

# The Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Award

## THE WINNER and RUNNERS UP

The **winner** is **Helena Miles, from Goldsmiths university**. Helena's intervention is 'Walking for Wellbeing' set up to help alleviate depression, mental health issues and anxiety disorders and aimed particularly at students at her university who can find the relative isolation of the Summer term emotionally disorientating.

While many walking initiatives focus solely on the benefits of physical exercise, Helena's intervention is different; she provided a practical programme focused on both the physical and the intellectual. As a history student she wanted to be sure her fellow students had a reason to come on the walks. Walking for Wellbeing consisted of alternating weekly classroom-based workshop sessions and weekly historical walks in and around London. The intervention concluded with a Showcase Event at which participants exhibited works they had created as part of the project. Thus, as Helena commented "*the project not only provided participants with various opportunities for understanding, assessing and sharing their emotions but it also allowed them to achieve something tangible and intellectually stimulating from their walking experiences in addition to the physical exercise alone.*"

Regarding the design of her intervention, Helena wrote in her winning entry:

*"When you are depressed, forcing yourself to go for a run or to somewhere like a gym can be like asking a tortoise to run a marathon, whereas walking is one of the easiest ways to get active.....However, even walking can sometimes feel pointless and the prospect of aimlessly wandering can defeat the exercise before it has even begun. Thus, the aim of this project was to offer participants both a reason for walking and give them the skills to plan and research walks with some kind of point and purpose beyond walking itself."*

The panel of judges found this entry very appealing. Crucially, it is closely aligned to the broader academic curriculum making it attractive to busy students. It is evidence-based, natural, easy to replicate, and can apply at any time of the year. It does not need any special resources apart from the most important resource of someone dedicated to make it work. It sounds like fun!

The runners up are:

**Jack Roby, from Lancaster University**. Jack's intervention (communicated through a beautiful video) was creating the Lancaster Autistic Social Society (LASS) of which Jack is the founder and president. What this project has highlighted is the wellbeing needs of students with autism must be more in the spotlight and there needs to be more of a focus on what can be done to help.

**Ellisiv Clarke, from Newcastle university**. Ellisiv's intervention is a 'Mental health toolkit' for medical students. This is a short elegant flowchart that simplifies a large amount of potentially confusing information. It is a high impact low-cost simple solution to the challenge students face in dealing with multiple sources of advice and guidance on mental wellbeing and health.