Let’s talk about Mental Health

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2025 SSI Fellow

Trigger Warning

This talk includes discussions of mental health issues and statistics, including brief mentions of anxiety attacks and suicide.

My Story

Mike Simpson

Professional nerd, father, photographer, gamer, aspiring writer, sci-fi addict and code monkey.

https://linktr.ee/mdsimpson

I Am Your Father – Part 1: The Secret

04/10/2019 I Am Your Father

October 4, 2019

So, as I am sitting down to write this, my wife and I are just about to announce to our family and friends that we are expecting our first child.

[Pauses for applause and cooing noises]

Interesting times! I'm still not sure it feels real yet…

Anyway, there's quite a lot of information and advice out there, most of which is – quite rightly – aimed at expectant mothers. However, there doesn't seem to be as much stuff intended for fathers-to-be, so I thought I'd throw my digital ink into the mix. I'm going to be chronicling this adventure and trying to talk about what it is like to be a nerdy millennial on the road to fatherhood.

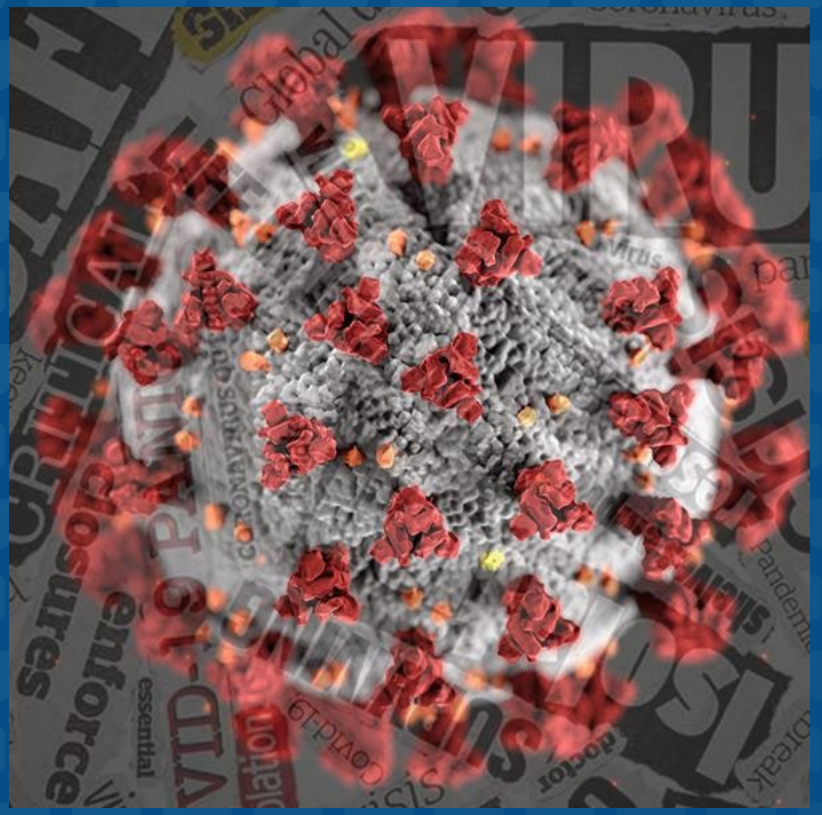
The plan with this blog series is to talk about our experience and to share any useful bits of information that I pick up along the way. This will be aimed mainly at new fathers but will include stuff we both learned that we didn't know before and which might be useful if you are thinking about having a child of your own.

I'm going to try and be brutally honest about it, as much as possible, but I have also given my wife power of veto over any information that I share. And yes, she will have read this before I post it!

The Story So Far

So, it is currently Week 12 (everything in our life is going to be measured in weeks for the foreseeable future) and we'll be having our scan soon. At this point, other than the fact that the baby is already the size of a lime, there is

April 2020



Also April 2020

I Am Your Father

My journey through Pregnancy, Parenthood and the Pandemic.

mdsimpson.co.uk/i-am-your-father

Human

Homo sapiens

"Hello, my name is Ben"

(Bred in Captivity)

