Making Sense of Mental Health - Lewisham

Children and Young People's Mental Health Matters in the London Borough of Lewisham

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Introduction

What is Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham?

Healthwatch Bromley is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations that were established throughout England in 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The dual role of local Healthwatch is to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

The remit of Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham as an independent health and social care watchdog is to be the voice of local people and ensure that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of patients, social care users and carers.

Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham (HWB&L) gives children, young people and adults in Bromley a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are purchased, provided and reviewed within the borough.

Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham's core functions are:

- Gathering the views and experiences of service users, carers, and the wider community,
- Making people's views known,
- Involving locals in the commissioning process for health and social care services, and process for their continual scrutiny,
- Referring providers of concern to Healthwatch England, or the CQC, to investigate,
- Providing information about which services are available to access and signposting,
- Collecting views and experiences and communicating them to Healthwatch England,
- Working with the Health and Wellbeing board in Lewisham on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy (which will influence the commissioning process).

Strategic Drivers

Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham's role is to support the voices and views of the local community and to ensure their opinions are taken into account when services are commissioned.

Healthwatch Bromley & Lewisham (HWBL) went out into the community and spoke to people of all ages and backgrounds to ask them what they believed should be the priorities for Children and Young people for HWBL to investigate in 2015-16. It was evident from feedback received that young people's mental health awareness and understanding was first and foremost in many people's minds.

Mental health has recently been in the spotlight in the media and has had several national campaigns. In the last few years, charities such as Time to Change have led campaigns like Time to Talk, aimed to get the nation talking about mental health. Much of the focus has been on reducing the stigma that seems to be present around mental health and emotional wellbeing.

HWBL were also keen to bring the term 'mental wellbeing' to the forefront and to make young people aware that the words "mental health" should not be negative and that everyone has mental health.

It has been reported that 850,000 children in the UK aged 5-16 have mental health problems, with the issues that surround it appearing to be on the rise. One example is that there has been a big increase in the number of young people being admitted to hospital because of self-harm. Over the last ten years this figure has increased by 68%.[1] In addition, the number of young people aged 15-16 with depression nearly doubled between the 1980s and the 2000s.[2]

In Lewisham, children and young people (0-19 years) make up 25 per cent of the population. Compared to England as a whole, Lewisham has a higher prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people and an expanding young population. Information from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that the prevalence of mental health problems in those aged 5-15 years is about 15% in Lewisham, 50% higher than nationally.[3]

In light of this, HWBL set out to speak to as many young people in the borough as possible in a bid to identify the gaps in mental health knowledge and raise awareness. This engagement was undertaken to gain a wider understanding and appreciation of the young people of Lewisham's attitude toward mental health and in the hope that it would raise awareness around the services that are available.

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[1] *YoungMinds (2011) 100,000 children and young people could be hospitalised due to self-harm by 2020 warns YoungMinds. London: YoungMinds.*

[2] *Nuffield Foundation (2013) Social trends and mental health: introducing the main findings. London: Nuffield Foundation.*

