



DRAMA, YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

An Evaluation of the Eden Court STIGMA Play Project which toured Secondary Schools as part of a series of Mental Health Awareness Raising Sessions in September 2005

January 2006

Funding was kindly received from Highland Choose Life, Child Protection Children's Service, Health Promoting Schools and Joint Committee on Children and Young People.

This project was a partnership between HUG, Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, the Primary Mental Health Worker Service and Eden Court Outreach.



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WHAT IS HUG?

HUG stands for the Highland Users Group, which is a network of people who use, or have used, mental health services in the Highlands.

At present, HUG has approximately 305 members and 13 branches across the Highlands. HUG has been in existence now for 9 years.

HUG wants people with mental health problems to live without discrimination and to be equal partners in their communities. They should be respected for their diversity and who they are.

We should:

- ◆ Be proud of who we are
- ◆ Be valued
- ◆ Not be feared
- ◆ Live lives free from harassment
- ◆ Live the lives we choose
- ◆ Be accepted by friends and loved ones
- ◆ Not be ashamed of what we have experienced

We hope to achieve this by:

- ◆ Speaking out about the services we need and the lives we want to lead.
- ◆ Educating the public, professionals and young people about our lives and experiences.

Between them, members of HUG have experience of nearly all the mental health services in the Highlands.

HUG's aims are as follows:

- ◆ To be the voice of people in Highland who have experienced mental health problems.
- ◆ To promote the interests of people in Highland who use or have used mental health services.
- ◆ To eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- ◆ To promote equality of opportunity for people with mental health problems irrespective of creed, sexuality, gender race or disability.
- ◆ To improve understanding about the lives of people with a mental health problem.
- ◆ To participate in the planning development and management of services for users at a local, Highland and national level.
- ◆ To identify gaps in services and to campaign to have them filled.
- ◆ To find ways of improving the lives, services and treatments of people with mental health problems.
- ◆ To share information and news on mental health issues among mental health service user group and interested parties.
- ◆ To increase knowledge about resources treatments and rights for users.
- ◆ To promote cooperation between agencies concerned with mental health.

INTRODUCTION

The Eden Court production STIGMA is a part of a collaborative project organised by the Self-harm Forum, an informal partnership between HUG, the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry and Eden Court Outreach.

The aim of the project is to raise awareness of mental health issues amongst secondary school children in the Highlands through the use of drama, workshops and classroom discussion. STIGMA takes the ground-breaking step of tackling emotive subjects through interactive drama and addresses a range of mental health issues in the context of the lives of young people including depression, self-harm and suicide. The performance also, importantly, provides a forum for challenging stigma, misconceptions and stereotypes, and the damaging use of language and attitudes that many people in our society still use to refer to people experiencing mental health problems.

The STIGMA play, which was performed by actors from Eden Court Outreach and supported by HUG workers and Primary Mental Health Workers, toured 13 schools in September 2005 and reached well over 1000 young people. The play was primarily aimed at 5th and 6th year students but in some schools it was shown to 3rd and 4th years.

The play is now in its third year and has reached a total well over 4000 young people in the Highlands. In the first year it toured 23 schools; in its second year 21 schools and this year 13 schools.

The play was also shown as part of four well attended multi-agency training seminars aimed at professionals who work with young people and who are concerned about self-harm. Evaluation forms completed on the day showed that the seminars had been extremely successful and very well received. These seminars were intended to support workers from a range of agencies in advance of the STIGMA play touring the schools and to help enhance professionals' skills and confidence in responding to self-harming behaviour. In particular we were keen for teaching staff to attend as previous experience had shown us that following the play some young people came forward within their schools for additional help, support and information.

This year is the first time that we have carried out a major evaluation of the project. This report is a description of our findings. The evaluation took the form of a questionnaire that was filled in by students after they had seen the play and before the workshops and so can only really be regarded as an evaluation of the play rather than the whole project. In total 950 students completed the evaluation form which was then analysed by a HUG worker and a member of HUG. Carrying out an internal evaluation rather than an independent one was justified on the grounds of time and cost.

The play and seminars were planned throughout the year by the Self-harm Forum, which is an informal partnership between HUG, the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry, the Primary Mental Health Worker Service and Eden Court Outreach. The Forum aims to bring together agencies and professionals who work with young people who self-harm to:

- Share experiences and knowledge
- Work in a co-ordinated way to deliver training across the Highlands to professionals, and
- Encourage good practice in responding to young people who self-harm

THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY

Ever since HUG was founded in 1996 its members have said that stigma is one of the key issues that they would like to see challenged. They have also consistently said that young people in particular could benefit from education. They believed that the way to educate them was through interactive and 'fun' methods which they would like to engage in such as drama.

The reasons for educating young people are numerous but include:

- Young people are our next generation; if we can help them gain a better understanding of mental illness before they develop entrenched attitudes then we can expect that stigma will decrease.
- Young people are often the people who our members blame for the more overt aspects of harassment. If we can let them see the effect this harassment has on us then hopefully this will also decrease.
- Some of the major mental illnesses commonly start in late adolescence and yet many young people have little knowledge about them. By providing education we hope that they will suffer less and seek help quicker.
- Everyone experiences poor and good mental health. By speaking about it we hope that people gain literacy about such issues that previous generations haven't had access to.

In 2002 HUG obtained funding from the Scottish Executive, under the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing which we used to commission our own play.

The play was written by Ilona Munro from Eden Court Outreach. The content was informed and developed by the experiences of HUG members, young people and workers as well as professionals working in mental health mainly drawn from Lochaber via Lochaber Youth Minds.

We decided that we would like professional actors to perform the play. On balance, knowing that we would have a quality product provided quickly by a reputable agency was preferable to trying to get HUG members themselves to perform in the play (which is a route that is sometimes successfully used elsewhere.) It also tied us into the Eden Court Outreach programme which is highly successful and has an expertise that we do not have in HUG.