Arrived: April 2020

Region: North East England

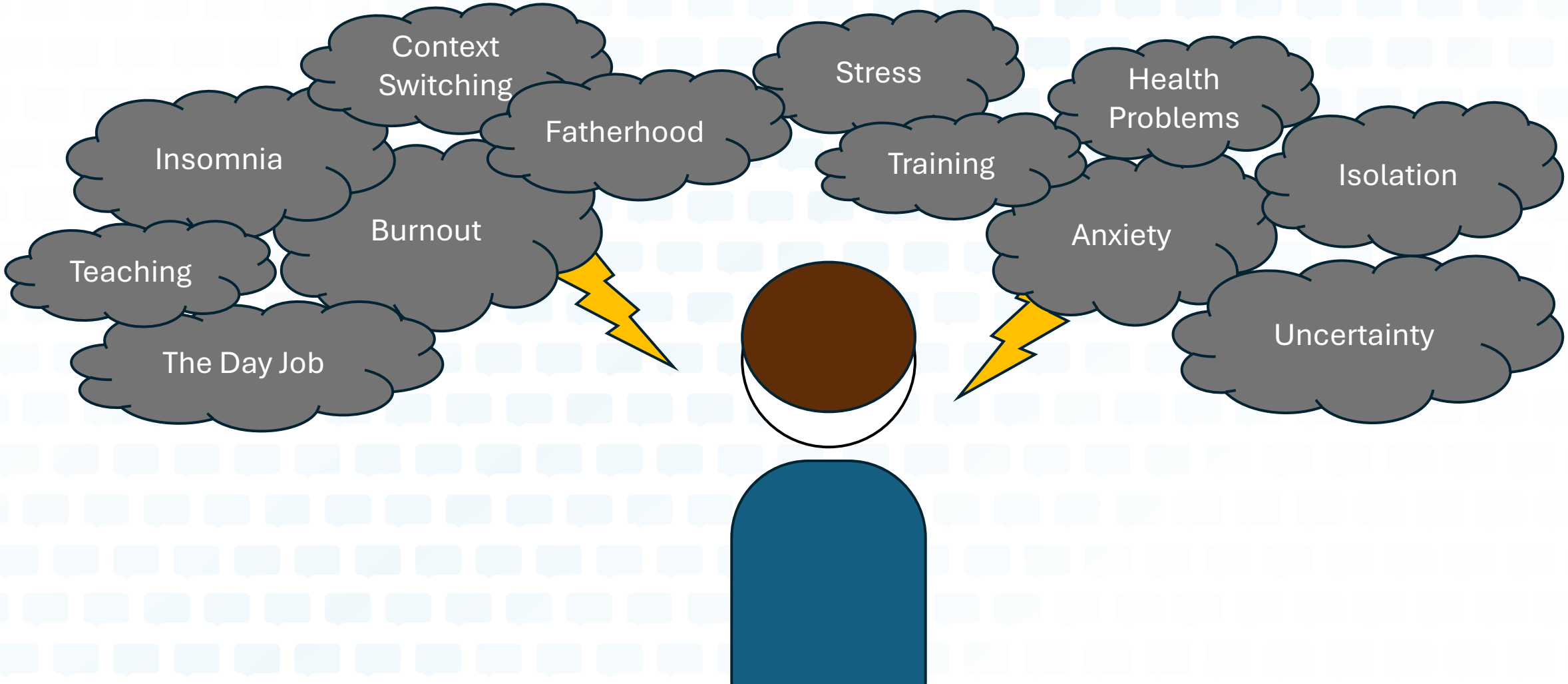
Diet: Mostly lactose

Sleeping Habits: None

Do not tap on the glass!

PLEASE DO FEED THE HUMANS!

Mounting Pressures



So, why am I talking about it?

A lot of what happened was out of my control (or anyone else's).

But there are things we can learn from my experience – and the experiences of others.

That was why I applied for an SSI fellowship.

The Software Sustainability Institute

Founded in 2010.

Mission:

Helping people build better and more sustainable software to enable world-class research.

Next round of Fellowships: **August 2025**.

Website: software.ac.uk

SOFTWARE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

Supporting Mental Health

Mental Health in the UK

1 in 4 adults will experience a mental health problem each year in England.

- [Mind]

Photo by Nubelson Fernandes on Unsplash

Mental Health in the UK

Some statistics:

- People who identify **as LGBTQ+ are 2-3 times more likely** to report a mental health problem than heterosexual people [Mind]
- **23% of Black British people** will experience a mental health problem compared to **17% of White British people** [Mind]
- Men are **3 times more likely** to take their own lives than women [Mind]

Photo by Nubelson Fernandes on Unsplash

Mental Health in the Research Software Community

2022

- Dave Horsfall becomes SSI Fellow.
- Conducts a survey into Mental Health in the Community.

I’ve been helping analyse the results.

