

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3 MARCH 2016**

### **MEDWAY YOUTH PARLIAMENT – ANNUAL CONFERENCE FINDINGS**

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#### **Summary**

The attached report, prepared by the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP), provides the committee with the findings and outcomes from the MYP Annual Conference held in November 2015, which was entitled 'Just because you can't see it: Exploring Mental Wellbeing'.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The terms of reference for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Chapter 4 Part 5 paragraph 22.2 (b) of the Constitution) states; "to fulfil all the functions of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to children".

#### **2. Background**

2.1 For the first time, in March 2015, the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representatives who sat on the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee brought forward a report to the committee providing details of the key findings from the MYP's 2014 annual conference. It was agreed that the MYP should be invited to provide a similar report on an annual basis, informing the committee of the outcomes of its latest annual conference.

2.2 The MYP's last Annual Conference was held on 10 November 2015 and was entitled 'Just because you can't see it: Exploring Mental Wellbeing'. The conference consisted of three workshops:

- 'Community Wellbeing';
- 'Myth Busting' and
- 'Stress Management/Five ways to Wellbeing'.

2.3 The report attached at Appendix 1 gives further details of the Conference and key findings from each session.

### **3. Conclusions of conference**

3.1 The MYP made the following conclusions from the conference

- that young people would like to be able to access early help before the problem has escalated and the need for CAMHS intervention has arisen.
- They would like to see teachers trained on how to deal with young people's problems and where to signpost them if necessary.
- They would value a peer support group, such as the SAFE project and would like to see trained counsellors available to students whenever they need them.

3.2 MYP felt they were able to raise awareness of the importance in asking for help early and in listening to and supporting each other. Young people gained knowledge and awareness of mental health and attendees pledged to make a change themselves, pass on their knowledge or help another young person.

3.3 MYP wish to maintain an open dialogue with the Local Transformation Plan task group to make sure that they consistently and continually hear what young people have to say with regards to the services they provide, ensuring that the changes promised are followed through.

### **4. Risk Management**

4.1. There are no specific risk implications for Medway Council arising directly from this report.

### **5. Legal and Financial Implications**

5.1. There are no legal or financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

### **6. Recommendations**

6.1. Members are asked to note the update report attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

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#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – MYP report

#### **Background papers:**

None.



## MEDWAY YOUTH PARLIAMENT ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015 REPORT

**This report seeks to inform on the findings of the Medway Youth Parliament's (MYP) Annual Conference, which took place on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015 and was entitled 'Just because you can't see it: Exploring Mental Wellbeing'**

### Background

Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) was established for young people to come together and discuss issues that need addressing and create campaigns to improve the lives of young people within the area. We are made up of representatives from all secondary schools in Medway and partner youth organisations. We are a fully inclusive organisation providing members are between the ages of 11 and 18 and live, study or work in Medway.

Annually, MYP holds an annual conference based on a topic decided upon by the whole of the Parliament. The day consists of a central theme, which is then split into various subgroups. Those who attend our conference attend three workshops on the sub-topics, watch presentations and take part in an afternoon debate/Q&A with a specially selected panel.



## MYP Annual Conference 2015

All Medway secondary schools and special schools were sent an invitation for a small group of their students to attend and participate in the conference. These students usually are members of their school councils or hold some representative role within their school, however this is not necessary. This year the conference was attended by some SAFE mentors from schools. SAFE is a youth led project, which raises awareness of mental health; helping young people to talk about mental health and find help. Those students attending the conference ranged from Year 7 to Year 13. The whole day is run by MYP, who start organising the event in July.

Previous Conferences have been based on the topics of European Union membership, Regeneration in Medway and Secondary and Higher Education. The Annual Conference of October 2015, entitled 'Just because you can't see it: Exploring Mental Wellbeing', consisted of three workshops: 'Community Wellbeing'; 'Myth Busting' and 'Stress Management/Five ways it Wellbeing'.

### Aims

The aims of the conference were to educate young people about mental health and helping to remove the stigma surrounding this. The three key messages that we wanted to convey were:

- It is common to have a mental health problem, 1 in 4 people experience them
- Ask for help before your problem gets too bad
- Support someone who might be suffering

We also wanted to listen to young people around their understanding, experiences and what they wanted regarding services and support.



## ‘Stress Management – The Five Ways to Wellbeing’ Workshop

In this workshop young people were asked what stresses them, how they know they are stressed and what they do to relieve this stress. Stress busting ideas were shared and discussed amongst the group. The five ways to wellbeing were then discussed in small groups and young people gave their suggestions for how they could achieve the five ways, which are:

**Be Active:** Take a walk, play football or go cycling. No need to go to the gym.

**Keep Learning:** Learning a new skill can give you a sense of achievement and develop your confidence.

**Give:** From small acts such as a smile or a wave to volunteering.

**Connect:** Spend time with people around you and develop these relationships.

**Take Notice:** Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Be in the moment.



## Findings and recommendations

The young people came up with their list of stressors, none of which were unusual or anything other than what we would expect. By far, the most common stressor amongst the young people attending the conference was school – teachers, homework and deadlines, with high expectations mentioned frequently.

