

Report on a Healthwatch Consultation on Mental Health Support for Young People in Wandsworth

Introduction

Healthwatch Wandsworth had the opportunity to encourage young people to complete a questionnaire at a conference organised by the Wandsworth Youth Council called “Youth Momentum 2”. The conference took place on 3rd July 2015 and was attended by 180 young people. Representatives of various agencies attended this extremely successful conference as facilitators, stall holders or decision-makers. One of the topics discussed at the conference was youth mental health, which was also the topic of the consultation carried out by Healthwatch.

Overview of the survey

Young people who attended the conference were encouraged to complete a questionnaire including 4 main questions. A sample of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The questionnaire was designed in particular to help commissioners who are planning to set up a new school counselling services, but also to develop a better understanding of the kind of mental health support young people would be willing to access.

42 young people completed the questionnaire.

A further 15 young people were consulted over group discussions across 3 tables. These open discussions expanded the scope of the survey and added value to the findings of this consultation.

Findings

Question 1: *Do you think being able to talk to a counsellor at school would help young people feel better?*

95.2% of respondents thought this service would help young people, with only 2 answering NO to this question.

Question 2: *Where should the counselling service be based and why?*

Young people were asked to choose one of three possible locations (School, GP surgery, a neutral place) where they would like to see a counsellor and give reasons for their choice.

Interestingly, **none of the young people said that the counselling service should be based at a GP surgery**. Several of the responses included comments about not wanting to feel as if they had an “illness”. This is in line with a more general theme emerging both in the questionnaires and in the group discussions about the need to make young people feel that talking about their mental health is “normal”.

The majority of preference was given to the “neutral place” with **52.4%** of the vote. School came second with **45.2%**.

Only one person (equivalent to **2.4%**) refused to answer stating that the service would be useless in any case.

The main reasons given to explain their choices are summarised below:

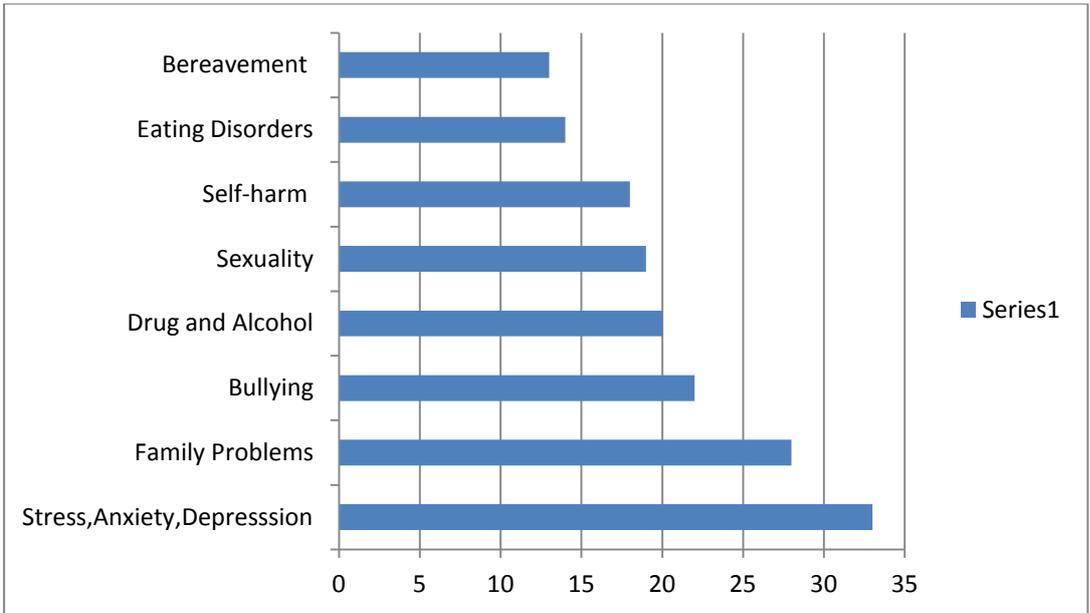
Neutral Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It would be anonymous, more discreet and confidential. Fewer people will know about it, info will not reach teachers. - It would be calmer, there would not be so many other things happening and the young people can relax, without taking in the tension around them. - It would provide an informal environment in which young people are more likely to feel comfortable and open up.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It would be easier to see a counsellor in schools. - As young people are there most of the time, it is easier to make sure that kids actually get the support they need. - Young people feel safe and comfortable in the school, they know the staff. - They can access the service without letting their parents know.

A list of all the free-text comments can be found in Appendix B.

Question 3: *What would you like to talk about in a counselling session?*

The questionnaire included a list of topics and young people were allowed to tick as many boxes as they wished as well as making other suggestions.

As shown in the chart below, stress, anxiety and depression and family problems were the most popular choices. Only three other topics were suggested, and they were friendships, education related problems, and anger management.



Question 4: What do you think we can do to help you and other young people talk about their mental health and look after themselves?

Four themes were identified in the 38 responses given by young people to this open question:

More Mental Health Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach people that mental health is equally as valid as physical health. - Have speakers and run sessions in schools and youth centres to get kids talking about it. - If more young people know what mental health is, they will feel more comfortable talking about it. - Educate all young people about it.
Challenge Stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make young people think that mental health is a normal topic, it shouldn't be frowned upon. Make it less scary. - Make it less something that needs to be treated e.g. a disease. - Make counselling a more accepted thing. - Encourage young people to be open and don't feel ashamed. Don't make it a taboo subject.
Improve communication with young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be open and kind to young people. Look after them and show them that they are not alone. - Talk to them as a "friend" to make them more comfortable. - Make sure counsellors know how to talk to the youth.
Offer more practical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help young people boost their confidence - Arrange activities and events to help young people

help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have more information and support contacts available - Have a young counsellor that is relatable - Talk to people who need it the most
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A complete list of all the free-text comments can be found in Appendix B.