We hope to publish soon! Here’s a preview…

Mental Health in the Research Software Community

Is it any wonder that of 135 people:

- 52% reported mental health problems.

Specifically:

- 32% experienced Anxiety.
- 30% experienced Stress.
- 22% experienced Burnout.
- 17% experienced Depression.

Photo by Max Bender on Unsplash

Mental Health in the Research Software Community

Sources of Stress and Anxiety

1. Context Shifting
2. Deadlines
3. Activities outside your Comfort Zone
4. Difficult Partners
5. Life/work balance
6. Lack of recognition

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez CA on Unsplash

Mental Health in the Research Software Community

Sources of negative feelings:

1. Feeling you're not up to the job
2. Lack of control over workload
3. Feeling like you don't fit in

33 (10.8%) considered leaving their current job

26 (8.5%) considered leaving the profession

Photo by charlesdeluvio on Unsplash

If we want to make Research Software more sustainable, we have to help sustain the **people** writing the software, too!

What can we do?

I can’t make your boss give you…

- More money
- Less work
- The promotion you deserve

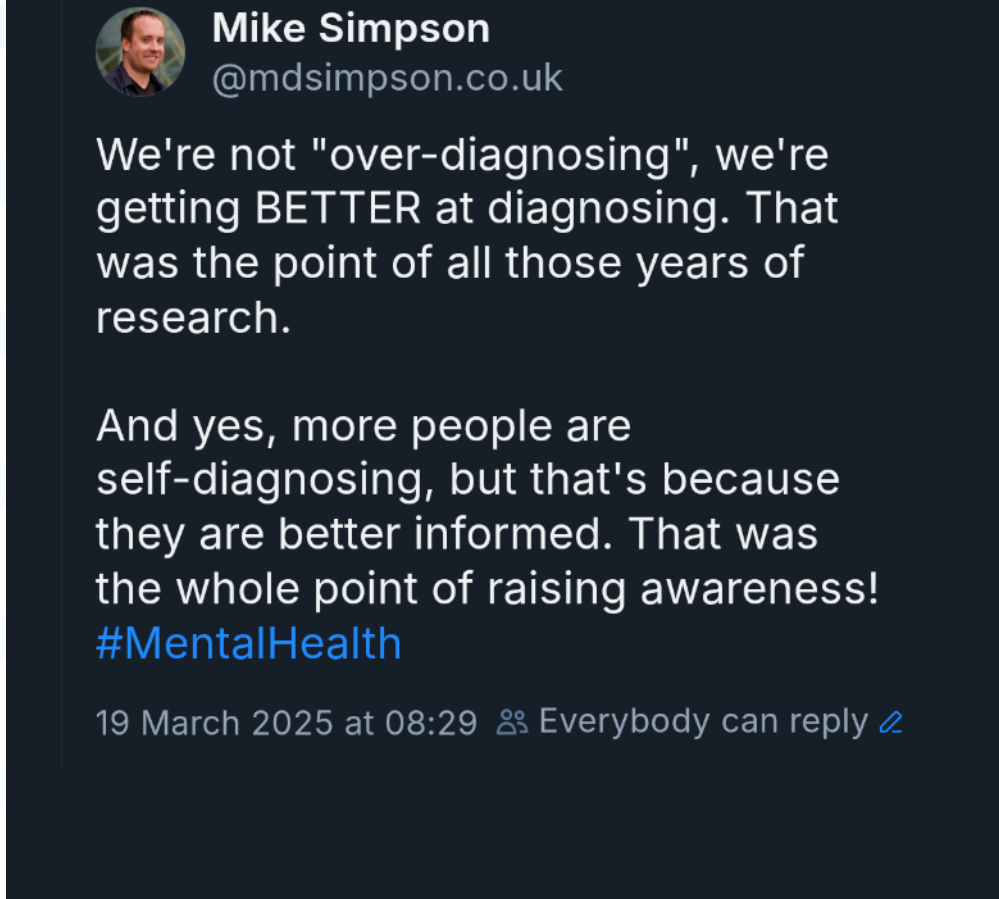
So, what can we do?

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez CA on Unsplash

Continue the Conversation

We need to:

- Smash the Stigma
- Create an environment where people feel able to discuss issues.
- Address issues before they become problems



It’s better to raise a **RED FLAG** before you are forced to wave a WHITE one.

Continue the Conversation

It can be difficult to talk to colleagues or your line manager.

It could be perceived as a sign of weakness.

