

Case study: Y-Talk counselling and therapy service, Sheffield YMCA

Summary

Y-Talk counselling and therapy service is a third sector service for 16-25 year olds who require emotional and mental health support. The service is based in Sheffield and provided in the city centre and outreach centres, including schools and community settings.

Y-Talk is a key part of Sheffield YMCA's Interchange Emotional Well-Being Programme which works mostly with young people aged 13-25. The other central strand of the Interchange Programme is Right Here Sheffield which is a joint initiative between the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation designed to develop new ways of working to address the mental health needs of young people aged 16-25. In addition, there is a small art therapy project offering therapeutic work in primary schools.

How the service works

Y-Talk aims to provide an accessible and young person friendly counselling and therapy service. This is delivered in partnership with other organisations from places that young people already go, such as schools and youth and community centres. There is a diverse team of counsellors and therapists which helps the service to reach out and provide support to young people from many different backgrounds.

The service fills a gap between universal and more specialist mental health services and is designed specifically for young people making the transition into adulthood. It is located alongside universal services, working closely with staff such as teachers, learning support staff and youth workers who are able to refer young people for professional support to meet their emotional and/or mental health needs. Many of the young people who are referred for help would be either unable or unwilling to access specialist statutory mental health services provided through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or the Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS).

Data has so far been collected on over 600 young people who have accessed counselling or therapy with the project. Of these:

- 42 per cent are male, 58 per cent female
- 46 per cent are 16-19
- of the participants for whom ethnicity is known, just under 20 per cent are black and minority ethnic (BME)
- over 75 per cent present with issues to do with emotional wellbeing or mental health
- the most common problems within this category are: depression (36 per cent), anger (33.5 per cent), stress (17.5 per cent), loneliness/isolation (15.5 per cent) anxiety (12.5 per cent), self-harm (12 per cent) and other serious presenting issues including suicidal

feelings, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, mental illness in family, sleep difficulties and post traumatic stress disorder.

Background to the project

The YMCA has a long history of supporting people both nationally and locally, at first through the establishment of hostels. More recently, Sheffield YMCA has changed its focus towards supporting the emotional wellbeing of young people in the city through the Interchange Emotional Well-Being Programme.

The programme builds on key reviews in the city. Sheffield City Council's 2006 and 2008 reviews considered the arrangements for transitions of young people from CAMHS to AMHS¹ and assessed the mental health needs of 16 and 17 year olds at all levels of need, from mental health promotion and early intervention and prevention through to specialist interventions.² Following further consultation on the findings, a preferred service delivery model for meeting the mental health needs of a wider age range of young people from 16-25 was developed which included more support within universal services and clear pathways between the different levels of service. The need for more counselling provision for young people was amongst the recommendations for change.

Sheffield YMCA's Y-Talk service has been designed to take account of views expressed by young people aged 14-18 in the city around how emotional and mental health support should be provided. This consultation was carried out in 2008 through a collaborative project between Sheffield YMCA, NSPCC Young People's Centre in Sheffield and the South West Sector Team of AMHS³.

Findings from other research and consultation projects have also been taken into account in the design and development of the Y-Talk service. A key document is the *Listen up* report by the Mental Health Foundation⁴. There are many other relevant reports, for example a Social Exclusion Unit report⁵ on transitions for young adults with complex needs, and research by Young Minds.^{6,7}

¹ Sheffield City Council Health and Community Care Children and Young People Scrutiny and Policy Development Boards (2006) *Report of the working group into young people's mental health services*, Sheffield City Council

² Sheffield City Council (2008) *A mental health needs assessment of 16 and 17 year olds in Sheffield*, Sheffield: Sheffield City Council

³ Sheffield YMCA, NSPCC Sheffield Young People's Centre and South West Sector Team (2008) *An exploration into the views of young people around how mental health support should be provided in Sheffield*, Sheffield: Sheffield YMCA

⁴ The Mental Health Foundation (2007) *Listen up! Person-centred approaches to young people experiencing mental health and emotional problems*, London: The Mental Health Foundation

⁵ Social Exclusion Unit (2005) *Transitions: young adults with complex needs*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

⁶ YoungMinds (2007) *Two steps forward and one step back*, London: Young Minds

⁷ YoungMinds (2006) *A call to action: commissioning mental health services for 16-25 year olds: Stressed Out and Struggling*, London: Young Minds

During the planning and development stage, Sheffield YMCA received helpful advice and support from a number of projects across the country, some of which provide mental health support as part of a one-stop shop approach described by Young Minds⁸.

