

# YouthWatch Wiltshire.

COMMUNITY  
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## Advancing Mental Health in Schools Report **March 2018**

**healthwatch**  
Wiltshire



# Contents.

Contents.....	P2
Executive Summary.....	P3
National Context.....	P5
Service Summary.....	P6
What did young people tell us?.....	P8
Recommendations.....	P10
Conclusion.....	P11
Appendix 1: Case Study.....	P13
Appendix 2: Case Study.....	P14

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# Youth Watch Wiltshire: Advancing Mental Health in Schools Report.

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This report presents the findings of an Advancing Mental Health in Schools project delivered in 2017 by Community First and commissioned by Healthwatch Wiltshire.

The objective was to increase Healthwatch Wiltshire's knowledge base on healthcare experiences for young people and how young people access healthcare in schools.

The project includes records reflecting a wide range of opinions and viewpoints from young people from four Wiltshire based secondary schools. For schools, this programme offered the opportunity to become involved in a local youth programme that understood young peoples' views and experiences on a range of existing mental, physical and psychosocial health concerns, in addition to how they accessed wider healthcare services. It also observed more informal networks and approaches that young people use within their peer group, or other ways in how they found out health information online.

Community Organisers from Community First, Youth Leaders from Youth Action Wiltshire and staff from Healthwatch Wiltshire trained 18 young people aged 12-14 years old through our Young Listeners Training Programme, that subsequently collected information from young people to young people. This peer to peer youth project integrated with existing school health education programmes and student support systems and identified areas where adjustments could be made to improve access to appropriate healthcare in addition to an improved student experience.

A sample of 156 recorded conversations took place 74% were female with 26% male. Three quarters of young people knew what support was available if they had a mental or physical health problem. Of the young people who accessed support, 27% reported a positive experience, with almost 30% reporting a negative experience.

**Overall, this project helped us to determine and conclude:**

- How young people receive healthcare support and how they know where to go for support and information
- What young people's experiences were in accessing healthcare through schools



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**This peer to peer youth project integrated with existing school health education programmes and student support systems and identified areas where adjustments could be made to improve access to appropriate healthcare.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Whether young people felt respected and listened to by staff
- What improvements schools can make around mental health and wellbeing in the future.

Over and above, it also delivered personal development for some of the young team – read **Case Study 2** that demonstrates how powerful listening and support is in all of our lives, but for young people, this can really be a game changer in how they learn life-long skills to build resilience in later life.

## Acknowledgements

We are extremely proud of this work and want to thank Healthwatch Wiltshire for the opportunity to deliver a project such as this. We would also like to thank Youth Action Wiltshire and our Community Organising Development Team, who have demonstrated tenacity, hope and championship for some of our future adults and potential future leaders.

Thank you to the schools that participated in and supported this project: Bradon Forest School, Hardenhuish School, South Wiltshire Grammar School and Avon Valley College.

And finally, to our excellent team of Young Listeners who gave their time, energy and a lot of themselves, to help other young people and professionals do healthcare better for young people.

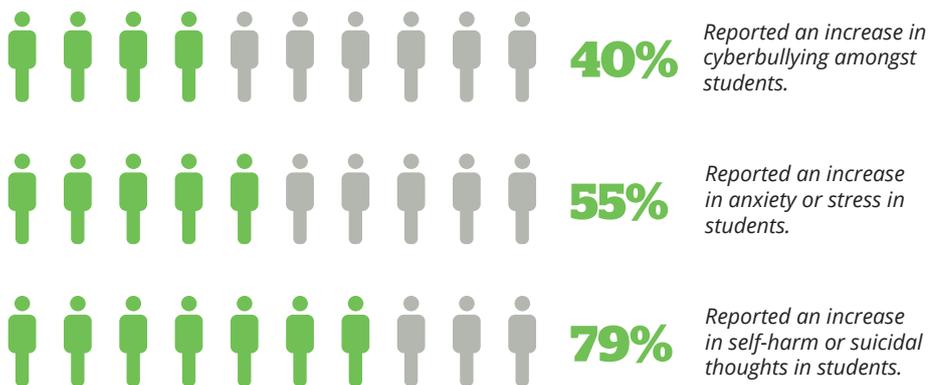


*The team of young people involved in supporting the YouthWatch Wiltshire Young Listeners project in 2017, along with Youth Action Wiltshire and Community First support staff Alex Neale, Katrina Watson and Cleo Evans.*

## National Context.

According to a 2016 survey from the National Children's Bureau there is a rising tide of mental health issues among young people and a serious gap in specialist care beyond the school gates.