I am not weak! I am resilient,
because of my previous experiences.

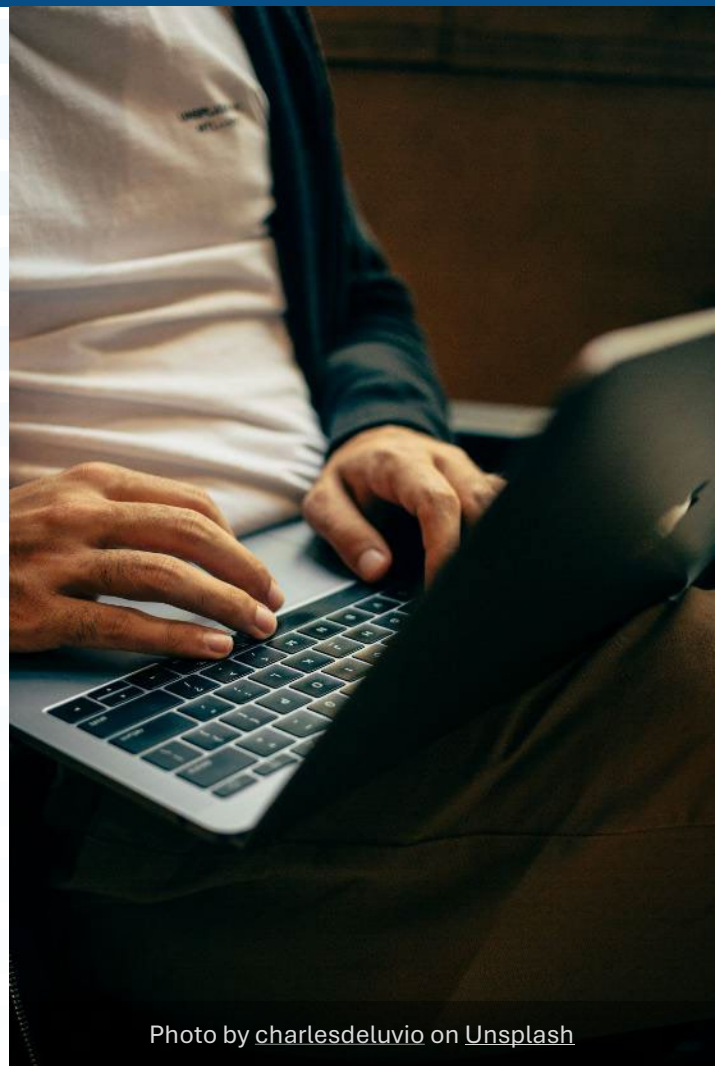


Photo by charlesdeluvio on Unsplash

The Cost of Absence

If I was off for six weeks

- 30 days
- £12,480

Photo by Rachel McDermott on Unsplash

The Cost of Absence

If I was off for six weeks

- 30 days
- £12,480

Mental Health First Aid

- £325 (+ 2 days)
- £1,155

Photo by Rachel McDermott on Unsplash

The Cost of Absence

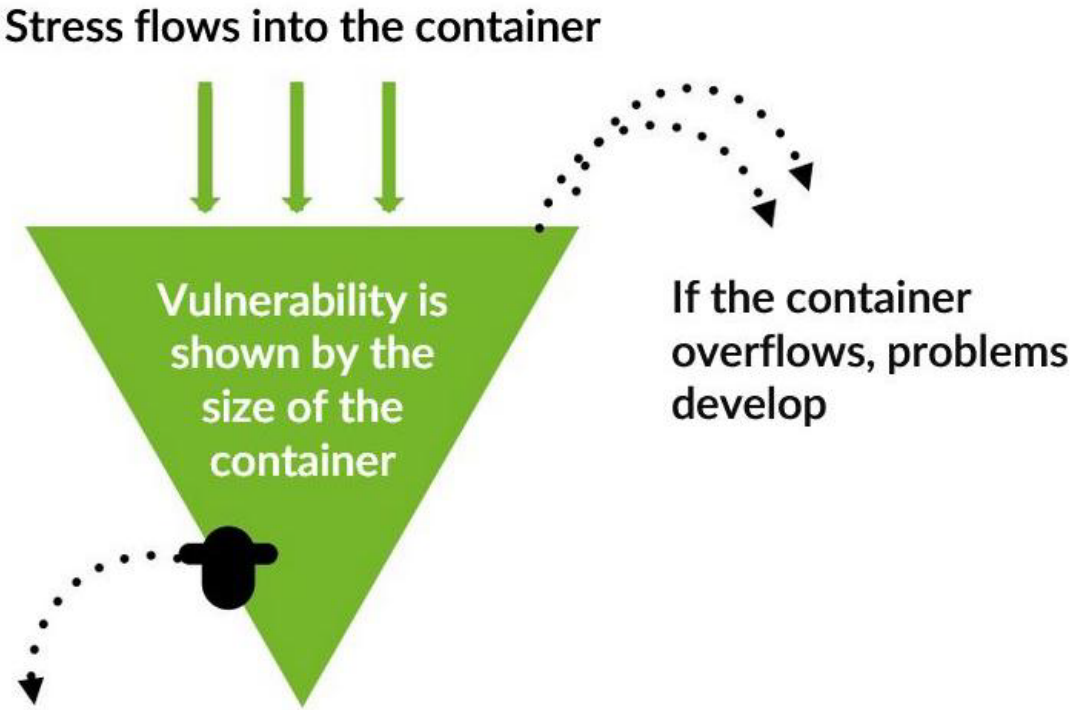
Poor mental health is responsible for **72 million working days** lost and costs UK employers **£45 billion each year.**

