

Alex Cotton MBE has worked for the NHS for thirty years as a registered Mental Health Nurse for sixteen years, Alex worked as a Senior Mental Health Nurse in the Coventry Crisis Team, which provides support for people in mental distress, preferably within their own homes. In 2014 she commenced work alongside the police, as a Mental Health Nurse in the Mental Health Street Triage Team. This team works to reduce the distress of an individual who the police have contact with, and provide alternatives to detention, while reducing the need for ambulances or admission to A&E.

The statistic that 75% of men who take their lives, have not had contact with mental health services is one that Alex became all too familiar with during her work in the Street Triage team and it was the driving influence behind the creation of the mental health campaign It Takes Balls to Talk.

Alex wanted to create a way to engage men, reducing the barriers to accessing support and encouraging them to view speaking out as strength, not a weakness. She was sure she could help to reduce male suicide if she could increase self-help skills and uptake of services. Whilst attending a Coventry City Football Club match on Boxing Day 2015, Alex thought, “we should bring mental health messages to where men are” and so It Takes Balls to Talk was founded. It is a campaign that uses sporting themes to encourage people, particularly men, to talk about how they feel. The campaign visits sporting venues and workplaces and, to date, has reached over 200,000 people along with a social media reach that has increased from an average of 17,000 to in excess of 70,000 month in the last year.

In 2018 Alex received an MBE for her services to mental health.