The play is extremely powerful, though funny in parts. In the first year it was organised and delivered by HUG and Eden Court alone. In the second and third years the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry and the Primary Mental Health Workers played an increasingly important role. This was a reaction to the vulnerability some young people may experience when faced with the subject and by the large and important task of briefing and supporting the schools and pupils prior to the play touring.

By the third year we felt very confident that, as far as is possible, the young people had sufficient advance warning and preparation for the content of the play. This meant that

they could choose to miss it if they felt that it would be too much for them and also access help from the Primary Mental Health Workers or guidance teachers if it raised issues that they needed help with once they had seen it.

Through the evaluation process (and in light of our experience over the previous two years) we learnt that schools would benefit from additional preparation both before and after the young people have experienced the play. We therefore restricted the 2005 tour to 13 schools (whereas in the first and second year we visited around 20 schools) this allowed for more intense work within each school.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

Over the year following the last production of the STIGMA play the Self-harm Forum developed the project to its final shape which is as follows:

Preparation for the play:

Eden Court selected the actors and rehearsed the play with some adaptations following lessons from previous years. The actors met with HUG members to gain a greater insight into the lives they lead and the messages they wanted to convey. A rehearsal was provided which members of the Self-harm Forum and some HUG members saw and where reaction could be assessed about its content.

Support and briefing for schools:

Each school provided preparation for students with workers coming into classes to give out information on mental health and mental illness as well as on the subject of the play. This was mainly carried out by Primary Mental Health Workers as well as guidance teachers and on occasion by HUG workers and members.

The schools also made sure that any students they thought may be vulnerable had the option to miss the play. Although some students chose not to attend, there were others who found the subject so important that they chose to participate despite the distress it caused them.

The performance:

The play was performed by Eden Court with (as far as possible) HUG members and workers, Primary Mental Health Workers and teachers in attendance.

First the play and its purpose was introduced by a HUG worker, then the play was performed (in the round) followed by an interval for everyone to regain their breath and fill in the evaluation forms.

After this, the Eden Court actors ran a workshop on the play. It was a mixture of information, provided through the use of statistics and sources of help, and also a chance for the students to influence key episodes of the performance by having scenes rerun under their direction.

At the end, the HUG worker summed up the play and introduced the Primary Mental Health Workers again as well as making time available for students to gather information leaflets and talk to members of the project.

Before the cast left for the next performance, evaluation forms were scanned to see if anyone had asked for help, students who approached us looking for more information or assistance were put in contact with the Primary Mental Health Workers or Guidance Teachers.

Information and Support for Young People:

Due to the content of the play it was vital that accurate and appropriate information was made available to the young people. A wide selection of leaflets, website addresses, national organisations, help-lines and booklets on a range of mental health issues were available on the day for the pupils to take away with them. The school was encouraged to set up a display for pupils to access later in a quiet and private place e.g. in the library or guidance office.

Primary Mental Health Workers were involved in briefing staff and pupils in some schools and some were there on the day to offer support should it be required by any young person. Other mental health professionals attended, but some felt they were not able to offer direct pupil support as their remits were not specifically to work with young people. However, they were there to respond to any issues or concerns of teaching staff.

Guidance staff were on hand and indeed a number of pupils did go and speak to their guidance teacher immediately after the performance.

A HUG worker also attended each performance and the young people were invited to speak to them if they felt the need. A few pupils did come and ask HUG for additional information and to share some concerns they had about friends or family members.

As a result of the play we had records of a total of 50 young people from 8 schools asking for help either on the evaluation forms or by seeing workers after the play. Some of these young people were already known to services or had relatively minor requests to make but others were contacting services about issues such as self-harm and depression for the first time. This meant that some pupils who had up to then suffered alone were now able to access support.

Debrief:

In most cases the Primary Mental Health Workers revisited the schools some time later to provide a debrief for the students.

THE PLAY ITSELF

The whole performance lasted one hour 10 minutes and included a 35-minute play and a workshop of similar length, which allowed the pupils to air their views in a forum style theatre. The forum also encouraged the young people to voice different decisions from those made by characters in the play, or to propose different behaviour for characters in scenes from the play – in a quest for happier outcomes and to emphasise how negative or uninformed attitudes about mental illness can make young people feel they are to blame and can discourage them from seeking help.

The play follows the story of five students at High School:

Callum, a young man with a difficult family background who has experienced depression and has attempted suicide in the past but is now beginning to recover.

Joanne, a young woman who has suffered a family bereavement and is struggling to manage with her life. She doesn't know what to do and is self-harming as a way of coping with her emotions.

Robbie, a young man who is friendly with Joanne and Liam and knows almost nothing about mental illness

Ilona, a young woman who is very prejudiced about mental illness and bullies the 2 people who are experiencing mental health problems.

Joanne's' sister, Julie, who tries to help but is not always very sensitive in how she does this.

Circling around the five characters are other family members and teachers.

The play graphically depicts self-harm and depression and the emotions it causes. It shows how the young people deal with the situation and learn from each other about illness and mental health. It provides information about why people may get into such situations and some of the things that professionals and others can do to help. It looks at the effect of unhelpful or prejudiced attitudes from others and through the use of humour challenges many of the myths associated with mental illness and its treatment.

It also shows that people can recover, and promotes the importance of seeking help.

Through the medium of the play we hoped that students would learn:

- That anyone, including young people, can have poor mental health
- That there are understandable reasons for mental illness
- That people can recover and that getting help is important
- That the reaction of young people and other people are very important
- That stigma and prejudice is hurtful and damaging
- That many of the myths around mental illness are inaccurate and unnecessary
- That people can help each other.

REACTIONS TO 'STIGMA'

The Initial Reaction of Students

For most students the play was a powerful and an emotional event. They concentrated hard and were very attentive. We heard that in many schools that the play was a topic of conversation for some days afterwards.

There were some students for whom the play held few surprises and who were not really very interested. This, however, is to be expected amongst an audience of a thousand people.

