

Mindfull

'Nothing about us, without us' – young people
and mental wellbeing in Newham

Event report, January 2012

The Right Here programme is a youth-led initiative that is raising the profile of mental wellbeing among young people. Right Here is running across four regions of the UK and is led by the NCY Trust in Newham, in partnership with NAWP, Harmony Family Centre and The Forum for Health and Wellbeing.

Newham LINK is a unique one-stop port of call for your comments on all aspects of Health and Social Care in Newham. The aim of the LINK is to ensure people get involved and have a stronger say in how local Health and Social Care services are planned, commissioned and delivered. LINK is driven by local people, groups and organisations that promote and support all sectors of the community.

Right Here Newham and Newham LINK are working together to ensure that young people have an ongoing voice in development and delivery of health services in Newham



“My feelings and emotions... I keep inside”

At the end of January 2012 over 130 people came together at the Stratford Circus to attend the Mindfull event. Mindfull, or 'Mind-full?' was a powerful exploration of the stresses that young people in Newham commonly face. Led by young people, the event used drama, discussion, film and music to debate the issues surrounding the mental wellbeing of young people. The challenge was to find better ways to support young people through difficult times. The Mindfull event was structured around the themes of isolation, lack of support and violence. These issues have been identified by the Right Here Youth Panel as having a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of young people growing up in the borough. Young people, youth workers, mental health practitioners, policy makers and commissioners came together to look afresh at what could be done to improve the support provided to young people in the borough. Amongst those attending were Lise Hertel, GP lead for Mental Health services from the Newham Clinical Commissioning Group, Ashley Brooks, East London and City Local Patient Champion, Coordinator for the National Patient Champion Network and Dipti Morjaria, Senior Service Development manager, Children and Young People's Commissioning at Newham Council.



“How did it feel growing up?
Alone, frustrated,
occasionally depressed”

**“They go about it
in completely the
wrong way, the
only way you get
access to these
services is through
the police and by
then you have the
wrong mindset”**

Dealing with violence

The Right Here Youth panel has identified the impact of violence in young people's lives, (particularly street violence between young people) as a major cause of stress and anxiety in Newham. Constantly having to watch your back, pretending to be someone you are not just so that you don't become a target or losing close friends or family to gun or knife crime were some of the main causes of emotional pressure, stress and anxiety that the young people identified. Right Here well-being champions interviewed their peers about their experience of violence. These true stories were re-enacted powerfully by actors at the Mindfull event and included examples of young people perpetrating and becoming victims of violence and knife crime. The drama pieces prompted lots of debate during the event. Young people discussed how violence has almost become

normal in their lives and that they just deal with it. However, looking a little deeper it became obvious that not all the ways young people dealt with their experience of violence were good for their mental (or physical) well-being. Many young people, especially young men would not talk about it. Crying was seen as a weakness even when you had lost close friends. Often feelings were bottled up and came out as anger. Those that needed help the most were the least likely to access it. Young men faced particular barriers of stigma when talking about their problems. One young woman who initially said that she did have people to talk to about problems at school etc, later admitted that she had similar experiences to some of those portrayed on the stage, but had not spoken to any adults about it. Dance was her emotional outlet that kept her 'sane'.



“If the media was to show mental health in a more positive light them maybe more of us young people would be able to stand up and say I have mental health issues”

There were also specific differences for young men and young women. Whilst young men primarily raised the issue of street violence (although it is apparent that young women of all ethnicities are also affected and involved), it was young women who highlighted the impact of domestic violence on their mental health and well-being. Again in some instances there was a worrying level of acceptance of violence within the home or from older male siblings. What became obvious from the young people is that current services are not reaching the young people affected most by violence at the right time (if at all). Most young people remain poorly equipped to manage and / or bounce back from some of the extreme, experiences of, or fear of violence that they are experiencing.

Lack of support and isolation

Lack of information and knowledge

Many young people talked about how mental health was just not discussed amongst their friends or family “*I didn't even know what mental health was until tonight*” Very few young people knew what support was out there or how to access it. For some the barrier to gaining support came even earlier. They felt that young people needed support just to recognise when things were becoming a problem “*some young people don't even realise that they have a problem – they just think it is normal*”. Education, more events ‘like this’, and work with schools and families to provide early intervention were reoccurring themes on the night. The stigma surrounding mental health within families and with friends means that many young people are simply not talking about their emotions or how they are really feeling. More work needs to be done to help young people and their families develop trust and learn to listen without

“When I was getting counselled she said it was confidential – the next minute she was calling up my head of year – I didn't want them to know that – they're gonna be saying you grassed me up”



“In my community you don't talk about mental health. My mum would say get a grip of yourself it's nothing”

“Kids nowadays of 15, they don't know anything, they don't know there is a project out there, they don't know they can get support. They think 'you know what? Adults out there, they don't care' ”

judgment. Without this openness many young people will not be able to identify problematic feelings and take that first step to getting help.

