

Interim Report

Somewhere to talk – Someone to listen

The Role of
Youth Clubs in
Supporting the
Mental Health
and Emotional
Wellbeing of
Young People



About Clubs for Young People

Clubs for Young People helps young people to achieve their potential through social and personal development opportunities. We provide support to our network of members, as well as deliver a national programme of initiatives. Our network comprises over 3000 voluntary youth clubs, youth groups and projects across the UK, helping close to half a million young people each year. We have been working with young people and youth clubs for over 80 years.

Our network consists of community based member youth clubs and projects (who work with young people directly), city and county organisations who provide locally tailored support to youth clubs and projects on a daily basis, and our national office, which as well as providing national representation, advocacy and resources, offers specialist capacity-building through regional teams.

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Executive summary

Executive summary

Introduction

'Somewhere to talk – Someone to listen' aims to enhance the support youth clubs provide to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people who access their services. The project was set up by Clubs for Young People and Young Devon, who have continued to lead the project.

This Interim Report has been produced midway through the project following a consultation exercise with members of Clubs for Young People through the distribution of a questionnaire. The Mental Health Foundation was commissioned to undertake a brief literature review to identify key issues relating to the role of youth clubs and the mental health of young people. The Steering Group has contributed to the design and analysis of materials.

Young people and mental health

Mental health, like physical health, relates to everybody. During the course of their life everyone will experience some level of mental distress, such as feelings of sadness, anxiety or confusion. When such feelings affect a person's ability to cope with their everyday life they are often said to have a mental health problem.

Many children and young people will experience 'low level' mental health problems, leaving them vulnerable to developing more serious problems if the right support is not available. Young people in this country have lower levels of wellbeing than their peers around the world.

A range of factors have been consistently associated with an increased risk of mental health problems in young people and in adulthood. These generally relate to individual characteristics such as genetic influences, personality and physical health, family dynamics (such as the quality of relationships, parenting style and parental mental health) and environmental factors (such as poverty, unemployment, and level of support at school.).

Just as there are factors which increase the likelihood of a young person developing mental health problems, there are also factors which can protect them. This is where youth clubs can play an important role.

The role and value of youth clubs in supporting young people's mental health

It is estimated there are over 11,000 youth clubs in both the voluntary and statutory sectors. Youth clubs provide many factors identified as important for strengthening resilience and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing in young people, including:

- Strong social support networks
- A committed person from outside the family
- A sense that what they do at clubs can make a difference, including the opportunity to help others
- Taking part in activities outside of school or college
- The chance to put themselves in new and challenging situations which can help to develop coping skills

As well as developing and strengthening young people's resilience, youth clubs also help through:

- The promotion of mental health
- Supporting young people to access youth counselling services and statutory mental health services when needed

Public sector cuts will impact on mental health services for children and young people, as will the current economic climate, with recessions disproportionately affecting young people. Support for young people, particularly their mental health, is therefore, more important than ever.

Recent statements from the Coalition Government have reaffirmed the importance of youth work in general and its role in meeting Government's aspirations for young people.

Key findings

Youth Clubs contribute to the positive mental health of young people. They:

- Help to develop and strengthen young people's resilience
- Reduce the level of risk for those young people experiencing adverse socio-demographic factors from developing mental health problems
- Reduce the level of risk for vulnerable young people experiencing 'low level' mental health problems from developing a more severe mental health problem.
- Support young people to access youth counselling services and statutory mental health services when needed
- Have a role in mental health promotion
- Could and want to do more to support the mental health of young people with access to the right resources, training and information

“...the youth workers themselves are good to work with in that they are always friendly and helpful. They helped me in the beginning ... gave me the extra support I needed and supported me to get the right help.”

Young person, Hear Our Voice, Cornwall

Recommendations

A further and consolidated set of recommendations will be included in the final report:

- 1 The role of youth clubs in signposting to appropriate services is enhanced through
 - Clubs having information about youth counselling and other mental health services in their areas
 - Clubs being supported in establishing and maintaining links with youth counselling and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and, where relevant Adult Mental Health support
- 2 The Clubs for Young People newsletter, network news & website are used more effectively to communicate with and support clubs
- 3 The provision of mental health awareness for youth workers and young people through training or other methods
- 4 Clubs develop methods to demonstrate how they make a difference to the lives of young people
- 5 The views of young people are sought to find out how they currently use or would like to use youth clubs, particularly in times of emotional crisis.

Introduction

Introduction

Good mental health is fundamental to the ability of every young person to remain healthy and to enjoy their life. It enables them to develop and achieve and to participate in and contribute to society. The entire children and young person's workforce and its surrounding local communities play a pivotal role in supporting the mental health of young people through health promotion, early intervention and the prevention of mental health problems.

The next few years will be tough in many respects for young people. Public sector cuts will impact on the services that are provided, hitting both youth services and local mental health provision, as well as presenting a real challenge to the voluntary sector, who deliver 70% of local youth work. Youth unemployment is high, making the support that young people access, including youth clubs, even more vital and relevant.