A small number of students said that repeated warnings that the play was very powerful and that people could leave if necessary were overprotective and unnecessary. However the fact that the play did reduce some students (and some adults) to tears meant that we felt justified in taking the precautions that we did.

Some students had to leave the play because of the emotions it provoked and others approached us afterwards to get assistance; this year we provided room for students to ask for help on their evaluation form if they wanted help. As a result some students accessed help for the first time.

This, combined with the enhanced visibility of the Primary Mental Health Workers, was an additional result of the play that we didn't initially expect, but which we were glad happened.

A description of the play, written by one of the students can be seen in Appendix G.

The Reactions of HUG Members and Workers

We had begun to think that the play was losing its impact and were contemplating trying a different project next year. However, the reaction of the students made us think otherwise. The play still has a power to affect us deeply despite having seen it numerous times.

Some HUG members who saw it for the first time reacted as follows:

"Whilst we would all like to see new initiatives we think the play has a power to educate and move that we shouldn't underestimate."

"I thought that the STIGMA play was extremely powerful and thought provoking, and was very encouraged to read the pupils' feedback forms in relation to their reactions and what they had learned."

The Reaction of Primary Mental Health Workers

The Primary Mental Health Workers were all very enthusiastic about the play despite the considerable additional work of preparing for the performance and dealing with its aftermath.

Some of the feelings are listed below:

"The play has been a powerful asset in raising the profile of mental health issues in school. The play, due to the material and the great acting, has provided a great tool to help communication about the significance of mental health issues, whilst also allowing the forum for young people to ask and receive support."

Chris Lemon, Primary Mental Health Worker Easter Ross

"The play was the talk of the classroom and corridors of Dornoch Academy even after several weeks following the STIGMA play. It raised the profile of mental

health problems in a really positive way among the staff and pupils who watched it, and they would be more than happy to have it back next year."

Steve Spence, Primary Mental Health Worker Sutherland

The Reaction of Teachers

Almost all the teachers we talked to were very positive about the play and many had made the assumption that it was now becoming a yearly event which they were very keen on.

The teachers talked about the play making mental health into a subject that was now visible and talked about. They thought this was very good and were glad that it would now be easier for children to seek help rather than suffering in silence.

Some reactions are listed below:

"Fifth Year pupils have been discussing mental health issues in PSE this term and in September S5 pupils watched 'STIGMA' which was very well received by both pupils and staff and the quality of the acting performances was excellent.

As preparation for the play all S5 pupils took part in a very informative discussion with Jim Neville, a Community Psychiatric Nurse, who outlined some of the pressures experienced by teenagers and the range of mental health problems that can occur. 'STIGMA' is a thought provoking play and was very well received by the pupils."

Susan Ritson, Guidance Staff, Charleston Academy

"I thought the play dealt with a difficult topic very well and that the young people were well engaged with and sympathetic to the subject. It provided an excellent opportunity for young people to discuss the subject and therefore allowed them to become more aware of self harm and mental health generally."

Ken Deans, Principle Teacher Guidance, Kingussie High school

The Reaction of Eden Court Outreach

"The STIGMA Project was an invaluable tool to promote the issues of self-harm and depression among young adults and those who work with them. The use of drama on a normally taboo subject opened up discussion and debate, not only highlighting a serious problem but ways to overcome it".

Islay Macrae, Actor

"The STIGMA play and workshop were once again remarkable in their capacity to hold, entertain and educate the school audience. This occurred across the spectrum of involvement with mental health issues that each audience member might have had."

John Batty, Artist in Residence

"It has been a pleasure to be involved in such an important project with so many brilliant people whom without, the project would not have been such a

success the play itself raised many different points and I found myself, along with the audiences, learning."

Alan, Actor

Working with the members of HUG, along with many other mental health workers in the area, gave me a fresher perception on mental ill health and helped me to understand the emotions of my character. The main feeling that I think surrounds this work is one of hope and change for the better.

There was a lot of discussion on how great it was that pupils had asked for help and I met many people who have overcome their difficulties and are open and frank about their illnesses. Speaking with them really made me understand the need to affect change when it comes to stigmatising mental ill health.

Catriona Lexy Campbell, Actor

THE EVALUATION OF THE PLAY

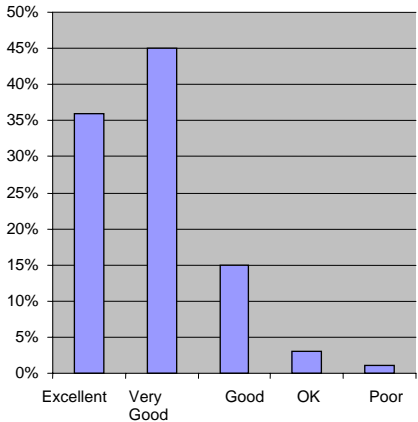
The evaluation was carried out from 950 returned evaluation forms, which the pupils completed immediately following the play. We undertook a quantitative analysis of all 950 forms in which the pupils rated the play and the extent to which their understanding of the main issues (depression, self-harm and stigma) had increased.

We selected a sample of 130 forms (ten from each school) for the qualitative results where students had written down their reactions to the issues raised in the play, how (if at all) their attitudes had changed and if anything had surprised them in the messages they had heard.