[3] *Meltzer (2003) Model-based small area estimation series No. 1. Childhood Mental Disorder in England: Ward Estimates. Office for National Statistics.*
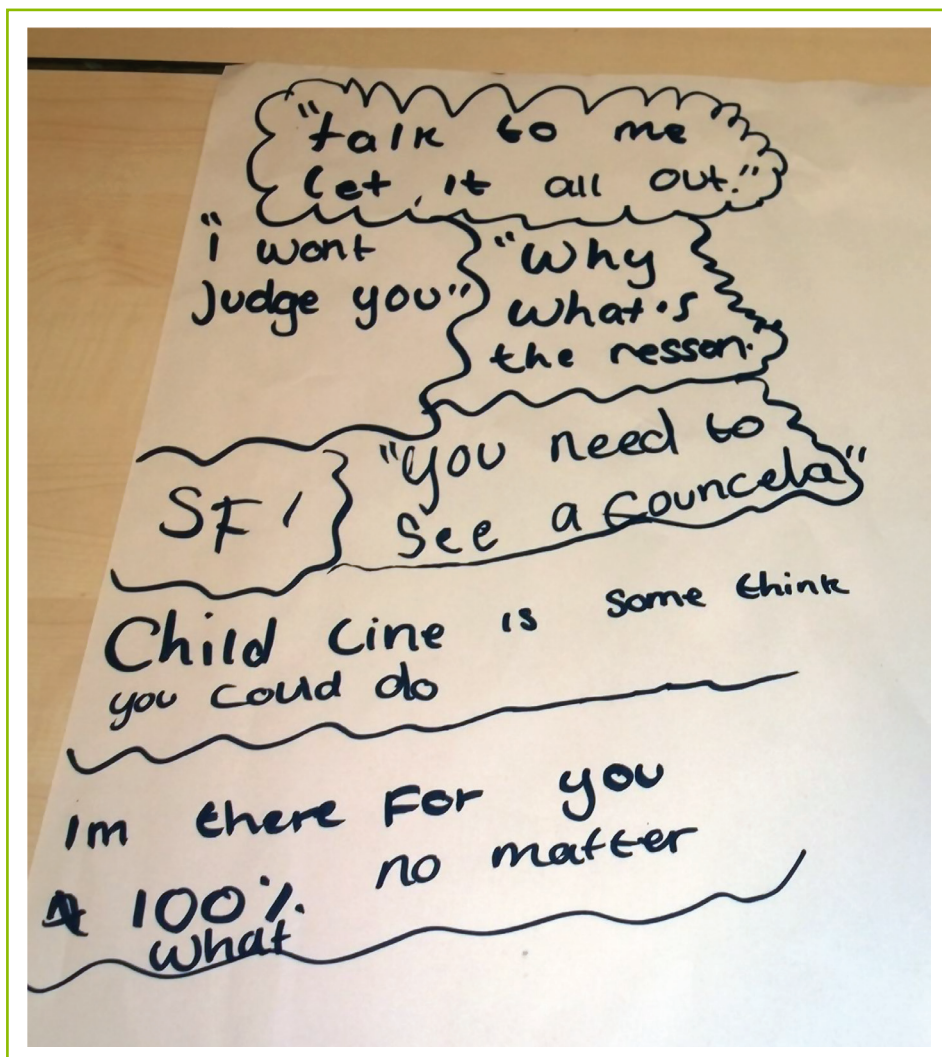
To do this we focused on:

- Raising awareness around mental health and wellbeing. Understanding what the phrase "mental health" actually means to young people.
- Promoting the "5 ways to wellbeing" framework
- Identifying the percentage of young people who feel that they have experienced poor mental health and in which areas.
- Getting feedback on services in the borough.

This report presents the findings that emerged through our engagement. The recommendations that are provided, were led by the young people themselves and are included to support decision making and commissioning of services for them.

This report will be shared with the Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Board, the schools and organisations that participated, the Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), NHS England and Healthwatch England, The London Borough of Lewisham's Children and Young People Senior Commissioning Manager and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Methodology

This report documents the findings of the research, which took place from October 2015 to January 2016. Every secondary school in Lewisham was invited to take part in the study which comprised of a drama style workshop. During the four months allocated to this project, five workshops were held across two schools (Conisborough College and Sedgehill) and one charity organisation (Lewisham Young Carers.) Alongside this some outreach work which involved talking to young people was carried out, including one child who is home schooled. This report aims to identify areas of success in the current system and suggest areas where services could improve. It also aims to recognise what young people understand about mental health.

Each workshop began with an informal chat about mental health. Questions such as "What comes into your head when you hear the words 'mental health'?" were posed and the young people were encouraged to share their thoughts and views. Responses ranged from expressions such as "mad" "disabled" and "bipolar". Most words were used in a negative manner.

When asked the question "Who has mental health?" roughly half of all the young people correctly answered "everybody." The remaining either said that they didn't know or used responses similar to the first question including "mad people." Some of the children appeared surprised when it was stated that everyone has mental health. However they gained a better understanding when we explored the matter more deeply with over 95% of the students that took part indicating that they had a better understanding about mental health after the workshop.

It was explained that just like everybody has physical health, they also all have mental health. It was discussed that people can experience poor mental health just the same as people can experience poor physical health conditions. To give a better understanding, comparisons were made with physical health illnesses, such as the flu. The facilitator explained that anybody can catch the flu and that it didn't matter what sex, race, etc. you are. This was then compared with mental health conditions and that the same rules apply – it can happen to anybody.