“The fact is, society has changed hugely. Families have become more nuclear, and communities more fragmented, and the UK has had to face up to the consequences of that change, with some of the highest levels of alcohol and drug use amongst its young people in the developed world, the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, and more than a million of our children suffering from some kind of mental health disorder.”

Tim Loughton to EESI (effective, efficient, supported and independent third sector) conference

16.09.10

The offer to young people from the Coalition Government is still emerging, although recent developments, such as the National Citizen Service, are encouraging.

This Interim Report begins to look at the mental health issues young people face, and the role and value of youth clubs in supporting them.

Youth workers and volunteers who work at clubs have an important role in supporting young people's mental health. However 'mental health' is often considered the realm of specialist mental health services rather than universal services, so that staff and volunteers may not recognise the contribution they make, or feel confident in supporting the mental health of young people at the club.

The report highlights the value of youth clubs in developing young people's resilience, preventing mental health issues from escalating, helping young people to access services, and promoting positive mental health. However, clubs want to and could do more to help young people with the right resources, training and information, and in partnership with mental health professionals.

The recommendations present opportunities that could make a real difference to young people, in what will be a challenging few years, particularly for those young people who need our help the most.

Young People & Mental Health

Young People & Mental Health

What is mental health?

There is a significant amount of stigma attached to the term 'mental health', and associated use of mental health services. This often acts as a barrier to people talking about mental health or mental wellbeing within our society. In recent years a number of celebrities and sports stars who have personal experience of mental health problems such as Marcus Trescothick, Stephen Fry and Jo Brand, have spoken out in an attempt to battle this stigma.

Because of this stigma there is a tendency to view the phrase 'mental health' as negative and a term which exclusively refers to mental illness. However, mental health, like physical health, relates to everybody. Some people prefer to use the term 'emotional wellbeing' when talking about 'mental health'. The Department of Health describes mental health/emotional wellbeing as the following:

"A positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment" (New Horizons, 2009).

The Mental Health Foundation (1999) has identified that mentally healthy children should have the ability to:

- Develop emotionally, creatively and intellectually
- Develop and maintain good relationships with other people
- Play and learn
- Understand 'right' from 'wrong'
- Face problems, setbacks and learn from them

Mental Ill Health

During the course of their life everyone will experience some level of mental distress, such as feelings of sadness, anxiety or confusion. At times these feelings can become overwhelming and mean that it becomes very difficult to do everyday things such as go to work, sleep well, or socialise with friends. When such feelings affect a person's ability to cope with their everyday life they are often said to have a mental health problem. The term 'mental health problem' or 'mental illness' refers to a wide range of psychiatric diagnoses from depression and anxiety to schizophrenia and bi polar disorder. It is the role of psychiatrists and other specialist mental health clinicians to assess how a person is feeling and behaving and ascertain whether or not they have a mental health problem. Following this a number of things can happen to them; they may be offered some support such as counselling or medication, they also may be signposted to another service or they might be discharged.

Poor mental health is likely to have a significant impact on the life of a child or young person; including adverse affects on their educational achievement and relationships with family and friends, and an increased risk of them becoming unemployed, developing physical health problems and mental health problems during adulthood (Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health, 2007; Mental Health Foundation, 2006b; Department for Health, 2004; Seymour, 2003; Delvin & O'Brien, 1999).

"As a youth worker for Young People Cornwall, without a background in mental health work, and with the added obstacle of being from a different country originally, it has been quite a challenge for me to uncover resources for young people in the area of mental health."

Young People Cornwall

Prevalence of mental health problems amongst young people

Low level mental health problems

“In general there is a lack of consistent national data on the overall psychological well being of children and young people in England, and also on the prevalence of ‘lower-level’ mental health problems that do not meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis” (CAMHS Review, 2008)

Many children and young people will experience ‘low level’ mental health problems which are not severe enough to be classified with a psychiatric diagnosis but leave them vulnerable to developing more serious problems if the right support is not available. As highlighted by the recent CAMHS Review (2008) there is a lack of data around the mental wellbeing and prevalence of ‘low level’ mental health problems amongst children and young people in the UK. It is however evident that young people in this country have lower levels of wellbeing than their peers around the world.

A UNICEF inquiry into the wellbeing of children and young people living in the world’s richest countries looked specifically at six different aspects of wellbeing: Material well-being, subjective well-being, health and safety, education, family and peer relationships and behaviours and risks. Worryingly, out of the 21 nations involved in the study, the UK received the lowest score for child wellbeing (UNICEF, 2007).

The existing data indicating the prevalence of ‘low level’ mental health problems in the UK is patchy; however it suggests that many young people are experiencing emotional difficulties. An investigation by Plymouth’s Children and Young People’s Trust found that an estimated 15% of children and young people living in the city were experiencing mild emotional and behavioural difficulties or the early stages of a mental health disorder (Plymouth Children and Young people’s Trust, 2009). This research backs up anecdotal evidence provided by youth workers, foster carers, residential social workers and other professionals who work directly with children and young people and feel that the challenges presented by mental ill health have intensified over recent years.

