

Listening to Children and Young People:

a Young Listeners project with
6 secondary schools

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shaped by you

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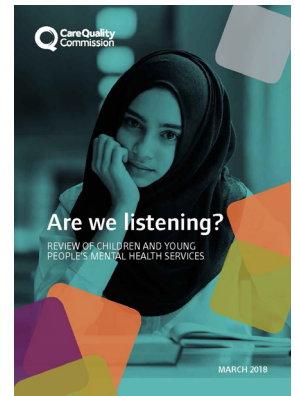
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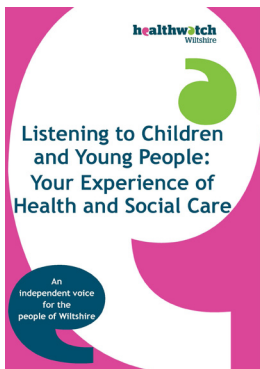
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Background

The state of mental health services for children and young people is a rising concern. It has been reported by school leaders that the number of young people affected by health and wellbeing issues has risen over the last 5 years with more than half (55%) saying there had been a large increase in anxiety or stress of students (National Children's Bureau¹). The Care Quality Commission's 2018 report² *Are we listening?* found that many children and young people aren't receiving the care that they deserve and that the system is over complicated. They did see examples of good practice however; these staff were often working long hours, with limited resources whilst the demand for their services is increasing.



More locally, the Wiltshire Health and Wellbeing survey³ carried out in 2017 found that children and young people thought that they needed more support and knowledge in many areas related to mental and physical health, including coping with stress, body image and healthy eating.



At the end of 2016 Healthwatch Wiltshire published the report, *Listening to Children and Young People: Your Experience of Health and Social Care*⁴. Working with Youth Action Wiltshire and Community First's Community Organisers, a team of young people were trained in safeguarding, communication and listening skills. They listened to other children and young people at youth groups to hear their experiences of using health and care services. One of the key themes that arose from this was that young people didn't know where to access support for physical or mental health in schools. Healthwatch Wiltshire felt that further work should be carried out looking at this in more detail.

Continuing to work with Youth Action Wiltshire and Community First's Community Organisers, we developed a different method to engage young people, this time in the school environment. We recruited a team of 18 young people from secondary schools across Wiltshire and invited them to take part in a five-week engagement programme. The programme allowed them to build confidence, gain new skills and increase resilience. Some of them attended further training to become Young Listeners. They then went on to carry out "listening" with their peers to hear their views of health and wellbeing support within their school. The project ran from June 2017 until January 2018.



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

Sources:

^[1] <https://www.ncb.org.uk/news-opinion/news-highlights/school-leaders-voice-concerns-over-childrens-mental-health-care>

^[2] <http://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/themed-work/are-we-listening-review-children-young-peoples-mental-health-services>

^[3] https://www.wiltshirehealthyschools.org/documents/survey_data/Wiltshire_School_Health_Survey_1_overview_report_2017.pdf

^[4] <https://www.healthwatchwiltshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Listening-to-Children-and-Young-People-Your-Experiences-of-Health-and-Care-002.pdf>

What we did

1. Recruitment

An information flyer and invitation letter was sent to all Wiltshire schools inviting them to express their interest in being involved in this project. Schools were able to refer up to four students and they could include students that had poor attendance or attainment and those who may benefit from additional support. Four schools referred a total of 18 students aged 12-14 years to the program.



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

The schools involved were:

- South Wilts Grammar
- Avon Valley
- Hardenhuish
- Bradon Forest

All students received a home visit from the team before the engagement programme began to discuss the project in detail with them and their families. This also allowed us to identify any additional support requirements that may be needed.

2. Engagement programme

The engagement programme began in June and the young people attended one day a week over a five-week period. A bespoke programme was created, tailored to the needs of the young people and their schools. The engagement programme allowed the young people and staff to build relationships and understanding.

