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CYP Mental Health – Youth Engagement Insights

ADPH London

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Context & Aim:



CONTEXT

Across London, there are several initiatives aiming to improve the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People (CYP).

Many of these initiatives focus on Youth Engagement to understand CYP mental health needs and/or to deliver mental health & wellbeing initiatives. This centres the youth perspective and develops services that meet their needs in their context,

AIM

This document aims to collect findings from on-going Young People's Mental Health programmes, and highlight their methodologies, barriers and challenges, and youth engagement insights.

GLA: Youth Ambassadors



CONTEXT: The Young Ambassadors Mental Health stream works in primary schools, secondary schools, PRUs and Aps to help young people to use youth social action to improve wellbeing provision at their school. Young people are taught about mental health, then given the freedom to plan a project and pitch it for a small grant which goes towards delivery.

METHODOLOGY: This project is delivered by Volunteering Matters. Our insights were found accidentally during implementation of the project, we did not set out to find out young people's opinions on mental health and wellbeing. However, during the training sessions, young people often speak up about the things that are worrying them.

GREATER
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AUTHORITY

GLA: Youth Ambassadors



INSIGHTS:

Schools very interested in the Youth Social Action approach with many keen to take a whole school approach to YSA. The most enjoyed aspect of the Mental Health stream of the Young Ambassadors project is the 'Forum Theatre' element.

This interactive theatre-based training allows them to be in the director's seat whilst, safely sharing their inputs on mental health, what is needed, and missing, when it comes to support for young people.

Children and young people believed that detention was a significant detractor for their wellbeing. During discussions, the elimination of detention was brought up regularly as a potential wellbeing initiative.

- Additionally, initiatives which gave more freedom to young people were also perceived to better support wellbeing. Ideas from young people included not locking form rooms, more free time and less homework.
- Young people wanted to be able to use the equipment their school has when they wanted to: "Personally I feel like schools waste their space, we have so much equipment and space but its only open certain days rather than every day for everyone to join. ' – Young person, aged 15

When surveyed, young people taking part in the Young Ambassadors programme overwhelmingly believe that mental health is the most important social issue (36.4%) followed by the environment (18.2%).

GLA: Youth Ambassadors



BARRIERS:

The biggest delivery challenge was attendance and engagement. As the programme often worked with young people with severe SEMH needs, there were difficulties around behaviour in the sessions.

- School delays also often meant changes to the timeframe available for the young people to plan, pitch and complete their project (at one point just six weeks).
- Other difficulties also arose when this project was the first time a group of students worked together.
- Communication with schools is also extremely challenging due to the overstretched nature of school staff.

NEXT STEPS:

We are keeping a track of the lessons learned during the implementation of this project as we begin the next Mayoral term. These will hopefully help to develop new projects as decided by the Mayor of London.

CONTACT:

Key contact – Sarah Dobson (Sarah.Dobson@london.gov.uk)

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



CONTEXT:

Toynbee Hall, in collaboration with Thrive LDN, [conducted a Participatory Action Research \(PAR\) project](#) funded by the Health Foundation. This research aimed to investigate the impact of increased living costs on families and their ability to provide emotional support to young people.

The research aims have been the following:

To investigate:

- Whether young Londoners in low-income households get the emotional support they need from their families, in the context of the cost-of-living crisis
- The impact of increased living costs on the relationships between young Londoners and their families.

As well as:

- Develop and action solutions alongside residents in Tower Hamlets that reflect the priorities, needs and experiences of young people and their families.



Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



METHODOLOGY:

From March 2023 to May 2024, we have partnered with 12 young peer researchers, aged 16-22, who are residents of Tower Hamlets. These peer researchers have led Participatory Action Research, engaging with young people of the same age group as well as parents and carers of young people within this age range. Overall, we have worked with 44 young people between 16-22 years old and 25 parents/carers of young people, all residents of Tower Hamlets.