Data from youth counselling services which operate within the voluntary youth service sector provide a picture of the range of low level mental health problems experienced by young people (see Appendix 1 for an outline of this data).

This data suggests that the most common problems experienced by young people are feelings of

- anxiety
- low self esteem
- depression
- relationships difficulties with families and peers.
- traumatic experiences such as bullying at school, abuse, bereavement or divorce were also common issues along with eating disorders and issues around sexuality

Diagnosed mental health problems

Over the past 35 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children and young people diagnosed with an emotional or behavioural disorder in this country (Collishaw et al., 2004). However over recent years this appears to have plateaued and there has been no significant change in the prevalence rate of mental health problems amongst this age group since the year 1999 (Maughan et al., 2008) Although this worrying trend appears to have stabilised there are still considerable numbers of children and young people suffering from poor mental health in this country. Research from the Office of National Statistics (Green et al., 2005) found that one in ten young people aged 5-16 have a diagnosis of a mental health problem, the most common of which being a conduct or emotional disorder and it is thought that as many as 1 in 12 children and young people deliberately self-harm (Mental Health Foundation, 2006).

Difficulties facing young people

As they mature into early adulthood, children and young people experience a variety of changes which make their mental health particularly vulnerable. It has recently been shown that the teenage years are a critical time for brain development (Giedd & Blumenthal, 1999). It is therefore important that young people have access to support and the opportunities to develop and learn during this time.

Research however suggests that our children and young people experience more emotional difficulties growing up in this country than any other in the western world. The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Western Europe (Population Action International, 2007) and our young people are among the highest users of alcohol in Europe (Hibell, B et al., 2007).

There is also some concern that the values and lifestyle choices within our society play a significant contribution to the difficulties faced by young people today. The Good Childhood report for the Children's Society suggests that modern culture promotes '*consumerism, aggression and unhealthy living*' (Layard & Dunn, 2009) and there is some research evidence to suggest that this is having an impact on the mental wellbeing of our children and young people. A joint report by the Mental Health Foundation and Girl Guiding UK 'A generation under stress' (2008) found that pressure to grow up before they felt ready was among the greatest influences on the mental wellbeing of girls aged 10-14, and two-fifths of the girls surveyed said they felt worse about themselves after looking at magazine pictures of models, pop stars or actresses.

It is also thought that the increasing health and safety concerns within society are limiting the kinds of activities that children and young people can get involved in. The 2008 Playday campaign 'Give us a go!' (www.playday.org.uk) highlighted that children are facing serious restrictions to their opportunities for adventurous play due to a current 'cotton wool' culture. Significantly, adventurous play has been shown to be important for social and emotional wellbeing as well as healthy brain development (Elias & Arnold, 2006; Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2004)

Risk Factors to developing mental ill health

A range of factors have been consistently associated with an increased risk of mental health problems in young people and in adulthood. Young Minds (2006) describe the 'subtle and complex interplay of many different factors that may influence whether or not a child develops a mental health problem. These generally relate to individual characteristics such as genetic influences, personality and physical health, family dynamics (such as the quality of relationships, parenting style and parental mental health) and environmental factors (such as poverty, unemployment, and level of support at school.) See Appendix 2 for a detailed outline of these factors.

Risk factors and their relative importance are subject to change over time, both in light of social and economic pressures. There is much debate over what the current influences on these risk factors may be. The pressures of the modern education system, the availability of recreational drugs and alcohol, and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, have all been cited as possible influences (Mental Health Foundation, 2007). The development of a mental health problem is often due to a combination of risk factors which have a cumulative effect; the greater the number of such risk factors experienced by the child the more likely it is that they will develop a mental health problem (Mental Health Foundation, 1999). For example, children who are carers for a parent or relative are likely to face considerable psychological and social stress; poverty, unemployment, increased familial stress, or decreased social support leaving them more vulnerable

“I was very lucky. The youth worker who worked with me was really well informed on mental health issues and was a great support.”

Young person, Young People Cornwall

“Due to the nature of the sport, club coaches have a very special relationship with young people, different to that of their parents. Years of experience have led us to identify a troubled young person and be able to give them the right support and advice.”

Malmesbury Boxing Club

to developing mental health problems themselves (Mowbray & Mowbray, 2006; Tebes et al, 2001). Today's youth face increasingly difficult decisions about their futures. These decisions come at deeply vulnerable time of transition as young people move into early adulthood.

"Fifteen per cent of young people across the country feel their life lacks direction, with this figure increasing to 42% for those out of work. One in three unemployed young people (32%) feel down or depressed all or most of the time. One in ten young people (10%) 'rarely' or 'never' feels loved, with this figure increasing to 15% for those out of work."
(Princes Trust YouGov Youth Index, 2010).