The discussion then moved on to the Five Ways to Wellbeing. The young people were asked, whether we are able to take steps to try and keep our mental health well. There was roughly a 50/50 split in the responses of yes and no. This led on to a discussion about the Five Ways; Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give. Throughout this discussion, the young people were encouraged to talk about what these things might entail.

The participants were then asked to form small groups and devise a short performance about something mental health related. Example of themes chosen by young people for these performances were suicide, depression, peer pressure and bullying. After each performance, the characters and their situations were discussed with the students coming up with different ways that the characters could be helped or supported.

Finally the participants filled out an anonymous questionnaire which comprised of four main questions and several sub questions.[4] Additional questions were included in order to gauge the demographics of the students. The findings of this are presented towards the end of the report as an appendix to the main body of data.

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[4]   *Appendix 1*

Findings

70 responses were gathered during the course of the workshops and outreach work.

The data collected suggests mixed feelings regarding if the young people surveyed believe they have suffered with poor mental health. A high volume stated that they have suffered with stress at some point in their lives. It was also very evident that prior to the workshop taking place that many of the young people who took part were unaware of what mental health means, with over half stating they would not associate with someone who suffers with poor mental health and that such people were "crazy" or "nutters". According to feedback given, 95% of the children that took part in the workshops were also unaware that they could help keep their mental health well and none of them had heard of the Five Ways to Wellbeing.

Although only a small number of the young people involved in the workshops have used counselling services, either formal or informal, the data collected also suggests that the young service user's views of counselling services within the London Borough of Lewisham's are mixed. Talking to charity organizations is particularly well received.
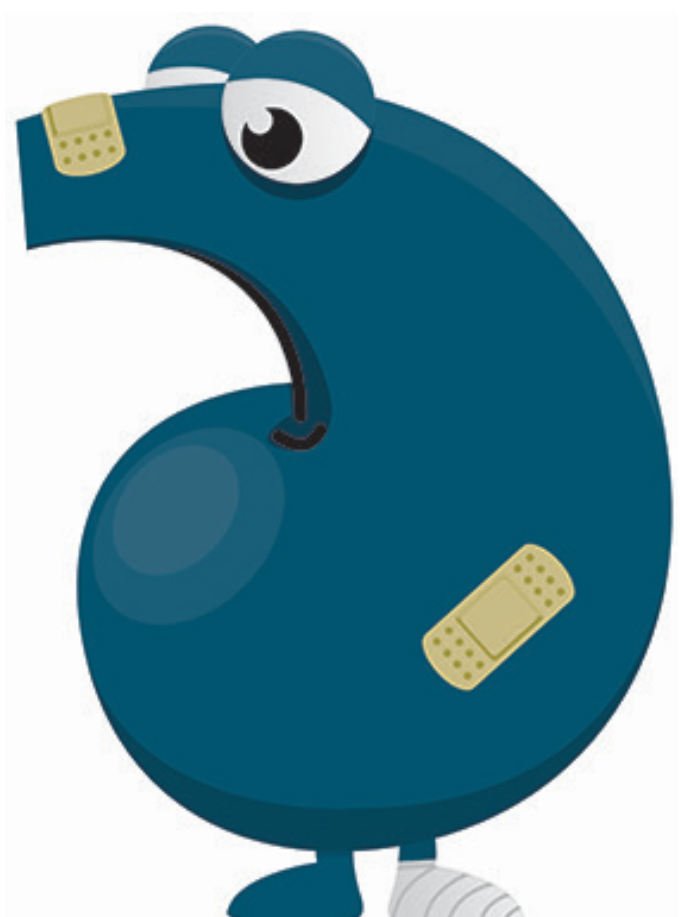
Demographics

Of those who took part in the study, 50% were 11 years of age and 34% were aged 12. The remaining 16% were aged 13-17.

Of those surveyed, 57% of respondents were male and 43% female. 34% of respondents identified as being White British, 28% Black Caribbean, 17% Black African, 8% White Other, 7% Mixed Race, 4% other and 1% Irish.

