Children and young people's mental health & wellbeing

An overview of the work carried out by Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch

This briefing provides a number of examples of work local Healthwatch are taking forward in relation to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing (CYPMHW) as well as key findings from the work. Local Healthwatch are independent organisations working across all 152 local authorities in England and give communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided within their area.

Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch in action

What local Healthwatch tell us...

Based on our bi-annual data return and on-going discussion with the network, we know that local Healthwatch have identified mental health services for children and young people (CYP) as a key priority area that needs improvements to ensure that CYP benefit now and in the future from much more effective services:

- 77 local Healthwatch undertook work on mental health services for children and young people or have identified it as a priority area in 2014/15
- Where local Healthwatch have been contacted by the public regarding those services, 64 of them noted it was to report a negative experience compared with 5 who said it was to report a positive experience.

... is gathered and used to challenge national decisions & stakeholders

Last year, we used local Healthwatch's findings to comment on the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Taskforce’s report 'Future in Mind: promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing'. The value of our contribution and of the insight provided by the network has been recognised by the Department of Health.
Next steps: identifying the gaps between the intent and the reality

Based on this recognition - and in the context of the development of the Local Transformation Plans - we decided to continue our work in 2015/16.

The work of local Healthwatch will be particularly useful to both local and national stakeholders in identifying and tracking the gaps between the Children and Young people’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce Future in Mind report’s intent and the reality of mental health services provision for CYP across the country.

- Locally, local Healthwatch’s involvement in the development of the Local Transformation Plans will be extremely beneficial:
  - Their insights from children, young people and the people surrounding them (including families, carers and professionals) will help inform the content of the Plans before they go to Health and Wellbeing Boards.
  - Local Healthwatch will also be able to provide feedback on the degree to which children, young people and the public are involved in the development, implementation and review of the Plans.

- At the national level, local Healthwatch’s insights will be gathered by Healthwatch England and fed back to key national decision makers to demonstrate whether the aspirations of Future in Mind are translated into reality.

Top three issues raised by the network and proposals for improvements

1/ Promoting resilience & early intervention, raising mental health awareness and tackling stigma

There is currently a lack of clarity on what people can expect from mental health services for CYP and what services are provided. Many local Healthwatch highlighted the crucial role of schools in raising mental health awareness - yet provision of information in schools is patchy - while there is a huge demand from schools to establish a dialogue with the authorities and local Healthwatch.

**Local Healthwatch recommend:**

- ‘Someone to talk to’, regular check-ups, peer mentoring and single points of contact not only in secondary but also in primary schools for young people, training and peer support for teachers, group meetings and crisis planning with mental health practitioners for parents.
• Information, prevention and engagement with children and young people in and outside of schools - as not all young people are attending schools and some of them would prefer having these discussions elsewhere.

2/ Improving access, referrals and transitions between services

Long waits for accessing mental health services and having to be in crisis in order to get a referral were mentioned in almost every report we received from local Healthwatch. Moreover, we have evidence through our Special Inquiry showing that transitions from services for CYP to adult psychiatric services need to urgently change in practice as many YP leave the system at the age of 18 when they are still receiving treatment and/or with insufficient support in adult care or community-based services. Last but not least, families are often not involved in the decision-making process when their children are discharged.

Therefore:

• We fully support the development of waiting time standards in mental health. We also believe children and young people who are waiting to access services must be given accurate, up-to-date information, especially on access to local help.
• It is vital that young people and their families are fully involved in planning their transition and discharge process. Referral processes must be simpler and more transparent. All processes must be closely monitored. Better communication and adequate professional support post-discharge are needed to avoid the risk of re-admission.

3/ Improving staff attitudes and increasing meaningful engagement with and support to parents and carers

We have evidence that backlogs lead to staff being stressed and attitudes are not what patients would expect. It is very important to keep in mind that young people’s uptake of services depends on how they feel a service will treat them. Being dismissed by a GP or receiving no follow-up from appointments can discourage young people from seeking the support they need.

