



**Thank you for taking the time to answer the feature questions below.**

**Please, tell us about yourself?**

I'm a Londoner born and bred and proudly so. An amazing and stimulating city that is always full of surprises. I love exploring the South Bank of the Thames and the many lovely parks but often also can be found indoors, in a darkened room, savouring cinema!



**What education course did you follow or where did life take you after this?**

I went to university in another great city – Manchester – to study History, and as a tutor told us “you only chose this subject because you like hearing stories!” I'm sure he was half right as I believe we can learn much from the experiences of those who lived before us, and as has been said truth is very often stranger than fiction. I've done a fair bit of travelling including six months in South America, which I loved - so vibrant, varied and welcoming.

**Would you like to share how you got involved in Mental Health?**

I had been working in events, with a particular interest in films, when my good friend from school (and now also my colleague at Mental Fight Club) invited me along to an evening that he promised would be well worth the trip. Seth was reading some poetry as part of an impressively slick and fascinatingly varied programme that was an exploration of the mind and experiences of mental illness, recovery and wellbeing. It was through my good friend's experiences of being Bipolar, and supporting him with this, that I was introduced to the world of 'Mental Health', but in reality I feel we all have some experience of it either personally or via friends or family.

Following on from this event in 2003, I offered to volunteer for Mental Fight Club (MFC) and have been involved ever since.

**What is Mental Fight Club & the Dragon Café all about?**

Mental Fight Club seeks to explore the creativity that can be found in the experience of mental illness and recovery in an effort to connect more with one self and others. We have been an events based organisation since inception in 2003, popping up in various venues in the London borough of Southwark, and so The Dragon Café is the first time that MFC has manifested in a regular form and location.



**PsyCope 'Coping with Psychosis'**  
Feature of the Month – December 2013  
Declan McGill, Mental Fight Club & Dragon Café

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The Dragon Café is a safe yet stimulating space with art on the walls, freshly prepared food from the kitchen and a wide range of creative groups (all FREE and open to all) happening throughout the day. Daytime groups have included writing, art, Tai Chi, boxing, Mindfulness, gardening, dancing, singing, drama, film making, drumming, and we are very open to collaborations. The evenings can take many shapes including

performance, presentation, and discussion or dancing!



Check out a short film on The Dragon Café here

Here's the embed code to the Film Works video

[www.youtube.com/embed/Ed45U4ngC\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/embed/Ed45U4ngC_8)

A brilliant way to get a feel for the huge variety we have held in the Café over the last year is through our weekly podcast, Dragon Radio. On the website you can listen to the entire archive and also listen to our discussion series We Need to Talk About...

**What has been some of the personal highlights of your time with Mental Fight Club & Dragon Café?**

In 2007 I coordinated a two week series of workshops MFC held with Tate Britain and I really enjoyed our connection with a major Art Institution. I am Communications Manager for MFC but the Management Team is also encouraged to contribute creatively to the programme. In March this year I curated a Film Month at the Café. I was in my element during this month as I believe film is a fantastically powerful medium to explore the many varied and complicated experiences of life. Really this whole last year has been a highlight as we were starting something new and fresh and the response has been incredibly positive. We have had around 200 people visiting the Café each week and with an open door rather than a focus on diagnosis or referral for access, it has been a brilliantly fresh experience for all.



### **What projects are you currently working on?**

We recently received confirmation of further funding from The Maudsley Charity and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity. Hurrah! So currently we are in a development period to take everything that we have learnt from our initial one year project, and strengthen the model for Dragon Café 2 - which will open in February 2014. This is keeping us very busy but we are also welcoming approaches for collaboration in 2014.

### **Do you have any 'coping strategies' that you use?**

I often feel that fresh air can be incredibly healing and so I gain great comfort from walking in the lovely parks of London, or if I'm lucky getting out of the city and heading to the coast. Sea breeze is revitalising, I find.

### **What does the future hold for you?**

We have an exciting time ahead with Dragon Café 2 and so I am very much looking forward to this and hope to see you there too! You can find us at The Crypt of St George the Martyr Church, Borough High St, SE1 1JA.

### **Favourite Quote?**

The great visionary artist and poet William Blake is a creative muse for Mental Fight Club (mental fight being a phrase from 'Jerusalem') and so I think one of his would be appropriate.

*'...To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour...'*

Check our website for exact details of opening date in February 2013.

[www.dragoncafe.co.uk](http://www.dragoncafe.co.uk)

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