

Children & Young People - Emotionally Healthy Schools Project



July 2020

Background

We asked the public what their top 3 priorities would be for Healthwatch Bolton to focus its work on in 2019/2020. The second top priority was voted as ‘young people’s mental health and emotionally healthy schools’.

The Mental Health Five Year Forward View acknowledges that early intervention could empower families and schools to support young children which will ultimately lead to improved quality of life.

This project explored more about low- level mental health provision for young people from the perspective of professionals, parents and carers, to establish gaps in terms of training and support for professionals and what changes would be of benefit. We also hope the work will help as a way of disseminating information to professionals and parents/carers and provide us with the opportunity to conduct focus groups with parents/carers about how to have ‘better conversations’ with their children around mental health.

The overall objectives for Healthwatch Bolton are as follows:

- ✚ How much awareness and information is known about current low level mental health provision?
 - ✚ How effective is the current system at managing mental health and what barriers exist for professionals and parents/carers in accessing support?
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The need for research

Schools are at the very epicentre of the mental health ecosystem and play a vital role in supporting young people, either through their own provision or through liaison with local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). It is thought by many, that schools should be the premise where much needed early intervention services are integrated. It is however acknowledged that the responsibility for student wellbeing should not solely be placed within schools, as these institutions have been subject to funding cuts and local authorities have reduced their level of external services and support due to spending constraints.

This strand of research forms part of a wider base of work being conducted by the Thrive Alliance which consists of Zac's Sycamore Project, Bolton Lads and Girls Club (BLGC), YMCA, Fortalice, BAND and Headspace with Bolton Together as the lead organisation in the partnership. With funding received from Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) from the Children and Young People's Mental Health Local Transformation Plan (LTP) Funding the providers work together to deliver preventative and low level mental health and well-being activities and services for children and young people in Bolton.

Moving on to stage 2 which focuses on engaging with parents/carers and professionals about supporting children and young people, the Greater Manchester (GM) i-Thrive team had some funding for 'Subject Matter Experts' which focused on establishing what's on offer, where do young people go if CAMHS isn't an option and where would young people go and professionals/parents signpost people to if CAMHS and the GP didn't exist. This forms part of each localities approach to implementing Thrive which is the mental health framework replacing the Tiered Model of provision.

This part of the project involved delivering information sessions and gaining feedback from professionals who work with young people in Bolton. This brought together a series of engagement ideas from Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group, Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership, Healthwatch Bolton and Children's Social Care. Future work will involve the sessions taking place in schools with young people, parents and carers.

Methodology

Professionals briefing and engagement sessions

- 3 professionals briefing and engagement sessions were held at Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), throughout March 2020 each lasting 2 hours. A fourth session was later cancelled later due to the impact of Covid-19
- A total of 86 Professionals booked a place onto one of the three briefing sessions (111 in total if including the fourth cancelled session)

- We hosted the sessions alongside both the CCG's Children and Young People's Commissioning Team and Communications and Engagement Team.
- The sessions were advertised on social media and via various mailing lists to encourage a mix of professionals to attend.
- The women and children's commissioning manager from Bolton CCG led the sessions with support from Healthwatch and the CCG's engagement specialist.
- These sessions enabled attendees to find out more about the current landscape of mental health provision in Bolton and how we are performing against national statistics, what Bolton's Local Transformation Plan is, and information about 'Thrive' and the Bekindtomymind* campaign. The engagement activity itself focused on establishing what mental health provision professionals are already aware of, any barriers to accessing support and gaps in training and support.
- During the sessions the team highlighted the opportunity for schools to get involved further by registering their interest in the future parent/carers sessions.
- 71 people attended the sessions in total (83% attendance rate).

Professionals Survey

The Professionals Survey was designed to understand the current experiences of Professionals supporting the mental health of children and young people and how this could be improved across Bolton.

A series of questions were drafted and agreed between Bolton CCG, Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership and Bolton's Children Social Care. These were uploaded onto Survey Monkey and the link was cascaded across a range of platforms.

A total of 159 responses were captured as part of Bolton's Children and Young People's Professionals Survey, however, 9 were discarded due to no information present. The following split of responses was collated:

- Health 46 (31%)
- Social Care 46 (31%)
- Education 15 (10%)
- Voluntary Sector 15 (10%)
- Other 27 (18%)
 - 'Other' included supported housing/accommodation, adoption support, foster carers and youth charities.

Children and Young People’s Briefing Session

Out of the 150 professionals that completed the survey, 19 attended one of the 3 briefing sessions in March (13%). Those that attended were asked to rate their confidence (on a continuum scale from 0 - 100) in supporting young people’s mental health before and after the session. Responses varied, however, the average confidence level prior to the session was 55 with an average of 71 after attending the session. The most significant increase was 46 - from 26 pre-session to 72 post-session.

Supporting children and young people in Bolton

109 Professionals responded to questions about the current approach to supporting children and young people’s mental health. This included questions as to whether they felt the right interventions and support is currently in place for themselves, children, young people and their parents/carers. The following table provides a summary of all responses.