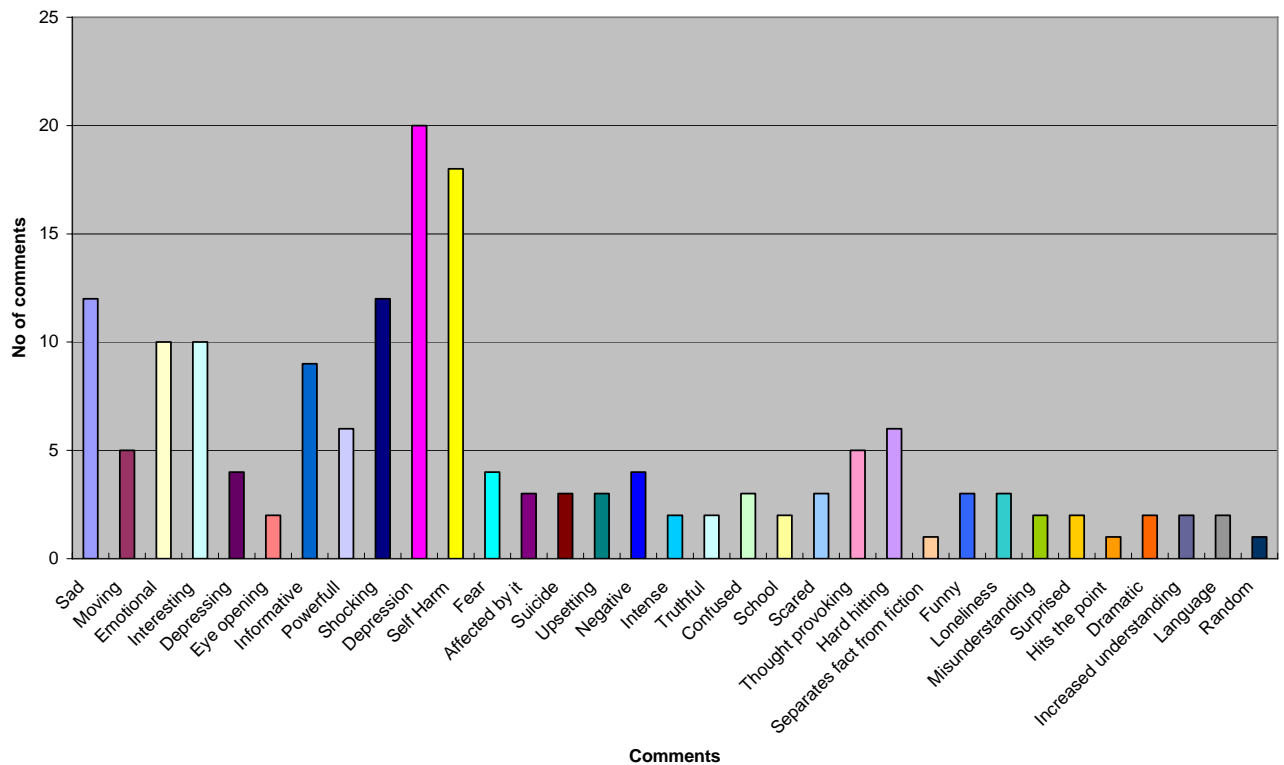
The Quality of the Performance

The quality of the play itself and the skill of the actors shone through in the evaluation forms.

- 1. 81% of students thought the play was either excellent or very good. Considerably less than 1% thought that it was poor. This is a testament to the quality of the script, the acting and the preparation by Eden Court and the Self-harm Forum.



2. We asked students to write a few words describing their reaction to the play and these are displayed on the following graph. Some just list the subject of the play but it can also be seen that the play was seen as sad, hard hitting, powerful and emotional.



We haven't recorded the comments here that were made only once but they include a whole range of reactions such as "laughter" "helpful", "deep", "striking", "help!", "touching", "funny", "annoying", "devastating" and "pretty tame."

Some of the students also made more detailed comments which include:

"It made me think; bullying could affect someone with a mental illness."

"I was impressed by the way the issues were approached."

"The mental issues and the people in the plays reaction were very realistic and put the message across well."

"Shocked that people treat themselves like that."

"Reminds me of being at home."

"It brought up memories of friends I was very close to."

"It was a play you have to see."

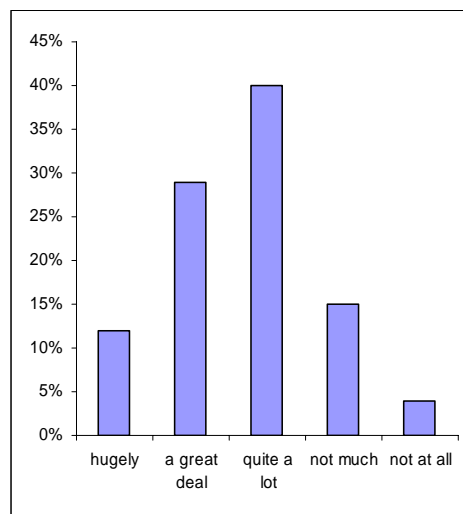
Although a very small number of pupils weren't interested, most people were very positive and some people were reminded of experiences from their own lives.

See Appendix A for a break down of reactions about the play for each school.

How has Understanding of Self-harm Increased?

As can be seen from the graph, the change in understanding is not as dramatic as the evaluation of the play itself, but it is still very encouraging that 80% of students said that their understanding had increased somewhere between “quite a lot” and “hugely”.

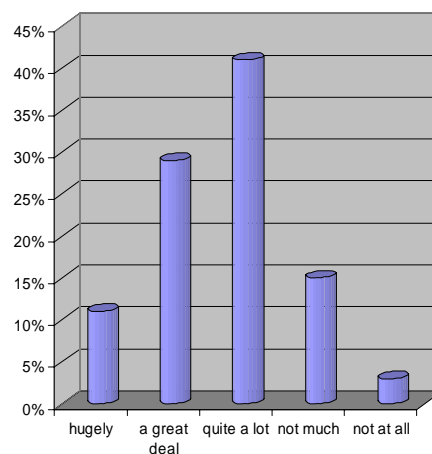
It has also to be remembered that the students had already been through a session with the Primary Mental Health Workers or HUG workers and many told us that they already had some knowledge of the subject because of this.



See Appendix B for a break down of how students understanding of self-harm changed in each school.

How has Understanding of Depression Increased?

