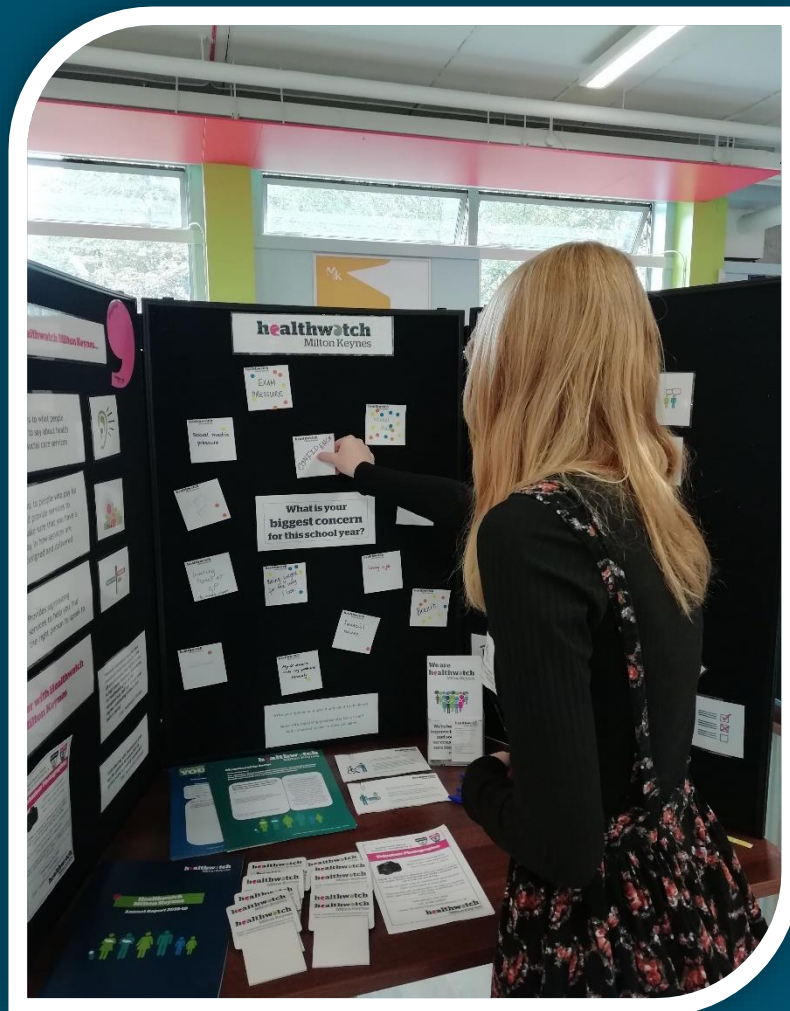


“Listen to us”

Young People’s Experiences of Health and Social Care



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Introduction

Who is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Milton Keynes was set up in April 2013 as a requirement of the Health and Social Care Act of 2012. We are part of the Local Healthwatch Network, covering all 152 local authorities in England. We work closely with our national body, Healthwatch England, to put local issues in national perspective.

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care. Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

How we work

We are here to listen to what people like about services and what they think could be improved. No matter how big or small the issue, we want to hear about it.

We have a statutory role to represent people's views on Health and Social Care service and this gives us the power to make those voices heard. Our reports are written based on experiences shared with us and include recommendations of how services can be improved. We distribute these reports to [Healthwatch England](#), the [Care Quality Commission](#), and the people who pay for and provide local services.

We also offer advice and signposting about health and social care services available locally.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, Healthwatch Milton Keynes would like to thank all the young people who engaged with us as part of this project, for their enthusiasm, openness, and honesty.

We would also like to extend our thanks to staff at Ousedale School, The Hazeley Academy, and Milton Keynes College. Thank you for your willingness to cooperate with Healthwatch Milton Keynes, and for recognising the value in allowing your students to have a say in the future of their health and social care services. Finally, our thanks go to Transitions UK, SEND IAS and Service Six for allowing us to engage with the young people that you support.

Methodology and Engagement

Healthwatch Milton Keynes made contact with a number of schools and organisations to arrange sessions where we could speak with directly to groups of young people to get their views on how their Health and Social Care services are designed and delivered.

We worked with the schools and organisations to ensure that the groups we spoke to were representative of the overall Milton Keynes population. Specific workshops were held with young people leaving care, with hearing impairments, and groups of disadvantaged young people.

