

CAMPAIGN

Community comes together for district's second Children's Mental Health Week

The second St Albans Children's Mental Health Week saw events take place across the district, hosted by mental health awareness campaign It's OK To Say. Founder **Stacey Turner** looks at some of the things that happened over the course of the week...

"It has given me the greatest pleasure to shine the light on children's mental health over this very special week, working closely with organisations and schools within our community."

Stacey was speaking in the wake of a whirlwind week dashing across the city and beyond as part of It's OK To Say's second year at the heart of the Children's Mental Health Week initiative.

She explained: "Weaved throughout the week, we have promoted preventative steps, actively encouraged a healthy lifestyle and supported self-care. We have listened and directed people to help available. Most importantly, we have encouraged people to consider their mental health and talk.

"Every single day has been about promoting positive mental

health for the whole family, educating on the topic of mental health is priceless and acts as a shield. You don't need to have a problem to talk, identify your feelings and talk about how you feel.

"We have also been encouraging children and young people to 'find their brave' and know that it's OK to speak up, and that's precisely what I want to make the norm!"

"I am very excited to be launching a schools initiative this year bringing children's mental health to the forefront encouraging children and young people to believe in themselves, self-care and communicate key messages, as well as supporting parents and carers."

Children's soft play centre DJ's Play hosted a morning dedicated to children's mental health, with face-painting by Aceface

Creations and bubbles, and a visit by their mascot monkey.

Owner Helen Whittington said: "We were so pleased to be asked to be involved with It's OK To Say again for a second year of Children's Mental Health Week. At DJ's Play we promote the benefits of interaction and play time.

"Years of research have shown that play is an important part of a child's development, assisting in confidence, social skills, and also mental health.

"At DJ's we often see friendships made, taking turns, sharing and resolving conflict. Raising awareness of talking about feelings is such an important campaign that we are proud to support."

Thursday saw an early start at Verulam School to present and chat to various age groups alongside ex-England cricketer Monty Panesar.

Stacey said: "It was a great opportunity to communicate our key messages. Three Year 11 mental health champions joined Monty and I for a table talk discussing positive mental health.

We discussed social media and I was struck by one comment 'People just need to be a little nicer', to which I agreed, as kindness goes a long way.

"It was also lovely to meet the school's dog Bobby who was ready for a stroke from passers-by and as a form of therapy by students and staff throughout the day."

Daniel Tansley, pastoral director of Verulam School said: "It was a privilege for Verulam to welcome England cricket legend Monty Panesar and Stacey Turner into the school. Both Year 8 and Year 9 were treated to a presentation on positive mental health.

"Monty shared his experiences from both on and off the cricket pitch and engaged in some fantastic conversations highlighting the importance of taking the time to talk.

"Stacey's It's OK To Say website really will help promote that message and our Year 11 mental health leaders enjoyed an excellent Q&A with Monty and Stacey discussing what we currently do at Verulam to help support positive mental health."

Monty Panesar added: "It was



great fun to join Stacey at Verulam School to help reiterate the key messages that it is OK to say, to ask for help and the difference it makes. The questions from the students were great!

"I have played cricket matches around the world and felt the pressure. If my game was off, I'd consult our sports psychologist and work hard to improve. You can do this too in your everyday life."

Straight after Verulam School, Stacey headed to Busy Bees Nursery at St Albans Hospital.

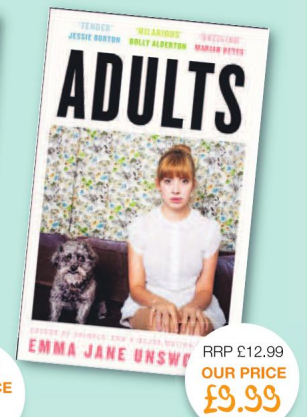
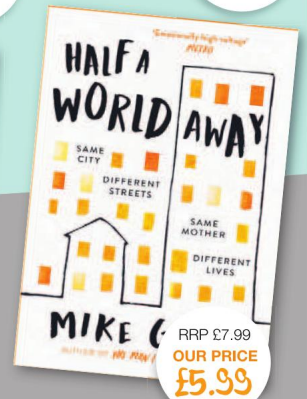
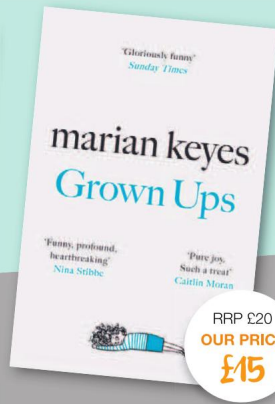
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(Left) Stacey Turner with the team at DJ's Play; (top right) at Busy Bees Nursery St Albans, and (below) filming events from the week with Oaklands College students.