Age of Young people

■ Age 11   ■ Age 12   ■ Age 13   ■ Age 14   ■ Age 15   ■ Age 16   ■ Age 17

Overview

Do You Believe That You Have Ever Suffered With Poor Mental Health?
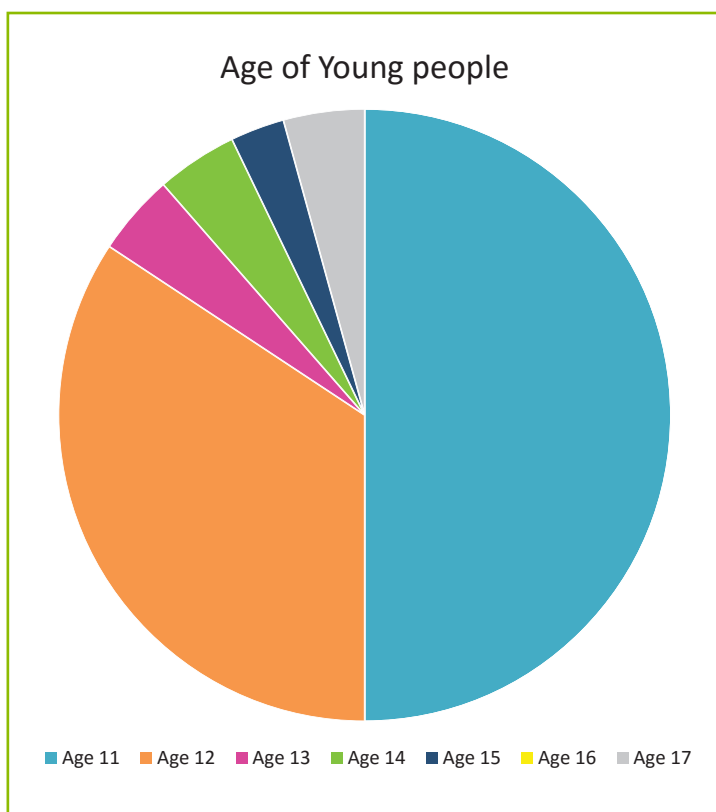

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know
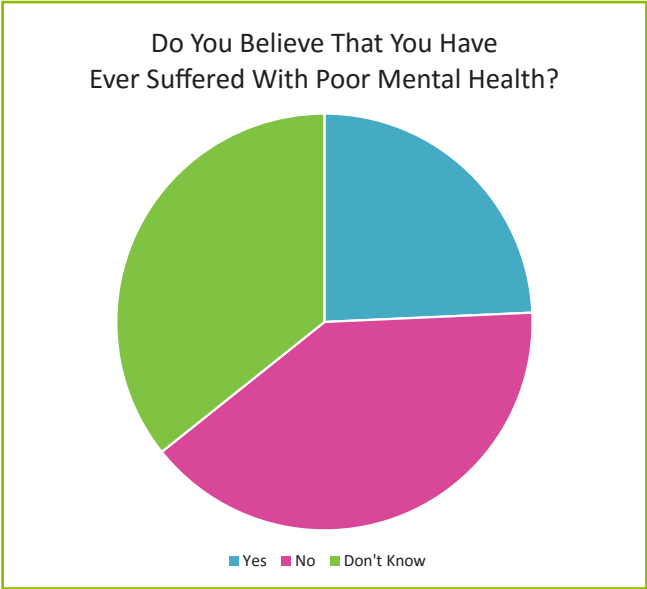
The survey asked if the young person believe they have ever suffered with poor mental health. 24% said they did, with 40% stating they did not and 36% being unsure.

However, many of the young people who didn't believe that they had ever suffered with poor mental health, did admit to experiencing issues such as stress, "depression" and school pressure.