We recommend:

• Further training for health and social care professionals - and in particular for GPs - as they all need to have the appropriate skills and feel confident to promote good mental health and wellbeing and identify problems earlier.
• A greater focus on supporting and engaging with parents and carers as they do not feel listened to or feel blamed for the problems they and their children are experiencing.
The following examples illustrate a number of different approaches local Healthwatch are taking to engage, collaborate and challenge local stakeholders to ensure the views of children, young people, families and carers are reflected in discussions and decisions on CYPMHW and local mental health services for CYP.

Healthwatch Bristol

Developed workshops in schools and youth groups about mental health

**ACTION** Through engagement events with young people, Healthwatch Bristol heard that pupils would like to be told less about different types of mental illness and focus more on techniques they can use to build their resilience and cope with stress.

**RESULT** Based on the feedback received from children and young people, Healthwatch Bristol has worked with a local organisation, Off the Record, to develop ‘Your Voice, Your Wellbeing’ workshops which are delivered in secondary schools and youth groups.

**IMPACT** Pupils have learnt about health and social care services and commissioning structures. Young people have been encouraged to comment on the services they have used and to discuss health and social care issues. Last but not least, they have been introduced to a positive way of thinking about mental health and building resilience.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

Work with a local parent group and a secondary school to make sure improvements to local mental health services for CYP happen

**ACTION** In 2014, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire worked closely with a local parent group, Pinpoint, to collect 200 pieces of feedback from parents regarding mental health services for CYP. The vast majority of these comments were negative, particularly around quality of information and waiting times. Healthwatch Cambridgeshire are also working with a local secondary school on a project to find out from young people what sort of things can help them deal with stress and anxiety and generally feel better about themselves.

**RESULT** Healthwatch Cambridgeshire escalated the negative feedback from parents received to Healthwatch England who directly fed this evidence into the work of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce. Locally, Pinpoint and Healthwatch Cambridgeshire have brought this to the attention of the service commissioners and providers and asked for local emotional wellbeing services to be mapped so that they can see exactly who can access what service and in what part of the county.

**IMPACT** There has been agreement that a new service framework will be co-designed with children, young people and parents. Pinpoint and Healthwatch Cambridgeshire are continuing to meet with the commissioners and the providers to make sure that improvements to service happen and that young people and parents are fully involved.
Healthwatch Kent

Collected insight and shared their findings to challenge local CCGs and providers

**ACTION** Healthwatch Kent commissioned Activmob to undertake an engagement project to better understand the concerns that have been raised about CYP’s mental health services related to diagnosis, access, engagement, waiting times, quality of service amongst others.

**RESULT** In August 2014, Healthwatch Kent produced a report including key findings and recommendations and shared it with the NHS West Kent CCG.

**IMPACT** The CCG acknowledged that the observations of children and young people included in the report will help them in their efforts to improve the provision of local mental health services for CYP. They responded to every recommendation made by Healthwatch Kent and used their work as a marker to hold providers to account.

Healthwatch Hampshire

Developed an outreach programme to gather insight to support the re-tendering process for mental health services for CYP locally

**ACTION** In collaboration with the Children’s Services at Hampshire County Council (HCC), Healthwatch Hampshire played a leading role in supporting the development of a new strategy for mental health services for CYP in Hampshire. As part of the engagement exercise, a conference was organised to obtain feedback from the young people where Healthwatch Hampshire used a variety of different engagement methods to understand what matters most to young people. This included a workshop activity, but also a ‘Big Brother’ style Video diary room, comment cards and speak out forms.

**RESULT** The exercise highlighted the need for support to get involved sooner, before someone had reached crisis point, as well as addressing concerns on waiting times.

**IMPACT** Healthwatch Hampshire produced a report and a short film drawing all the experiences together and this has been used to help inform the re-tendering process for mental health services for CYP in Hampshire.

If you would like further information or if you have any queries, please contact Zoe Mulliez, Policy Advisor, on zoe.mulliez@healthwatch.co.uk or call 020 7972 8053.

Please contact us if you would like this policy in another language or format for example in large print, in Braille or on CD.

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