Between September 2019 and January 2020, Healthwatch Milton Keynes engaged with a total of 604 young people between the ages of 10 and 21. Approximately 24% of the young people we engaged with were from Black, Asian and Minority and Ethnic backgrounds (BAME) backgrounds. To understand how services could work better for them, Healthwatch Milton Keynes explored the following questions:

- What are young people’s wellbeing related concerns for the future?
- What changes to services would have a positive impact on young people’s lives?
- To what extent are young people aware of existing services, and how can services be better promoted to young people?

To give all young people the opportunity to share their views as part of this project, we launched an online survey, promoted through our social media channels and via schools in Milton Keynes. Healthwatch Milton Keynes presented at a large Young People’s Mental Health event, ‘Time to Talk’, and worked with the organiser to follow up with those who attended and needed advice and signposting to relevant services. These conversations provided further insights into how services could better meet young people’s needs.

Many of the young people we spoke to expressed frustration at not being listened to or taken seriously when talking to professionals.

We worked with:

- **Ousedale School**
- **Hazeley Academy**
- **Milton Keynes College**
- **Transitions UK**
- **Service Six**
- **SEND IAS**

Highlights

We gave 604 young people the opportunity to have their say about how health and social care services in Milton Keynes are designed and delivered.

24% of the young people we engaged with were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

The young people we engaged with told us “*young people’s views are never listened to*” and “*nobody cares about student’s concerns*”.

Young people worry about:

- Not meeting people’s expectations, especially around schooling
- Low confidence and the fear of being judged
- Social media pressure
- Mental Health
- The future and what it should look like
- Safety in Milton Keynes
- Family Issues



Young people want better:

- Mental Health support
- Facilities, Activities and things to do
- Professionals’ attitudes
- Confidentiality when seeking support
- Information about what help is available

Academic Pressure

The young people we spoke to recognised exams as the biggest cause of concern and anxiety, particularly for those preparing for GCSEs and A Levels. The revision they are expected to do, the actual exams, and the grades they get are all areas of concern. For young people who had not yet started preparing for GCSEs or A Levels, homework was noted as being a worry.

I worry about:

“feeling like a disappointment”

“not being able to match people’s expectations”

“failing my exams and disappointing my parents”

Young people told us that they feel a lot of pressure to do well academically from their friends, their parents, and their schools. They

were worried about letting people down when they were not able to meet their expectations, amplifying their existing concerns even more.

Young people also shared that they feel a lot of pressure to “succeed” in life, but they are unsure what “success” should look like for them in the future, particularly in relation to career paths and university.



Self-Image and Social Media

Low confidence and the fear of being judged was a common cause of concern. Young people told us that they experience a wide range of insecurities about themselves, leading to low self-esteem and poor mental wellbeing.

Many of the young people we spoke to said they were very body conscious.

Social Media was recognised as a significant contributor to preoccupations about diet and weight.

Young people described not feeling confident that they would be accepted, socially, for who they are, particularly relating to the social hierarchy and groups within school.

Young people told us that social media, and the problems that surround it, are a significant concern. The three key aspects of social media that created these feelings are:

- The prevalence of bullying on social media platforms
- An individual's value being judged by the number of likes/comments that they get on their posts
- Unrealistic expectations of achieving certain things, acting in a certain way and looking a certain way are perpetuated on social media. We were told of the huge amount of peer pressure there was to follow the crowd and meet these unrealistic expectations.

Mental Health

While mental wellbeing was an underlying theme throughout many of the responses, with young people readily acknowledging the negative impact their biggest concerns were having on their mental health, mental health, in itself, was not their biggest concern.

Young people identified experiencing, or knowing people who do, both poor mental health at present, including stress, depression and anxiety, as well as expressing a fear of what this would lead to in the future, such as self-harm and suicide. Others referred to Mental Health more generally, for example *“falling into a dark place mentally”*. We heard that one of the reasons this is such a big concern is because they don't know when and how to ask for help, for themselves or for their friends.

My biggest concern is “knowing when it's okay to ask for help”

I worry about:

“being judged for the way I look”

“fear of being judged”

“what people think of me”

“losing friends because I am not good enough for them”

Professionals' attitudes

Young people want to be taken seriously by health professionals. Most young people were referring to this in the context of GPs, because they have more interaction with GPs than most other health professionals. Young people explained that they want a safe environment where they feel they can share their concerns openly with professionals they can trust, without being judged. When young people share their health-related concerns they want to feel listened to and understood, particularly when their concerns relate to mental health.

“Young people are told it’s just a phase. We should be taken seriously”

“don’t treat us like 5-year olds”

“treat us like adults, with respect”

“don’t dismiss young people’s problems”

Confidentiality

Young people identified confidentiality, in relation to both accessing and using services, as a very important issue for them.

