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Black Dog on campus helps to stimulate depression discussion

Nursing students from Northumbria University are working to raise awareness of mental health issues in advance of World Mental Health Day on Saturday (10 October).

Students from Northumbria's Mental Health Nursing Society have worked with the charity SANE to arrange for the first ever Black Dog statue to be hosted in the North East region at the University's Coach Lane Campus.

'The Black Dog' has been used as a metaphor for depression for centuries and

the 2015 World Mental Health Day aims to raise awareness of what can be done to ensure that people with mental health problems can live with dignity.

A number of Black Dog sculptures were commissioned by SANE in the hope that they would be put in prominent positions in communities to stimulate awareness of mental health issues and encourage discussion about the subject.

Northumbria's statue – known as Hugo – is wearing a coat designed by the actress Joanna Lumley. It was unveiled this morning (Friday 9 October) and will be based at Coach Lane Campus West for approximately one month.

Student Rebecca Robson, a programme rep for Northumbria's Mental Health Nursing course which is based in the University's Department of Public Health and Wellbeing, said: "It's hugely important to raise awareness of mental health issues and hear the experiences of someone living with this condition. Nursing students will encounter issues involving and related to suicide, whether on clinical placement or teaching.

"We hope that having the black dog on campus will become a talking point for students and the public and will help people to understand some of the issues that many people have to live with."

The students hope to raise £1,000 to help SANE with their work and will be organising a number of fundraising events to which the local community will be invited.

The students also arranged a private talk by Jonny Benjamin, the subject of Channel 4 documentary *Stranger on the Bridge*. Jonny planned to jump off Waterloo Bridge during a period of depression in 2008 but was persuaded by a stranger that things would get better. He now works to raise awareness of mental health issues and aims to reduce stigma about the condition.

Dr David Morning, a principal lecturer in the Department of Public Health and Wellbeing, added: "Nursing students spend 50% of their time at university and 50% of their time on clinical placement in practice settings across the region. This ensures they can take their theory into real-life settings and become caring, compassionate nurses.

“I’m delighted that these students have taken the initiative to bring the black dog onto campus to help to stimulate discussion and debate on this important issue which affects many people in society.”

Northumbria University’s nursing courses allow students to specialise in nursing for various groups including children, adults and those with mental health issues or learning disabilities. For more information on nursing courses at Northumbria University visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/nursing

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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