**Equipping students to look out for their friends’ mental health must be a university - wide priority**

A national campaign launches this Wednesday 9th April to equip students across the UK to support their friends at university. The campaign follows the publication of Student Minds’ [‘Grand Challenges’ research](http://www.studentminds.org.uk/grand-challenges) last month, which identified the ‘fear of being judged’ as the primary challenge for student mental health, whilst a number of the additional top 10 challenges relate to social relationships and the difficulty in talking openly about mental health.

In response, hundreds of students and a variety of charities have shaped the development of a new toolkit equipping students with the knowledge, skills and confidence to offer support to a friend.

A spokesperson for Student Minds commented:

*“Various reports in the Higher Education sector have identified that support from friends is key to student retention. Students are most likely to speak to their friends when they are experiencing difficulties and good social networks can have a protective influence against mental health difficulties. University health promotion activities have rarely focused on the crucial role that friends have to play, so we’re excited to work with a number of universities to address this over the coming months.”*

Vicky, a student at Southampton University who has recorded a video sharing her story as part of the campaign, commented:

*“There is no lesson at school that prepares you for supporting a friend with a mental health difficulty. I found it hard to know what to do or say to help and support my friends when I was first faced with this challenge. Learning about the conditions affecting my friends was really important and over a long period of time I have learnt how I can support my friends and look after myself at the same time. There is such limited information readily available for supporters to help through this process that can be very confusing and at points upsetting. These resources are very exciting and I would have loved to have had access to them back at the beginning of my supporting experience.”*

Vicky’s video can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OD2mj8GmArM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OD2mj8GmArM" \t "_blank).

The ‘Look After Your Mate’ Campaign provides members of the university community with access to a range of resources including an activities toolkit, an online guide for friends and a new interactive workshop which will be touring the UK. More information about the campaign can be found here: [www.studentminds.org.uk/look-after-your-mate](http://www.studentminds.org.uk/look-after-your-mate).