Many school leaders reported increases in the number of students suffering from mental health and wellbeing issues over the past five years. More than half (55%) said there had been a large increase in anxiety or stress, and over 40% reported an increase in cyberbullying. Alarmingly, nearly eight out of ten school leaders (79%) reported an increase in self harm or suicidal thoughts amongst students.



The findings reflect cutbacks in CAMHS in many areas of the country over the past five years. The Government has recently pledged to invest an extra £1 billion for mental health care by 2021.

Most schools offer on-site support to students, such as counselling and sessions with educational psychologists, even though a large proportion reported that there was limited funding for these services. However, nearly two-thirds (65%) say they have had challenges in obtaining mental health care from local services in their area for students who need more specialist support, and 53% who have made a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) rated their effectiveness as poor or very poor. The findings reflect cutbacks in CAMHS in many areas of the country over the past five years. The Government has recently pledged to invest an extra £1 billion for mental health care by 2021.

The survey was conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Children's Bureau. It received 338 responses, mostly from leaders in secondary schools. 80% of survey respondents to the National Children's Bureau said they would like to see CAMHS expanded in their area.

Source: National Children's Bureau - March 2016. Accessed via: <https://www.ncb.org.uk/news-opinion/news-highlights/school-leaders-voice-concerns-over-childrens-mental-health-care>.

# Advancing Mental Health in Schools Service Summary.

This Programme was delivered through a 5 week, off-site engagement programme, centred around Mental Health and positive wellbeing with an invitation to join the programme and become a Young Listener.

Following training, our participants were known as 'Cluster Listeners' working in neighbouring schools to deliver a minimum of 20 'listenings' in each school around mental health issues, concerns and suggestions.

Our Graduate Young Listeners and Senior Community Organisers presented the programme at school assemblies and through personal invites from schools staff inviting all students to a drop-in session to hear their views and ask if they would be willing to take on Young Listeners role on behalf of Healthwatch Wiltshire in their school.

Our Senior Community Organisers worked with four Wiltshire based secondary schools, to create a bespoke programme which tailored to the needs of the schools' mental health agenda. The overall programme content is listed in the table below.

## Programme Content.

<b>Week 1</b>	Team Building	Group Contract	Project Benefits	Ice Breakers	Raft Building
<b>Week 2</b>	Healthy Eating	Healthy Mind, Healthy Body			
<b>Week 3</b>	Mental Health & Physical Activity	Looking After Yourself			
<b>Week 4</b>	Reflection & Self Awareness	Volunteering and Giving/Doing for Others			
<b>Week 5</b>	ASDAN* Certificates	Reward Activity	Trampolining		

\*ASDAN - Award Scheme Development & Accreditation Network

## **Recruitment.**

Our engagement and recruitment process enabled us to form relationships and understanding of young people to ensure that the mentoring throughout the project would be as effective as possible. It also helped young people to decide for themselves if they would like to take part in the project. Over 20 applicants came forward to become Young Listeners and were offered the opportunity to take part in a training residential weekend that equipped them to deliver listenings in their schools.

We visited secondary schools and spoke to the Pastoral Managers discussing the project on a one to one basis. We originally spoke with six Wiltshire based schools who were interested in referring students onto the programme, four of which went on to refer students. This resulted in a total of 18 young people taking part in our engagement programme aged 12-14yrs.

Each student received a home visit from our training team (in some cases accompanied by a Healthwatch Wiltshire representative). This included an in-depth discussion with both the student and their parents to explain the project and understand if there were any other considerations or requirements that might be needed. It was also an opportunity to introduce ourselves to parents so that they could fully understand the purpose of the project and the benefits that would result through participation. It was critical, that we had input from parents, students and teachers, so that we could gather a clear picture of any challenges that young people had in their lives

## **Residential Training.**

We received 11 applications from students who wanted to continue with training. Those that chose not to continue were referred to other projects offered through Community First and Youth Action Wiltshire (e.g. Young carers, Splash and Inspire), so that we could continue to support them in other ways. Each young person also received a certificate of completion and an ASDAN award to place in their record of achievement. The 11 applicants were all interviewed and accepted onto the next stage of the project.

The residential training took place from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon at Oxenwood Outdoor Adventure Centre. During this weekend the students received intensive training in Safeguarding and Community Organising where they explored topics such as Power, Effective Listening, Reflection and ways in how to protect themselves and others while listening to their peers.