Worryingly, as young people get older, those in abusive situations are less likely to receive a child protection response from Social Services (Children Society, 2010) as the outside world is likely to perceive them as more resilient and able to cope. This leaves them highly vulnerable at a time when early intervention and support are at their most crucial.

The prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people can be seen to increase where certain socio-economic factors are present. Box 1 highlights the impact of such socioeconomic factors on the mental health of young people in the UK

BOX 1: The impact of socio-demographic factors on the mental health of young people (Green et al., 2005)

Boys are more likely to have a mental health problem than girls, and the prevalence of mental health problems among children increase as they reach adolescence:

- Aged 5-10 - 10% of boys and 5% of girls have a mental health problem,
- Aged 11 -16 -13% of boys and 10% of girls have a mental health problem

Prevalence of diagnosed mental health problems are higher amongst young people:

- In care (45%) (Meltzer et al., 2003)
- With a parent with a mental health problem (children of depressed parents have a 50% risk of developing depression themselves before the age of 20) (World Health Organisation, 2004)
- In lone parent families (15% compared to 8%)
- In reconstituted families (14% compared with 9%)
- In families with neither working parent working (20% compared with 8% where both parent works)
- In low income compared to high income families (16% compared with 5%)
- Living in 'hard pressed' as opposed to 'prosperous' areas (15% compared with 7%).
A recent survey of 1275 youth clubs identified that 44% are located in areas ranked 50% most deprived (Clubs for Young People, via personal communication, 2010)

Resilience Factors to protect against mental ill health

'A resilient child can resist adversity, cope with uncertainty and recover more successfully from traumatic events or episodes' (Newman T 2002)

Just as there are factors which increase the likelihood of a child or young person developing mental health problems, there are also factors which can protect them from poor mental health. Some children have the resilience to live through adverse circumstances without developing a significant mental health problem (Masten et al, 1990).

The young person must be able to navigate access to resources that are relevant and responsive to their needs (Ungar et al, 2008). *The key building blocks for developing resilience in children are likely to include; a sense of security, a recognition of self-worth, and having the experience of control over one's immediate environment* (Parrot et al, 2008). Likewise, support from other adults such as teachers and youth workers (Daniel & Wassell, 2005), or from holistic family care services (Dearden & Becker, 2004) can be helpful. Action for Children (formerly National Children's Home, 2007) argues that the interplay of vulnerability, protective factors and coping strategies determine children's outcomes in distressing situations, highlighting the need for a holistic, preventative approach to mental health and well being. Coping strategies to deal with adversity can take a variety of forms, for example, in adults; three coping styles were identified (Kartalova-O'Doherty and Doherty, 2008). It is possible that young people use avoidant coping strategies more often, which may be less conducive to developing resilience.

- Active behavioural, such as; seeking support from others or getting information.
- Active cognitive, such as; applying previous experience to deal with a situation.
- Avoidant, such as; denial or avoiding discussions.

Brandon Youth Club

Brandon Youth Club, Brandon, Durham

Work is undertaken on the initiative of the youth workers and at very little cost.

- Gender groups are facilitated by youth workers where young people are encouraged to share their feelings on a range of topics. When it is difficult to 'break the ice' youth workers make use of 'feelings cards' which help the young people to 'open up' and start talking.
- 'friendship flower' - individuals write down a positive comment about everyone in the group. These are passed to each other with individuals collecting a number of 'petals' for their 'flower' all composed of positive comments. They can then read out the comments on their flower to the rest of the group.
- 'body image' project involved young people obtaining clothes from charity shops in order to undertake a 'fashion shoot' at a local hotel. During the course of the project issues of sexuality, sexual health, body size & shape, 'what is normal' were discussed

"I was angry and surrounded by darkness and I hated everyone in the world... I find it hard to express myself and with boxing I can release all my anger. It occupies me and teaches me self discipline ...It's turned my life around."

Kirk, aged 16, The Times 17.11.09

Broad Plain Boys Club and
Riverside Youth Project - Bristol

The role and value of youth clubs

The role and value of youth clubs in supporting young people's mental health

Youth Clubs are located in the heart of communities across the United Kingdom in rural, urban and suburban settings. It is estimated there are over 11,000 youth clubs in both the voluntary and statutory sectors. They vary in size and capacity with committed volunteers working alongside part-time or full time youth workers. Children and young people from the age of 8 up to 18 attend youth clubs some of whom will have unmet mental health or emotional needs.

4Children (2007) found that 80% of young people say they have "nowhere to go". Youth clubs, and their universal, open access policy for all young people give young people a sense of mastery in their own development by affording them the decision to attend. Participation in clubs may promote the idea of young people being less marginalised, as they "...enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential" (Clubs for Young People, 2009).

Youth clubs work with many young people whose emotional needs do not meet the thresholds for intervention from statutory services; they do this in a range of settings and contexts such as counselling services, mental health projects, youth club settings and outreach programmes.