We engaged with residents through workshops during the research and action phases of the project, gathering qualitative insights. The workshops in the research phases involved; a 30minute wellbeing activity, 1:1 discussions on emotional support and the impacts of the cost of living, and a group discussion based on solutions. In the action phase of the project, these workshops focused on group discussions, two workshops with a specific intergenerational focus (young people and parents and/or carers). All discussions were recorded via mobile phones and transcribed for analysis. These insights were further complimented by a nation-wide survey that collected quantitative data on participants at a larger scale.

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



INSIGHT:

Research Phase Insights

Emotional Support Sources:

- Young people prefer to turn to close family and friends for emotional support.
- Effective support involves regular, judgment-free listening and understanding of social contexts.

Barriers to Family Support:

- Communication barriers with parents, especially regarding mental health.
- Cultural stigma, language barriers, and lack of access to appropriate resources for Bangladeshi families.

Role of Friends and Services:

- Friends play a crucial role in emotional support.
- For those unable to turn to family and friends, services like therapists and school support are vital.

Impact of Cost-of-Living Crisis

Reduced Quality Time:

- Family members working extra shifts, less money for activities.
- Family members exhausted; this is impacting quality time together and as a result trust/openness in those relationships.
- Financial barriers to travel and wellbeing activities.

Increased Stress:

- Strain on family relationships and visible stress among parents.
- Overcrowded housing reducing space for recharging.

Youth Employment Pressure:

- Young people pressured to work part-time to support family finances.

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



INSIGHT:

Identified Solutions for Improving Emotional Support

Greater Access to Enrichment/community building Opportunities:

- Activities with family and community to build social connections/social support networks and emotional well-being.
- Arts, crafts, games, cooking, and sports to relieve stress and strengthen relationships.

Emotional wellbeing and support workshops + learning resources (focussed on building resilience and practising/learning about communication for emotional support) Focus on providing young people & parents with the tools they need to look after their emotional wellbeing, including learning about communication when it comes to providing/receiving emotional support.

Better Employment Support:

- Address structural challenges impacting emotional well-being.
- Provide entry-level job opportunities and career-relevant skills training.
- Career mentoring from young adults with similar experiences.

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



BARRIERS & ENABLERS:

Barriers

- Staff capacity
- Providing emotional support to young people on the project – vulnerable people involved in the process
- Communications of research activities whilst resource was low
- Engagement of peer researchers and steering group of decision makers – harder to maintain due to longer duration of project
- Influencing policy/ decision -makers

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



BARRIERS & ENABLERS:

Enablers

- Collaborating with various individuals and organisations to develop the peer researchers, skills and interests. For example, working with an external videographer to develop the young peer researcher's understanding of videography from capturing content of workshops to editing the content. Also, signposting peer researchers to other opportunities such as taking part in external photography research projects and digital skills development programmes.
- Building a close relationship with tower hamlets public health team throughout to share the process and insights. In addition to wider decision makers through the steering group, economic wellbeing forum and Greater London Authority youth-led events.
- Inbuilt remuneration of peer researchers and participants
- Developed relationships with residents from tower hamlets due to Toynbee Hall's community engagement function/ activities.
- The openness towards implementing creative approaches to the engagement/research and outputs of the project.
- The time available to the project to develop relationships.
- The co-location of Toynbee Hall was key to this project being successful, it provided the opportunity to build relationships that were crucial to the partnership through in-person socialisation.

Thrive LDN: Emotional support for young Londoners



NEXT STEPS:

- A report with the research findings will be published soon.
- Toynbee Hall have received additional funding to pilot some of the solutions/activities recommended by residents of Tower Hamlets



UCL Partners: BeeWell



CONTEXT:

UCLPartners is a health innovation partnership working across North London and Essex, and youth mental health is one of our key priority areas. We have a dedicated programme of work to bring innovation and research to some of the toughest problems in this area. We are working with young people, their families, communities and the system to develop and implement new innovations, focusing on predictive and early treatment interventions.

