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Effect should not be measured in money – but it could help

Society's attitude and the public perception to eating disorders has come a long way in recent years.

The human cost to those whose lives are blighted – and in some cases destroyed – by the illnesses is a heavy enough burden to bear.

And the toll on loved ones who find themselves in the heartbreaking position of watching on, powerless to help, is equally as great.

But the shocking findings of a report commissioned by Norfolk-based charity Beat into the economic cost of eating disorders provides sobering reading.

Carried out by Price Cooper and Waterhouse, the report, based on a survey of first-hand experiences from more than 500 people, reveals that the average annual cost to treat someone is £8,900 – but that there are examples where annual treatment costs were £100,000.

It may seem insensitive to measure human suffering in terms of the economic cost to society, but as our understanding of mental health issues becomes more enlightened, surely a case should be made for better funding for care in the sector.

As we have reported, eating disorders claim more lives than any other mental illness – and a shocking one in five of the most seriously affected will die prematurely from the physical consequences or suicide.

Beat says that the report's finding support their argument for an investment in early intervention, to diagnose cases earlier and provide access to treatment.

While a £30m government initiative has been welcomed, surely more investment must be secured to not only limit the financial strain on the NHS, but to ease the personal struggle for those forced to live with eating disorders.

Signs are promising

It has not been a vintage couple of years for Norfolk's children's services department.

Critical Ofsted reports, poor school performance and a change of leadership have combined to undermine confidence in this most critical of areas.

And there are few things more important than the education and care of our children.

While it is too early to become carried away, it is encouraging to read that James Joyce, chairman of the children's services committee, believes things are improving.

We sincerely hope that he is right, and are pleased that the signs are better.

For when children's services falls short, it has a demoralising impact on the county as a whole – and a potentially significant impact on our children and young people.

Zippy is not forgotten

It is rare that an animal can bring a community together – but Zippy the donkey has done just that.

He and his brother George had become a popular part of life in Elsing but, despite the best efforts of villagers, Zippy was put down after a battle with cancer.

The good news is that the arrival of donkeys Crawford and Cameron will not only keep George company, but will help Zippy's legacy live on in the memories of the village's children.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ Fay Neale came across this tranquil scene along the River Nar at West Acre on a lovely February day. If you have got a picture for possible publication in the EDP, send it to us via our website at www.iwitness24.co.uk

Just speaking English is not enough in the world we live in

Peter
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An index of world-wide language skills shows that the very highest levels of proficiency in English as a foreign language are found in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Poland and Austria, in that order.

The nations outside Europe with the highest levels of English proficiency are Malaysia, Singapore, the Dominican Republic and South Korea. The lowest levels in Europe (although we don't have information for many of the Balkan countries) are, starting from the bottom, Ukraine, Russia, France, Italy, Slovakia, Portugal and Spain.

The low position of France is rather remarkable. Although they're just across the Channel from us, the French are lower on the index than Hungary, Romania, Latvia – and Argentina. Maybe this is because there's a tradition in France of resisting English as the language of American imperialism, which of course it is; but it is also the language of international communication, and even French people are at a disadvantage without it.

Talking of disadvantages, where would the British come on any world-wide index of foreign language proficiency? Pretty



■ A high proportion of people in the Netherlands speak English so well they can use it fluently in their working lives. Picture: PA/RENATO GRANIERI

low, in my guess. Too many people here have the wrong attitude to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Fewer pupils now study languages at school; language qualifications are no longer a requirement for university entrance; and, in a spate of academic vandalism, universities are closing down language departments.

Some people think that's OK: why should young British people bother to learn other languages when everywhere else in the world there is such a strong emphasis on developing a very good command of English?

A high proportion of people in Denmark, Holland, Sweden and elsewhere speak English so well that, if necessary, they can use it fluently in their working lives, and

with clarity and accuracy. Very many educated Swiss people speak Swiss German, Standard German, English and French, and then apologise for their bad Italian. And we are not just talking about academics and top professionals – think of all those eloquent Dutch and Scandinavian footballers you can hear doing post-match interviews on TV.

So the real question that we should be asking is: why would an international business employ a young monolingual British speaker when they could engage a bilingual (or trilingual or quadrilingual) Dutch, Austrian, Swiss, or South Korean person? By thinking that "English is enough", we are putting our country and our young people at a disadvantage. The truth is that English is not enough.

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Let the morning bring me word of
your unfailing love, for I have put
my trust in you.
Psalm 143:8

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