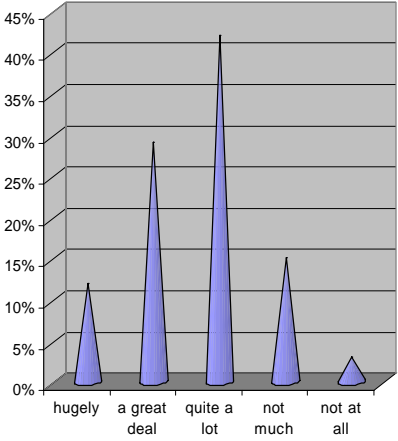
As we can see we had very similar results to the subject of self-harm; 81% of students knowledge increased in the range from “quite a lot” to “hugely” and only 3% said that their knowledge hadn’t increased at all.



See Appendix C for a breakdown of how students understanding of depression changed in each school.

How has Understanding of Stigma Increased?

Again we have very similar results; 83% of students understanding of stigma had increased and only 3% felt that they learnt nothing at all.



See Appendix D for a breakdown of how students’ understanding of stigma changed in each school.

Were Pupils Surprised by Anything They Had Learnt?

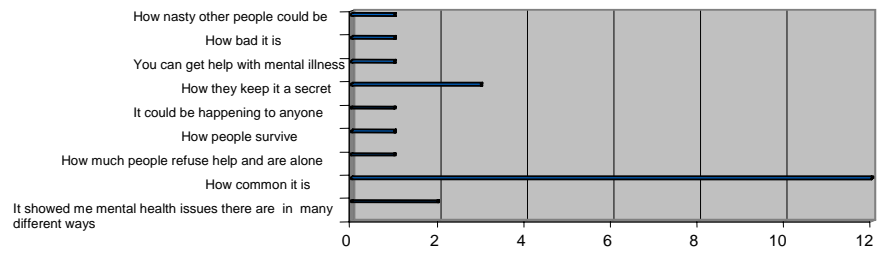
This question showed that many students already have some awareness of the issues surrounding mental illness. 32% of the pupils were surprised by what they had heard or learnt during the session, but 68% were not surprised.

The reasons people gave for not being surprised were that they knew about it already or that they had been through it either themselves by experiencing mental illness directly or witnessing it in friends or family. Some people said that it was a subject that people are more willing to talk about and that therefore people were becoming more aware.

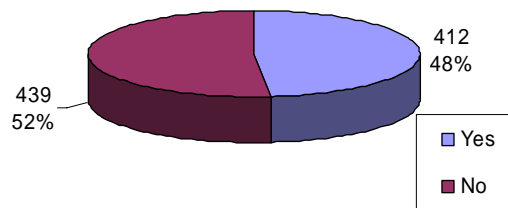
What surprised the pupils was how common mental illness is and that anyone could experience it, and just how bad the experience could be and how unpleasant other people could be.

See Appendix E for a breakdown of this school by school

The main reasons people were surprised



Have attitudes towards people With A mental illness changed as a result of the play?



As we can see 48% of the answers showed a change in attitude. Many other students were at pains to say that before they saw the play they felt that their attitudes to people with a mental health problem were already positive.

This is a very encouraging result and shows how valuable this medium can be in helping people come to an understanding of the lives of people who experience mental health problems.

The comments people had about their attitudes have been grouped into broad categories which can be seen below:

- I understand a lot more about they are going through
- I never thought of them as different/ I always respected them
- I will treat them better and be more considerate and understanding

A breakdown of how people’s attitudes changed is shown school by school in Appendix F

Any Additional Comments People Would Like To Make?

The vast majority of comments were made to compliment the actors and the play itself:

"I thought the play was awesome, moving and helpful"

"The play was fantastic and thanks to the actors and actresses who brought the issues to life."

Other comments were made about the humour in it which people liked and about the power of it:

"It almost got me crying"

There was also a comment about the need to show more clearly that people can recover:

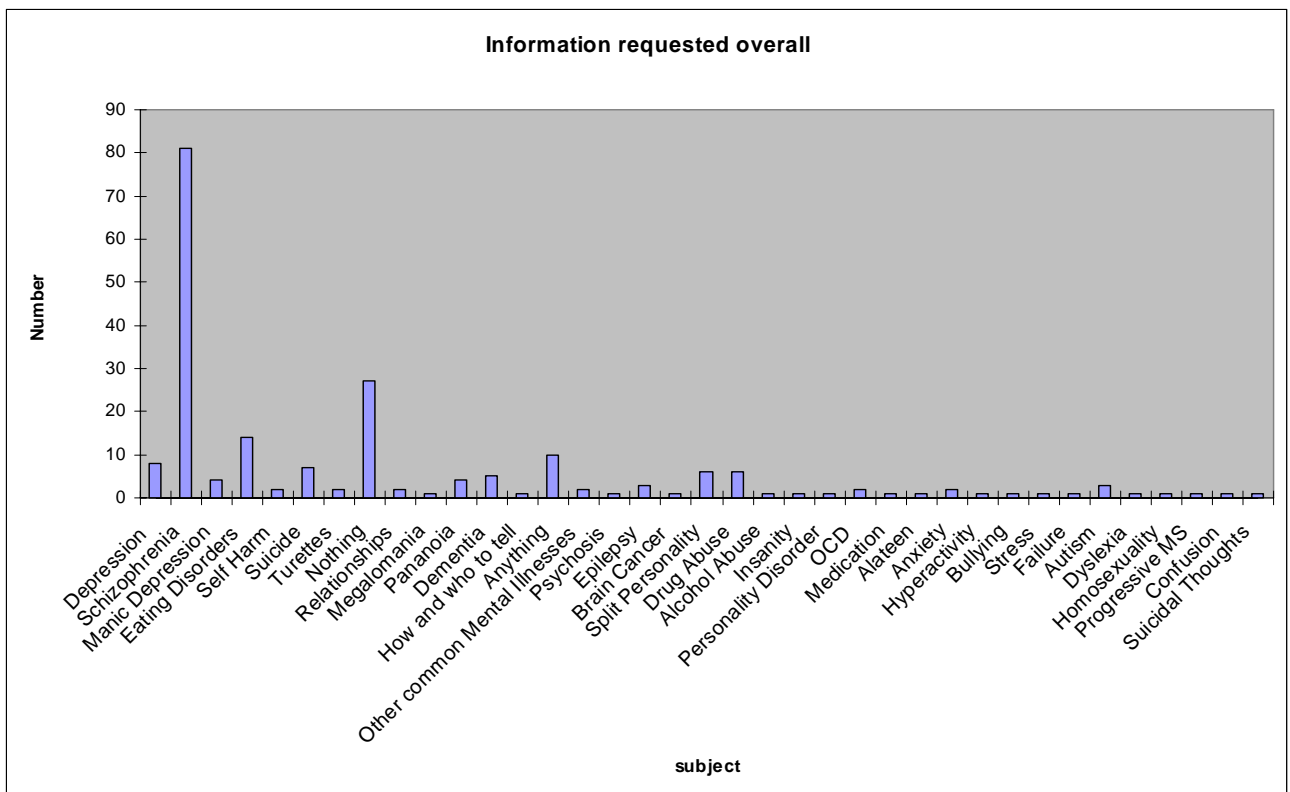
"The play should have been longer – I would have liked to see Joanne get better in the end"