Comments relating to confidentiality fitted into three main areas:

- Confidentiality when making a GP appointment: Young people want to be able to make an appointment at their GP without a family member knowing what the appointment is for, particularly for appointments relating to sexual health or mental health.
- Sharing information with a healthcare professional confidentially: young people want to feel confident that the information they share with their GP will be kept between the GP and themselves; *“people wouldn’t want their parents to know”*.
- Seeking confidential advice and support from healthcare professionals: Young people want to be able to access support services such as therapy, without their parent knowing.

This suggests that young people may not be accessing vital support because of concerns that other people will find out about their personal issues.

Awareness of services

Young people told us that knowing more about what services were available would make a positive difference to their lives; they said that young people need to be told clearly “*who/where they can go for help*” and that services need to “*advertise more clearly, people might not know they exist*”. We used scenarios to explore where young people thought they would go for help and followed this exercise with a broader discussion and information session to ensure the groups knew what services were available and how to access them.

Scenario 1: You are feeling extremely anxious about your GCSE exams because there is so much pressure to do well. You don't feel comfortable talking to anyone you know about the situation. You don't have the money to pay for private counselling.

The most significant findings emerged in relation to this scenario. Despite low level mental health and wellbeing concerns one of the biggest worries for young people we spoke to, awareness of support available was minimal. The majority of the young people admitted they would have no idea where to go for support if they were feeling extremely anxious about exams.

Fewer than 20 of the 604 young people that we engaged were aware of Kooth. Importantly, even in schools where Healthwatch Milton Keynes staff had seen Kooth posters displayed in corridors, young people were still unaware of the service. This suggests that posters alone are not effective way of, and that the placement of this type of advertising should be reassessed.

Scenario 2: You hurt your foot badly while playing football. The pain has been getting worse for 24hours. You would go to your GP, but it is a Sunday and your GP is not open. You are considering go to A&E.

Most of the young people we talked to would go to A&E “*just in case*”, “*even though it is probably not necessary*”. Less than 20 out of 604 young people we engaged knew ringing NHS 111 or going to the Walk in Centre may be appropriate alternatives.

Scenario 3: You've had a bad cold for 5 days and you are feeling rubbish.

The two most common solutions to this were self-care and going to a GP. Those that thought this scenario was too serious for self-care automatically assumed the next step was seeing a GP. When informed they could go to their local Pharmacy for minor illness and injuries some young people did appear to be aware of this. However, when presented with a scenario where this would be appropriate, their automatic assumption was to go to a GP.



We have the solutions!

What would help our mental health?

Young people noted the need for more mental health support within the school setting. Importantly, in all three of the schools where workshops were held at least one young person referred to good mental health support that was already available to them within their school. For example, one young person wrote “*we have a chill zone with like comfy sofas and it’s relaxing. You can pick a teacher or a friend to talk to you*”. However, young people felt there was not enough support for the number that needed it. They suggested:

- Educating teachers and students about mental health and “*the difference between being a bit sad and depressed*”
- More information sharing by Mental Health Providers to Schools. Young people want to be told about services through their school.
- More support to cope with exam pressure including formal classes on how to cope with exam stress as well as less formal activities to reduce stress. One example of this included a ‘[puppy party](#)’.
- 1-1 support from teachers. Young people want some flexibility about who can offer mental health support. If the pupil doesn’t know the designated staff members well enough, they won’t feel able to open up to them.

Young people identified easier access to counselling generally, not just within the school setting, as a key means of improving mental health support. One young person told us that “*people feel forced to go privately, which is expensive*”. Young people said that they want more mental health support available from the beginning to prevent problems escalating, they also said that long waiting lists to access services contributed to this problem.

Interestingly, the young people we engaged with were largely unaware of some local free support available, such as Kooth, an online counselling service specifically designed to meet these lower level needs. Whilst there may still be a need for more of this type of support, it suggests the need to promote existing services more effectively.

Finally, young people told us that educating parents was a vital part of improving mental health support for young people as many of them go to their parents for advice and support in the first instance. One young Person told us that that parents need support learning how to approach the subject of mental health, recognising when their child needs extra support and how to access extra support, as well as support with their own mental health needs.

We need:

- “*reduced waiting time for counselling as issues and situations deteriorate quickly*”
- “*support at the start before it gets worse*”
- “*parents to be offered help and taught how best to support their child*”.
- “*more free counselling*”
- “*shorter waiting lists - 18 months is an absolute joke!*”

Activities and things to do

Young people told us that they want more facilities and youth clubs that they can make use of in the evenings/weekends. Importantly, young people asked that these were safe, free, and easily accessible, particularly via public transport.

