File name: Max MHWeek.mp3

Audio quality: Great

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: **Unable to decipher** = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Speaker1: So, I'm Max Spencer-Roe, I'm 20 years old and I'm from Liverpool. I currently work in Aintree Hospital and I'm working for the Future Voices group as well. I've been dealing with mental health issues since I was around 7 years old, so that's around 13 years now. As I was growing older, going through my young years, I started noticing a lot more stress, a lot more anxieties around things but obviously at that age I wasn't very educated on it. So, it was little things here and there, little bit of obsessions and things like that. It became an issue for me, so I went to my first counselling session around 7, 8 years old. I couldn't really tell you where that came from. I think I was just born that way with a very anxious and stressed personality, and then that developed into many, many years of having to deal with it. I think the way mental health has affected me in terms of being successful is a lot of the time it's very difficult to be confident in yourself and believe in yourself and your abilities and what you can achieve. You set yourself back, you set standards which are maybe even too low for yourself. You really can't see yourself achieving those goals.

It set me back in many ways, in terms of schooling as well. It was very difficult for me in school, just being in those lessons being distracted by my mental health issues and my mind being in completely different places. So, with the mental health issues, that made me very unsuccessful in school with my GCSEs. The one time I did show a bit of perseverance and got myself up and dusted myself off, I went back and got my English and Maths. From that experience, I went to a few different job interviews and I decided I wasn't really ready 100% to go straight into the workplace so I went for a traineeship in an opticians for a while. My anxiety really, really got to me there and I only ended up being there for 2 weeks. So, I went back to the drawing board. I went to a training college to develop job skills and interview skills, things like that, to try and build up my confidence. I got removed from my college because I wouldn't do a speech because of my anxiety. So, I ended up trying to develop those skills and I ended up doing that speech but at a different college that were more supportive.

From the traineeship and from my job skills I ended up working on a building site at first just to get some money, and then I got an apprenticeship at Health Education England. I think at that point I'd had enough experience of speaking to people and developing my skills. I was taught to identify my skills because I think that's a thing that a lot of people struggle to identify when they're asked, 'What are your strengths?' I think a lot of people can answer weaknesses, but I think a lot of people struggle with strengths as well. I identified my strengths and I think I used them in the interview very well which led me to that

apprenticeship. So, at the moment, I'm struggling with health anxiety. I work in head and neck cancer services so it's quite a difficult place to be sometimes, seeing that all the time, bearing in mind that's one of my stresses. Some of my coping mechanisms, keeping fit is one of the best coping mechanisms I can give anybody because it gives you something to do, something to work towards. I think for me with the physical fitness you set a goal and once you achieve that goal you can take that into into your working life as well and apply the same principles. It allows you to work harder as well.

I also would say speak to people, to your friends, to your family. If you really need it I'd seek professional help as well because that's what I have done myself. I speak to friends, family members. When things do start getting a little bit too tough I've had regular counselling and therapy for many years. Every couple of years my anxiety or depression might flare up and I think it's a good coping mechanism just to talk to somebody who you don't know. Them being anonymous to you as well can really help, and you can do that via phone now as well because of Covid. I think that helps some people as well. It sometimes helps me because I don't physically want to go to the place. It allows you to be in that safe space and get off your chest what you need. I don't necessarily think it's set me back. I think it's put bumps in the road. I'd say sometimes you have a few stumbles, which everybody's going to at times, but I don't think it's set me back in my career whatsoever. I've progresses quite well and still believe that I am progressing. I believe personally it only stops your progression if you allow it to stop your progression. If you put those things in place, coping mechanisms, and you speak to people and you try your absolute hardest, you can manage mental health.

Some people, they're always going to have mental health issues and it's not going to go away, but it's about managing those issues and pushing on. I think I've always worked with an older workforce so I think sometimes you don't want to intrude on somebody's situation. However, I remember this particular colleague, she was struggling with the kids, with the workload and she was getting really upset. So, when it was just me and her around I'd have a conversation with her and we discussed mental health together, or we'd maybe go in a different room and we'd have that chat. I do check up on my friends a lot as well. I think that's probably the one where I give the most advice, to my friends, and my friends might come to me. I think when you're dealing with mental health issues, and you've been to therapy quite a lot, you do start noticing it in other people quite a fair bit. Even if it's people just at a bar or anywhere else, and I think when you talk to those people, have that conversation, sometimes you're the first person they've ever opened up to. You may have only just met them. The woman in work as well, she wasn't speaking to anybody else about it.

I think you can use your mental health in a positive way to connect with other people who are dealing with it as well. Obviously, the future can be very scary for some people. I think anxiety doesn't really help that. I think the coping mechanisms are the things that are really, really keeping me going, really pushing me for my future to be successful. I want to defeat these mental health issues and I want to go on to be very successful. I think you can use anxiety in a positive way. You can use it to pay attention to detail. If you're able to speak about it, you can use it to improve your communication skills. You can use it to

develop relationships. I've only started believing that a few years ago. I spoke to a doctor and she said to me, 'I see anxiety as a positive.' She gave me a book which I can't remember the name of. Actually, it was called 'The Secrets of Hollywood'. It was about all these successful people who have suffered from anxiety and used it in a positive way. I believe that I can really use my disadvantages to an advantage and push on in the future. I feel like it's definitely a topic and they're allowing more conversation and there are more steps in place in my workplace, being the NHS, there are more things in place for me.