A final comment which demonstrates the reason for such performances:

"I could relate to the issue of depression and have attempted the issue of self-harm. This session made me think that I could in fact open up to more of my close family members for advice"

What Else People Would Like To Learn?

We wanted to see what else students would like to learn. Some students stated that they didn't want to learn about anything else to do with mental ill health but those who wanted to find out more asked for the following subjects:



CONCLUSION

For the first time, we have carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the STIGMA play which is part of the campaign to increase understanding about mental health issues and mental illness in schools in the Highlands.

Although we have concentrated mainly on the play rather than the whole session we now have evidence that apart from the quality of the play and the acting itself, that the students learnt more about mental illness and that a great deal of them felt that their attitudes had changed as a result .

Anecdotal evidence was provided from a drop-in-centre for people with mental health problems. Previously students had thrown stones at the windows of the drop-in-centre and hurled verbal abuse at clients. After a previous production of the play in their nearby school this abuse declined dramatically which clients attributed to the power of the play.

Despite our worries that the play was becoming a little tired we now realise that it is an excellent medium to continue to use in schools and would urge future funding of productions across the Highlands.

We have learnt that it is very important to make the performance as safe as possible for pupils and believe that this tour achieved that end. We learnt that some of the workshops that followed the play (namely the use of statistics) could be improved and are considering asking HUG members do a short testimony on how they have recovered and managed with mental illness as a final contribution to future performances.

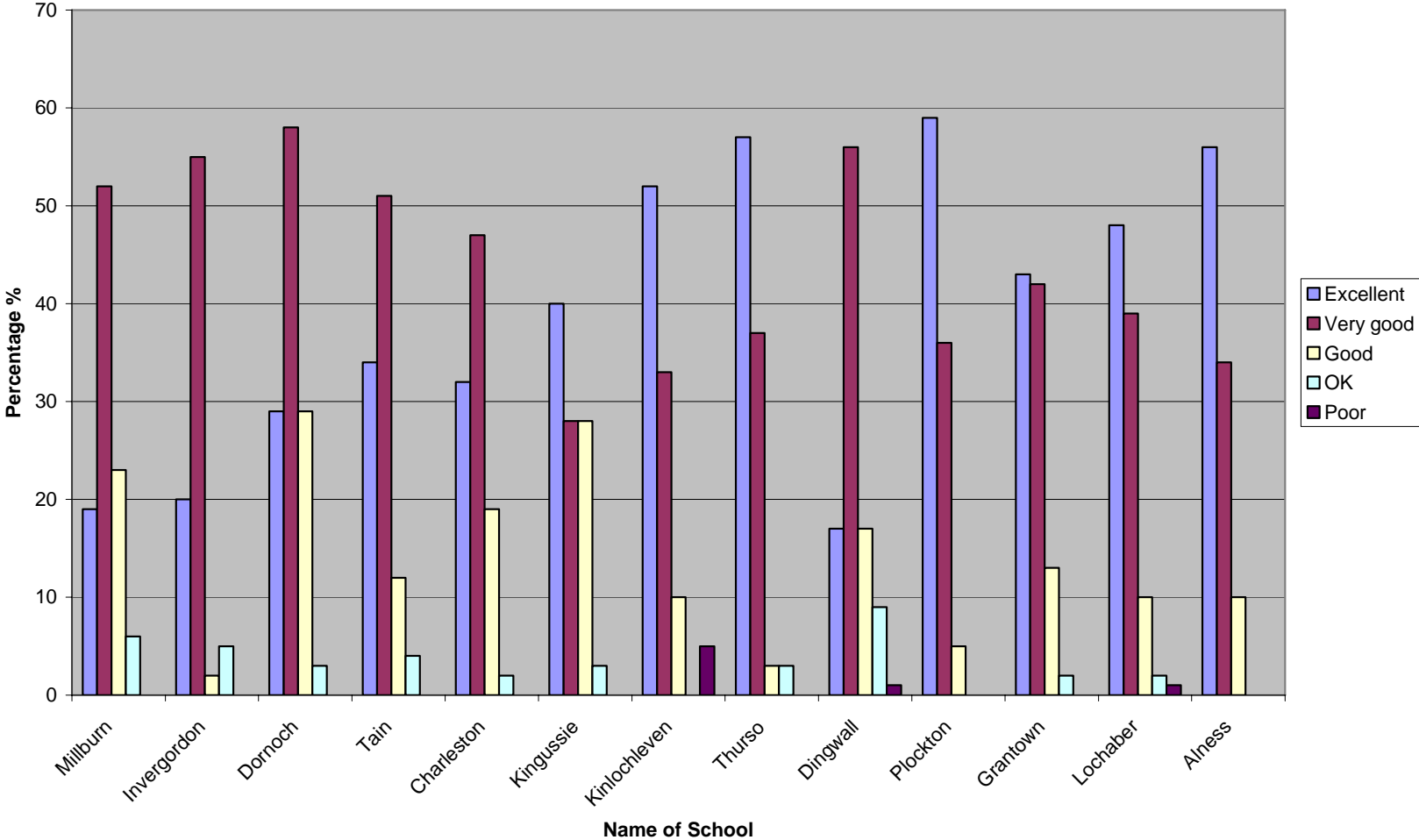
We are also very pleased that a substantial number of students came forward to ask for more help and information either for themselves or their friends.