From the below chart, we can see that 45 out of the 70 students surveyed admit to dealing with stress at some point in their lives with 28 believing that they have suffered with "depression". Furthermore, 32 young people feel that they are not being listened to by professionals, teachers and parents. Nearly 19% of those surveyed say they have experienced pressure at school. With 22 young people stating they have issues with sleep disturbance and another 22 suffering with lack of interest, this could be an indicator of other underlying mental health conditions.
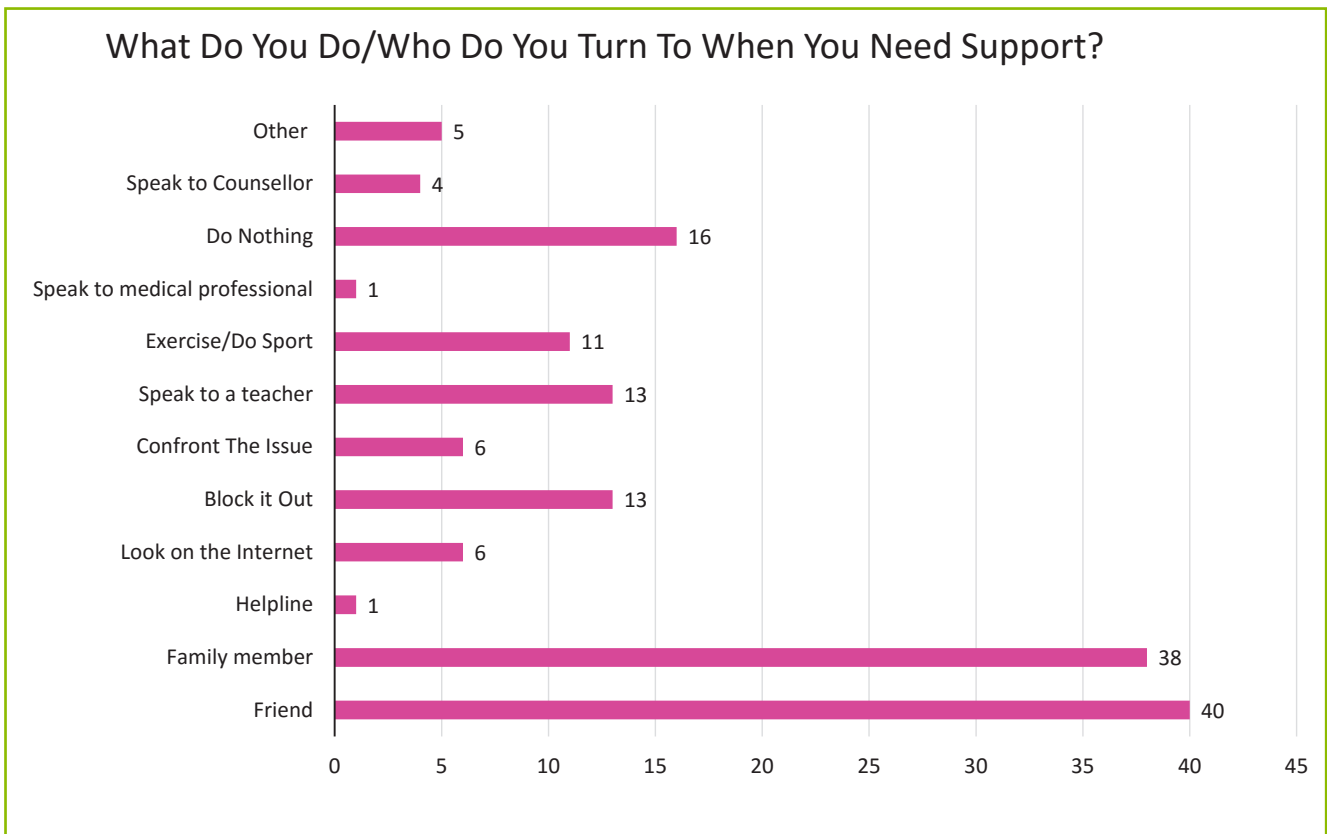
The three "other" options were stated as oversleeping, bullying and stuttering.