"I decided the little ones and I were going to make a 'mini me' each, a perfect opportunity to engage with the children and talk about the things that make us happy. I received a very warm welcome and loved our 'mini me' making session, they were just so cute."

Claire Bye, centre director at Busy Bees St Albans Hospital, said: "We were delighted to welcome It's OK To Say during Children's Mental Health Week. We believe it's important that we promote children's wellbeing and

develop healthy ways to express their emotions.

"The children really enjoyed creating their own 'mini me' as part of the craft project Stacey brought in, engaging in a discussion about themselves. It was the perfect activity for our pre-school children and is a simple but effective way to support their emotional literacy. Thanks again to It's OK To Say for including our nursery."

■ Continued on next page.

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Raising profile of mental health awareness in district

Friday morning was mental health morning at St Albans Girls' School, complete with cake and refreshments.

Stacey said: "The students took turns to ask a question about my role as founder and within the community. I loved how I was asked 'How do you identify concerns with a young child?' and 'What to do if we're concerned about someone?'"

"We also welcomed St Albans MP Daisy Cooper and the students really enjoyed hearing how she supports mental health within her role. The students had well thought-out questions and made the most of the opportunity to share the positive and supportive work within their everyday, to include their Stamp Out Stigma Pledge."

STAGS deputy head and mental health lead Karen Thomas said: "It was so valuable to welcome Stacey and Daisy to STAGS to raise the profile of mental health awareness and answer questions about mental health provision outside school. The whole school has been involved in activities to

support Children's Mental Health Week and the students were very keen to discuss what both the charity and politicians are doing to support young people."

Daisy said "I was really pleased to join It's OK To Say to promote Children's Mental Health Week. For far too many children and young people however, the help just isn't there. Children looking for help are often told they are not ill enough. Inadequate funding has left Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) close to breaking point. Nonetheless, the week is really important in raising awareness of the issue and encouraging young people to speak more openly about the challenges they face.

"We have a duty to ensure that no young person struggling with their mental health is left without support. I will continue to campaign for a system where mental health is treated with the same urgency as physical health, and where everyone gets the help they need, when they need it."

The campaign also popped up at Westminster Lodge on Friday

evening with the mascot bear meeting and greeting children and young people with lots of hugs, while speaking to many people about It's OK To Say and its work.

James Tiley, sports development and activities manager at Westminster Lodge said: "It's OK To Say helps to shine a light on children's mental health and well-being, promoting healthy and open discussions from an early age. It has been established that one in 10 children aged between five and 16 have a diagnosable mental health condition, so it is important to create an open environment for children to be able to talk, building foundations for positive mental health later in life."

Stacey added: "I would like to say a massive thank you and shout out to How Wood Primary School, St Albans Library, DJ's Play, Verulam School, Monty Panesar, Busy Bees Nursery St Albans Hospital, STAGS, Daisy Cooper MP and Westminster Lodge. I would also like to thank Oaklands College film students. We had such a lovely time filming together throughout the week."



Students from STAGS met with Stacey Turner and MP Daisy Cooper as part of their mental health...

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It's OK To Say's mascot bear at Westminster Lodge.



factbox

Tips and advice

Encourage conversation: Discussions about mental health and feelings should happen regularly.

Be present: This demonstrates you will listen and they can talk to you.

Look after yourself: You can't pour from an empty cup!

Stay calm and promote calm: Leading by example and demonstrating you can support them.

Ask for help! You're only human and we thrive when we feel supported.



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