Topics covered through the programme were as follows:

Week one	Team building and icebreakers
Week two	Healthy eating and healthy body, healthy mind
Week three	Mental health and physical activity
Week four	Reflection, self-awareness and volunteering
Week five	ASDAN* certificates and reward activity



*Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
Listening to Children and Young People



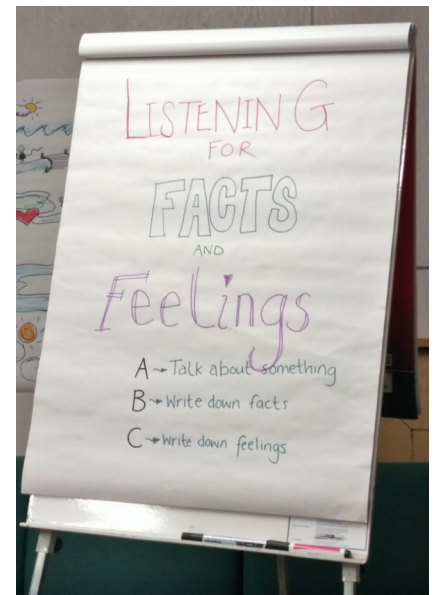
Feedback about the young people’s progress was shared with their parents and teachers at the end of the five weeks.

On completion of the engagement programme the young people were awarded ASDAN certificates. Eleven young people applied to continue to become Young Listeners. The others were referred on to other projects supported by Youth Action Wiltshire and Community First.



3. Residential training

The weekend residential training took place in September and the young people received intensive training in safeguarding and community organising covering topics such as effective listening, exploring power dynamics and self-reflection. They also spent time in their school groups, discussing how they would carry out their listening when they returned to school. At the end of the residential training 11 young people became Young Listeners. They returned to school and began their “listening” with fellow students with mentoring support from Community First Community Organisers throughout.



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How young people were engaged

The Young Listeners engaged other students from their school and had the opportunity to listen to all year groups from Years 7-12. They decided where they wanted to carry out their “listening” and how they wanted to undertake them. They also publicised the project in assemblies and made posters that were displayed around the schools.

Methods of engagement included:

- 1-1 “listening”
- Group “listening”
- Anonymous surveys

Across the four schools, a total of 156 “listening” took place between September and December. The breakdown by school is:

School	Number of listening
Bradon Forest	10
Hardenhuish	25
South Wilts Grammar	63
Avon Valley	58



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

There were some barriers to the methods used. The Young Listeners were relying on other young people to come to them and it was a slow process to build up the trust needed to share their views openly. There were also some issues with the support that the Young Listeners received from school staff. This slowed the process and affected the time that they had available to listen to other students.

The key messages

Young people felt that it was important for them to have opportunities to discuss mental health and wellbeing.

Young people said that they wanted support for health and wellbeing in school to be more accessible.

Young people said that they wanted to be able to talk about health and wellbeing issues without judgement and be respected.

Young people said that they welcomed having the opportunity to share their views with their peers.

What did young people say?



Across the four schools, 87% of young people said that they knew where to go if they felt unwell and 44% said that they had visited the school nurse or medical room. 57%

of those who had accessed the school nurse felt that they had been given enough support. Young people from all four schools accessed the school nurse initially through reception, and many said that they did not wish to do this. Two of the schools only had access to the school nurse one day a week, and young people said that they felt this was not helpful when concerns arose. They said that they would like more staff available so that they could talk to someone when support was needed.

“The school nurse didn’t exactly pay any attention to me! I hardly got any support at all so was rather annoyed and disrespected.”

“I’m not sure where to go if I have a concern, as everyone else I have been to see has put me down.”

“I feel listened to when talking to someone with a concern, because they find a solution instead of interrupting and assuming”

“Make services in school and outside of school easier to access, less pressure; less stigma!”



