

CCD- Healthy Mind Project working together on Mental Health Day 2018

The Healthy Mind Project (HMP) recognises World Mental Health Day on 10 October every year and organises an event to provide an opportunity for stakeholders working on mental health issues affecting the Tamil community in Kingston in particular to come together and talk about their work and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people.

This year HMP organised the World Mental Health Event on Saturday, 2 June 2018 at Shiraz Mirza Community Hall in Norbiton. On a more welcoming note this free event was co-ordinated by the Project leader Mrs Sarva Kumararajah attracted around 50 people from the different ethnic minority communities in Kingston.

The event started with serving refreshments, followed by A-minute silence to honour those who have died in conflicts world over.

Sarva opened the meeting with an annotation on how to achieve healthier life and happier minds. Mental health is a critical issue for all of us. Depression and anxiety are common mental disorders. The impact on people's lives can be huge. The most important thing, she said is to talk about mental health, recognise how important it is, and create and support a culture where it is treated as seriously and sympathetically, and discussed as openly, as physical health. We should all take care of our own wellbeing, and look out for our friends and colleagues. Being active, mingling with people, going out for walks, appreciating nature, smiling, using positive thinking and giving without expecting any returns from others are just some of the ways to overcome mental health problems.

The speaker, Dr. Balu stressed on how stigma was attached to mental health. Alcohol, drugs and family disturbances all contribute to mental health problems. Awareness to overcome this problem is very important. Mind and body are connected. There will be warning signs like sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, irritability, weight gain or weight loss. These are some of the signs of mental disturbances. Do not ignore the symptoms or it will become a problem. Early intervention is advisable. Seek professional help. For major mental disorders like psychosis or hearing voices, continued treatment is recommended.

Ms. Lubna in her presentation said that she is finding it difficult to get people to come round for coffee mornings. So she had joined Sarva's group and helping with health issues, welfare problems including housing problems.

Dr. Siva Thiagarajah talked about the brain. He said that there are three types of dementia. Alzheimer's dementia, vascular dementia and Lewy body disease. There is short-term memory loss, where you can't remember names, and experience disorientation of time, place. High blood pressure and obesity also contribute to dementia. To overcome all these problems, there are certain recommendations that you could follow: get out and about, join a club

or association, develop a hobby, practise writing with your left hand, take up dance lessons, start gardening, walk daily, do some reading and writing, learn a new language, play games, travel, meditate, etc. Eating oily fish is also helpful. Try and have at least one meal a day with family.

Dr. Srini Aravinthan gave a talk on childhood relationship. Mental problems stem from childhood. Parents' behaviour affects a child's life. Divorce, family arguments and abusive behaviour all affect the child, and this extends into adult life. Help the children to adjust and grow up in a normal way. Punishment doesn't help. Instead, reward and give helpful advice. Nutrition is important in mental health and growth. Lack of communication between parents and children also affects their normal life.

Shavina, the War Widows Project leader of the Centre for Community Development gave a small introduction on the plight of war widows event to be held on 24th June 2018 at Shiraz Mirza Hall between 2pm and 5pm and encouraged the participants to attend.

Finally, Dr. Jeyasunderam spoke on Cultural Psychiatry. He said, migration causes a lot of problems among refugees. Reality is difficult to fathom. Anxiety, drug abuse and suicidal tendencies are common within migrants. Try to analyse the problem instead of treating it. Refugees migrating from abroad to the U.K. find it difficult to settle down. Finding a job, a house and friends all become a nightmare. Counselling doesn't always help either, because of the different cultures and languages involved. Our core values are the same e.g. the universality of religion, which moulds a person. Different generations with different cultures have to adjust and live in harmony.

The talks were followed by a very interesting Questions and answer session. Questions were raised about various matters like exercise, taking vitamins, antidepressants, psychiatric medications, anxiety and worrying, Dementia and mental health, children's mental health and a healthy lifestyle.

On the whole, it was a pleasant and informative session with having people singing together to make them joyful. The medical professionals touched on various aspects of mental health issues like dementia, mental health in children and cultural psychiatry.

The event was such a success and also helped to tackle the stigma amongst people who attended. People were willing to be open about their mental health difficulties and seek information for themselves and others struggling.

The participants were happy with the information they gained in the session, and the lunch was a treat.

The meeting came to a close at 3pm with a vote of thanks by Viji Sachi.