Suggestions made to us were:

- a quiet room where young people can relax, socialise and share their concerns. This must be safe space where young people are made to feel comfortable talking to other young people or to adults about their concerns, particularly around mental health. young people want somebody who they can trust to open up to.
- Good facilities for sports including football, rugby, basketball, squash and swimming. Outdoor football pitches were the most favoured.

“youth groups that mum will let me go to”

“places you can go to without worrying about things that are going on at home and school”.

Young people felt that this would have a positive impact on their physical and mental health.

Young people also shared that their parents are increasingly concerned about their safety so would be more likely to let them go somewhere with a structured facility or group.

“safer, more protected environment from crime”

Finally, young people wanted to make sure that these facilities and youth clubs must be accessible to all young people, including those with learning disabilities and physical disabilities. Young people told us that at present, where these facilities do exist, young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are often excluded from participating - particular reference was made to young people with autism and young people who use wheelchairs.



Relationships with professionals

Top Tips for Doctors in the words of Young People:

Lots of people are nervous about visiting the doctor, so please be kind, welcoming and helpful.

- 1. We could be anxious, so help us feel comfortable. Please talk to us and listen to us calmly. Tell us what you are doing.**
- 2. I struggle to talk to doctors. It would be really helpful if you could not ask so many questions. When you do, give us time to answer the questions.**
- 3. Let your patient know that they can trust you, so you can know what is wrong. Respect that I feel like I can trust you and respect our opinion.**
- 4. We, as patients, would like to be able to see the equipment being cleaned. Sterilise the apparatus in front of the patient to make them feel comfortable.**

Remember these top tips please, you'll make our day.

Suggestions from Young People with Hearing Impairments

- Dentists: please take off your face mask so I can lip read
- Audiology Department: please speak louder when you know my hearing aids are out

Suggestions from Young People leaving care

For new, unaccompanied young people, settling in Milton Keynes, there must be better support.

- Information about services must be available in different languages
- Social services should organise a weekly meet up with established refugees and new refugees who need support and are still adapting to the culture.
- There must be more structured opportunities to young refugees to mix with people who speak English so that they can learn the language quickly
- Social services must respond to emails/calls

Confidentiality

The young people we spoke to were unaware that they have the right not to share the reason for their GP appointment with the receptionist. They suggested that there could be a separate phone number to ring, where receptionists would be aware that callers on this number do not want to disclose the reason for an appointment.

In terms of sharing information with, and seeking advice and support from a healthcare professional, people want more assurance from healthcare professionals that personal issues will not be shared.

Improved communication between the healthcare professional and the young person, rather than changes to the system, would therefore improve this service.

Communication about services

Young people told us that when they want advice and signposting about health and social care related issues they go to a trusted person. The most common first points of contact, in order, were:

 Parents/Carers  Teachers  Friends

When young people are in a situation where they need to access a service, but do not want to speak to parents/teachers/friends, they go online to find out about the support that is available. The young people we spoke to said they would google search the issue, usually focusing on the top 1 or 2 search results, and assume they are trustworthy sources.

We asked young people how they want to be told about the services available to them locally. Young people told us that to improve awareness of local provision, health and social care services should:

- **Work more closely with schools.** Young people shared that they would like more service providers to run assemblies and PSHE classes to explain about the service they offer. This is a way of keeping young people informed of a range of services, not just ones that seem relevant to them at the time. If young people are going to their peers for advice, it is important that all young people have a broad knowledge of the support that is available for a variety of issues. Young people also suggested that running Information Evenings at schools that parents and students can attend would be beneficial.
- **Increase advertising in places where young people are waiting anyway.** Young people we spoke to were very conscious that they need to be able to find out about some services discreetly. For example, young people may not want to admit that they need to find out about Mental Health services or Sexual Health services. Young people suggested that an effective way of doing this would be putting posters on back of toilet doors, in bus stops and buses, near queues in shops, and on Milton Keynes train station platforms.
- **Work with local celebrities, youtubers and social influencers.** Many local celebrities are choosing to use their platforms to promote wellbeing and may therefore be willing to endorse some services. Young people are significantly more likely to engage with services they have heard about through a local celebrity/influencer that they admire.
- **Develop a single app where all services are listed.** Young people shared that they did not know where to search for trustworthy and reliable information. Young people suggested a single app which contains all relevant health and social care services would be beneficial.

