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By Martin Bond

in Education, Health & fitness, Life

Mental health does not discriminate. Staggeringly, almost half of adults in the UK believe they've had a diagnosable mental health condition in their lifetime. Several high-profile sports people have discussed their 'battles' with mental health, including former professional footballer Clarke Carlisle who has been open about attempting to take his own life. Suicide is the most common cause of death for males aged 20-49 years and, in the UK, men are three times as likely to take their own lives than women. Whilst this is not always mental health related, it is a big contributing factor.

Universities have a duty of care

Mental health amongst university students is reflecting that of the general population and is a growing concern, with many labelling it a crisis. Universities have a duty of care to safeguard the future custodians of society. Sport and physical activity programmes have been shown to benefit mental well-being. Universities can provide an inclusive environment for those experiencing mental health issues to engage in sport and physical activity and provide 'real world' opportunities for student volunteers to enhance their personal and professional development. Universities also have a health-promoting role to play within the local community that they serve.

Health body-healthy mind: activities and sport for mental health

York St John University offers several opportunities for people with mental health issues to participate in sport and physical activity. An example of one of these programmes is Discover Physical Activity, run through Converge in partnership with York Mind. It's a programme of physical activity and education that aims to reconnect adults experiencing mental health issues with sport and physical activity. Participants are given the opportunity to complete a nationally recognised Level 1 qualification, which in turn enhances employability and hopefully empowers participants to make

informed healthier lifestyle changes. Exercise is one of the best ways to improve mental health and well-being and it's also one of the cheapest. The benefits are well documented, it's about getting people to take those first steps.