- [MHFA England]

Photo by Nubelson Fernandes on Unsplash

What can we practically do?

Stress Container



Helpful coping strategies = tap working, lets stress out

Unhelpful coping strategies = tap blocked, stress fills container and can overflow

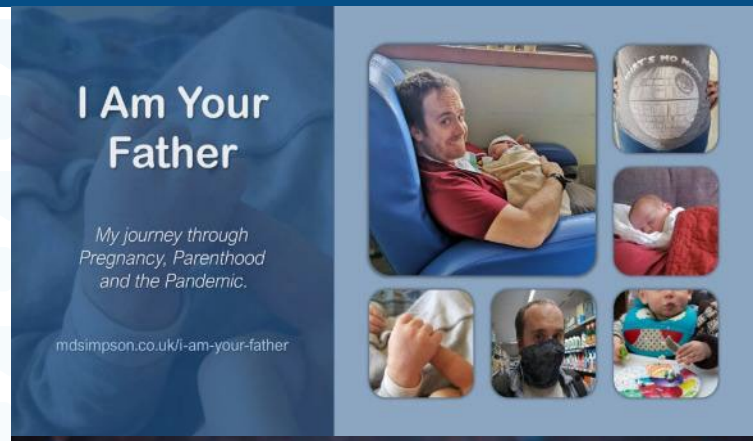
[MHFA England]

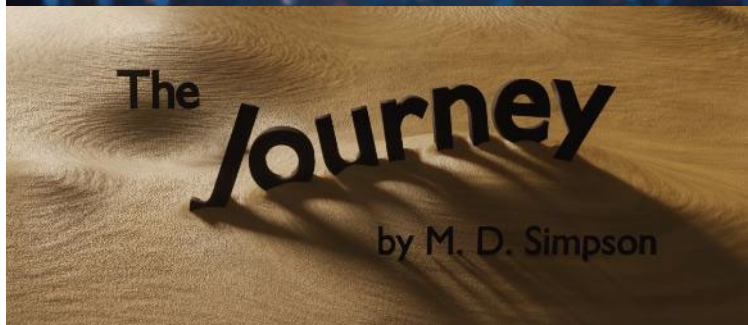
How Writing saved my Life

If thoughts are spiralling…

Writing is:

- a way to process things
- A way to get it “out of your head and onto the page”

