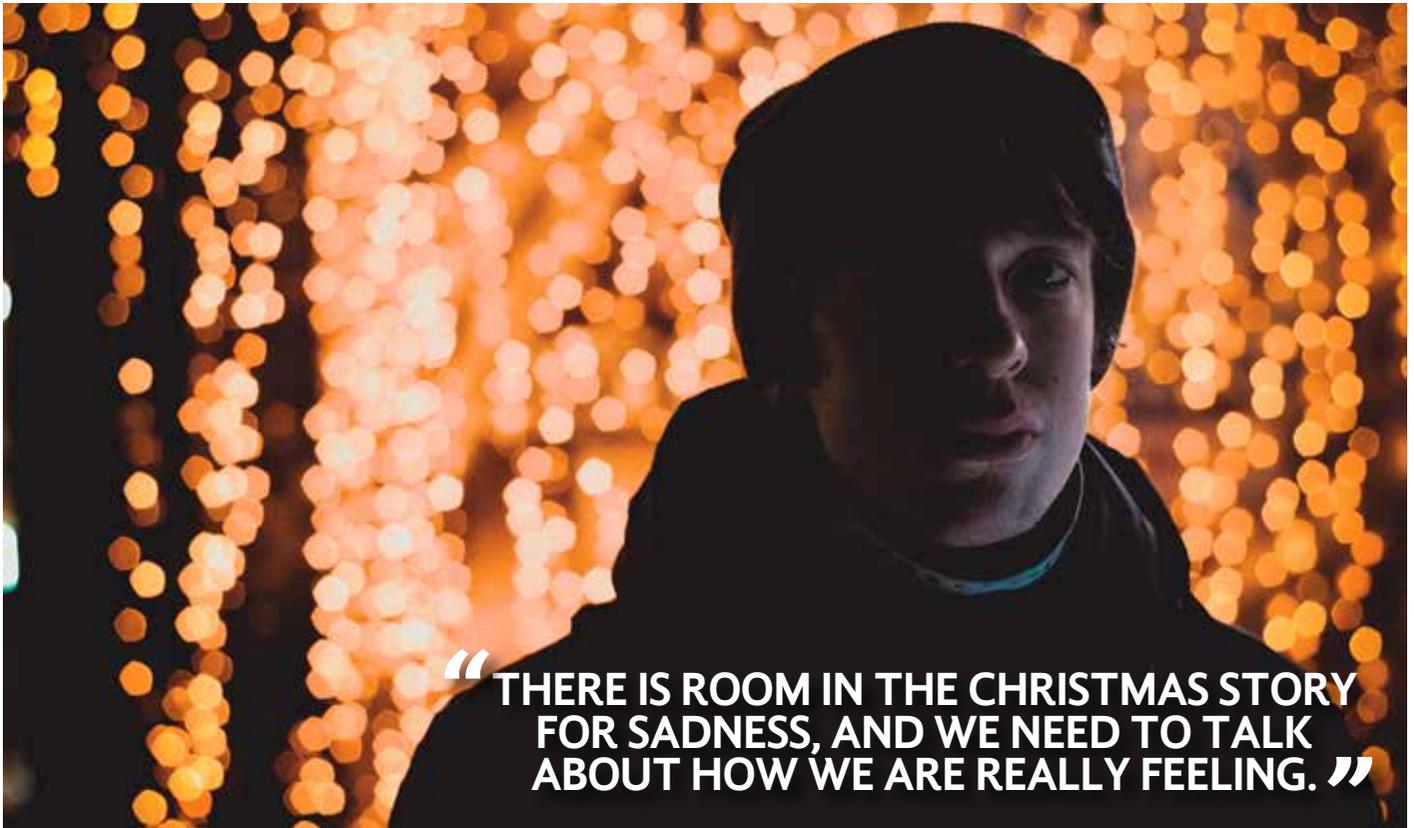


“THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR” – IS IT?

BY NICOLA MCCONNELL AND MAURA CALVERT



“THERE IS ROOM IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY FOR SADNESS, AND WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT HOW WE ARE REALLY FEELING.”

For many people Christmas is a happy and joyous time. However unfortunately for many of us it is a time that can bring about feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed, depressed and lonely.

Nothing about our usual daily life goes away because it is Christmas, in fact Christmas often adds a layer of activities both real and imagined that can impact on us. This can be even more difficult to manage when you are already suffering with a mental health condition. People compare their emotions to what they assume others are experiencing or what they think they are supposed to feel. Then they think that they alone fall short. They judge themselves and feel like an outsider. Difficulties can become exacerbated: financial pressure/loneliness/relationship difficulties/bereavement/physical health conditions. If you have depression, then all this messaging about happiness and cheer might make you feel

guilty about how you actually feel on a regular basis.

No matter where you turn at this time of year, it can feel like everyone is trying to push merriment and joy your way. There is, perhaps, no other time of year where such a huge gap exists between what we are told we should experience (A.K.A. Hollywood Christmas), and most people’s actual reality.

There is room in the Christmas story for sadness, and we need to talk about how we are really feeling.

We need to allow space and time to reflect and grieve when necessary. Let yourself feel the emotion, and also plan something nice for yourself. Comparing yourself against others is unhelpful. Anticipate your challenges and problem solve them in advance. Keep expectations of yourself and others real and achievable. Take time out

when you feel overwhelmed - give yourself permission to leave a stressful situation. Say sorry if you do have irritable moments.

Try to find the balance between time alone and time with others. Don’t isolate, reach out to others who may also be lonely. Exercise - outdoors if possible. Research suggests that outdoor activity can provide additional benefits to health and well-being. Also helps with SAD (Seasonal Adjustment Disorder).

Drink responsibly - alcohol reduces the amount of serotonin – our “happiness” hormone in the brain and can make anxiety worse.

Contact Lifeline on 0808 808 800 (24 hour helpline). Make a GP appointment. Seek psychological support or therapy via PRRT (for retired officers and where appropriate retired officers’ family members).

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychological therapies, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly.

Contact PRRT on Telephone: 028 9042 7788 | Email: servicesadmin@prrt.org | Website: www.prrt.org



Rehabilitation and
Retraining Trust