75% of young people said they knew how to access support for mental health. 26% of the young people listened to said that they had accessed support for mental

health in school and 48% of those said that this was a positive experience. Accessing pastoral care and mental health support differed between the schools, with two schools offering support through the school nurse. One school no longer had a dedicated pastoral team, so support was given by their tutor. Many students said that they did not feel comfortable talking to their tutor about personal issues and that they would have felt more comfortable discussing issues with the pastoral team. One of the Young Listeners had similar feelings. One school offered pastoral support via referral or self-referral. There were very mixed opinions on the referral times at this school; some had a good experience, while others had a poor experience, long waiting time and felt they didn’t have enough time given to them. Overall across all four schools, 54% of young people said that they would have liked more support around mental health.

“The only issue is the regularity of appointments but obviously there is a large demand for services in school that are not being met, so it is understandable, but changes should happen to ensure we are able to get regular appointments that we need to ensure a better service and support”

“Teachers say they are helpful and give you support, but they don’t actually care and it’s never confidential.”

3

Young people said that it was important that they had opportunities to discuss their mental health and wellbeing and that they wanted platforms that allowed open dialogue. At one school, young people listened to felt that there were no opportunities to discuss mental health in school and said that there were no awareness posters for mental health around school either. Young people at another school said that there were a lot of information posters around the school, but that they did not feel that they were being educated or had the opportunity to talk about mental health. Across all four schools, 66% of young people said that their teachers were helpful and that there was support and information in school. They said that their preferred methods of communication around mental health were posters and discussions in assemblies and classes.

“I would really like information about support available in school verbally, maybe more talks about mental health.”

“I think the support systems in schools should be greater and people should be more educated on Mental Health, so it doesn't become such a taboo topic.”

“Information about school nurses, mental health support and others should not be on posters or online this just allows the school to pretend they're doing stuff. I would like to see more action from teachers and pastoral.”

“Treat me like a person, not a child, work with me/us to find a solution, not talk at me from over a desk like an interrogation.”

4

Young people from all four schools said that they wanted to be respected and not judged when they discussed their mental health and wellbeing in school. 65% of young people said that they wanted the person that they were talking to be kind, caring and to listen to them. Young people also said that they wanted to be treated as an equal and taken seriously. Across the four schools, over 60% of young people said that they felt listened to by staff around health and wellbeing.



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

“I don’t feel comfortable about talking about my problems.”

“They take the time out to stop and hear what I have to say.”

5

Many young people said that they did not feel confident or comfortable enough to open up about their feelings to the school nurse or pastoral support. However, once a relationship was built some young people said that they felt listened to and supported.

6

Young people across the schools suggested ways that things could be improved. These included:

- raising awareness of the services available
- cutting waiting times
- increased availability of services
- better attitude from professionals

7

Several young people said that it was good being able to discuss their issues with the Young Listeners. They felt that they were more approachable and had a better understanding of the issues that young people faced.



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

Recommendations

Based on what the Young Listeners heard from other young people, we recommend that:

1. More opportunities are given to young people to discuss mental health and wellbeing in school, for example in assemblies, PSHE lessons and involvement in national campaigns.
2. All schools continue to provide mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people, and promote this widely.
3. More training is provided for all school staff around mental health and wellbeing awareness, and the support that is available locally so that they can signpost.
4. The peer to peer approach used by the Young Listeners is promoted and fostered within schools.

Next steps

We will work together with the Young Listeners to share what they have heard with the commissioners and providers of services (the people who plan, pay for, and run services) so that the voices of the children and young people who spoke to the Young Listeners can help shape services in the future. The Young Listeners are also being supported by the Community Organisers to share what they heard with their schools directly to influence changes.



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

Our volunteers

This project was made possible by the dedication and enthusiasm of the Young Listeners. The project has benefitted the Young Listeners themselves, increasing their confidence, better attendance at school and improved mental health. See appendix for case study and feedback from parents and teachers.

In total, 11 Young Listeners took part:

- 4 from Hardenhuish
- 2 from Bradon Forest
- 2 from Avon Valley
- 3 from South Wilts grammar

Overall, they gave 999 hours of their time.

