PRESS RELEASE

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Scots Not Getting the Help They Need for Self Harm

PEOPLE across Scotland who experience self-harm are facing stigma and discrimination in health services.

See Me, the national programme to end mental health discrimination, are calling for a change in behaviours towards people experiencing self harm, for Self Injury Awareness Day (TODAY, MARCH 1).

They say that there needs to be a focus on changing how many people are dealt with in health and social care, to ensure that people are treated fairly and not faced with prejudices about self harm

Due to the stigma around self-harm many people feel unable to speak about what they are going through, which can lead to problems getting worse as the cause of the pain they are experiencing is not properly addressed.

Denise Welsh, 32, from Stirling, began self harming when she was 14 after being bullied at school.

She said: "I was so scared about anyone I knew finding out about me self-harming because i was so scared that i would be sent away or put into the hospital.

"As the years went on i suffered two traumatic assaults which led to my self-harming getting a lot worse and resulted in me being taken to the hospital where I was treated very badly.

"I recall one doctor saying to me: 'there are people here who are really sick and we have to deal with people like you so just sit there be quiet and let me stitch your arm'.

"She said a nurse had numbed me, which she hadn't, so I should stop being so childish and sit still so she could stitch me up."

Denise wants to see a change in how people think about self-harm. She added: "I do think there is still stigma around self-harm as people still see it as attention seeking behaviour but in reality that is not the case at all.

"It's their way of coping with the troubles they have in their lives. People need to try and educate themselves before passing judgement on the individual who self-harms."

Phoebe McBarron, 25, a nurse from Ayr, first experienced self harm when she was 16 after experiencing difficulties in her home life, but couldn't talk about what she was feeling.

She said: "I would have done everything I could not to have people find out. Particularly my family, as I didn't want to upset them. I didn't think they would understand – I barely understood it myself at the time. Even when they did know, it was still very secret.

"I think it's a common misconception that people self-harm for attention. In my experience it was something I was very ashamed about."

A friend helped Phoebe to go to her GP and get help, but despite having many supportive reactions, she has experienced discrimination in health care settings.

She added: "I have had some negative reactions – mainly these are comments made by health care professionals.

"One took place when I was giving blood at a time I had no fresh injuries. The nurse made a comment in a derogatory manner, saying 'You do realise those are needle stick injuries', and walked away.

"They aren't needle stick injuries, and she was making an assumption about the cleanliness of the method of self-harm. I've had assumptions made that I had self-harmed for attention also, in questions asked or remarks made.

"Self-harm should be taken seriously, the person experiencing it needs support not judgement. People have a variety of reasons for self-harming, don't make assumptions."

Calum Irving, See Me director said: "Unfortunately people still experience stigma and discrimination when trying to get help for their mental health and often don't open up about their mental health for fear of prejudice.

"If someone attends A&E after experiencing self-harm, as well as addressing their physical wounds in a caring way, their mental health must not be ignored, so the cause of the self-harm can be treated.

"We want to work together with collegues in health and social care in Scotland to ensure that our mental health and wellbeing considered is no matter what difficulties we are experiencing with our physical or mental health."

You can get involved in the conversation on social media using #SIAD.

ENDS…

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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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 or Instagram @seemescotland or find us on Facebook: Facebook/seemescotland, or at www.seemescotland.org

3. See Me is managed by SAMH and the Mental Health Foundation and funded by Scottish Government and Comic Relief