Projects visited included 42nd Street in Manchester, Base 51 in Nottingham, The Market Place in Leeds, Youth Start in Rotherham, Streetwise in Newcastle, Young Person's Advisory Service in Liverpool and Sussex Central YMCA.

Youth Access, the national membership organisation for voluntary sector organisations involved in setting up and running YIACS (Young People's Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services) has also provided valuable training, information and support as the Y-Talk service has developed.

Designing the service

As part of the consultation carried out in 2008, young people were asked what would help them to access emotional and mental health support. Some of the responses are shown below:

"Being able to take a friend with you for support and therefore having a good waiting area"

"Using modern ways of communicating with young people such as email and text"

"A place that had lots of different services on offer, not just mental health provision"

"A service that offered food and drink to make it feel more welcoming"

"A welcoming, friendly receptionist who told you what was going to happen"

"Having the confidentiality policy explained, carefully and simply and maybe being sent a leaflet about this beforehand"

"Having workers of different ethnicities so as to represent young people's different needs"

Sheffield YMCA, NSPCC and AMHS consultation, 2008

Sheffield YMCA began its Emotional Well-Being Service in schools, (funded by Children in Need) followed by the development of a community-based counselling service to reach out to those young people unable or unwilling to access services in school or college (funded by Comic Relief and local trusts). Y-Talk is the name given to cover all of the counselling services provided by Sheffield YMCA.

⁸ ibid

Two key principles for Y-Talk have been:

- (to appoint a diverse team of counsellors skilled at building relationships with disadvantaged young people
- to work closely with professionals, such as youth workers, learning mentors and Connexions advisers, who are:
 - skilled at building relationships with disadvantaged and vulnerable young people
 - able to identify young people in need of mental health support and make appropriate referrals for counselling
 - able to provide wrap around services to complement the counselling support.

Other important features of the Y-Talk service are that young people can self-refer, are offered a high degree of confidentiality, an age-appropriate service and are treated independently of parents, unless they wish parents or referrers to be involved.

When the project has control of the physical space, rooms are decorated to be colourful, bright and homely with bean bags, drinks, tissues (and make up remover!) available. Text reminders of appointments are sent if the young person finds this helpful. Flexible appointments that fit round changing school, college or work commitments are offered where possible. The core community service is located within the headquarters of Sheffield Futures (the organisation which provides the bulk of the city's youth work and Connexions services) and is a building used by a large number of young people, attending for a variety of services, making it a non-stigmatising place to access mental health support.

Young people's involvement

One of the core principles of the Interchange Emotional Well-Being Programme is that all services will be underpinned by the involvement of people who use services and volunteers. The main vehicle for this is the youth panel 'STAMP', which is Right Here Sheffield's participation group and is part of the central governance of the project. There are currently 13 young people aged 16-25 sitting on the panel, including young people with mental health issues who also have experience of statutory mental health services. With regard to transitions, young people will be involved in helping to work with statutory services to look at how the pathway can be improved for young people. They are involved in shaping and designing the Right Here Sheffield project but can also contribute valuable advice and guidance to Y-Talk.

Y-Act is an embryonic group which has recently formed and is open to all users of the Y-Talk counselling services, plus volunteers interested in improving mental health services for young people. This group enables the project to offer various activities to users who may want to stay involved after their counselling has ended, or who want to meet other young people in a supportive group setting. The group began with a project, working with a film maker, to make a DVD aiming to raise awareness about young people and mental health called *Stigma deleted*. This group can also advise on service developments, and both STAMP and Y-Act were consulted on new evaluation tools proposed by the Tavistock Centre (involved in the evaluation of Right Here) to measure the impact of services.

At regular intervals, a feedback questionnaire entitled 'How are we doing?' is distributed to all

users of Y-Talk to gauge 'customer satisfaction' and invite suggestions for improvements. Y-Act members are to be consulted as to the best ways to feed back these findings and resulting actions to people using the service.