Young people discussed the symptoms of their stress and how it affects them, it is hoped that they will now identify when they are starting to get stressed and take steps to relieve this through the variety of ways discussed during the day. The five ways to wellbeing were discussed in small groups and young people came up with ideas of how they could achieve these and what they could do to improve their mental wellbeing on a daily basis.



## **‘Myth Busting’ Workshop**

This workshop took a look at why young people hide their mental health problems. There were lots of ideas around fear of the consequences; being treated differently, being bullied and judged. There were also a lot of comments around other people not understanding.

The young people had the opportunity to try out some breathing techniques to help relieve stress as part of this workshop.



## **Findings and recommendations**

The main findings in the workshop were that young people felt there was no specific education around mental wellbeing, but that people wanted to learn. The young people came up with the following recommendations themselves:

- Schools should implement peer support groups so that young people have someone to talk to
- There should be more education on mental health within schools from Year 7
- This could be taught alongside bullying, as in some cases mental illness can lead to bullying
- Sixth form mentors could be a student’s first port of call if they wish to speak to someone. These mentors would be more approachable than teachers.
- It should be compulsory for every school to have a trained councillor and/or safe space (SAFE project)
- More information concerning mental illnesses should be provided within PSHE lessons.

It was clear from the outcomes of this workshop that young people would like to learn more about mental health and that they feel schools should be doing more to provide the information and support networks for young people. Young people see the need for early help and understand that this can sometimes mean that a young person would not then need to support of CAMHS as the problem can be dealt with before it gets too that level of need.

## ‘Community Wellbeing’ Workshop

The Community Wellbeing workshop enabled young people to explore their ideas around community wellbeing, what it is and how this can impact on a young person’s mental wellbeing. ‘Community’ in respect of this workshop was explained to be Medway as a whole, the area in which a young person lives or their school community. This then lead to discussions around what we can do to improve this and what the young people would like to change in their local community to improve their mental wellbeing.



## Findings and recommendations

The young people in this workshop had a good understanding of how your environment and community can affect your mental wellbeing and there were discussions around bullying, safety and discrimination.

The main outcome from what young people were saying in this workshop was around what they would like to change in their community to improve their mental wellbeing. These were their suggestions:

- Better understanding and awareness of mental health/illnesses
- Talks in schools around the subject
- SAFE mentors should be in every school
- Counselling should be readily available to all who need it – reduced waiting times (not necessarily or just at school). Youth centres were mentioned as an ideal venue for this
- More training for teachers
- Adults need to listen to young people more

## Pledge Tree

At the end of the morning, young people were asked to make a pledge of one thing they would change as a result of what they had learnt during the workshop sessions.

*'I pledge to raise awareness of mental health in schools'*

*'I pledge to improve my own mental wellbeing. I will take away how to cope with stress and the methods to teach others if they need it'*

*'I will talk to people who look upset and educate myself more'*

*'To listen to people and treat them equally'*

*'I pledge to offer help'*

*'I pledge to be more aware of those with mental illness and to treat them equally as well as to help them regardless'*

*'I will be more open minded as anyone can be affected by mental illness'*



*'Talk about mental health to others to make them understand'*

*'I am going to stand up against the stigma against mental health sufferers'*

*'I will tell my friends how to deal with mental health problems'*

*'I will support anyone who is suffering from a mental health problem'*

*'I pledge to raise awareness in my school'*



## Afternoon Q&A Session with panel of experts

Prior to the debate in the afternoon we had 'Medway Speakers Corner' set up a podium for those attending the day to speak for one minute on an issue in which they felt personally passionately about. The activity was a huge success, with many students bravely building up the courage to have a go themselves. This gave young people another opportunity to speak out about mental health and any other issues that they wanted to.

After the break, Graham Tanner spoke about the recent developments to the local plan for children and young people's mental health services. The strategy for Medway includes promoting mental health in schools, accessible information and support and improving places for young people can go for support. This is all available in the 'Local Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing in Medway' document. Young people were signposted to A Better Medway website: <http://www.abettermedway.co.uk/healthymind.aspx> for further information.

Then the Q&A session with our panel of experts took place, where a carefully selected board of panellists were to reside over questions on the day's topic posed by the active and budding audience members. On the panel were:

- Graham Tanner  
Commissioning Programme Lead for CAMHS
- Tony Waite  
Head of Children and Young People's Service IMAGO,  
representing the SAFE project
- Rathini Mills  
Mental Health Promotion Project Officer
- Mary Coldwell  
Primary Mental Health Worker Tier 3
- Nina Marshall  
Cognitive Behaviour Therapist/Primary Mental Health Worker  
Tier 2



Debate was led by a series of questions by the audience to promote discussion on the most pressing matters from the day's topic. It was evident that this is a delicate subject and one that young people feel passionately about.