## Do you Feel That You Have Experienced Any Of The Following:
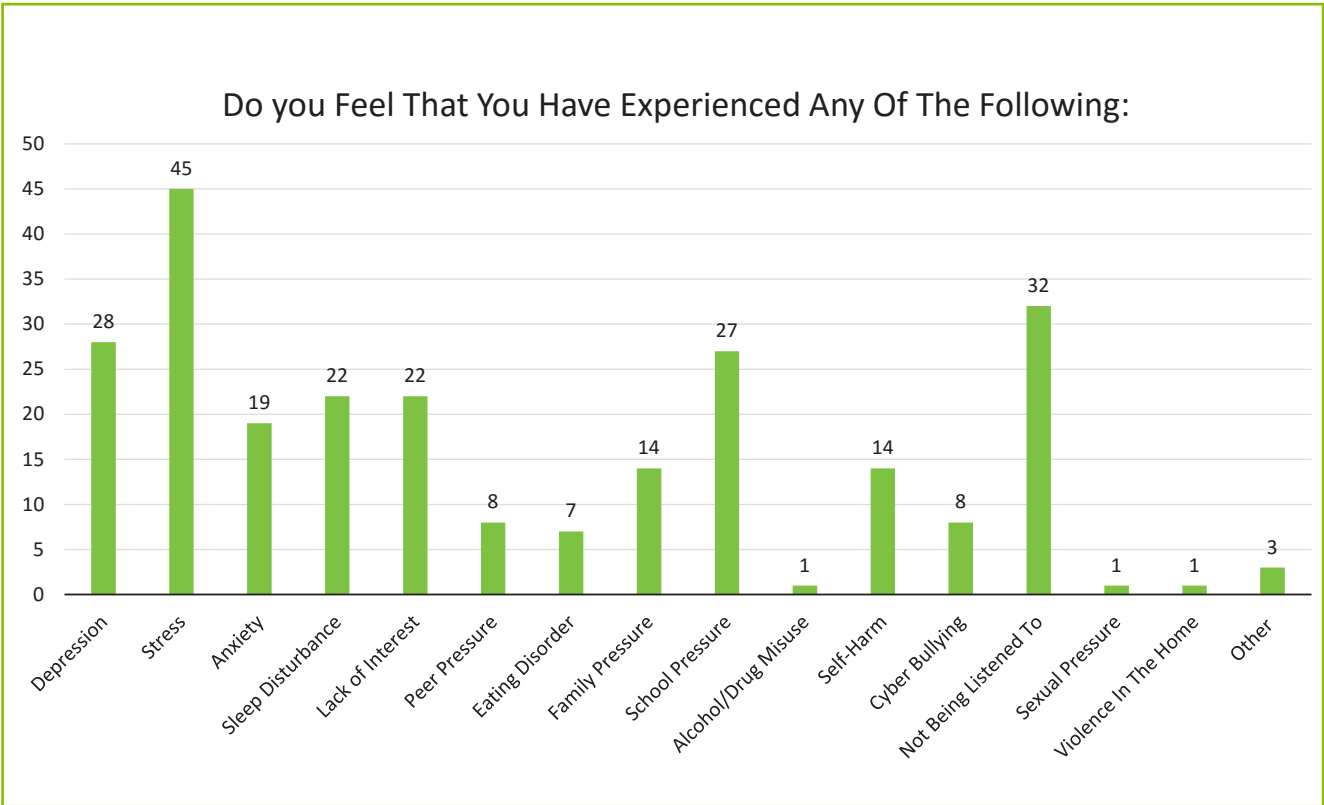
Support

The survey asked who young people turn to or what do they do when they require support. The large majority of answers suggested that they would speak to a friend or a family member. Only one child acknowledged that they would contact a counsellor and one would use a helpline. 23% stated that they would "do nothing" if faced with any of the above experiences.

What Do You Do/Who Do You Turn To When You Need Support?

Category	Value
Other	5
Speak to Counsellor	4
Do Nothing	16
Speak to medical professional	1
Exercise/Do Sport	11
Speak to a teacher	13
Confront The Issue	6
Block it Out	13
Look on the Internet	6
Helpline	1
Family member	38
Friend	40

The "Other" option produced answers such as drawing, playing piano, listening to music and playing on the PlayStation.