Youth Clubs contribute to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people through

- Developing and strengthening children and young people's resilience
- Having a role in mental health promotion
- Supporting children and young people to access youth counselling services and statutory mental health services when needed

Factors promoting resilience in young people have been outlined by Newman (2004) as illustrated in Table 1 (below), which also highlights the significant number of factors which are promoted by youth clubs (indicated with an '✓').

Table 1: The contribution of youth clubs to factors promoting resilience

Factor promoting resilience	Youth Clubs provide
Strong social support networks	✓
The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute	
A committed mentor or other person from outside the family	✓
Positive school experience	
A sense of mastery and a belief that one's own efforts can make a difference	✓
Participation in a range of extra-curricular activities	✓
The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognised	
The ability – or opportunity – to 'make a difference' by helping others or through part time work	✓
Not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations which provide opportunities to develop coping skills	✓

There is increasing emphasis being placed on the use of prevention and early intervention for mental health problems, which has been emphasized in the previous Government's New Horizons document (Department of Health, 2009). The potential benefits to both the individual and communities are enormous. The CAMHS Review (CAMHS Review, 2008) suggests the potential of generic services for helping people who may be at risk of developing mental health problems. However, it also suggests that large scale organisations working in generic settings (such as schools, colleges and youth clubs) will need support from more specialised services to ensure that they can meet the challenges.

Young people have said that specialist mental health support is not always what they need, and what they have found helpful is support from informal, community services. This represents an active behavioural coping strategy, where a young person can go and just have a friendly chat with a supportive adult, such as a youth worker who knows them and whom they can trust (Listen Up! Mental Health Foundation, 2007). Many young people who attend youth clubs will be experiencing 'low level' mental health problems. It has been shown to be easier to achieve positive change in the lives of those with moderate rather than high levels of risk (Fergusson 1996), and that naturally occurring opportunities in daily living may ultimately prove more therapeutic than ones which are specially contrived or engineered (Gilligan, 2000). It is thought that reducing just one of the problem areas in a child's life could have a significant impact on their wellbeing, providing them with the positive means to reach a 'turning point' in their development (Clausen, 1995). Youth clubs could play a key role in reducing the number of problem areas in a young person's life, for example, by enabling them to feel included socially, thus reducing the risk of vulnerable young people developing a more severe mental health problem in the future.

Bolton lads and girls club

Bolton Lads and Girls Club, Mentoring Project

In February 2010 'Ann' an 11 year old was referred into the core mentoring scheme after attending a sexual health clinic. She was matched with a mentor with whom she established a positive relationship. Ann's friend had recently committed suicide and whilst school reported no problems Ann's family was dysfunctional. Her relationship with Mum broke down and she went to live with her Aunty whose own child was 'in care'. School informed Bolton Lads & Girls Clubs they had noticed evidence of self harm. Following Ann's disclosure of sexual abuse to her mentor Child Protection procedures were instigated. Ann returned to Mum and after the 'case' was closed her mental health deteriorated to the extent of her being admitted to the child and adolescent mental health services inpatient unit. Ann's mentor has been able provide consistent support throughout this very difficult time and continues to visit Ann at the inpatient unit. The Mentor has received extra support through frequent supervision from her Co-ordinator.

Claire Stabler, Mentoring Project, Bolton Lads and Girls Club)

"We currently have 20 young people on the project who were referred by CAMHS with 10 on our waiting list 69 in total have been referred to us through CAMHS"

.... a high percentage of young people across the project are involved with CAMHS but were not referred by them and we ascertain this once they start on the Mentoring programme.

Joanne Duffy, Mentoring Project Manager, Bolton Lads & Girls Club

Youth clubs are well positioned to support young people's emotional well being by offering such a wide range of activities and facilities, thus allowing for multiple opportunities. These facilities are available to all young people regardless of their circumstances or situation. Interestingly 'structured' youth clubs have been found to be associated with more positive later life outcomes than those that are unstructured (Robson, 2007). The Blueprint Report (Clubs for Young People, 2009) highlights the potential of youth clubs in allowing each young person to guide their own future decisions and development. By choosing to attend a youth club young people are able to benefit from:

- A safe and supportive environment;
- Space to talk with peers and mentors;
- Space to build confidence and relationships in community settings;
- Opportunity to improve social and emotional skills;
- Opportunity to engage in a range of creative and challenging extra-curricular activities.

"A young person's sense of secure base is cultivated by a sense of belonging within supportive social networks, by attachment type relationships to reliable and responsible people, and by routines and structures in their lives." (Gilligan, 2000).

Bradford (2004) identifies youth clubs as a highly valued environment for young people. Research has shown that young people feel that belonging to a club contributes to their:

- Staying fit
- Making new friends
- Staying out of trouble
- Increased motivation
- Increased confidence
- Not taking drugs

Youth clubs are invaluable to young people in that they provide the opportunity to build strong and mutually supportive social networks. For refugee and newly arrived young people, youth provision functions have been found to be one of the main forms of social integration into youth peer networks and the local community (Bradford, 2004). Participation in clubs and groups from childhood to adolescence is related to attachment and self-esteem. McGee (2006) highlights that participation is significantly related to adolescent attachment to parents, friends and school/workplace, as well as self-perceived strengths.