Intended outcomes

The Y-Talk counselling and therapy service has two sets of aims and intended outcomes. One set is strategic and is about helping to bridge the gap:

- between accessible universal services and specialist statutory services to help provide a smoother care pathway, especially for vulnerable groups
- between children's and adult mental health services by providing age-appropriate transitional help and trying to influence commissioning to address the particular needs of 16-25 year olds.

The second set of aims and outcomes, which relates to the individuals who access services, is outlined below:

Aim 1: To increase the self-esteem and wellbeing of young people using the service

Outcome 1:

young people feel better about themselves

Outcome 2:

young people do more things that make them feel good about themselves

Outcome 3:

young people are more able to look after their well-being and less likely to engage in self-harming behaviour.

Aim 2: To increase young people's resilience and ability to cope when things are difficult by improving their ability to express their feelings appropriately, discuss their problems and gain support from others

Outcome 1:

young people who use the service are more able to appropriately communicate their feelings rather than 'acting out' their feelings

Outcome 2:

young people who use the service are better able to discuss their problems

Outcome 3:

young people are more able to ask for support when needed

Outcome 4:

young people feel better able to cope when things are difficult or go wrong.

Aim 3: To enable young people using the service to participate and make a positive contribution

Outcome 1:

young people feel more confident to participate in group situations

Outcome 2:

young people have improved relationships with peers

Outcome 3:

young people have improved relationships with adults at home, school or work.

Measuring impact

The service currently uses a range of monitoring and evaluation tools to capture the impact of the Y-Talk counselling and therapy project.

Current tools include:

- a monitoring form to capture relevant client details
- pre-service (before) and review (after) forms to help track clients' progress and measure the above outcomes
- a service evaluation/feedback form ('How are we doing?') to help the project learn and improve.

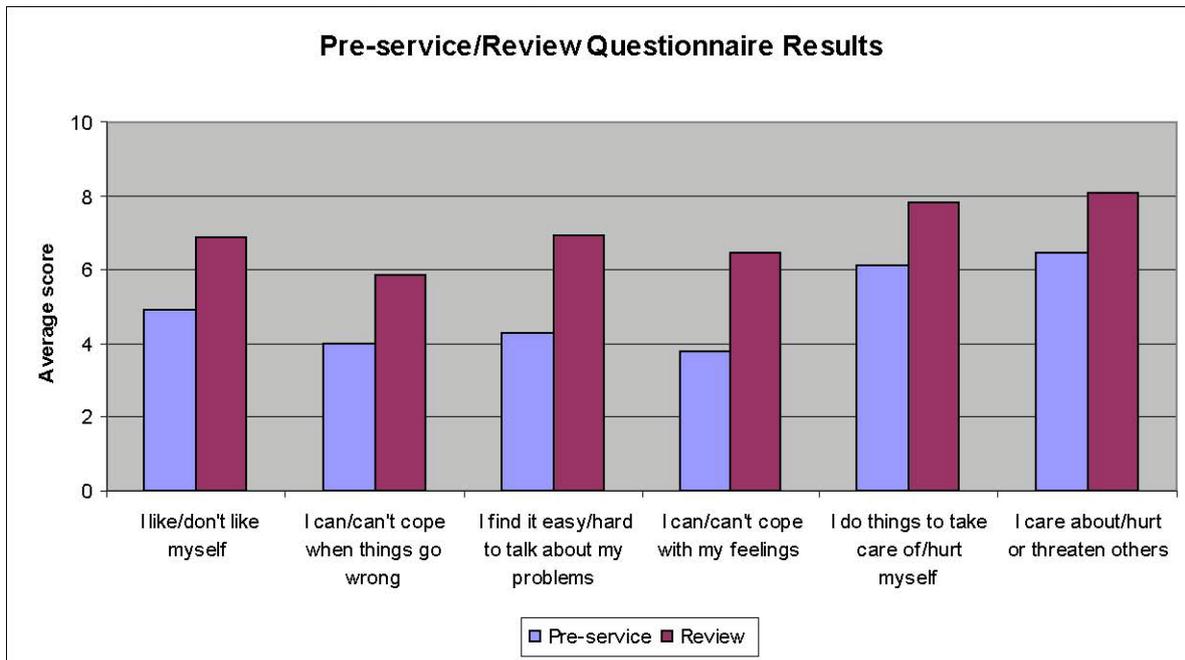
Some key findings to emerge to date include:

- over 95 per cent of young people completing forms report that counselling has helped a lot or a bit (this percentage is based on 37 per cent of young people who completed the post counselling questionnaires)
- nearly 95 per cent of young people completing forms gave the service an average score of 70 per cent or higher for overall satisfaction (this percentage is based on 56 returned forms although it is unclear as to what percentage of all young people using Y-Talk this figure represents)
- there is a good degree of improvement in all the areas measured in the before and after forms, with an average improvement of two points on a 0-10 scale in all areas (see chart below for an analysis of the core service at Star House, for all young people completing forms).

To date 101 people have completed pre-service (before) forms and 33 have also completed review (after) forms.

The chart below gives the average scores from the forms, which show progress in all areas.

The six areas selected all relate to Every Child Matters outcomes, particularly the 'Be healthy' strand. In addition to rating themselves in these six areas before and after counselling, participants report on how they are feeling and whether they have achieved their goals.



A sample of client comments so far received include the following in response to the question 'what changes, if any, have you noticed since you started coming here?'

- changes in my confidence and how I can express how I feel
- before I would just yell or cry; now if I have an issue I would try and talk it over with whoever is involved
- I am more confident to be myself again
- I am starting to accept myself
- I found the sessions at Star House really helpful - I am going great!
- I am a more confident and happier person
- counselling has helped a lot.

Sustainability

The project's vision is to develop Y-Talk into a service which provides sustainable emotional and mental health support for young people, particularly those aged 16-25 making the transition to adulthood. This represents a significant challenge, especially in the climate of budget reductions and funding cuts. Tackling this issue includes a number of elements such as:

- working towards a mixed economy of funding, including grants, commissioned and traded services
- recruiting and supporting a highly adaptable staff team with the skills and experience to respond to changing needs of young people, referrers and commissioners/budget

holders, as well as, where possible, the resilience to ‘weather’ contractions and expansions in levels of service

- maintaining the project’s capacity to build and sustain partnerships and to participate in key children and young people’s and mental health networks in the city.

Additional elements of the sustainability strategy include:

- capacity building – through responding to requests from partner organisations and referrers to enhance their ability to support the emotional and mental health of the young people they work with, for example
- evidence-based practice – providing robust evidence about what works in respect of supporting young people’s mental health
- young people’s participation – increasing the involvement of young people in the development of the service and wider mental health provision in the city
- smooth care pathways into and out of specialist mental health services – this is a key longer term aim which it is hoped can go forward with the involvement of young people and the support of partner organisations.

Next steps

Sheffield YMCA aims to continue working in partnership with youth service providers to ensure that young people can be referred on for accessible age-appropriate mental health support, when needed. In addition, the next steps include:

- Seeking funding to develop closer relationships with statutory mental health services and GPs to pilot new approaches to increase access by vulnerable groups, providing counselling/therapy and linking them into specialist services when needed. If a model can be developed that enables this to happen, this will make a very useful contribution to improving the care pathway for young people.
- Planning to increase the number of schools and locality based services and extend the current therapeutic work to include more group work and support for parents when appropriate. This will be aligned with the city’s Integrated Youth Support Service which is currently being re-designed by council led task groups, one of which includes Sheffield YMCA as a voluntary sector representative.
- Working with new partners and securing funding to reach out further to young people from vulnerable groups (such as BME or looked-after young people) who are reluctant to access mainstream services and for whom little alternative support is available.

Resources involved

The Y-Talk service employs a core team consisting of:

- Full time Counselling Manager
- Lead Counsellor (3 days) with special responsibility for developing outreach services
- Three time-limited contracted counsellors/therapists working in schools, plus a pool of

sessional practitioners. This enables the project to provide a flexible service, able to expand and contract as funding allows.

Current annual running costs are approximately £100,000, raised from a range of funding sources. The majority of the funding is spent on staff salaries, clinical supervision and training, with a contribution to management costs and central overheads.

Expenditure on premises has been kept to a minimum so far by the model used of taking services out to work in partnership with organisations already working with young people.

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