As part of this, UCLPartners is supporting local area partners to develop and deliver a youth wellbeing census, based on the #BeeWell survey, to measure young people's wellbeing and mobilise a place-based response to the results. The census is delivered annually to every Y8 and Y10 students in participating schools.



UCL Partners: BeeWell



METHODOLOGY:

During 2022-24 UCLPartners worked with Havering Council to deliver the Havering Youth Wellbeing Census using the #BeeWell survey.

Youth voice is key to the development and roll out of the survey. Initial focus groups with pupils in pathfinder schools in Havering identified important domains and drivers of wellbeing based on their experience.

A Questionnaire Advisory Group comprising council, health, education and academic stakeholders and young people themselves compared these local qualitative insights to coverage of the existing #BeeWell survey questions, to make recommendations for locally adapting the survey, sourcing new questions where required.

Survey themes include ‘emotions’, ‘meaning, purpose and control’ and ‘understanding yourself’, and what drives wellbeing (for example, health and routines, hobbies and entertainment, relationships). The adapted survey was tested with local young people prior to roll-out.

UCLPartners worked with Havering Council to present survey findings via school-facing reports for participating schools alongside a public-facing [neighbourhood dashboard](#) that allows service providers and partners across Havering and beyond to view the responses and find trends.

UCL Partners: BeeWell

INSIGHT:

One example - Across the borough young people reported not getting enough sleep as a common issue – only 38.5% of females who took part felt they got enough sleep to feel awake and concentrate during the school day.

More can be explored via [Havering's neighbourhood dashboard](#).



UCL Partners: BeeWell



BARRIERS & ENABLERS:

Barriers

- School engagement takes time and a few different approaches. So a long lead-in time is recommended.
- Additional arrangements to share pupil data are required to implement the survey in independent schools.
- Establishing a youth steering group requires dedicated resource. We recommend building this into the initial engagement with pathfinder schools.

Enablers

- Pathfinder workshops during early stages created buy-in from schools.
- The process of local adaptation of the questionnaire helped to engage different services and sectors with the survey and make it more responsive to local system need.

UCL Partners: BeeWell



NEXT STEPS:

The census process gives voice to children and young people in a local area about the domains and drivers of wellbeing. Schools are being supported to develop strategies as part of a whole school approach, alongside findings being made available to local area partners to stimulate action.

CONTACT:

Key contact – Gemma Copsey
(gemma.copsey@uclpartners.com)



UCL Partners: Kailo



CONTEXT:

Kailo is a 5-year funded research and design initiative aiming to support young people and local community partnerships to explore, determine and respond to the root causes of young people's poor mental health that exist in local places and are amenable to change through local action. Kailo is based upon four pillars:

- building strong relationships and partnerships at a local level committed to promoting young people's mental health
- taking a systemic view of the social determinants of health
- putting young people at the heart of a co-design process
- collaboration to make these co-designed solutions sustainable

The initial two years of the project focussed on two contrasting 'places' – Newham in London which UCLPartners are now leading on, and North Devon, a very rural but still socio-demographically deprived part of Southwest England. Partners as part of the wider initiative include: UCL, Dartington Service Design Lab, Anna Freud Centre, University of Exeter and NIHR.

The UCLPartners logo, featuring a green curved line above the text 'UCLPartners' in a dark blue sans-serif font.

Kailo

UCL Partners: Kailo



METHODOLOGY:

The in-depth participatory research undertaken followed a similar three phase process across both sites. For example, the Kailo Newham team worked with Newham Borough Council, North East London Integrated Care System, local schools and several community organisations.

Early Discovery

The first phase (Early Discovery) comprised of stakeholder and power-mapping and evidence synthesis. Qualitative methods (documentary analysis, workshops, focus groups, 1:1 engagements) were adopted to gather insights from young people and community/system leaders, followed by undertaking thematic analysis to identify eight emerging opportunity areas.

Early Discovery research informed development of local health and health inequalities strategies across the two localities.

