



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Music to Tackle Stigma Attracting the Attention of the First Minister

SCOTTISH musicians are helping to challenge mental health stigma in communities and change the way people view their own lives.

The Ensemble project from Loretto Care, part of the Wheatley Group, has brought together musicians and people who have experienced mental health conditions to give people a new way to express how they are feeling.

Steev Livingston, singer of Errors, Ross Clark, from Three Blind Wolves and singer songwriters Siobhan Wilson and Donna Maciocia have been working with people to create new songs which tackle attitudes towards mental health in society.

Now Loretto, which created Ensemble after receiving funding from anti stigma organisation See Me, is looking for people under 25 to expand the project.

Songs written about love, family, diagnosis and loneliness, among many other subjects have been created so far, with one even performed to First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Whitney Haughton, 24, from Stirling, was overwhelmed when a song she created with Siobhan Wilson, on violent relationships, was played to the First Minister at the opening of the Academy, a new learning centre in Glasgow created by Wheatley Group and designed to support people Loretto Care works for.

Miss Haughton said: "It has been an amazing project to be involved in, I have been able to write my own song and hear it back, it's absolutely fantastic. This is the first time I have ever done something like this, but I would definitely do it again.

"When we started writing the song it was nerve wracking, but I've really enjoyed it, the song writers are brilliant.

"My song was chosen for the performance to Nicola Sturgeon, it felt amazing and she said the song was really powerful, I was gobsmacked, she really understood it."

When all the songs are written they will be performed at a public performance in Edinburgh, and to staff of Wheatley Group in Glasgow and Edinburgh, including housing officers and community janitors who regularly deal with mental health as part of their job.

Michael Timmons, from Loretto Care, said: "It is awful that stigma still exists in this day and age, it's really important to stamp it out and increase understanding, especially for young people.

"Initially it can be a bit scary for people taking part, when you have never touched an instrument and suddenly you are writing a song, but after a few hours you can really see a difference in people. It is really creative and gets people to think in a different way.

"There will be a huge benefit for those participating as they will be learning about their own mental health and challenging their own self stigma through sharing their stories in this way.

"There is research that shows the benefits of music on mental health. It is accessible to everyone, opens door to conversations and can engage with people who struggle to speak about their mental health in other ways."

Calum Irving, See Me director, said: "This project is having a huge impact on those taking part and we have seen how emotional and rewarding it is for everyone.

"Having the professional musicians working on this means that not only do the songs have great messages and can help to tackle stigma, but they are musically brilliant.

"Mental health is a part of day to day life, just like music, so it's great to bring the two together."

Loretto is really keen to hear from people under 25 from across central Scotland to get involved in the project. To find out more contact Michael Timmons at michaelt1@lorettoha.co.uk.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: NICK JEDRZEJEWSKI [Media and Communications Officer]

0141 530 1049/07710 387 517

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. See Me is Scotland's National programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination, enabling people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We do this by:

- Mobilising people to work together and lead a movement to end mental health stigma and discrimination
 - Working with people to change negative behaviour towards those with mental health problems
 - Ensuring that the human rights of people with mental health problems are respected and upheld
2. Follow See Me on Twitter @seemescotland or find us on Facebook: Facebook/seemescotland, <http://seemescotland.tumblr.com/>, <https://medium.com/@seemescotland>, or at www.seemescotland.org
 3. Loretto Care provides personalised care and support to more than 2000 people each week, many of whom have particular learning and development needs.

