as we don't get affected by it for too long it's not a worry as if we didn't feel sad about some jobs it shows we've lost our passion and don't care anymore.

Do you have ways of maintaining good mental health when it has been affected by these experiences?

I personally am quite a private person so I prefer having a day to myself if I'm off the next day or if I am on shift the next day it's a good distraction as you have other people to be thinking about that shift so I try to move on as fast as I can. Obviously, everyone has jobs that will stick with them forever which I have definitely experienced but it doesn't have to remain negative in my mind, I just try and remember it as an experience when it creeps in my mind.



Jasmine
3rd Year Student Paramedic



Why did you decide to follow this career path?

I decided that I wanted to be a paramedic when I was around the age of 16. Truthfully, I had no idea what I wanted to do at university and initially was going to do psychology because I found it interesting. I know I wanted to do something related to healthcare, but didn't know what. I attended some university open days and stumbled across the paramedic science course, which I had no idea existed. Once I had gotten home, I looked more into it and realised that it was something that I really wanted to do and I found that it perfectly fit my personality as I wanted something more energetic and fast-paced.

Have your experiences in your training influenced how you view your future career?

Yes. Initially, I thought that it would be strictly all emergencies, all of the time. Upon starting the placement part of the course, it quickly became apparent that the workload was very different, in the sense that quite a lot of what we would attend would be more social in nature. We also attend lots of jobs that do not require an ambulance. In fact, it's quite a rarity that we attend a life-threatening emergency. This has been eye-opening for when I qualify as it's showed me more of what I should be realistically expect. The experiences I have had have also matured me and prepared me more for the future.

To what extent has your training impacted your mental health?

The training at university is very mentally draining and a lot to wrap your head around. The training on placement is also very tiring, but it's more rewarding. On placement I have seen some things that most people never will see and that does stick with you, but I've found ways to help with that. It's weird to think about how I've become so numb to it all but I think that's better than feeling all of the emotions at once. There's other elements as well as the training, such as mentorship and travel to placement and many other things which can really affect mental health as well.



Do you feel that your mental health is taken seriously by staff on your course and placements? Why?

My mental health is taken very seriously by the ambulance service that I do my placements with. I recently attended two very challenging jobs in the space of one 8-hour shift and almost immediately I had received three emails from different people at different ranks in the service, and I had an appointment set up within two weeks. I don't feel as though my mental health has been taken seriously by the staff on my course. They preach very often about getting in contact if you're struggling, but they often do not reply to emails or their advice is very helpless. The university do have a mental health wellbeing service which I've not looked into so perhaps that's better.

How often does your mental health dip after any difficult experiences on placements?

Normally I try not to let my experiences on placement follow me home. I try to speak about it with my mentor on shift and then after that I shut it off as it's best for me not to dwell on it, otherwise I'd never get any work done. It was hard finding this balance in first year but now I think I've gotten quite good at managing it. It can be difficult though as often the details are too gory for family members and people that are not on the course, and most people on the course tends to be jealous of the job nature. It's good being close friends with people on the course as I feel like they understand what I could be feeling.

Do you have ways of maintaining good mental health when it has been affected by these experiences?

I like to keep things light-hearted and I think that, as bad as it sounds, I like to joke around after those kinds of jobs as if you don't laugh, you'll cry. I have a good support system with my close friends and my mentor. I find it helps to write it all down when I'm struggling and look back on it in a week to see if I'm still equally or more affected, in which case I will mention it to my mentor.