## Findings and recommendations

The young people shared their experiences of services or trying to access services and it was evident that young people are frustrated. Through questions and discussions we found out the following:

At present there is nowhere apart from visiting your GP, school nurse, teacher or youth worker that young people can go to for help. However, the Local Transformation Plan task group are working on raising awareness in schools. We then learnt that the SAFE project is coming to an end in March due to lack of funding, which was quite frustrating.

Young people asked whether they could go to Parliament for funding and it was explained by Graham Tanner that there is recognition in Parliament now and that is why the 'Future in Mind' document has been released.

There is a plan to train teachers, not to become counsellors, but making them more comfortable when talking to young people; knowing what to say and where to send them for further help. There is an emphasis on getting early help before there is the need for CAMHS support.

CAMHS workers explained that they are trying to see people faster and before they get to the higher level of need. Young people are now being assessed within six weeks of being referred.

The panel were asked if there is the possibility of setting up some kind of forum for young people to advise other young people about which services they have used. The panel said that this was a good suggestion and there could be something like that could be set up to discuss their views about services and how to improve them. Rathini Mills explained that she was restarting the Youth Wellbeing Community and gave young people the opportunity to attend.

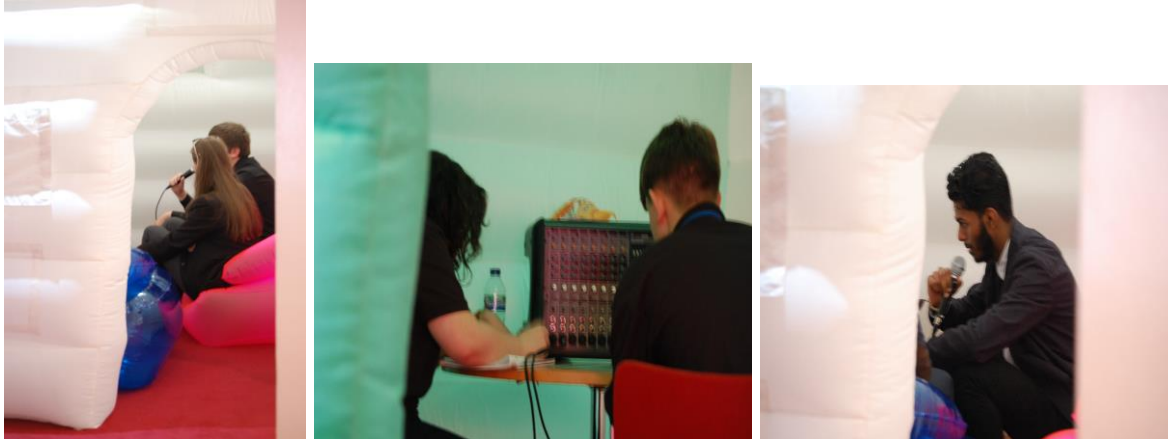
The panel summed up that they are beginning to fix the broken parts of the system but it is going to take time.



## MiPod

The MiPod is an inflatable interview booth where students were asked a set of questions for us to obtain data. The questions that were asked were:

- What does mental wellbeing mean to you?
- What stresses you? Why? How does it impact on your life?



## Findings

Some of the young people had a good understanding of and ideas around mental wellbeing, stating: '*Being able to function properly and being capable and aware of actions*' and '*Being in the right frame of mind to function daily*' and '*Healthy and fit, lack of stress and clear mind*'. Others found it a really difficult question to answer, especially at the beginning of the morning before they have visited workshops.

Again, when asked what stresses them, the young people's main issue was school. The pressure of school, school work, being a student, deadlines, being made to feel you are just a number, homework and exams. Two thirds of the young people questioned said school was the top thing that stresses them.

Other things that stress young people included looking after parents, fear of disappointment, uncertainty about the future, not being understood by older people bullying, family breakdown and pressures to look good.



## Further Actions and Summarised Recommendations

From our findings it is evident that young people would like to be able to access early help before the problem has escalated and the need for CAMHS intervention has arisen. They would like to see teachers trained on how to deal with young people's problems and where to signpost them if necessary. They would value a peer support group, such as the SAFE project and would like to see trained counsellors available to students whenever they need them. The young people expressed concerns over the funding for the SAFE project being cut in March.

We feel that we managed to get the message across about asking for help early on and how important it is to listen to and support each other. We believe that young people gained a lot from the conference, both in knowledge and awareness of mental health. The young people pledged to make a change themselves, pass on their knowledge or help another young person – and this is an outcome that we feel should be celebrated.

Medway Youth Parliament will endeavour to maintain an open dialogue with the Local Transformation Plan task group to make sure that they consistently and continually hear what young people have to say with regards to the services they provide, ensuring that the changes promised are followed through. Medway Youth Parliament will also listen to what young people have to say with regards to mental health services and then effectively question and scrutinise where necessary to lobby changes.



Thank you for taking the time to read our report.