Youth clubs are seen to play an important part in the socialization process by allowing young people to spend time with like-minded peers, exposing them to alternative points of view, and enabling them to work collaboratively and see things from other young people's perspectives. One of the most important coping strategies that young people can use is to seek support from others. Research by the National Children's Bureau (Earley et al, 2007) found that what young people found most helpful was informal support from members of the extended family, peers, neighbours and informal mentors or role models. Others found it helpful to be able to get away from their family problems by seeing people outside the family who were unaware of, or did not discuss, the difficult situation at home.

Youth workers may play a key role in determining the route taken by a young person experiencing mental health problems. Through the promotion of mental health issues and effective signposting to appropriate services at the earliest possible stage, it may be possible to protect young people from developing a more enduring mental illness in later life. For this reason it is important that youth workers are supported, trained and have the confidence to address mental health issues. Clubs for Young People (via personal communication, 2010) have completed a survey that suggested that 19% of youth workers reported feeling little or no confidence regarding these issues.

Sometimes young people are anxious about disclosing concerns about their well being. They may be feeling embarrassed and confused, and if they are experiencing mental health problem they may fear being stigmatized by those around them. The youth worker relationship with a young person can be non judgmental and respectful, a relationship built on trust through informal discussions. Young people may feel more comfortable in disclosing their concerns to someone they trust, someone they have a rapport with who understands them as an individual (Mental Health Foundation, in press). Youth clubs are in a strong position to foster trust based relationships with young people. In at least one study, young people positively rated rapport between them and youth workers (Love and Hendry, 1994).

More practically, youth clubs also present an ideal opportunity for young people to engage in physical activity. There is evidence that participation in sports and physical activity has benefits on health amongst young people (Pate, 2000). Research by the Mental Health Foundation (2005) found that physical exercise is an effective treatment for people experiencing depression and anxiety, and can prevent relapses in people who have previously had mental health problems. Previous research suggests that many adolescents feel that competitive school sport and PE are stigmatising and embarrassing (Schmalz et al, 2008). During this period, body image and self-confidence may be especially low (Hogan & Strasburger, 2008), causing young people to find it very difficult to partake in PE classes in schools. Youth clubs may help to break down some of these barriers, and can play an important role in helping young people lead a physically active lifestyle.

Youth clubs appear to have an important role in promoting active behavioural coping strategies, as they can act as a meeting place for peers to support one another and offer an antidote to avoidant strategies.

Youth workers do a lot of important work to support the mental health of children and young people in the UK, however 'mental health' is often considered a concern for specialist mental health services rather than universal services and so many workers in youth clubs may not recognise the contribution they make, or feel confident in supporting the mental wellbeing of the children and young people attending their club.

Youth clubs provide many factors identified as important for strengthening resilience and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing in children and young people, for example

- a safe and supportive environment,
- an opportunity to learn and achieve,
- an opportunity to engage in creative and challenging activities, and
- a chance to form lasting friendships.

Research evidence has shown that young people who attend youth clubs are more likely to have a positive relationship with their parents and friends, are more engaged in their education and are more aware of their strengths and skills (McGee et al., 2006). Significantly, it has been shown that involvement in out of school activities such as attending a youth club reduces the risk of depression during the teenage years (Mason et al., 2009).

Previous research has shown that 50% of adult mental health problems have their genesis before the age of 15 (Kim-Cohen et al, 2003). These figures suggest that there is an urgent need for early intervention in order to prevent young people from developing enduring mental health problems in later life.

Youth clubs can play a key role in reducing the risk of vulnerable young people developing a more severe mental health problem, which could potentially have a devastating impact on their life and also incur high financial cost.

“...and we know about the links between economic recession and the effects on mental health in the family and, increasingly, in children.

As they look to us, and to you, for support in these difficult times, we have to ensure that our services offer them what they need in the best possible way”

Tim Loughton to the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

29.06.2010

Conclusion

Conclusion

Youth clubs provide many of the resilience building factors associated with positive emotional wellbeing, such as increased social support and participation. These strengthening factors enhance young peoples' ability to cope with and survive adversities in their daily lives. Youth workers play an extremely valuable role in supporting young people's emotional well being, though many workers may not be aware that this is already inherent in their role. It is important this role is recognised, as it is often undertaken 'below the radar', and it brings added value to the work overtly undertaken in youth clubs. However, there is a potential problem in providing adequate training and information for youth workers in order to fulfil this role, and to enable them to signpost young people experiencing difficulties to the appropriate mental health services.



Methodology

Members of the Working Group and Steering Group have contributed their knowledge and expertise to the process of designing and analysing questionnaires and developing briefing papers and this Interim Report. Specialist support provided by the Mental Health Foundation has enabled the production of two papers (a) The emotional needs of young people and (b) the role of youth clubs which have been incorporated into this report.