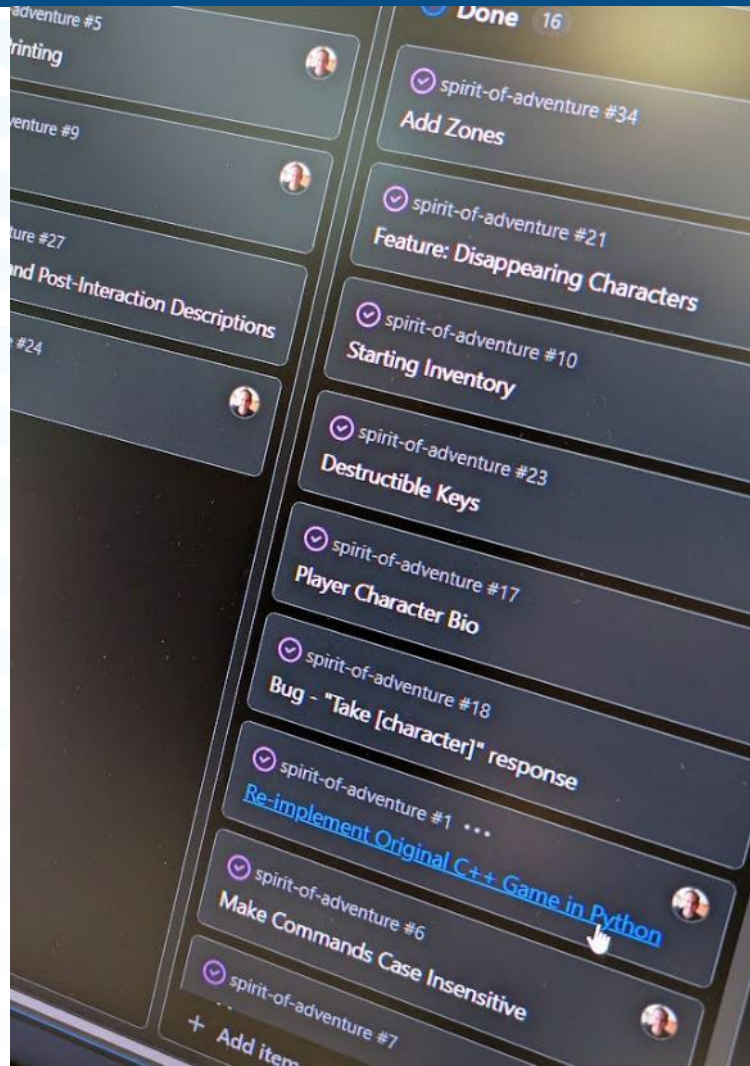




Reflect on your Progress

Feel like you haven't been "productive enough"?

- Don't just close issues
- Take time to reflect
  - What went right?
  - What went wrong?
  - **Why** did it take longer than expected?
  - What did you learn?



Practical Advice?

But what works for me probably won't work for you…

- There is no one magic bullet.
- Everyone is different.

So… what's the solution?

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez CA on Unsplash

CW24

2024 SSI Collaborations Workshop

Question:

What can we practically, realistically do to help improve mental health in the research software community?

Handling the Workload

Many of us struggle to manage our workloads and maintain a healthy life/work balance.

Lots of tools and frameworks exist.

- Often used by managers to increase productivity.

Could they help US?

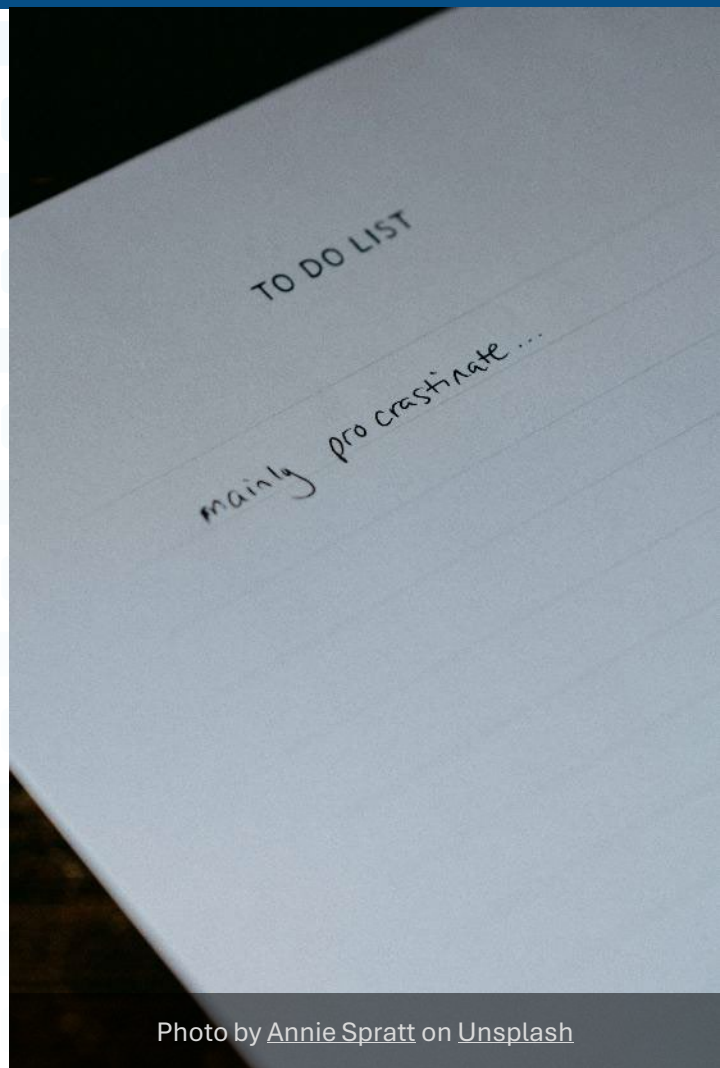


Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Task Management for Humans as Self-Care