Feedback from group discussions

During small group discussions in the second part of the conference Youth Momentum2, young people were given the opportunity to ask “decision-makers” questions related to mental health. Afterwards, decision-makers were also given the opportunity to ask the young people questions.

15 young people were consulted over three tables. Some of the suggestions made, such as more mental health education in schools, were the same as the ones made in the response to the questionnaire.

Additional suggestions we believe worth looking into include:

- Stress management programmes during exams. Some young people felt that the schools provide no support to help them deal with the enormous pressure they feel under while studying for their exams.
- Use online self-assessment tool for a young person to understand when to seek help
- Use online platform such as tumblr, which is completely anonymous and is the place where many young people go to talk about how they feel

Conclusions

Young people who attended the conference Youth Momentum 2 were mainly of school age and came from a wide range of backgrounds. Two of the young people we spoke to had learning disabilities and one had physical disabilities. They were all willing to speak up and/or complete the questionnaire and by the amount of free-text comments received it was clear that they had a lot to say.

In particular, they expressed clear views on the need to talk about mental health in schools, make young people feel less ashamed to seek help and make information and support easily accessible to them. We hope their comments will be taken into account by commissioners and providers of relevant services.

At the end of the conference, decision-makers and young people at each table had to take a “selfie pledge”(a picture of you making a pledge, usually by holding a hand-written sign). Ours was: Mandatory Mental Health Education in Schools.

Appendix A - The Questionnaire

In Wandsworth there are plans to launch a new school based counselling service.

Do you think being able to talk to a counsellor at school would help young people feel better?

Yes No

Would you and/or other young people you know prefer to see a counsellor:

in the school at a GP surgery in a neutral place

Please explain why:

What would you and/or other young people you know like to talk about in a counselling session (please tick as many as you wish):

Stress, Anxiety, Depression Family problems

Bullying Drug and Alcohol

Eating Disorders Sexuality

Bereavement Self Harm

Other

What do you think we can do to help you and other young people talk about their mental health and look after themselves?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Appendix B List of Free-text Comments

Question 2 - Reasons given for choosing Neutral Place

- As a young person I'd feel a lot more comfortable + more likely to open up in a neutral places
- I think sometimes people need an informal environment to feel more comfortable to talk
- This would be more comfortable for the young person to talk and express themselves with minimal pressure
- So the counsellor has more time to help the young person
- As there isn't a lot happening and it will help relax the student
- Because they will be calm
- It would be a lot more calm
- Because it will feel different
- They will feel more comfortable and will not take tension at the place
- Don't want it to feel like an illness but don't want to be seen at the school
- At a GP it would feel like an illness and you might not want to talk to someone at school who you see every week
- You can be anonymous
- Neutral place is more discreet and confidential
- No one about to see so it is more private and more relaxed than at the GP surgery
- It won't make it uncomfortable
- Less people know about it
- More anonymous
- Because it wouldn't be known I have a counsellor
- Because in a neutral place I will feel less worried about info reaching teachers etc...
- Away from people they knew like parents but not in a formal place
- Places like youth clubs are good

Question 2 - Reasons given for choosing schools

- Because it would be easier to meet and best for me
- It would be easier
- So you don't have to let your parents know
- Easier access to help, so that the situation does not go unnoticed
- It's not out of the way and it's easier to access
- A place we visit regularly
- It is easier and more comfortable
- Because it's easier
- Easy to access them
- It's somewhere we can be sure to receive support as we are there most of the time
- It is more neutral to speak to someone in school
- It's a public area where multiple kids can converse and share their issues

- Because you are more comfortable
- In a comfortable environment
- Somewhere most children feel safe
- I know the staff so more approachable
- Because it kills time
- More self-assessment tool online, anonymous and easy to access

Question 4 - What else can be done to improve young people's mental health

- More events, teach people that mental health is equally as valid as physical health
- Raising more awareness and lessons
- Promote it more so people understand it's ok
- Run sessions in schools and youth centres to get youth talking about it
- Advertise! If kids know what kind of thing it is, they will feel more comfortable talking
- Have more people to young people in schools
- More mental health education in schools
- Help people boost their confidence
- Counselling sessions would be just fine
- Be open and don't feel ashamed
- Show them that it is not bad – shouldn't be frowned on – always room to improve
- Everybody gets free sessions even if they don't want it
- Arrange activities and events to help young people
- Have more information and support contacts available
- Just listen + give advice
- Be open and kind to young people
- Have a young counsellor that is relatable
- Do talks and provide help
- Provide a comfortable environment
- We could issue them with a questionnaire to fill in regarding their mental health
- Make it less like something that needs to be treated – a disorder
- Talk to an adult teacher you trust, GO, parents, siblings
- Be more open about mental health with young people
- Make mental health less scary / make it have less of a stigma
- Talk to people who needs it the most
- Have speakers come into schools
- Talk to the kids who needs it the most
- It's a public area were multiple kids can converse and share their issues
- Look after them and show them you are not alone
- Be more understanding
- Examples of turn around people
- Make counselling a more accepted thing and encourage them to seek help in a friendly way.
- Talk to them as a "friend" as they will feel most comfortable. Have counsellors to talk in a way to open up youth.

- Don't make it a taboo subject. Educate all young people about it.
- Just being able to listen
- Not sure
- Home an approachable environment + confidentiality
- More people understand that mental health is a normal topic and increase most peoples' reluctance to tell normally comes from what they think their peers will think.