
Nicola Byrom

Student Run Self Help

Age: 26

Education: DPhil in Experimental Psychology - University of Oxford

Background: Undergraduate degree at University of Nottingham

University: Post Doctoral Researcher - University of Oxford

Area of Interest: Mental Health

Nicola Byrom has completed a DPhil in Experimental Psychology at Oxford University and is currently working there as a post doctoral researcher. In 2009 she launched Student Run Self Help www.srsh.co.uk, a volunteer-run organisation which provides self-help groups across the country for students with mental health problems such as depression and eating disorders. The project is entirely driven by young people's personal experiences of living life with mental health problems, to make sure that the work they do is relevant and needs-led.

Nicola herself experienced mental health problems as a teenager at school, which led to her taking time off school and considerable disruption to her life. Once recovered she continued her studies as an Undergraduate at University, but found that talking about her experiences with new people in a new environment wasn't easy. She also found that, if other students were experiencing mental health problems, or had friends with mental health problems, it was something they were not confident talking about either.

This inspired Nicola to set up Student Run Self Help when she was an Undergraduate at the University of Nottingham. Her main aim was to give students the courage and confidence they needed to talk to their peers about problems they may be facing, and to understand that mental health problems are perfectly normal and that talking about them can be a good idea.

Following on from the success of setting up the project at Nottingham, Nicola felt she wanted to continue the project in some form at Oxford, whilst she was studying for her DPhil. Initially, she felt that she would just write up her experiences and pass the project on to someone else, but then she spoke to the Student Hubs team who suggested she apply for funding from UnLtd.



“None of this would have existed without the initial funding from UnLtd, which enabled us to carry out the proof of concept work, and eventually to find funding from other sources.”

In terms of social impact, Student Run Self Help has now trained well over 200 students from 18 different Universities in the UK. They typically deliver 2 days of intensive training to a group of 15 or so students, comprising 4-5 volunteers from each of 3 or 4 Universities at a time. These volunteers then return to their Universities and run the self help groups themselves.

The biggest challenges for Nicola have been that although she has the psychological know-how and practical skills to set up and deliver the project, she has found running a business, to be a totally different skill set.

Has the project been life changing?

“Yes – there has been a huge impact – it has given me more confidence in my ideas, and knowing that you can put things into practice. I feel as though this is making a real difference in the student community in terms of mental health.”

Nicola commented “We have now been Awarded a further £10,000 through the UnLtd programme to give us the capacity to focus on strategic business development. This will allow us to rethink how we operate and carefully explore avenues for long-term financial stability. This should ensure that we can keep supporting students with mental health problems, for many years.”

Website: www.srsh.co.uk

Twitter: @SRSHNicola

Facebook: www.facebook.com/fb.SRSH

Blog: www.studentrunselfhelp.tumblr.com

Video: www.youtu.be/l4JP0jfwdpQ