

New Eating Disorder Initiative Labelled 'Potential Game Changer' by GP

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“Eating Disorder Support & Recovery Solutions Need to Change” –
Says Founder of New Mental Health Initiative

THOSE living with, caring for, and concerned about, friends and family with eating disorders, can now choose to send a carefully curated gift box with that audience in mind.

The boxes are a feature of a newly launched social enterprise – already labelled a ‘potential game-changer’ by one GP – which has been devised by a woman seeking continued recovery from her own 20 year battle with anorexia.

Debbie Watson, 41, has launched Wednesday’s Child to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Week, and says the boxes are just a doorway into a community of other services, events, training and coaching activities which are very specifically designed to acknowledge the troubling world of eating disorders.

It is estimated that in the UK alone, some 1.25 million contend with an eating disorder such as bulimia or anorexia, but that many more have become immersed in a distressing cycle of disordered eating and mental health struggles, in particular since the advent of social media.

Anorexia nervosa has the highest morbidity rate of any mental health illness, with death likely through suicide, or cardiac failure.

The curated Wednesday’s Child boxes can be ordered on a subscription basis, or as a one-off gift, and have been carefully considered to provide contents which aim to encourage mindfulness, self-soothing, nourishment, and comfort.

It is believed to be the first time that a box with such curated contents, and to this particular tailored audience, has been available. Run as a social enterprise, Wednesday’s Child commits to reinvest profits from its trading toward supporting those with eating disorders and related mental health illness.

A longer term mission aims to achieve a designated daycare and educational centre to support both individuals with eating disorders, and those wishing to gain more awareness.

“When you know someone with a mental health issue like anorexia nervosa, it’s natural that you might want to be able to show you care – but I’ve seen for myself how anxious friends and family become about what is ‘appropriate’ by way of a kindness gesture,” said Debbie.

“Wednesday’s Child’s boxes aren’t about an automatic fix, but they’re about showing empathy, and reminding an individual of their worth.

“I truly believe, from personal experience, that eating disorders require the ‘it takes a village’ approach, whereby there’s multiple people and functions helping one person to recover. The current system needs more. It has to change.

“Time and again we hear that mental health services are under strain, beds are in short supply, and that specialist care staff are fewer in number. It becomes imperative that everyone who cares, can, if they so choose, play a role in the support of another.”

As well as delivering the tailored boxes, Wednesday’s Child has also launched with a number of other unique services to help those dealing with an eating disorder.

It stages Supportive Suppers, Accompanied Shopping, Awareness Certification (for individuals and corporates), Recovery Coaching, and a Jobs and Skills Portal, aimed at allowing those with a mental health condition to access projects and opportunities which potentially need less formal workplace structures.

Debbie, who first experienced the onset of anorexia nervosa during university, says Wednesday’s Child has the potential to work in conjunction with what GP practices and specialist eating disorder units are themselves able to deliver for patients.

“We’re currently exploring ways in which our boxes can be accessed by GPs and specialist eating disorder units as part of a ‘social prescribing’ feature of patient care,” she explained.

“It’s very common for a person experiencing anorexia, bulimia, or another disordered eating condition, to be told that even at a very low BMI, they may have to wait some 10 weeks for something like cognitive behavioural therapy – and longer still for a bed.

“That makes it terribly distressing for all concerned, because a GP wants to be able to help and support as best they can, but often waiting lists are too long and services are too stretched.

“Just the provision of a box encourages that person to enter into the Wednesday’s Child community and its Supportive Suppers and other opportunities. It’s a small way of starting to reverse the decline in a person’s wellbeing and state of social isolation.”

She is also keen to hear from businesses, and in particular, those with HR responsibility, who may wish to send a sensitively curated box to an employee contending with stress, mental health issues, or a period of personal struggle.

“Whilst our boxes have been born out of my experience with an eating disorder, and a real understanding of that aspect of mental health, they are not solely for those with that illness or journey,” she adds.

“The way they have been curated – without mention of eating disorders inside – means they are just as appropriate for someone taking time out with stress, depression, bereavement, or needing a gift which

is more 'considered' at a time when a pick-up is really needed.

"I would welcome the chance to talk to businesses who would regularly like us to create wellbeing boxes for their staff and clients."

The boxes and services being offered by Wednesday's Child have already received positive approval from those experienced in primary care and GP practice.

Dr Lucy Henshall FRCGP, a Suffolk-based GP, said: "In my 25 plus years of work as a frontline GP, I always felt there was so little to offer to my patients with emerging eating disorders, or to those still on the recovery journey.

"Wednesday's Child sends 'kindness in a box', but it also provides a whole range of other initiatives, all within a supportive framework and community."

She added: "The "Supportive Suppers" and "Jobs Board" are both exciting and fresh ideas, being tailored specifically to the needs of a patient group who have traditionally had very few places to turn to for support in recovery.

"I think Wednesday's Child has the potential to be a real game-changer for those who battle with eating disorders, and its launch during Mental Health Awareness week is very timely."

Her opinions have been echoed by Dr Karol Silovski.

He said: "As a GP, all I have felt able to offer my patients with disordered eating was my own time, my listening ear and my understanding within longer and/or more frequent appointments in surgery.

"In the current pressured climate of General Practice that capacity has become almost impossible to offer, with little else to suggest instead - leaving this vulnerable group ever more marginalised and with painfully long waits for access to NHS treatment.

"I welcome the arrival of Wednesday's Child – something completely new - to fill that void, and help to support individuals and their families during a very challenging time in their lives."

This week marks Mental Health Awareness Week, which is led by the Mental Health Foundation. The theme for 2019 is 'Body Image', and in particular the need to look at the topic across all genders, age groups, sexuality and ethnicity.

Not all people who succumb to an eating disorder will initially have been focused on body image, but for many, it becomes a significant component of dealing with the disease.

For more information about Wednesday's Child, to collaborate, or to commission awareness training for staff teams, please visit www.wednesdayschild.co.uk or email debbie@wednesdayschild.co.uk

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Wednesday's Child:

Wednesday's Child is a social enterprise 'purpose driven business', reinvesting profits into supporting those with eating disorders, and other mental health issues.

Born out of the founder's experiences of adult mental health care and anorexia, it has at its core a subscription and gift box model, enabling the purchase of carefully curated gifts for those who need a wellbeing boost or gesture of kindness.

The business also delivers events, training, certification programmes, supportive coaching activities for those in the midst of an eating disorder, and a vocational portal to enable a supported return to work or education.

Our approach ensures enhanced global understanding about eating disorders and aids the ability for others to become cheerleaders in someone's desire for mental health recovery.

Wednesday's Child's curated boxes are equally beneficial to those experiencing any level of mental health frailty or wellbeing vulnerability. We work with GPs, charities, schools, universities and HR professionals in commercial organisations to ensure our considered gifts could serve a purpose in their effort to convey empathy.

IN A NUTSHELL: Launching in Mental Health Awareness Week 2019, Wednesday's Child is a social enterprise, providing gifts, services and training in an effort to support those experiencing an eating disorder.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Images produced by Warren Page and are owned by Wednesday's Child Ltd.

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CONTACT

Debbie Watson

Email debbie@wednesdayschild.co.uk

Tel 07974 359 001.

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