A key piece of work completed in phase one has been the consultation with members of Clubs for Young People. The subsequent analysis of the findings has helped to clarify project outputs and enhance understanding of issues for youth clubs. The second phase of the project will focus on more practical ways for youth clubs to support the emotional wellbeing of young people.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Case studies illustrating the problems experienced by young people accessing counselling services

Young Devon South Hams and West Devon Counselling and Psychotherapy Service

This is a community based service which provides early intervention & prevention of long term mental ill health in non-stigmatising environments to young people aged 12 - 25. It enables young people living in isolated rural locations to access mental health services within an 'Integrated Services' framework.

The following table A1 indicates the fifteen most prevalent issues experienced by over 1,200 young people accessing the service between 2002 and 2008.

Table A1: The 15 most common issues experienced by young people accessing Young Devon South Hams and West Devon Counselling and Psychotherapy service between 2002-2008

Presenting Issue	%
Anxiety / Stress	60
Relationship with parents/carers	43
Low Self esteem	37
Depression	35
Split family/separation	32
Communication difficulties	28
Relationship with peers	23
Bereavement	21
Emotional abuse	20
School / employment attendance	20
Dysfunctional family	20
Isolation / loneliness	18
Victim / bullying	16
Drug / alcohol misuse	15
Difficulty in social functioning	15

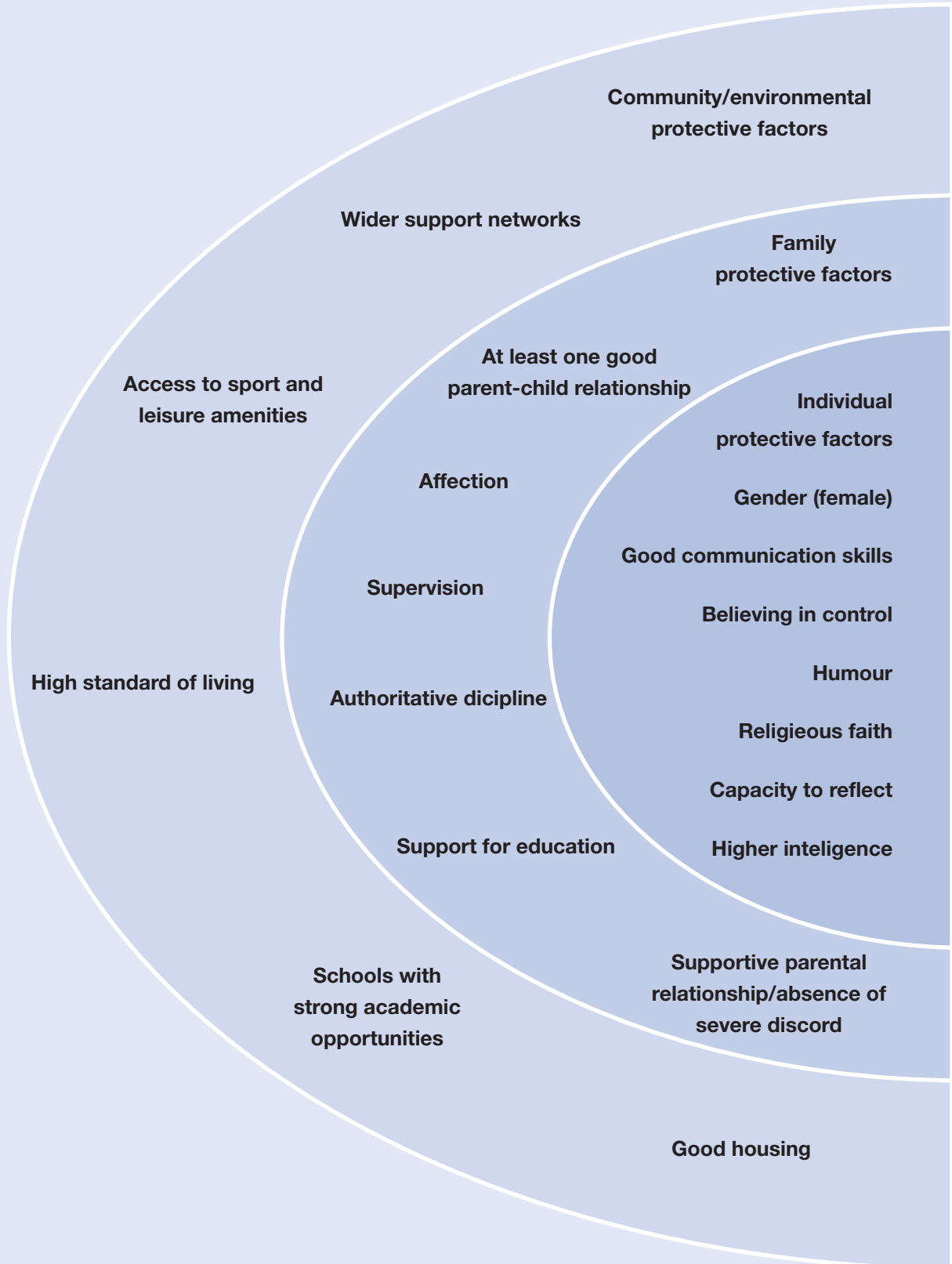
Table A2: Youth Access: Counselling Workforce Briefing: Young people's consultation findings and recommendations. (2008)

