



let's end mental health discrimination

Time to Change Legacy Materials
www.time-to-change.org.uk/legacy

Using social media

When the programme was first developed, social media were not such a significant communication platform as they later became. This new online community became a powerful way of involving more people in the campaign, spreading the word more widely and providing peer-to-peer support to empower people to speak out about their experiences.

Facebook became an important way of supporting the work and giving people a voice in the campaign, as we were able to put media and interview requests out to the growing pool of Facebook fans and match people up with opportunities to tell their stories. It was also a useful barometer to assess views on campaign ideas as well as mental health-related TV programmes, articles, films and adverts. This helped Time to Change to decide whether and when to respond.

Social media, including Twitter, were low-cost ways to bring tens of thousands of people with mental health problems, as well as their carers, other family members and friends, into the movement. These platforms enabled a more informal dialogue with supporters, helping create a sense of ownership of and connection to Time to Change among them. It was clear that social media was an essential part of the programme.

Establishing the impact of social media on its users was important. The Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London surveyed Facebook fans, and found that 84% of fans had lived experience of mental health problems. Of those, 82% felt that as a result of being a Facebook fan, they felt they had more confidence to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination.

Time to Change uses the following forms of social media:

- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Twitter](#)

Time to Change on Facebook

The Time to Change Facebook page launched in September 2008. The page quickly gained followers, many of whom would comment on almost every post. It became clear that this could be an effective way for people with lived experience of mental health problems to engage with and have a voice in the campaign, as well as engaging people without experience of mental health problems.

The programme gradually incorporated social media more fully into campaign and communications strategies. Facebook surveys were posted to find out people's views on mental health problems, and comments from Facebook fed into future planning.



People posting comments were often people directly affected by mental health problems and supporters of Time to Change, rather than the target audience of people without mental health problems. Facebook provided a clear channel for people to respond to campaign activity directly, for example: *'I felt they were thought provoking without being scary and dramatic without being OTT. They were well thought out and I hope had the desired effect – well done'.*

It also became clear that Facebook was having a wider effect, not just as a communications channel but as a way of empowering people with mental health problems to speak to others in their lives about their experiences – many for the first time.

Original plans for evaluation did not include measurement of any social media, but the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London did a survey that found that people felt empowered by their use of the Time to Change Facebook page, were more likely to seek help and felt more able to talk to their families about their mental health as a result of their use of the Facebook page. For more information, [take a look here](#).

"Just the fact that there 'was' a Facebook group and a new campaign, sort of made it okay to tick that little 'mental health issues' box on my college application form. First time ever."

Lessons learnt

Be where the audience is

By using social media effectively, Time to Change was able to take anti-stigma messages to platforms, such as Facebook, that people were already using as part of their everyday lives, so they could pick and choose how and when they engaged with it. Facebook had space for mutual support and making friends, while Twitter's strength lies in initiating conversations, sharing information more widely, and engaging with influencers such as journalists, politicians and organisations. Instead of trying to make people come to the website, social media allowed Time to Change to be where people were already. Social media also became an almost immediate feedback loop for supporters giving opinions because of this.

Facebook provides a space for fans to be who they need to be

For some people, Facebook became a place to share experiences and relieve loneliness in a relatively safe place. Some of the posts have made it clear that some individuals use Facebook as a place to be their 'real' selves. People with lived experience signed up and provide peer-led support and empowerment to take action against stigma. *'I have my fb friends, they are the only friends I want. It's nice to hide behind that screen. You can be who you want.'*

Facebook has multiple uses – including improving knowledge and support disclosure of mental health problems

The Facebook page created a great way for people without knowledge of mental health problems to find out more about the experiences of people with mental health problems. The comments and links posted meant there was always new and interesting content for people to read. Responses from people without experience of mental health problems included messages like this one: *'Wow, I've never suffered from depression but am genuinely inspired by how open and forthcoming with advice everyone is here. Keep it up'.*

For some people, Facebook was a helpful and, more importantly, safe place to test the waters for speaking out about their experience of mental health problems. Some people even used Facebook as a way of telling friends and family about their diagnosis. Surveys on the effectiveness of Facebook resulted in quotes such as: *'I told my family and friends and university friends that I have bipolar. Via my own Facebook page I put on my own status and as a part of my pledge I put on there I have bipolar.'*

Post regularly to encourage activity

The staff responsible for the Time to Change website, Facebook and Twitter accounts started posting more regularly and linking the platforms up as much as possible. This in turn led to more content, so people commented more regularly; they then shared the information, promoting Time to Change to other people.

Don't be too prescriptive with social media

The Open Up project built a web forum for people with experience of mental health problems to share ways of challenging stigma and discrimination. With hindsight, it was a very specific ask, and people using the forum wanted to use it for generic mental health information and support. The Open Up forum never truly took root, and instead the Time to Change Facebook page became a space where people shared tips and supported each other. People created content in a way that worked for them, and on platforms that they already used.

Prepare for all possible responses

Initially Time to Change was unprepared for the high level of online activity and the fact that the programme received feedback on every action. It became clear that anything launched on social media had to be fully prepared – it wasn't a way of soft launching something that was not quite finished. Sometimes pre-written Q&As were a useful way of dealing with issues that could provoke discussion.