

MEDIA RELEASE

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RU OK? City shoppers open up about mental wellbeing

Hundreds of Leicester shoppers took time out to talk about mental wellbeing at the weekend as volunteers from public and third sector organisations asked them: “Are

you OK?”

Around 2,000 city centre shoppers were engaged in short conversations and 20 people received support from trained advisers as part of the second RUOK? day in Leicester on Saturday.

Volunteers included Cathy Ellis, chair of Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Yasmin Surti lead mental health commissioner for Leicester City Council and Healthwatch executive officer



David Henson. **(See Morgan’s story at the end of this release)**

They mingled with shoppers by Leicester’s clock tower and in the Haymarket Shopping Centre encouraging them to ‘make connections’ for good mental health.

The event was organised for Mental Health Awareness Week by partners from health, police, rail, local authority and third sector organisations across Leicestershire and Rutland,

Many people also signed a pledge wall, promising to take positive steps to support their own or loved ones' emotional wellbeing.

Event co-ordinator Matthew Wakely, a mental health team manager from Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT), said: "RUOK? is about how all of us can look after ourselves and how important is to look after each other.

"Everyone can be affected by low mood – and it doesn't always show. Very often a simple act – taking time to ask someone; 'Are you OK?' and taking time to listen or something as simple as a friendly word or text can make a big difference in helping to lift low mood.

"It was really encouraging to see how willing people were to have open conversations about their feelings, or their concerns about others, when asked the question."

Shoppers were offered business cards and bookmarks signposting them to the RUOK? website – <http://ruoktoday.co.uk/> Information and advice leaflets were also provided.

Yasmin Surti said: "Leicester City Council was proud to be a partner in the RUOK? event, when one again we learnt just how important it is that we build resilience in our communities and encourage people to try and make a difference by looking out for each other, lending a listening ear or simply offering a friendly smile.

"On Saturday, volunteers and people from all walks of life took just a few seconds out of their busy day to say hello, whilst others clearly benefitted from the opportunity to have a longer chat about their wellbeing."

Captions: A shopper signs the RUOK? pledge wall; A police volunteer chats with a city centre shopper; Volunteers from RUOK? partner organisations including (seventh to ninth from left) Yasmin Surti from Leicester City Council, LPT chair Cathy Ellis and Healthwatch executive officer David Henson.

- *Organisations supporting *RUOK?* are: Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicestershire Police, Network Rail, British Transport Police, Railway Mission, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, Samaritans, LAMP, Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Richmond Fellowship, R2care, NHS England, CLASP, Healthwatch Leicester, Support for Carers and 2Care.



Morgan's story:

Among the volunteers on Saturday was Morgan Bates, 17, from New Parks, Leicester, who was inspired by her experience of mental illness to get involved in helping others.

Morgan, pictured with mum Rachel on the RUOK? stall in the Haymarket shopping centre, is a member of Leicester's young people's council and LPT's

Evolving Minds group a group of young people helping LPT to co-design service improvements around children's mental health.. She is currently involved in helping to develop the Trust's Health for Teens website.

She said: "Both mum and I were keen to get involved in the RUOK? campaign because of my own experience of mental illness and that of other members of my family.

"I've experienced quite severe depression and the support of my family was huge in helping me with recovery. It was important for me to do something that could help make a positive difference, and it was a really rewarding experience being able to signpost some people who said they weren't OK to further support.

"When people asked me what we were doing and talked to us about raising understanding and encouraging people to offer support to others, I felt like I was able to repay some of the help and support I have had."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

R U OK? Day was part of a week of activities in Leicester for Mental Health Awareness Week 16 – 22 May

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