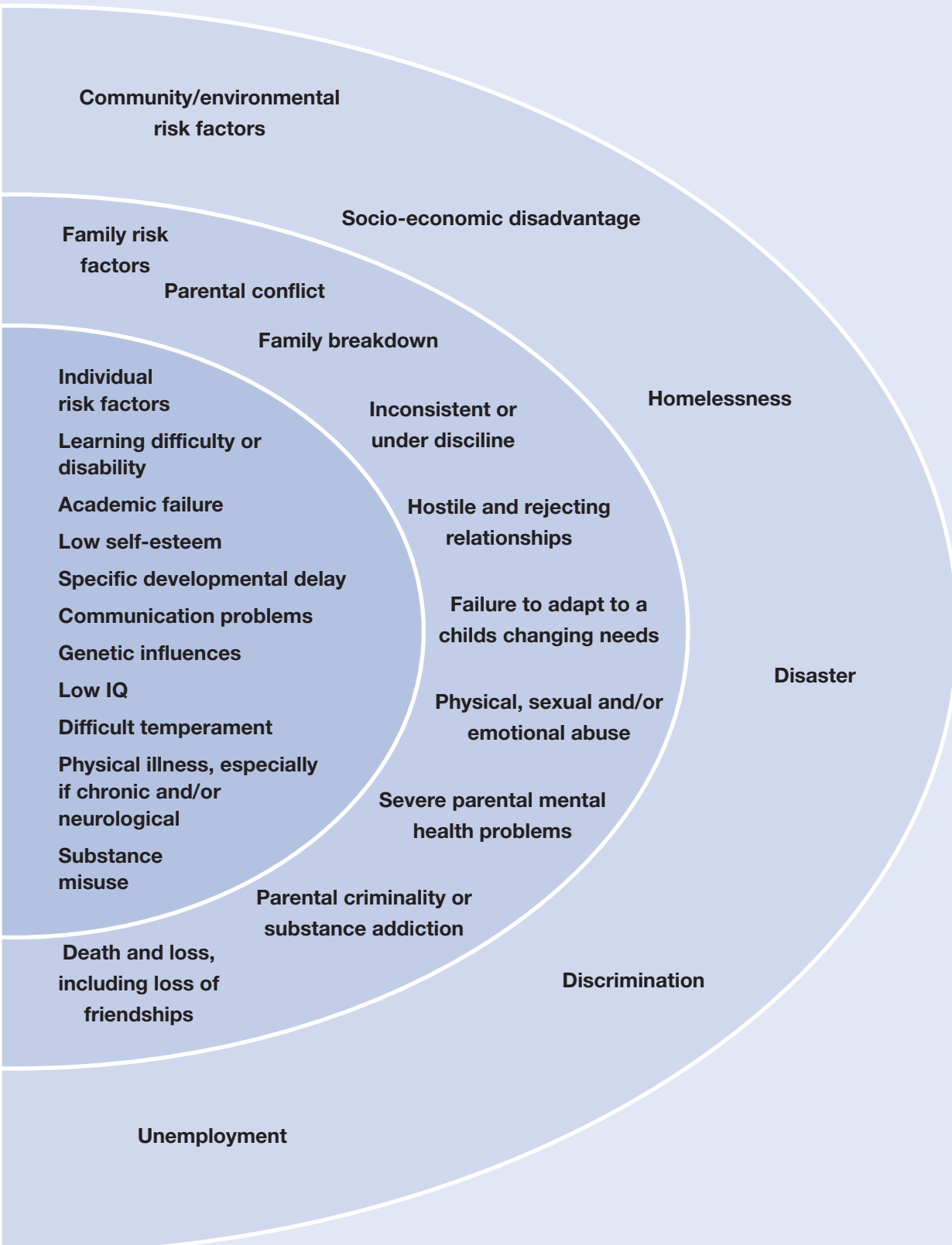
Youth Access is the largest provider of counselling services for young people in the UK. In a survey with young people the most common reasons young people said they wanted counselling were

	%
Family and relationships difficulties	88
General mental health (depression, anxiety, low self esteem)	67
Challenging behaviour	48
Self harm	34
Abuse and neglect	33
Bullying	29
Bereavement	22
Suicidal feelings	17
Eating disorders	12
Substance misuse	3

(Counselling Workforce Briefing: Young people's consultation findings and recommendations. Catherine Wilson, Youth Access, 2008)

Appendix 2: Diagram of risk and protective factors for young people's mental health (CAMHS Review, 2008)





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