Trust and confidentiality

Confidentiality emerged as a real issue. Many young people perceived mental health services either to part of a system closely linked to the police or to social services. They were deeply suspicious of how services would share information about them. Attempts by therapists to record in writing, audio or video counseling sessions were seen as evidence that the primary purpose was not simply for them to have someone to talk to and get things off their chest. The young people had many concerns about what might happen if what they said in a counseling room got out: from being labeled 'crazy', to people thinking that you were grassing them up. Even talking to your friends was challenging for some young people *“trust is actually a big issue for a young person nowadays...their main priority is mostly about money so their friendship that they create and have its not sincere”*.

Choice and informal support

Young people in Newham want support. However they want to get to know and trust those that they open up to. A number of young people talked about wanting to access support through the

informal activities they already took part in (boxing, dance, football etc). Ideas emerged about being able to discuss your problems informally and without stigma, with adults leading these activities. Many young people wanted to (and did) talk to their friends or said they would prefer peer workers to support them. Others were interested in receiving support from therapists. Again opinions were split with some wanting therapists with the same cultural or ethnic backgrounds as themselves, whilst others worried about confidentiality within community networks. Other ideas included being able to arrange to meet your therapist in a non-stigmatising environment like a shopping centre or youth club. Shisha cafes were identified by young people as being places where they felt comfortable and could be 'reached'. Whilst this report does not promote the use of Shisha cafes it is useful to understand their social and cultural importance to young people.

Involving young people

Whatever the mechanism for service delivery it is clear that young people are not only the beneficiaries, they are also the solution. Young people often turn to their friends first. Their friends are often best placed to offer initial support and to educate and encourage other young people to access services.

Recommendations

Work together

Schools, youth providers, mental health services and families need a more joined-up approach to supporting young people. We should:

- Share more knowledge around issues like violence and gangs so that professionals are better equipped to determine potential conflicts and support young people affected
- Offer counselling and specific support at youth clubs and other places young people frequent and feel comfortable with
- Support young people's access to activities that promote positive mental health (sports, media and music etc) and use these activities as a vehicle to also educate about mental wellbeing

Increase awareness and accessibility of services

Young people are often unaware of, or reluctant to access, support. To change this, we should:

- Promote services positively through social networking sites
- Develop a cross agency online advice / referral system so that young people feel more confident and aware when seeking help
- Provide outreach services for example offering a rapid response trauma service within 48 hours to anyone who has been affected by violence, e.g. knife crime victim or witness to an incident, which incorporates safe haven and / or telephone based assistance, and offers an integrated and multi agency approach (Health and Social Care)

Involve young people in local services – planning and delivery

Youth involvement can play a key role in challenging stigma, understanding experience and creating more effective services. We should:

- Involve young people in the full commissioning cycle for local services
- Train young people as peer counsellors and work with them to provide support in schools and youth clubs
- Give young people greater choice about how they access support and who provides it

What happened next?

Following on from the Mindfull event Right Here Newham and Newham LINK have, and will continue to, work with commissioners and decision makers to ensure that the event recommendations are shared and acted on. Already a young attendee, Naija Sultana has been recruited as the Young People's Patient Champion. Lise Hertel and Dipti Morjaria fed back from the event to Health and Social Care, which led to Right Here Newham and Newham LINK being asked to work in partnership with CAMHS Commissioners to follow through on some of the recommendations and suggested service examples. Through ongoing work we will work with young people to develop peer led support activities and investigate options for developing a rapid response trauma service.



The Mindfull Event.

'Mindfull' was led by a group of young people from across Newham. The group included a mix of mental health service users and others who have never used mental health services before. The group used skills built through the Right Here programme to lead on specific elements on the event, including programming, performance, filming and hosting.

'Mindfull' was designed to reflect young people's interests first, and engage them with the issues secondly. This approach was central to attracting large numbers of young people and giving the event kudos among the target group. The Youth Panel met on a regular basis to plan and steer the event. A number of key principles informed the shape of 'Mindfull':

- Young people should lead all aspects of the

consultation, ensuring that the process reflects the interests of peers

- Consultation should be delivered through entertaining methods, including drama and music
- Outcomes from the event should be recorded and young people should be kept informed of how they are being delivered

'Mindfull' featured performances from celebrity rappers Akala and Griminal, as well as young musicians, actors and budding presenters. The event was also recorded in a number of different ways, including a video diary booth, event camera crew and facilitated discussions.

Mindfull in numbers

Over 130 people attended the event. Forty two young people were involved in planning and delivery of the Mindfull event

The Mindfull event was presented by



Right Here Newham is delivered in partnership by:



Right Here is a national programme that is working with local projects to change the way that services look after the mental health of young people aged 16 to 25. This project is funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation as part of Right Here. Right Here is a joint initiative between Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation to support young people in improving their mental health. www.right-here.org.uk