“I found the project incredibly useful and inspiring. Although I was pushed out of my comfort zone in the beginning, I feel a lot more confidence when talking to people.” **Young Listener**



Photo by Siobhan Boyle

Thank you

Healthwatch Wiltshire would like to thank all the young people who took the time to share their experiences and views with the Young Listeners. Thanks also to Youth Action Wiltshire and Community First Community Organisers for working with us on this project. Finally, huge thanks to the dedicated Young Listeners who gave so much of their time to allow other young people the opportunity to be heard.

Appendix:

*Names of students have been changed

Case Study

Jennifer was put forward for the programme by the school after struggling with mental health issues including anxiety.

Jennifer attended the engagement programme and the Community Organising training and decided to be a Young Listener in her school. Jennifer has had an exceptional journey with us and embraces the project fully with enthusiasm and charisma. She talks about how many new skills she has now and how she flourished with the different methods of learning and the mentoring support. It has been wonderful that Jennifer and her team have also been able to support the students at South Wiltshire Grammar School. One girl told us how self-conscious and anxious she felt in school. The Young Listening team were there to listen to her and help support her feel more confident in herself. The school has embraced the project, referring some students to the Young Listeners when the Pastoral Care Team is particularly busy. The location that the Young Listeners have placed themselves within the school has become a safe and calm place where many students feel they can go for a friendly face and listening ear. We are so proud of Jennifer's achievements this year. She was nominated by Community First for a Young Person's Achievement Award last October. Community First also appreciated her volunteering support on our other projects with Splash and Youth Action Wiltshire, and as a result Jennifer will training with Community First to become an Ambassador.

Feedback from School Staff

Jane and John were two students in our cohort who struggled with various issues. Jane struggled to remain in class due to her anxiety and various other reasons and John's attendance was such that we were holding School Attendance Meetings. Both John and Jane lacked in confidence and self-esteem and would often put themselves down, never thinking they were good enough or had the ability to take part in various activities. Community First and Healthwatch Wiltshire have done wonders for them. Jane now remains in 24/25 lessons on weeks where she is having a bad time and most weeks she is in 25/25. Not only has she managed to stay in class and get the learning that she deserves, but she has also won awards at the Sports Awards evening and been chosen to attend a day at Bath University. Her confidence has grown and grown since taking part with Community First and Healthwatch Wiltshire, you can physically see a change and, with regards to her own mental health, the change is [incredible]. John's attendance has improved and despite all the upset that he has, and not being able to take part in every weekend, his confidence has definitely improved. He has a sense of belonging with the project and a sense that he matters - this is something that John really didn't have before the start of this programme. I honestly think that the change in these two students can't only be measured by what we see on the outside, it is what Community First and Healthwatch Wiltshire has done to their own sense of purpose that is more noticeable and even more significant.

Mandy Weyers, Pastoral Manager and Safeguarding Lead, Avon Valley School (January 2018)

Letter from a parent: Changes noted by Jane's mother over the duration of the project.

Dear Youth Action Wiltshire,

I just wanted to write to you to let you know how deeply grateful I am to you all, I really am in awe of everything you've done for my daughter Jane. Before Jane was referred to you through her school she was having some very difficult problems, she didn't want to be around her peers, or take part in school and pushed all her loved ones away. Since being with you, though I know it was difficult for her to open up at first, she has come such a long way. She is finally getting back to her old humorous self. She's learning new skills, skills that by helping others she is beginning to learn how to help herself. She is learning to overcome all the boundaries that she had surrounded herself with and most importantly she is beginning to have pride in herself and her efforts again. She absolutely loves attending her meetings and training sessions with you guys and she never passes on the opportunities you offer, quite often giving up her weekends for events. You have helped Jane and our whole family in so many ways, I could honestly not thank you all enough, because, while things might still sometimes be difficult, you have given us hope. Hope that one day, she'll be able to find peace and balance within herself.

Thank you all so very much.

Why not get involved?



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