- Carpentries-style resource.
- Introduce task-management ideas.
- Refocus away from value for your employer.
- It’s about value for you!
  - Feel like you’ve been productive.
  - Silencing The Voices.

Why is it important?

“Task Management for Humans as Self-Care”

- Wins one of the top prizes during the Ideas Session on Day 2.
- Goes on to win 1st Prize for the Hack Day on Day 3.

Because mental health is important!

The ConveRSE 2025 Tour

- CW25, *Stirling, May*
- UKCEH, *Lancaster, June*
- WHPC Workshop, *Durham, June*
- DCC Coding Session, *Netherlands, June*
- N8CIR RSE Meetup, *York, July*
- RSECon25, *Warwick, September*
- RSAA, *Online, September*
- Alan Turing Institute, *London, September*

Common Questions

- How to deal with Impostor Syndrome?
- What can I do for my team?
- Where can I go to get help?

If you are struggling…

Talk to:

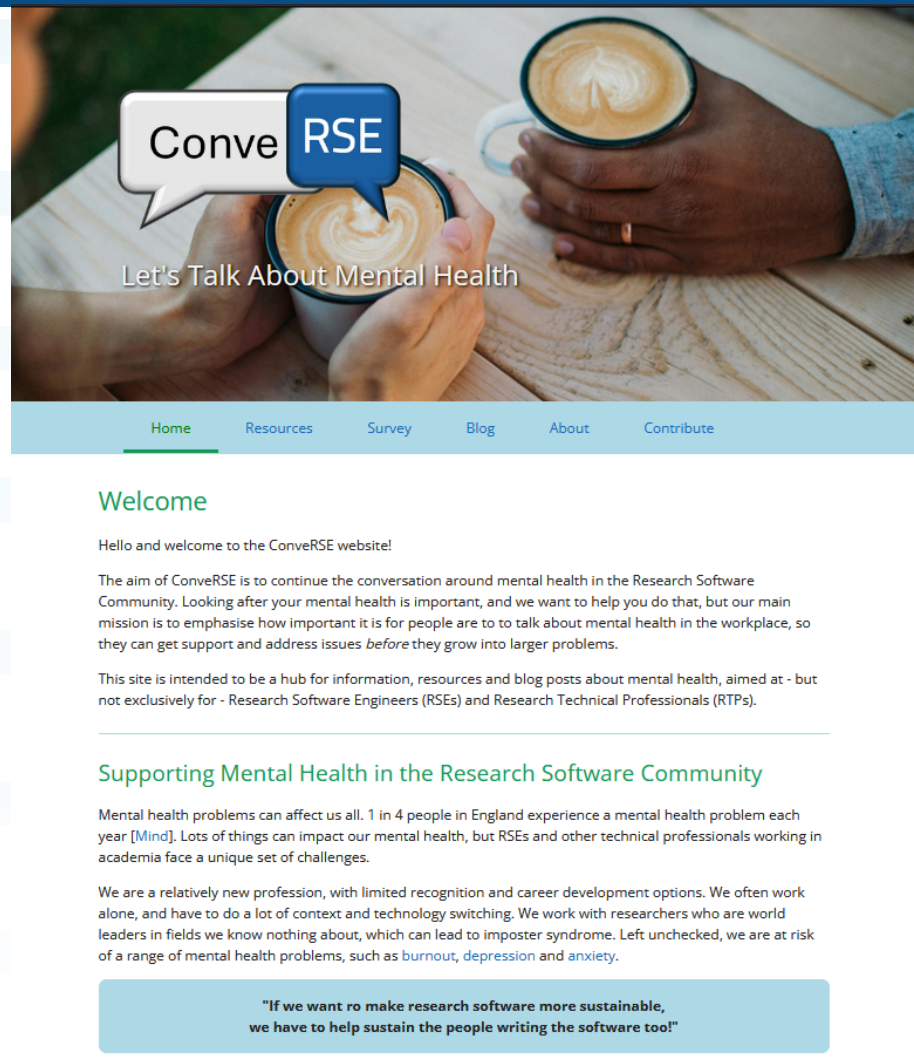
- Your Line Manager
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Employee Assistance Programme or Occupational Health
- Your GP
- And/or a therapist

