

Club President JULIA BRADBURY talks about her work to raise the profile of mental health and how the outdoors and camping can help alleviate the symptoms

First lady



MENTAL HEALTH has been in the news a lot lately. It's a topic of conversation from the Prime Minister right down the spectrum.

In the last couple of months I've been involved in getting the message about mental health really talked about for two reasons.

Firstly, I did some work for a mental health charity called MQ, which campaigns for a better understanding of the causes and prevention of mental health problems. Its aim is to transform mental health through research. You can see me below swearing my support by shouting something rather provocative and loud at the camera, which I shan't repeat in this column. Do check out its website www.mqmentalhealth.org for the details. It's a vitally important charity



that's doing amazing work in its field.

Secondly, I did a series of three interviews for BBC Radio Four called One to One (you can still tune in to them on iPlayer) in which I talked to people about how they operate in jobs that are mentally and emotionally challenging, such as working in an A&E department and dealing with life, death, tragedy and trauma.

I spoke to Laura Rutherford who volunteers with the Samaritans, Dr Martin McKechnie, a consultant in emergency medicine, and psychiatrist Dr Rory Conn, who works at a mental health inpatient unit for adolescents.

They all have incredibly interesting and very challenging jobs, but the common factor is how they cope with those challenges. The two things they all said help them are physical exercise and time spent outdoors.

Martin's a cyclist and Rory cycles to work every day. Laura is into yoga and pilates. They all find the way to relieve their work pressures is to get out and do outdoor pursuits.

This all chimes with what we as campers believe to be true anecdotally. We know that campers feel happier, healthier and believe they form better bonds with others than they would if they didn't go camping.

The Club's own research projects over the last few years (Real Richness and Get Kids Camping) have shown how strong the groundswell of opinion is on this subject.

And just recently the Sport and Recreation Alliance, an umbrella organisation for hundreds of

organisations including the Club, has followed up a key report with further research into the value of the outdoors on health, among other things.

The report, Reconomics Plus, demonstrates how time spent in green spaces can significantly counter obesity and improve mental health.

Meanwhile, a report by Public Health England states: "Access to good quality green space is associated with a range of positive health outcomes including better self-rated health; lower body mass index scores, overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing and increased longevity in older people."

With all the evidence we have about how time spent outdoors can be of enormous benefit to our physical and mental health, what better medicine is there?

I've been happy to talk about times in my own life when I've found it therapeutic and helpful to speak to somebody about a low period I've experienced – and I'm fortunate that I don't have a mental health problem. We need to realise there's no stigma attached and that talking to someone about your feelings or concerns is the starting point.

And when we acknowledge the way forward and what benefits the outdoors can truly bring in our hour of need, it might be that a good walk or a spot of camping is just what the doctor ordered.