

Better Choices

Interim Report

This report looks at the data for the first 6 months of year 2 (1st April – 30th September 2019)

Referrals

Seventeen new young people have been referred to the Better Choices programme during the reporting period. Of these, work has successfully completed with four of them and remains ongoing with eleven. Two young people did not choose to engage with the programme.

Support is also currently continuing with a further nine young people referred before the start of this period.

All seventeen referrals during this period have been made by schools – namely Reach Free, St Clement Danes and St Michaels plus from Chessbrook ESC and Francis Combe (where pupils live within Three Rivers).

Reasons for referral

Referrals have been made for a range of reasons where there has been concern over the young person's behaviour or decisions. These have included:

- Understanding risk
- Online safety
- Sexual health
- Smoking, drug and alcohol use
- Anger management
- Self-esteem, self-harm and family relationships
- Risk of exclusion
- Behaviour and Personal safety
- Mental health
- Confidence and social skills
- Risk of CSE

Allocation of hours

The allocation of 150 hours per year was exceeded during year one and there has been an awareness by the team of the need to control this going forward if the project is to be delivered with

the allocated funds. In this reporting period, 88 hours have been worked by the team (which is above target by 15%).

A broad aim of allocating six sessions per young person is evolving, although this remains flexible depending on the needs of each individual. Where possible, targeted 1-2-1 work has been followed up by group work in school and as schools have become more familiar with, and confident in, referring their students to Better Choices this has become more feasible. In every case, the needs of the young person are determined at the outset in consultation between them, the YC Hertfordshire worker and the school.

Applications for further funding are currently being made/ explored to allow additional hours to be allocated to this work .

Measuring the Impact

The impact of the support offered is measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. At the start of the programme, every young person completes an action plan based on YC Hertfordshire's 'My Star' – rating where they feel they are on eight given criteria (Confidence & Self-Esteem, Being Safe, Physical, Where You Live, Education & Learning, Relationships, Friends, Feelings & Behaviour). At the end of the support, the My Star is reviewed, and the young person re-evaluates how they feel. The difference in rating provides the quantitative data.

Qualitative data is provided in the form of feedback from the young person, school, parent or referrer.

Quantitative data to date indicates that all young people who have completed the programme showed a positive change in at least two areas that were monitored and 53% showed a positive change in at least half of the areas monitored.

Examples of qualitative data include feedback from young people such as:

'This programme has helped me with friendships and emotions due to the fact that I can talk instead of getting angry and be guided into new friendship groups'

'It was good and helped me understand drug misuse and healthy relationships'

'The lessons have helped me feel more safe online. And I think this has helped my self-esteem more'

'I found this extremely helpful. I am usually quite a confident person but at home my confidence and self-esteem used to drop but now I feel confident and that I belong where I live. I used to have trouble communicating with my Dad but I feel our relationship has improved. I always let my feelings affect what/how I'm doing but now that's hardly the case. The YCH Practitioner was extremely friendly and supportive and made my sessions fun. I have improved greatly, and I would recommend this to anyone in a similar situation.'

Feedback from the school echoed the self-evaluation above, with the Head of Year commenting, *'I think the sessions have gone really well with X, she seems more confident and able to talk to her father which is what we wanted from the programme. I know she enjoyed meeting with you and*

found your sessions valuable. The length of the programme was just right and I like the fact that it was tailored towards what she wanted to work on.'

The full impact of the work will clearly not be known for some time and can never be definitive. However, by engaging the young person in self-evaluation at the beginning and end of the programme it is possible to make a reasonable assessment of the programme's effectiveness.

The value of the Better Choices work has been externally recognised in June 2019 with an Excellence in Public Health award given to the project.

Conclusion

Positive results from the Better Choices programme show that the support being offered is both necessary and makes a difference to young people. Schools, in particular, are keen to refer young people for support and demand is currently outstripping the available provision. The high value placed on the work carried out by YC Hertfordshire youth workers is clearly demonstrated by the continued referrals being received into the programme.

It is very positive that additional funding has been identified and is likely to be made available within the second half of this project.

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