

Marsha McAdam

Influencer Award

Describe the work of the individual being nominated

Marsha McAdam is a remarkable and formidable woman who is continually driven and determined in her commitment to bring about positive change within the mental health sector. She has a diagnosed borderline personality disorder and endures a range of significant physical health issues that have a dramatic effect on her daily life. Life is a constant daily battle for her, and she admits that a life with such complications could have easily led her to lead the life of a recluse. Things changed after she received life-changing mentalisation-based therapy (MBT). With support and the recognition of those working with her, Marsha embarked on a venture to bring about positive change to both physical and mental healthcare. She reports that she finds working with charities like Centre for Mental Health a fundamental element for remaining positive and having the opportunity to help others is essential to her wellbeing. She is an avid and visible influencer, and her skills and unwavering commitment have been recognised by the organisations she continually commits her time to support. She is an active Member of the Lived Experience Group for Equally Well and is Co-Chair of the Greater Manchester Personality Disorder Strategy. Marsha has written a very personal and moving blog for the Centre for Mental Health, describing her battle with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), the stigma a diagnosis attracts and her journey to affecting change (www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/blog/centre-mental-health-blog/my-battle-borderline-personality-disorder-marshas-story).

She was instrumental in bringing the attention of senior leaders to BPD in Greater Manchester. She has designed and led focused workshops with key players in the field and has put the key messages about BPD onto a nationwide platform, and was lucky enough to attend the launch of the BPD Consensus document being published at the House of Commons.

What was the change that was required? Help us understand the vision, aims, and objectives

As a person with significant lived experience of poor mental health who has personally endured the effect of stigma, Marsha has also had many life-threatening episodes and constantly deals with the endless harrowing experiences her illness inflicts. Marsha was shocked with the amount of stigma attached to BPD diagnosis and the little recognition and understanding of the condition in society, leading to such significant poor outcomes for individuals affected by the condition. She was determined to introduce a positive change and had the vision to create the foundation for the development of the Greater Manchester BPD Ambition. The aim of this ambition was to *ensure everyone across Greater Manchester openly stands united to make sure that people with BPD are no longer seen as too 'complex' or 'manipulative' to treat*. Marsha's objective has been to influence a joint professional and expert, by experience call-to-action to stop the exclusion of people who have been diagnosed, or would be diagnosed, with personality disorder from mental health services and to reduce the associated health and social inequalities and disadvantages that lead to a much lower life expectancy. Her commitment to influencing change through her hard work does not stop there. Together with the CEO of Centre for Mental Health, Sarah Hughes, Marsha recently contributed to a podcast for the King's Fund. She hosts an active informative, inclusive and brutally honest Twitter presence as a mental health advocate and a person with lived experience attracting over 1,500 followers and 12,000 likes to date. She has written an honest account of her experiences for Equally

Well UK called *Stop the Rollercoaster I want to get off* bringing attention to the multiple and complex challenges of managing both mental and physical health conditions at the same time.

How did you use your influence? Who you influenced, what methods you used to influence them, what resources you used and how you overcame the problem etc.

Marsha has used the most powerful commodity she has available to her in order to influence and affect positive change and continues to do so. Her method is to use her lived experience and personal stories of the impact of both her mental health and physical illness to reach and impact on the opinions of key decision makers. Examples of practical resources Marsha has used in her approach to influencing change include:

- designing and facilitating BPD workshops to get key players around the table to listen and take action
- collation of live data to prove the need for change
- speaking at conferences and events such as the King's Fund, the Mental Health Challenge and the Westminster Health Forum on Parity of Esteem to bring attention to the issue
- podcasts, blogs and social media platforms (e.g. Twitter)

Marsha contends with mental health and a range of physical health conditions as an overarching barrier that can impede her activity daily, and that is her. It is vitally important to Marsha that nothing stops her from being an avid and visible influencer in the field of mental health and she strives to let nothing stop her. To counteract the potential for problems, she ensures she has the right network of support to stop issues escalating out of control. Ultimately, her work as an influencer in the field also supports her own wellbeing and self-esteem. She recommends having her hair done and listening to music, wearing nice earrings and putting her lipstick on to counteract depression and low mood to give her the mental and physical strength to get out there and influence! Marsha also gets support and offers support to other experts by experience through the recently established Speakers Collective, a self-organising group of people who seek to change society through their personal experience of mental health challenges.

What changed? Outline the result of your work and its impact, with specific examples

Marsha has committed a significant amount of her life to being an active, visible influencer who is heard and listened to. We are nominating her for the Influencer Award, as we believe she should be given the recognition she so much deserves. Her work to date has had significant impact both nationally and closer to home. She was instrumental in setting up Greater Manchester BPD Ambition and has engaged with high profile decision-makers in the devolved administration of the recently established city region in the process. Marsha has also given a platform to the concept of Parity of Esteem and has opened discussions with regards to the debate on mental health being given the same status as physical health.

She has written blogs to put this issue in the mental health domain for further debate and consideration. As part of her work in Manchester she has collated invaluable live data on people's individual experiences with a diagnosis of BPD. This has given service-users a voice and place to openly share what works and what doesn't, and more importantly what needs to change. Marsha's support for Equally Well has enabled us to build this new collaborative on firm foundations of the lived experience of those for whom physical health inequalities matter most. She has spoken about the importance of Equally Well at events and online, helping us build the alliance of organisations and individuals committed to achieving equal health. Marsha has also supported the centre's work to enable local elected council members to become champions for mental health. For example, she

shared her experience and her insights with a group of local councillors in the North West at a training day, giving the whole day a firm grounding in what local authorities can do to support better mental health.

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Website equallywell.co.uk/2019/03/25/physical-and-mental-health-experience

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