Photo by Rachel McDermott on Unsplash

ConveRSE

We have launched ‘ConveRSE’:

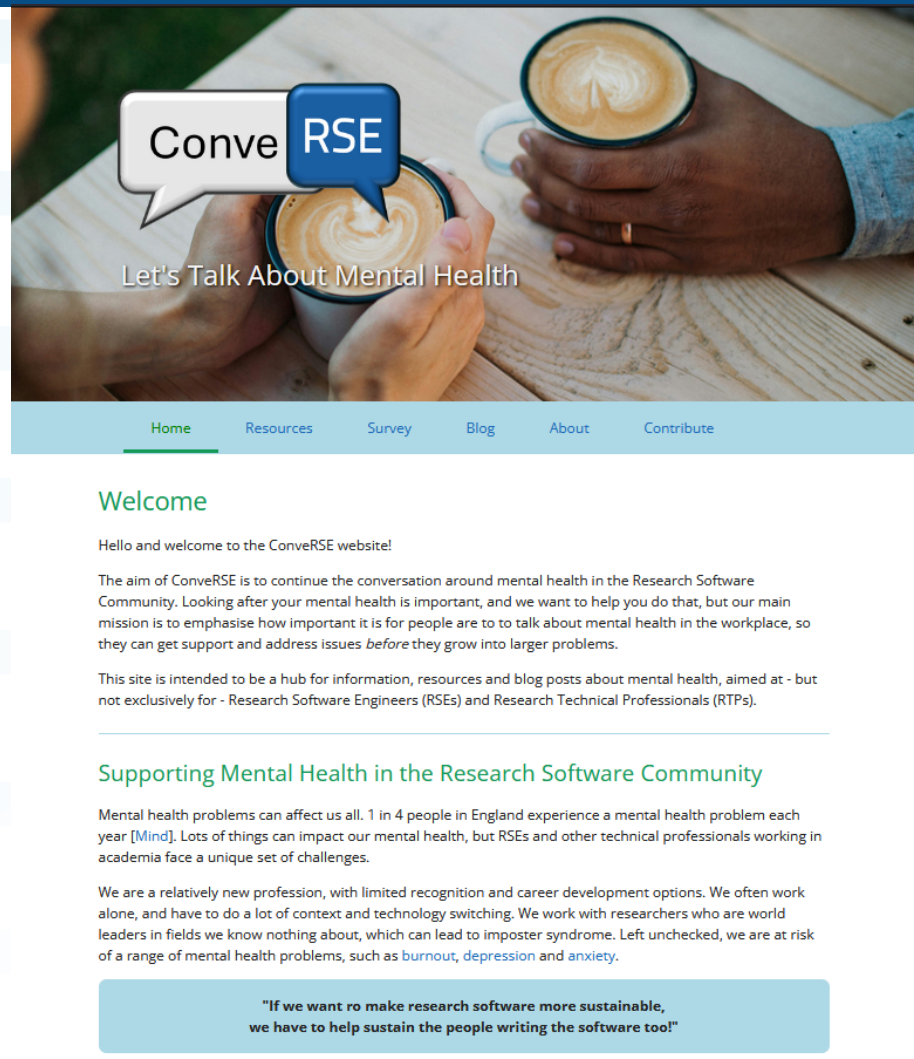
- An online hub for mental health information, resources and support
- Aimed primarily at RSEs and RTPs
  (hopefully applicable to PhD students and others in similar professions)
- Continuing the conversation



ConveRSE

Including:

- Results from Dave Horsfall's survey
- Tips and advice for looking after
  - Yourself
  - Your colleagues
  - Your teams
- Links to additional information and resources



We need your help!

Blog posts from the community:

- Stories
- Resources
- Communities
- Tips & Advice

For more information or to submit:

➢ https://github.com/mdsimpson42/converse

We need your help!

Go to

www.menti.com

Enter the code

7112 9818

Or use QR code

Keep the conversation going!

Join us:

- **#mental-health** on the RSE Society Slack
- Sign up to the mailing list
- Mike and SSI on Social Media

For more info and to contribute:

- https://mdsimpson42.github.io/converse/

Thank you and take care of yourselves!

Let’s talk about Mental Health

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