I do believe it is something that still isn't addressed enough. I think in certain workplaces, even working hours or the pressure they put on 1 individual is just too much completely. I still do see it in work as well. A lot of people want to seek help and I just don't think it's dealt with enough. I think there's support there but I don't think it's enough. I think it's not to benefit the person, just to make the company look better. I think there should be an open dialogue with the line manager. You should be able to be 100% honest with your manager. I don't think you should have to hide things for the worry that you might lose your job. I think that if you have that open dialogue they can put things in place. Whatever it is that makes you anxious, that makes you sad, whatever it is in work, I think things should be put in place for you to be able to cope with them and they provide coping mechanisms for you. As an example, with my anxiousness I've been offered counselling. I had an appointment today about seeking advice whether I need medication, this, that and there other. They said, 'Is there anything that we can do in your office, in your workplace, (TC 00:10:00) in your workstation to prevent you from feeling anxious or to prevent you from feeling down?' I think that conversation should be had with every colleague and their line manager.

The main thing for me, because I've felt it personally sometimes, you should be able to be 100% honest about your mental health, not hold back. The most important thing is that you really listen to what the person is saying and allow them to feel comfortable in the workplace. I would also say have a positive working environment and making sure you're hiring people who are competent and not insensitive to the mental health topic and are very aware of the situation. There have been certain circumstances where employees, it's happened to me, have been made aware of my mental health issues without my consent. I think keeping that confidentiality is something that definitely needs to be done. I would also say I think some employers look at it as a negative, look at is as, 'This person's got mental health issues, they've got a disorder.' Don't judge that person based off their mental health. You don't know what they've been through, you don't know what they can bring to the table. Judge them off their skills, not just off the mental health issues.

Before I did any interview training or skills I had my first job interview and that was at a private medical centre. I'd gone with my friend, we'd both gone for the same job interview. He was late and I did my interview. I was very, very nervous and I didn't feel prepared. I didn't feel like I had the skills. I didn't really want to go in. So, I did the job interview and I thought at the time that it went quite well. I've gone outside and my friend missed his interview so I spoke to the manager and he allowed my friend to go in because I'd mentioned it. So, my friend went in and I think it was a week or so later we got the results back of who got the job. He ended up getting the job. I can't stress enough how much that knocked my

confidence, how much that put me down. I was happy for my friend because he was my close friend, but I felt very, very inadequate and I felt really down. I didn't ever want to go to a job interview ever again. He ended up leaving the college and I ended up in the college for another 4, 5 months and it took me that long to go to another job interview because I just wouldn't go any time any job opportunities came up. I wouldn't even apply for me. That's how much it was really knocking my confidence.

The only thing that really saved me was a few months later we got feedback from the manager who was interviewing us, and he said that if I'd have had some more qualifications he would have hired me. So, that gave me a little bit of a push. That's when I went on to do my English and Maths and get my qualifications. However, the same company before getting those qualifications, I went to another job interview. This time it took me about an hour to get there. I had to get a train, a taxi, and I went in and I had an interview. They made me really, really, really uncomfortable. They were very cold towards me, there were 2 managers. It was a really, really bad experience. I just think some of the questions, it's something a 17-year-old lad would not be able to answer who's never had any experience in work. I think they were very nasty, but then they let me have an hour or so meeting everybody, getting my hopes up really. Then I went into a boardroom and this is probably the worst moment I've ever had in an interview. I went in, sat down. It was the owner of the whole company's son. I think he was COO, some high up executive, and he really embarrassed me.

He asked me such ridiculous questions as, 'If you had to put a leaflet on every car in Liverpool, how would you work it out?' I just thought, 'Oh, what is going on here?' He was asking me questions about the weight of apples, all these different things. I took it as someone's sat there and laughing at me. I walked out of that building just distraught. After building up my confidence a little bit more, it was just completely all gone again, absolutely shattered. It took a few months and then the qualifications, things like that, and many, many applications for me to finally be successful in a job interview. The job I ended up getting, I didn't prepare at all. I wanted the job, I wanted the money, but I wasn't confident in myself at all and I had no belief in my abilities. So, I just went there and I just spoke from the heart, spoke from what I know. That's the job I did end up getting, which was a big surprise to me. I think when you first go to job interviews you take it personally and you don't realise there are a lot of other people out there who don't get the jobs as well. I think perseverance is something that I'd tell my younger self. If I was going for the job interviews now, I'd just keep going.

The more times you can make yourself uncomfortable, the more you'll be comfortable in those situations. I think if you see job interviews as a scary thing, the more you do the more you're comfortable with anything. So, I think I'll just keep going, keep persevering, even I kept getting knocked back from each job. It's learning experience, and also 1 thing I would do is go back to the employer and ask them what I could have done better. That's something that I never did, and I would definitely, definitely do now. I was on an apprenticeship and that contract was ending in October 2020. I really, really desperately needed to get a new job lined up before this job ended. When I was applying for jobs, I think it was a lot more difficult to try and show, even though I was working with Health Education England and it was about

getting people into the NHS and employment, I still found it difficult to really point out my strengths, sell myself and be confident in myself. I was working from home for 6 months so all that interaction with people had gone. I didn't really have much confidence in myself, and I found the market for getting a job in Covid is so saturated. So many people needed a job.

I had people coming up to me, my friends, my friends' dads, speaking to me about applying for the NHS. Everybody was trying to get a job so I found it really, really difficult. I did end up getting about 4 interviews. I only went to 1 interview. I just cancelled the other ones. I was just trying to apply for anything, I was desperate. I think it was really difficult to have a good application when you don't want to do the job and you're just pushing to try and get money because everybody's struggling. I did end up getting that job, which I found out I was being underpaid and things like that. I ended up leaving that job after a month, and I had to reapply for jobs while I was doing that. So, I had to apply again. Even though I'd already done it all, the nerves were still there. The competition from everybody else was still there. I ended up applying again, and I ended up getting the job. I think it was a really, really, really nerve wracking time and it took me back to when I first ever applied for a job and the first ever interview I'd gone to.