Deeper Discovery and Co-Design

Prioritisation exercises with young people and system leaders led to the creation of co-design communities (called small circles) around two 'opportunity areas': Activities for Wellbeing and Violence and Crime. These small circles have consisted largely of young people and have been running in Newham as a series of fortnightly workshops over a six-month period. A variety of system maps have been co-developed to inform priorities, systemic intervention points and intervention design. The small circles will use the partnerships developed to engage with stakeholders who hold resource and power across the local system to start to effect change.

UCL Partners: Kailo



INSIGHTS:

The work is currently underway, and findings will be made available via the website:

<https://kailo.community/kailo-newham/>



UCL Partners: Kailo



BARRIERS & ENABLERS:

Barriers

Some challenges have consisted of:

- difficulty engaging a diverse range of young people consistently.
- ensuring inclusivity and representation from all community segments.

Enablers

Enabling factors have been:

- strong collaborations with local organisations provided access and trust. Community partners supported with recruitment of young people and co-facilitating some of the sessions.
- flexible and varied engagement methods that facilitated broader participation.
- employment of youth peer researchers (who grew up in and live in Newham & North Devon) to support running of the small circle sessions.

UCL Partners: Kailo



BARRIERS & ENABLERS:

Following completion of Deeper Discovery and Co-design, the aim of the third phase (implementation, testing and refinement) is to support the local co-design communities to share their recommendations more widely and identify opportunities for local implementation and refinement.

In addition, Kailo intends on expanding the work into new areas, with the ambition of scaling to make resources available for more communities after that.

CONTACT:

Key contact – Gemma Copsey (gemma.copsey@uclpartners.com)

Core Themes



Importance of dynamic mental health initiatives:

- Interactive activities put young people in control, allowing them to direct and share their thoughts on mental health in an engaging and safe forum
- Give young people freedom through reducing school responsibilities and allow open access to school mental health facilities – this gives young people a sense of value.

Core Themes

Support Systems

- Young people can be encouraged to lean on their close family and friends as a support system, with regular, judgement-free listening making a difference
- Young people from minoritised communities, may need support to overcome communication barriers and cultural stigmas with parents.
- Promote the availability of therapists and school support services for those who might not have a strong family or friend network.

Core Themes



Family & Financial Strain

- Families face financial and work pressures, which can impact relationships with young people
- Young people need physical personal space to recharge especially in crowded living conditions

Community & Connections

- Encourage participation in arts, crafts, games, cooking, and sports to relieve stress and build stronger relationships
- Building resilience and communication skills can equip young people and their parents with tools to better support each other emotionally.

Core Themes



Addressing Challenges

- It is important to tackle structural challenges that impact emotional wellbeing. Engage young people in conversations about what changes they would like to see.

Barriers to Engagement

SEMH Needs

- Engaging young people with severe Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs can be challenging due to behavioural issues. Tailoring sessions to be more inclusive and supportive can help.

Initial Group Dynamics

- When students work together for the first time, it can be difficult to foster collaboration and engagement. Ice-breaking activities and team-building exercises can mitigate this.

Barriers to Engagement

School Related Issues

- School delays can significantly impact project timelines, sometimes reducing them to as short as six weeks. Flexibility and contingency planning are crucial.
- Overstretched school staff can make communication difficult. Establishing clear, consistent communication channels and regular check-ins can improve engagement.
- Engaging schools requires multiple approaches and a long lead-in time. Building strong relationships with school staff and demonstrating the project's value can enhance participation.

Barriers to Engagement

Limited Resource

- Conducting youth engagement work can be difficult with limited staff or resource for research activity – ensure programmes are sufficiently staffed and make use of digital comms tools

Emotional Stress

- Providing safeguarding and emotional support is key to support vulnerable young people taking part in mental health programmes.

Sustaining Engagement

- Engagement over a long project can be difficult, so require regular feedback sessions and recognising contributions of peer researchers and steering groups can keep motivation high