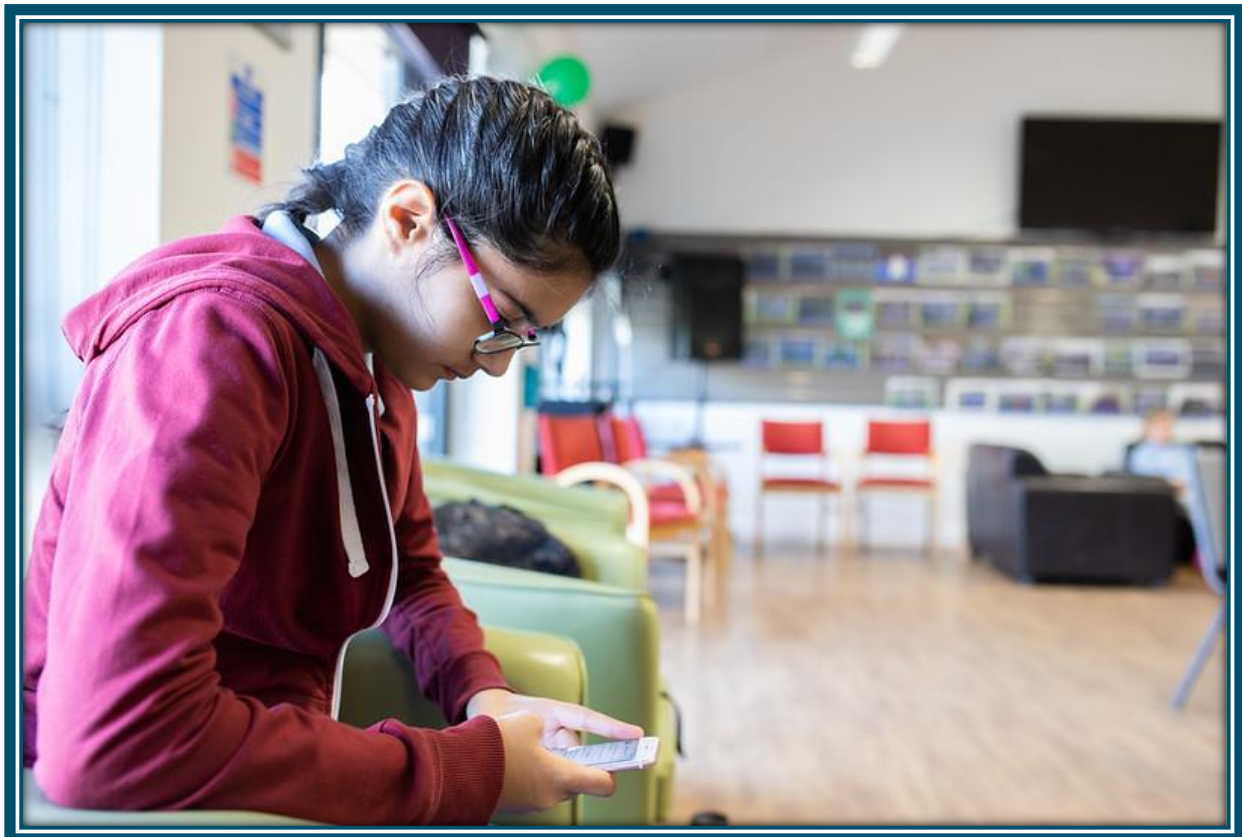
Use Social media that we do

Instagram and Snapchat were the two social media channels most regularly used by the young people we engaged with.

Healthwatch Milton Keynes is aware that many of the services that choose to promote their provision on social media, do so on Facebook and Twitter, often sharing template wording across both platforms. When discussing the use of Facebook as a means to promote local services, the young people we spoke to had a clear and consistent message; *“Facebook is for older people”, “use Facebook to inform parents, not us”*.

Young people said that promoting services on Facebook does have value, but only to inform parents about services available for their children. Given that young people told us that they usually go to their parents for advice and signposting about services, it is vital that parents are kept informed. Using Facebook is, therefore, essential. However, advertising aimed at young people should be done elsewhere.

“My mum has Facebook, I don’t”



What next?

Our conversations with young people across Milton Keynes demonstrate there is a significant need to increase awareness of the services available to young people locally. It is encouraging to note that there was a real desire amongst those we spoke to, to be better informed.

We know that there is a lot of work is being carried out around youth services and provision, and a lot of organisations committed to supporting young people. We hope that the information within this report helps inform some of that work, and the ways in which it is promoted and delivered to the young people of Milton Keynes.

Healthwatch Milton Keynes will be extending an invitation to young people to be involved in a series of workshops to develop a targeted project, based on the suggestions for improvement outlined in this report, that will make a positive difference to the wellbeing of young people in Milton Keynes.