



Press Release

Immediate Release

30 June 2026

### **Former patient encourages men to speak up about their mental health**

A former mental health patient who is now working as an Expert by Experience (EbyE) is encouraging men to seek support when they are struggling and to talk openly about their mental health.

Levi Kent, 30, who supports men hospitalised at Cygnet Hospital Colchester, first experienced mental health difficulties when he was 21. Looking back, he said some of the early warning signs included a lack of sleep, increased stress levels and anxiety.

At the time, Levi said he did not fully understand what he was experiencing. He was first admitted to mental health services in 2017 and spent six months on an acute ward.

Reflecting on that period, he said: "I found this experience challenging and confusing as I didn't have much knowledge or awareness of mental health problems and services."

He said his mental health difficulties affected many aspects of his day-to-day life.

"It made it hard for me to function normally in day-to-day life," Levi explained. "Feeling drained, paranoid and anxious made being outside hard. Showing up to work and social gatherings seemed a lot harder."

Levi experienced two further admissions in the years that followed. Looking back, he said it took time for him to gain a greater understanding of his mental health and the support available to him.

"I shrugged off the experience as I felt it was a one-off and would just go away," he said.

"It wasn't until my third and final admission that I truly gained insight into myself and my problems. I dismissed mental health before and saw it as something that could be easily overcome but I realised it was a challenge and took work, patience and perseverance."

As part of Men's Health Month in June, Levi has shared his experiences of living with mental health challenges and reflected on why many men find it difficult to ask for help.

He believes expectations around masculinity can make it harder for men to speak openly about how they are feeling.

"I think being a man affected the way I viewed my mental health because we don't really share our feelings or emotions, so I tried to bottle it all up inside," he said.

"Fear of judgement was probably the main factor for me. I was young and around new friends, so I didn't want it to seem like there was something wrong.

"For so many years it has been that men are meant to be the protectors and providers, so showing emotion may make them look or feel weak and vulnerable. It can make them feel like they aren't doing what is expected of them."

Levi also believes some misconceptions about men's mental health still exist.

"Maybe that men don't need as much care and attention, and that they can't talk to each other about their mental health as much as women do," he said.

His final admission was to Cygnet Hospital Woking, where he engaged in Occupational Therapy activities, psychology, vocational roles and health and wellbeing programmes.

He said the experience helped him build confidence and develop new skills.

Following his discharge in November 2023, Levi joined the Lived Experience Network and became an Expert by Experience, using his own experiences to help improve services and support current patients across a number of Cygnet hospitals.

"I was inspired by the care I was given, it made me want to improve the lives of others too," he explained.

Today, he says having a routine plays an important role in managing his wellbeing.

"Having a routine helps massively, as well as getting out when possible and keeping in touch with friends and family," he said.

"I would also say not being afraid to take some time out and have some alone time when necessary."

Levi is encouraging other men who may be struggling in silence to reach out for support before problems become more difficult to manage.

"You have to speak up about what you are going through because it could solve a lot of the problems before they escalate," he said.

"What I would say to men who think they need to 'just get on with it' is that it will cause you to burn out in the long run. A problem shared is a problem halved, so speak to those who you trust and confide in."

He added that friends, family members, colleagues and partners can play an important role in supporting men who may be finding things difficult.

“Just lend a listening ear and make time where available to care for and comfort the person,” he said.

Levi also highlighted some of the signs that could indicate someone may need support, including isolation, changes in behaviour or character, or noticeable changes in the way they communicate.

For anyone concerned about their mental health, he recommends taking a simple first step.

“Seek either a therapist or confide in someone you trust, like a close friend or family member,” he said.

As Men's Health Month raises awareness of the importance of men's wellbeing, Levi hopes his experiences will encourage others to start conversations about mental health and seek support when they need it.

Now working as an Expert by Experience, Levi regularly visits Cygnet services, including Cygnet Hospital Colchester, to speak with patients and staff, helping ensure the voices of service users are heard and considered in the planning and delivery of care.

“I truly believe people with lived experience can play an important role in improving mental health services and supporting others on their recovery journey,” he said.

“I feel extremely proud, grateful and content with all the work that I have done and am doing and blessed to be working alongside so many amazing people.”