Despite the success of the play we would be keen to look at other ways of discussing mental health –maybe discussing mental health as much as mental illness and maybe encouraging students to get involved in creating their own drama's on the subject.

Appendix A

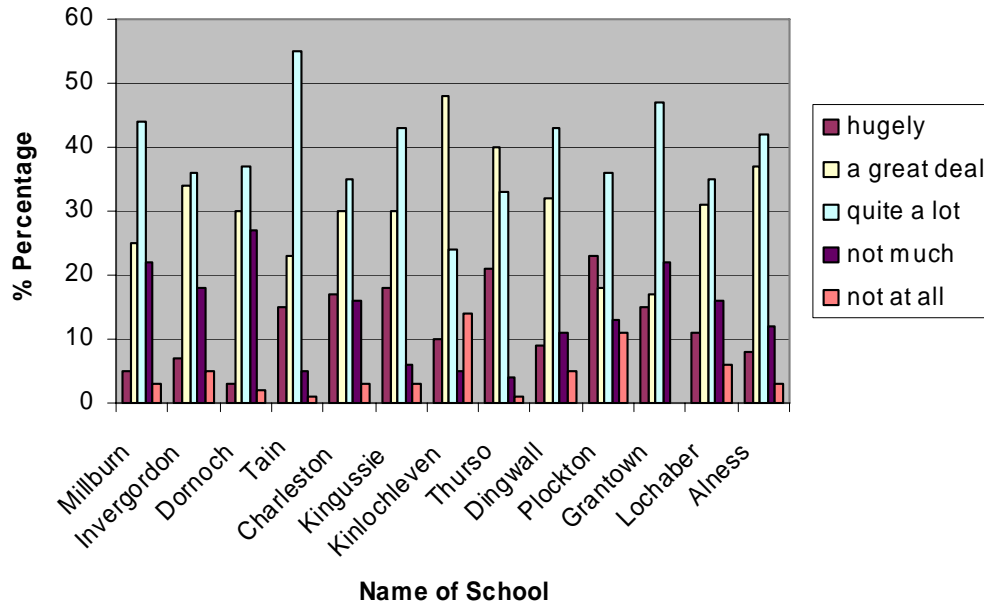
Breakdown of statistics by each school:

Rating the Play.



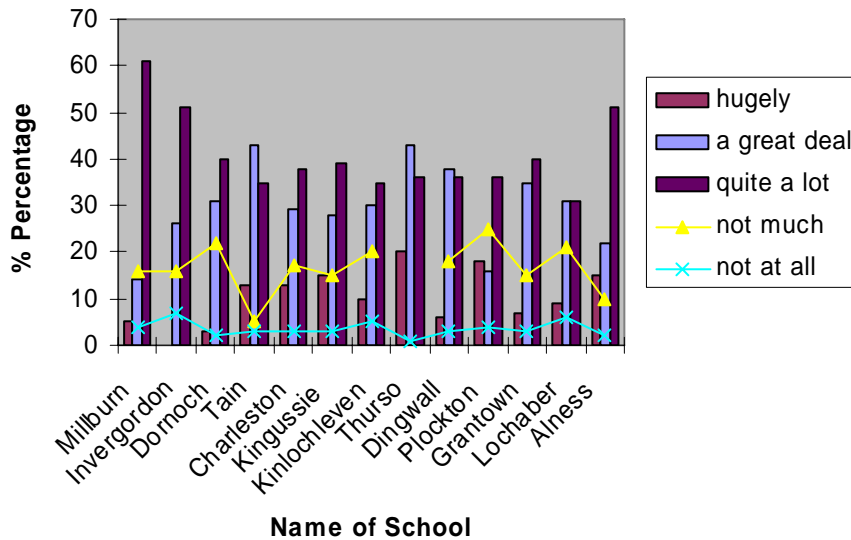
Appendix B

Self Harm - How has your understanding increased?