When asked if the young person had ever used any counselling services, including teachers, helplines etc. 64% of the young people answered no, 21% were unsure if they had accessed such services and 14% said that they had. The participants that indicated they had used a source of counselling were then asked to name and grade the support they received on a scale of Excellent to Very Poor. The Results were as follows:

Services as Graded
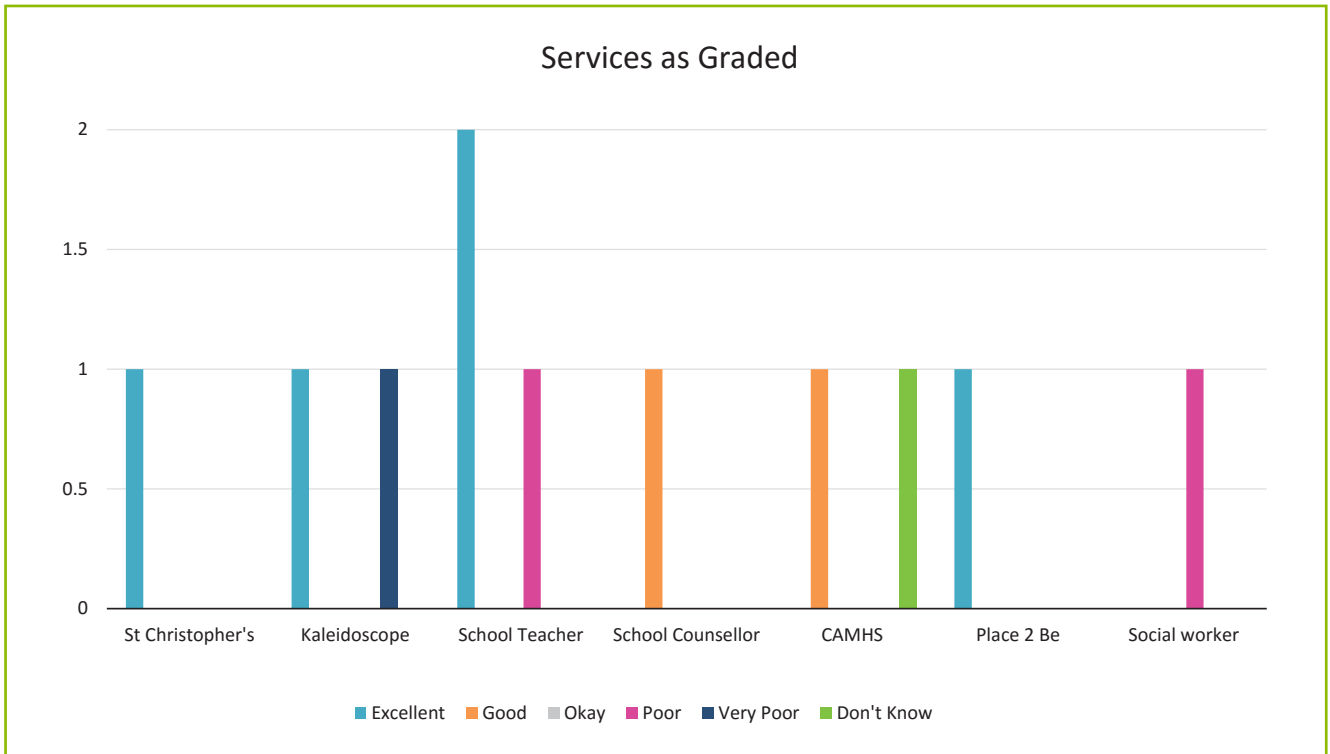
Our analysis shows that charitable organisations such as Place2Be and St. Christopher's both scored as "excellent" One child described Place2Be as giving them "hope" and another said that St Christopher's counselling service helped them with their worries.

Kaleidoscope came out with two very mixed reviews with one young person rating them as "excellent" and describing them as "helpful". Whereas the second reviewer rated them as "very poor" and described them as "annoying" him.

One young person said that when they spoke to a teacher/counsellor at school, that they felt that they "wasn't listened to", whereas another young person said that they speak to a teacher/counsellor regularly and quoted that the teacher "helps me through life". It was voiced by more than one student that school counsellors/teachers should be more readily available for them to see when the need arises.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham's engagement with these young people showed that the large majority of those that took part in the workshops were initially unaware of what mental health means and there was a lot of stigma surrounding mental health illness. The young people were asked after the session to write or speak about what they had learned. It was clear that, through the workshop they went away with a better understanding of what to do and where they might seek support if the need arises in the future. Young people said this themselves.

"I found the workshop helpful and learnt things I found essential to understand."

