



Alliance  
for Learning

BRIGHT FUTURES EDUCATIONAL TRUST

**GM Mentally Healthy Schools &  
Colleges Programme  
– Developing a Whole School Approach  
Impact Report**



**Bright Futures**

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The best *for* everyone, the best *from* everyone

NHS figures show 1 in 8 young people have a diagnosable mental health condition<sup>1</sup> and approximately 50% of people with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14,<sup>2</sup> yet early intervention can prevent problems escalating.

The national aim is for every school and college to have a designated mental health lead by 2025. The designated lead will be a trained member of staff who's responsible for the school's approach to mental health.

Recognising the need to be proactive, The Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership commissioned The Greater Manchester Mentally Healthy Schools & Colleges Programme. A collaboration between **Youth Sport Trust, The Alliance for Learning Teaching School, 42nd Street** and **Place2Be** the aim was to explore how evidence-based approaches could create a whole school approach to improving young people's mental health through developing their physical and emotional literacy and by providing the right training, support and resources for an adult and young person workforce including:

- Training to become mental health champions for both school leaders and school students (delivered by Youth Sport Trust/Place2Be and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street)
- Mental health first aid training for school staff – allowing them to spot the signs and symptoms, enabling quicker intervention, enabling “difficult conversations” and signpost to appropriate support (delivered by The Alliance for Learning)
- Work with athlete mentors to develop young mental health champions and work with targeted groups to build resilience and develop coping strategies using healthy active lifestyles to prevent stress and anxiety (sessions run by Youth Sport Trust)
- One to one support for the more vulnerable children – by appointment with a trained mental health worker (Mental Health Practitioners from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Manchester and Place2Be)
- Support for senior leaders to establish a whole school leadership strategy for mental health and wellbeing (consultations delivered by Place2Be)

The Alliance for Learning initially recruited schools for phase one of the pilot scheme in 2018 which included primary and secondary schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and colleges across 7 Greater Manchester localities. During a second phase, the scheme expanded to include a further 20 schools and two further education colleges. In July 2019 the programme expanded to include a total of 125 special schools, PRUs, primary and secondary schools and colleges across all 10 Greater Manchester localities.

In addition to co-ordinating the programme within participating schools, we trained the school leadership teams in youth mental health first aid (YMHFA), also working with the Youth Sport Trust to arrange the athlete mentor workshops for young mental health champions as part of the programme. These workshops have supported students to build confidence, manage physical and emotional wellbeing and achieve their potential in school.

One young mental health champion who reluctantly took part in the project, was able to discuss his own suicidal thoughts, opening-up about why he blamed himself for the way he felt. Through his involvement as a champion he has made many positive changes to his life and now wants to inspire others to get involved with sport to explore the benefits of exercise.

The YMHFA courses have enabled teaching staff to be confident in spotting signs of mental health issues in a young person, offer them first aid and guide them towards the support they need.

- Each school involved in the programme had an opportunity to send two teachers/support staff who are not senior leaders into the two-day MHFA training to become a certified Youth Mental Health First Aider
- Schools were also able to send two teaching assistants/ pastoral assistants on a half day MHFA course to become more mental health aware. This was designed to give an understanding of some of the more common mental health issues affecting young people including depression, anxiety, eating disorders and psychosis.
- We also set up a legacy project via one-day sessions designed to assist schools who have already accessed the YMHFA 2-day and half-day training. These aim to embed and enhance mental health first aid practice among colleagues and students, while sharing best practice from the growing network of schools involved with the project. A key goal is to share that knowledge with schools in the wider local community that have yet to access training and support offered by the programme.

### **Impact of MHFA training**

- The overall programme and training have communicated the important message that 'physical and mental health are one'. One school has improved physical first aid stations to now include mental health-related topics.
- School leaders have improved confidence and knowledge. To date, more than 230 school staff have attended the 2-day MHFA training and over 200 have completed the half-day session since the programme's inception. At one school, as a result of the training, the Safeguarding Lead recognised the signs of depression in a Year 11 student a lot earlier on and they had the confidence to make a referral.
- One Vice Principal and Pastoral Lead at a secondary school highlighted how the programme focussed the objectives of their team, resulting in them employing a fully trained counsellor. They now have pastoral briefings every week and CPD at the school is tailored to colleague wellbeing. The programme has brought colleagues closer together from a professional and social perspective helping the team to take a more solutions-based approach to challenges.
- An Assistant Vice Principal at a boys' secondary school highlighted that in addition to positive benefits for the students, staff had also been managing their own wellbeing more effectively, introducing staff yoga sessions and celebrating their achievements more widely. When their year 8 students completed a wellbeing survey, student self-esteem was highlighted as an emotional strength, along with their participation in the community.
- Mindfulness has now been embedded into some of the schools involved, as well as encouraging many to re-think the importance of Art, Music and PE within a 'social prescribing' model. For example, if a child likes music, he or she could be encouraged to join a choir and these creative sessions can be used as part of their plan to develop coping strategies.

### **Feedback from 90 respondents attending the most recent MHFA courses illustrates:**

- Before the course, participants' average rating for their "personal confidence of how best to support others with a mental health issue" was 5/10. After completing training, their average rating was **9/10**.
- Before the course, participants' average rating for their "knowledge and understanding of how best to support others with a mental health issue" was also 5/10. After training, the average rating increased to **9/10**

The Youth Sport Trust states that the health and wellbeing of a generation of young people across the UK is in decline with NHS Digital figures showing one in three young people is overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school.<sup>3</sup>

Phase one evaluation showed a number of improvements in understanding of mental health and the importance of physical exercise:

- Overall, 93% of secondary young mental health champions reported increased knowledge about health and wellbeing.
- Primary students reported increased levels of physical activity after taking part in the programme. At baseline, 38% of students stated they would be active every day. This increased to 50%. A total of 88% were able to recognise poor mental health in their peers.
- Among secondary students, at baseline, 65% believed it is important to exercise regularly. This increased to 80% following the pilot and enjoyment of exercise also increased from 59% to 77%.

The delivery model was unique in that it comprised Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners and national charities offering a complete package of support.

Schools have valued the external expertise and additional support structures they have had access to, which has given school leaders time to think, understand and take action. The nature of the project has also empowered young people as mentors and influencers and this will have a long-lasting impact on how they approach their own health and discussing the health of others in the future.

## References

<sup>1</sup>NHS Digital (22 November 2018) <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>

<sup>2</sup>Mental Health Foundation <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>

<sup>3</sup>NHS Digital <https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/news-archive/2016-news-archive/national-child-measurement-programme-shows-increased-obesity-prevalence-in-primary-schools>