Information Sharing works well across services in Bolton	The right interventions and support are available locally to help you support the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people	The right interventions and support are available locally to help children and young people with their emotional health and wellbeing	The right interventions and support are available to help parents/carers	I feel that I am involved in any appropriate multi-agency planning for children and young people	I am confident to challenge other practitioners to ensure good outcomes for a child or young person
Strongly Agree 14 13%	Strongly Agree 10 9%	Strongly Agree 8 7%	Strongly Agree 7 6%	Strongly Agree 18 17%	Strongly Agree 40 37%
Somewhat Agree 56 51%	Somewhat Agree 43 39%	Somewhat Agree 41 38%	Somewhat Agree 33 30%	Somewhat Agree 53 49%	Somewhat Agree 48 44%
Neither Agree or Disagree 14 13%	Neither Agree or Disagree 11 10%	Neither Agree or Disagree 9 8%	Neither Agree or Disagree 8 7%	Neither Agree or Disagree 19 17%	Neither Agree or Disagree 39 36%
Somewhat Disagree 13 12%	Somewhat Disagree 23 21%	Somewhat Disagree 19 17%	Somewhat Disagree 22 20%	Somewhat Disagree 9 8%	Somewhat Disagree 7 6%
Strongly Disagree 4 4%	Strongly Disagree 5 5%	Strongly Disagree 4 4%	Strongly Disagree 6 6%	Strongly Disagree 3 3%	Strongly Disagree 1 1%

Confidence in supporting children and young people’s mental health

A total of 142 Professionals contributed to questions about their confidence in supporting Children and Young People’s Mental Health. The following table provides a breakdown of the responses

Spotting early signs of mental health issues in Children and Young People	Understanding resilience and protective factors and their role in promoting good mental health	Talking with children, young people and families about mental health	Recognising when to refer to specialist services	Recognising safeguarding issues in relation to a child/young persons mental health	Understanding attachment theory and the implication of early relationships on emotional wellbeing
Strongly Agree 45 32%	Strongly Agree 55 39%	Strongly Agree 52 37%	Strongly Agree 59 42%	Strongly Agree 77 54%	Strongly Agree 56 39%
Somewhat Agree 76 54%	Somewhat Agree 76 54%	Somewhat Agree 69 49%	Somewhat Agree 62 44%	Somewhat Agree 55 39%	Somewhat Agree 67 47%
Neither Agree or Disagree 15 11%	Neither Agree or Disagree 5 4%	Neither Agree or Disagree 11 8%	Neither Agree or Disagree 14 10%	Neither Agree or Disagree 3 2%	Neither Agree or Disagree 12 8%
Somewhat Disagree 4 3%	Somewhat Disagree 5 4%	Somewhat Disagree 8 6%	Somewhat Disagree 4 3%	Somewhat Disagree 4 3%	Somewhat Disagree 4 3%
Strongly Disagree 2 1%	Strongly Disagree 1 1%	Strongly Disagree 2 1%	Strongly Disagree 2 1%	Strongly Disagree 2 1%	Strongly Disagree 3 2%

Findings

Healthwatch Bolton had 3 key objectives for the research, the first of these was to understand how much awareness and information is known about current low level mental health provision?

Although some awareness around local low level mental health provision was known by the professionals, the briefing sessions highlighted the limitations in this knowledge. For many, they were only aware of support that they had specifically come into contact with, but what was most surprising was the limitations in terms of the remit of the support known.

Few identified online resources and it was apparent that most of the organisations known were larger organisations and those that were specific for mental health as opposed to those offering more generic wide ranging support which ultimately support an individual's health and wellbeing.

We also wanted to understand how effective the current system is at managing mental health and what barriers exist for professionals and parents/carers in accessing support?

There are flaws in the current system in terms of helping professionals support young people to manage their mental health. With such huge variations in terms of the knowledge known it is clear that an up-to-date single point of information would be favourable and professionals saw the idea of the Bekindtomymind microsite as beneficial especially if this was to be incorporated onto education establishments' websites. All professionals advised increased incidences of mental

health difficulties within children and young people and how cuts to funding was making support more of a challenge.

Specifically for those working in schools, they felt year on year more was expected of them from both parents but also services themselves, however training provided and time available was not in line with this. A combination of low confidence, increased workloads, funding cuts and minimal information mean many feel 'uninformed' and instead rely heavily on word of mouth from others with regards to what services are available as well as the repeat use of services. This often leaves them feeling 'worried' about overloading certain provisions and children and young people not getting the support that is best suited to their needs in a 'timely manner'.

What changes and innovations would parents/carers and professionals like to see to young people's low level mental health services in the future?

Support and training were identified as the main needs for professionals. In addition a single point of information which professionals could refer to but also signpost young people and parents/carers to was seen as advantageous. Having increased knowledge of resources which would enable children and young people to better self-manage their health and wellbeing was seen as a necessity and helping to reduce the stigma around mental health so parents/carers are better equipped to have conversations and support their children was seen as beneficial.

Summary

There was a lack of knowledge of what support is available, not knowing where to get local information. People appeared to know the larger more well known support organisations more than smaller ones. There was a reliance of using information by word of mouth. Some felt that funding cuts and increased workloads were impacting on the support they felt able to offer young people, and there was pressure from both from services and parents. The training that was on offer did not seem to be lined up to needs and many feel uninformed leading to repeated use of the same services and worrying about overloading such services.

Support and training were seen as what needs to change to improve children and young people's low level mental health services. A single point of information was also regarded as being beneficial.

Next steps

A significant amount of qualitative data has been captured and will be discussed within a multi-agency forum to enable a shared approach to recommendations and next steps. Initial findings show that professionals would benefit from regular training (including refresher training) and whilst some organisations feel they have the appropriate tools and resources, a consistent approach to assessment tools and interventions across all agencies is desired. A large amount of responses also alluded to a central access point where professionals can find information about local services and their criteria, clinical pathways, referral forms and separate resources to give to both children/young people and parents/carers.

This qualitative information will contribute to the expansion of Bolton's Be Kind to My Mind microsite www.bekindtomymind.co.uk which is a single point of access to information for children and young people in Bolton. The next phase is to develop a professional's section where a small task group will be responsible for the first design iteration; building upon the responses within the questionnaire.

Recommendations

Consider reviewing and tailoring specific training and support packages for mental health professionals.

Encourage and promote the development of a single point of access for information and support for both professionals and young people.

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