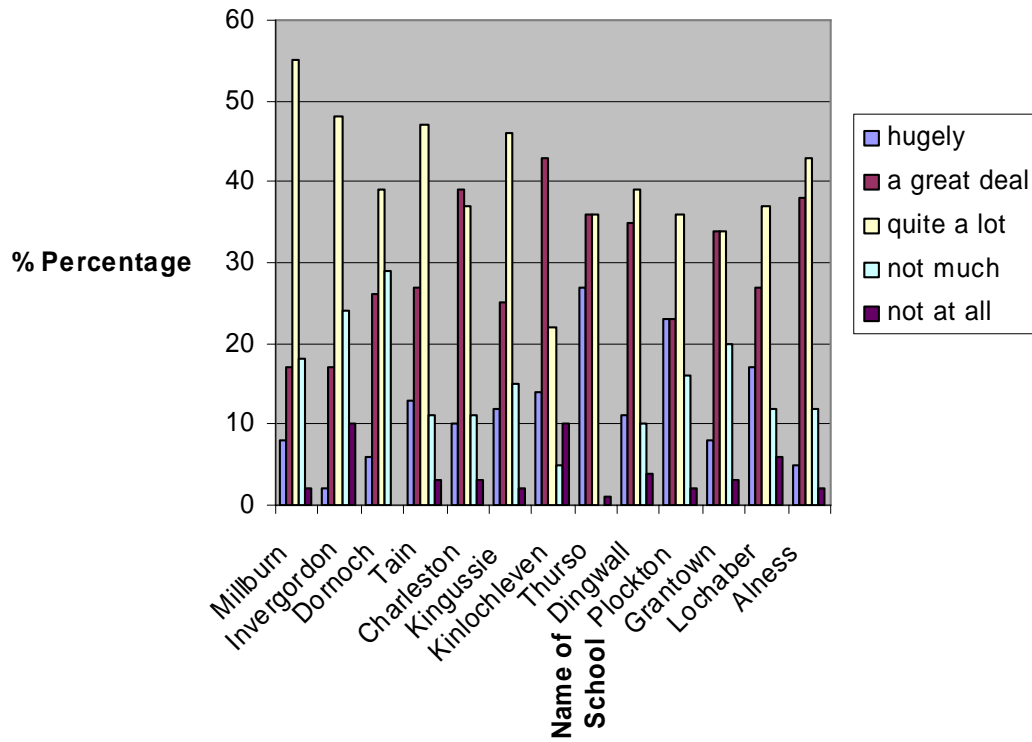
Appendix C

Depression - How has your understanding increased?



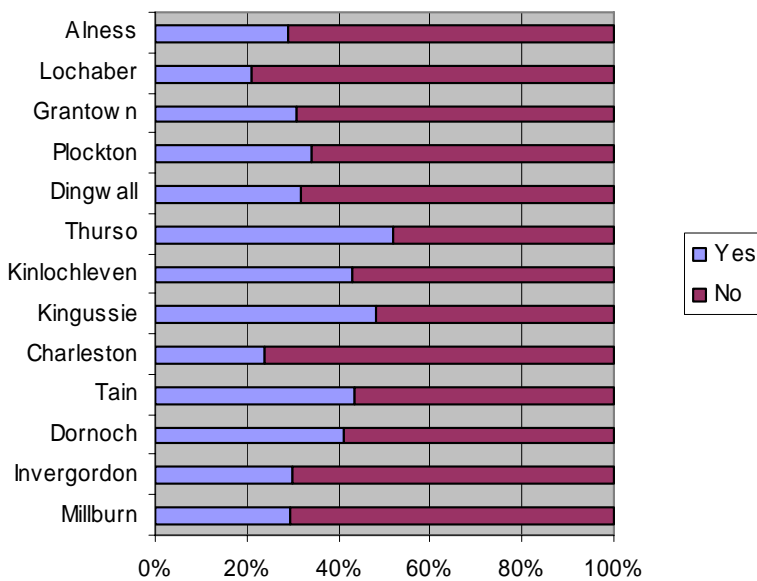
Appendix D

Stigma - how has your understanding increased?

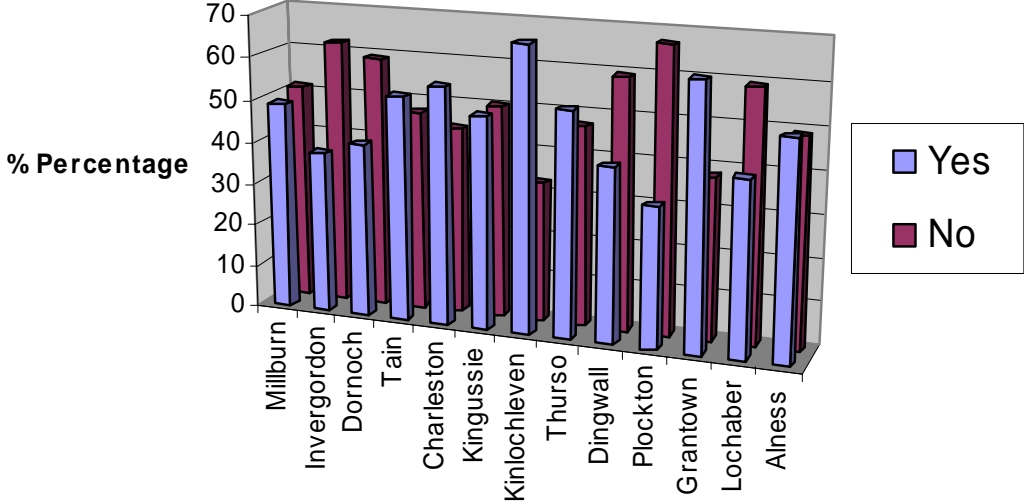


Appendix E

Surprised by anything you have seen today



Has your attitude changed?



Appendix G

A Review of STIGMA

“STIGMA’ has to have been one of the most shocking and one of the most thought provoking plays I have ever seen. It starts in total silence with a boy slowly taking an overdose of pills followed by a girl cutting her arms with a razor blade – both very powerful scenes. The silence was shattered by a sudden burst of local radio. From this explosive start everyone in the audience close to the actors knew it was going to be a really emotional play.

It tells the stories of these two teenagers who had both developed mental health problems. Joanne who was cutting herself after the death of her mother a year before and Callum who was depressed because of pressures in his life were getting too much, so he tried to end it. They both went to the same school and were in the same year. Their paths crossed and they found themselves in similar situations getting bullied and sneered at. Their families couldn’t help or didn’t understand what was wrong so nobody listened to them or talked to them. Nobody that is, except Robbie, the annoying but sympathetic friend who kept asking the out right difficult questions about Callum’s depression and the suicide attempt. Robbie was not aware of the stigma of mental problems and just talked about it. Talking begins to help them all in the end – Callum talks to Joanne, she talks to her sister, then her dad so her problems are shared. Callum starts feeling better and begins to look forward to the future.

After the play the actors ran a workshop that tested our knowledge of mental health issues and gave us some understanding of the different types of mental problems anyone can suffer. Although the play shocked me and was very realistic I think it was worth while and informative, giving us an insight into these challenges and what more young people than we think are actually going through.”

Katie Barr 5R

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to everyone who contributed to this report.

Please feel free to photocopy the report, however if you use the report or quote from it or use it to inform your practice or planning please tell us about this first. This helps us know what is being done on our behalf and helps us inform our members of the effect their voice is having.

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