Once this training was completed the students were then able to start listening within their schools. This took place at a pace that each young person was happy to go with each week, having one to one mentoring support from the training team. In these sessions the students received support with listening to others, producing surveys to work through with students, personal development mentoring and observations of listenings. It was also important that the training team were present in order to support the Young Listeners.

As a result of the above, 156 listenings were taken with students across their four schools in Wiltshire and Swindon.

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**Over 20 applicants came forward to become Young Listeners and were offered the opportunity to take part in a training residential weekend that equipped them to deliver listenings in their schools.**

## What did young people tell us?

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

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

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

“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.”

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

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

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

“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”

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

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

## What did young people tell us?

“My experience couldn’t have been any worse, I wasn’t listened to or helped. The issues were ignored and our feelings ignored. We were told to get over it- move on- forget about it! They ignored the problem so they wouldn’t have to do anything, they automatically believed the bully.”

“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”

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

“Have more services to help more people.”



*Young Listener Emily (left) listens to a young person at her school.*

# Recommendations.

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This project provided an engagement programme for 18 young people across 4 schools in Wiltshire through training, peer to peer listening and mentoring. The following four themes emerged from their findings.

## **1. Improved awareness from school staff around mental health and wellbeing:**

Students felt that it was important that there were opportunities to discuss their mental health and wellbeing. They wanted situations and platforms that allowed open dialogue around how they were feeling.

## **2. Make it easier for young people to access help and support in schools:**

Many students felt that the attitude of staff and teachers was good - but that their availability to talk was insufficient. For some, the school nurse was in school only on certain days of the week and they felt this did not help them when concerns arose. Students said that it would be more beneficial to have someone that they could approach at any time, or more staff availability, so that more help and support could be given when it was needed.

## **3. A better attitude needed from school staff when approached by young people about their mental health and wellbeing:**

Young people wanted to feel that they were able to discuss their mental health and wellbeing in schools without judgement. They wanted to be taken seriously and treated like an equal and to have their concerns treated respectfully.

## **4. More peer to peer support available in schools:**

Something that many young people stated was how good it was to be able to discuss their issues with the Young Listeners. Not only did they feel that it was easier to approach people that were their own age but they also felt there would be a deeper understanding from them. There was trust in the Young Listeners because they were trained; and students knew that if it was something beyond their capability then they would know to refer it to a teacher.

## SECTION THREE

### **Conclusion.**

Overall, this team of young listeners in schools helped to tackle the issues that students found through peer to peer listenings. The project supported Young Listeners by providing them with new skills, confidence which in turn improved their attendance in school. It also supported students by providing them with an alternative positive and constructive outlet to share their issues, thoughts and feelings in addition to be given the time and space to think, feel valued and most importantly, be heard.



*YouthWatch Wiltshire Young Listeners*



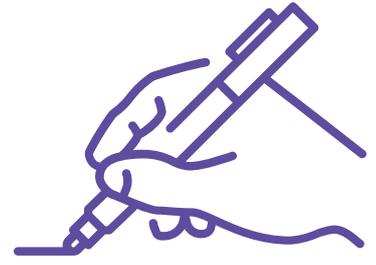
*Two Young Listeners from Avon Valley School*

# Appendices.



## Case Study.

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**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 her and help support her to feel more confident in herself.

The school has embraced the project, referring some students to the Young Listeners when the Pastoral Care Team are particularly busy. The location that the Young Listeners have placed themselves in 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.

\*Names have been changed

## Feedback from School Staff.

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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 also 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 insurmountable.

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)

\*Names have been changed

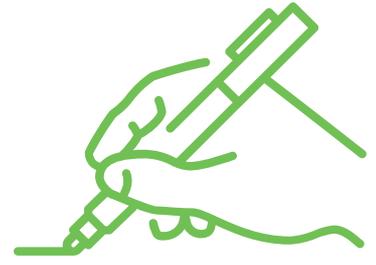


### **Changes noted by project staff and school professional in Jane\* over the duration of the project:**

- Improved confidence
- More able to contribute in a group session where she previously could not
- Improved control over her emotions - able to express herself
- Improved participation in a group setting
- Committed – turned up and became involved
- Actively trying to do better – a willingness to achieve more & learn new skills
- Able to self-reflect
- Improved listening skills & ability to adapt questions asked to obtain the best possible feedback on the listening work.

## Changes noted by Jane's mother over the duration of the project.

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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.

**Letter from a parent**

\*Names have been changed

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This report was produced in March 2018 by Community First as part of the YouthWatch Wiltshire Young Listeners project, commissioned and funded by Healthwatch Wiltshire.

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