

Foreword to 101 Distractions by Sophia Gill



I first met Sophia Gill on the set of This Morning. We were being interviewed for a piece on self-harm. I was struck by Sophia's attractive personality, warmth and candour. We have remained friends ever since.

Twenty-five years ago when I first started campaigning to improve the rights of people affected by mental health problems, my concern was that the Community Care policy meant, in real terms, that there was too little community and too little care. Has anything changed since that time? Yes. A community of people like Sophia emerged: A community of people affected by mental illness who have come together as artists, writers, and campaigners. Through their chosen medium they offer support and hope, showing that it is possible to journey from a place of extreme mental torment to a better place.

Unlike so many self help books where the premise is that you trade in your old self for a new self, in 101 Distractions, Sophia suggests you stay with who you are and how you are feeling but seek a practical solution that will help transport you to a different 'headspace'. For example, by reaching out and connecting to other people, interests or activities she shows you can move away from a familiar but unhelpful habit of mind to a more positive outlook.

Sophia's practical suggestions and advice on what helped her through her depression and self-harm is done with empathy and humour. She speaks in the language of the heart: a universal language we can all relate to regardless of why we have mental anguish.

The e-version of 101 Distractions makes it accessible on your computer or on the go with your kindle, portable phone, or iPad. The format is private and while stigma surrounding mental health still rife, it's understandable that you might not want fellow passengers on the bus knowing what you are reading! The quick tips, which Sophia suggests you refer to at the point of need, can be quickly accessed through the media of choice so it makes for a perfect match.

The need for a book like 101 Distractions has never been greater. Last year alone, there was a four-fold increase in the number of referrals for talking therapies and depression is still a major cause of suicide; sufferers are four times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. SANE campaigns on a macro level influencing government policy and health directives regarding the treatment and care of people with depression while the voices of people like Sophia are needed in equal measure to support the estimated one in five of us who will experience the paralysis of depression at some point in our lives.

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