"I think people should be aware of others and how they might feel. I think the workshop helped with that and gave us a better understanding of what mental health is."

"I liked the workshop because it made us aware what other people might be going through."

"Good. I learnt different ways of mental health that I never knew before which was surprising."

"I think the workshop was very helpful for me understanding more about mental health."

"I enjoyed this workshop and it has made me feel like I'm more aware of the mental health issues and will be more aware to look out for it."

"Very good, now I understand the depressing side of the world wider and I feel that I can now look out for someone if they need help."

"I was able to understand more about mental health and I think it helped me a lot."

"I think that it has helped me understand what mental health really is."

"I learnt a lot. I will use this help in the future"

"It was informative and told us what we could do if we had disorientating mental health, as well as giving in a practical way possible situations."

"Today was important to me because it happens to people and we need to know about this stuff."

"More workshops like this are needed for awareness and support."

On a large scale it appears that children need to be given information and an insight into mental health at a younger age than it appears that they are currently receiving it – especially as half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 . [5] This could help to combat the stigma surrounding it as if the young people were better educated about this subject from a younger age, they would have a better understanding about it. Also, a number of children made the suggestion that they would like councillors more readily available in their schools.

It is interesting to notice that some students made comments about how difficult it is to speak to a stranger about their problems, whilst others said that it was hard to speak to teachers/counsellors that that they do know. It is evident that the young people need to be given a choice as to what kind of support they can engage with as they all have different preferences.

Finally, some children fed back that when they feel that are experiencing poor mental health, they take part in recreational activities – this could be another form of support/therapy.

Recommendations from the young people:

- Children are educated at primary school age around what mental health is in order to stop stigma occurring.
- All young people should be taught the Five Ways of Wellbeing thus learning how to retain their good mental health and emotional resilience.
- Young people should have a choice on who they get support from – their preference for someone they know or do not know should be respected.
- School counsellors should be more readily available in schools.
- Young people should be aware of what services are available for them, both locally and nationally, so that they have a choice on which to use.
- The importance of youth clubs is recognised as many young people use recreational activities as support.

[5] *National Comorbidity Survey Replication, NIMH, 2005 (http://1.usa.gov/1hzshe2)*

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Bromley and Lewisham would like to thank the staff and students at Sedgehill School, Conisborough College, Lewisham Young Carers and all the young people that took part in the workshops and surveys. We would also like to thank our volunteers that helped us with this project.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Please fill out this survey by circling the answers where appropriate. This survey is anonymous.

Do you believe that you have ever suffered with poor mental health?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Do you feel that you have experienced any of the following?

Depression

Stress

Anxiety

Sleep Disturbance

Lack of Interest

Peer Pressure

Eating Disorders

Family Pressure

School Pressure

Alcohol/Drug Misuse

Self-Harm

Cyber Bullying

Not Being Listened To

Sexual Pressure

Violence In The Home

Other (Please state)

When or if you feel that you need support with any of the above, where might you turn to and/or what may you do?

Friend

Family Member

Helpline

Look on the internet

Block It Out

Confront The Issue

Speak To A Teacher

Exercise/Do Sport

Medical Professional

Do Nothing

Counsellor

Other (Please state)

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Have you ever used any counselling services? This can include talking to a health professional, a school counsellor, online and/or telephone counselling.

Yes (please state which service) ☐

No ☐

Not Sure ☐

If applicable, how would you rate that service?

Excellent ☐

Good ☐

Okay ☐

Poor ☐

Very Poor ☐

Don't Know ☐

Why did you choose that rating?

Do you have any comments that you would like to make about this workshop?

I would describe my ethnic origin as:

WHITE

White British ☐   Irish ☐

White other ☐

BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH

Black Caribbean ☐   Black African ☐

MIXED

White and Black Caribbean ☐

White and Black African ☐

White and Asian ☐

ASIAN

Indian ☐   Pakistani ☐

Bangladeshi ☐   Chinese ☐

OTHER ☐   (Please state) ☐

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes ☐   No ☐

AGE:

GENDER:

Female ☐   Male ☐

Many Thanks for completing this survey! If you would like to be contacted to talk further about anything regarding this questionnaire, please state your name, mobile number and/or e-mail address below:

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