

WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Review of
Interventions
for Young
People's
Mental Health
and Wellbeing



Introduction

Plan International is a founding partner of the AstraZeneca Young Health Programme (YHP). Since 2010, our global work has had a unique focus on young people and the prevention of the most common non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancers, heart disease, respiratory disease, diabetes and mental health conditions.

Plan International and AstraZeneca work with young people in Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Thailand, Vietnam and the UK to deliver the Young Health Programme, taking a holistic approach to NCD prevention by targeting risk factors alongside promoting the importance of good mental health and emotional wellbeing to improve young people's long-term health. Incorporating emotional wellbeing into the global programme – through discussing topics such as self-esteem, confidence, depression, stress and anxiety, and building skills, awareness and resilience in these areas – contributes to healthier life choices of young people.

In the UK, the YHP has a unique focus on empowering young people to manage their own mental health and emotional wellbeing to reduce the risk factors that can lead to NCDs in later life. The programme supports young people to develop coping mechanisms to improve their mental health and emotional wellbeing during adolescence, better equipping them to become healthier adults – mentally and physically.

Our recent report on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People in the UK with a Gender Lens highlighted:

The number of children and young people in the UK experiencing issues with mental and emotional wellbeing has increased. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated rising levels of poor mental wellbeing among children and young people in the UK. The report indicates a real and pressing need to support the growing number of adolescents in the UK who are experiencing poor mental health.

Sources point to the prevalence of identifiable risk factors to developing mental health issues. While a large amount of research exists into these risk factors, there are significant insight gaps. These include the lived experience of mental health issues in different children and young people, and how key factors such as gender, gender identity and ethnicity affect young people's understanding of mental wellbeing.

The number of children and young people in the UK who are experiencing issues with mental and emotional wellbeing already exceeds the capacity of the available clinical support. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the gap between need and provision – a shortfall which was steadily growing before the pandemic. Young people are acutely aware of the inadequacy of mental health support in the UK.

Existing evidence, and children and young people, have endorsed the need for interventions that support factors which protect against poor mental health and promote positive mental and emotional wellbeing. A preventative approach led by young people would help to build long term resilience in children and young people who may otherwise experience escalating wellbeing and mental health issues and not be able to access appropriate support.

This report details the review and analysis of current interventions designed to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. The review includes best practice principles, opportunities and recommendations for interventions designed to support young peoples' mental health and wellbeing. The methodology is comprised of:

1. **A literature review** including impact research on mental health interventions for children and young people.
2. **7 depth interviews** with representatives from a variety of organisations delivering mental health interventions to build on the literature review findings.

The desk research and literature review that informed this analysis identified a plethora of interventions to support wellbeing in children and young people in the UK. Interventions have been categorised by target audience focus, activity focus, delivery method focus and charities delivering interventions to support mental wellbeing in young people. However, many of the projects do cut across a number of the focuses.

Target Audience Focused	Activity Focused	Delivery Method Focused	Charity Organisations
<p>Young women and girls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls out Loud • EmpowHER <p>Young men and boys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up My Street <p>Disadvantaged Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tulloch Futures <p>Ethnic minority communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing Voices • Black Thrive <p>LGBTQ+ communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kite Trust 	<p>Sport-based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • StreetGames (community delivery intervention) • Youth Sport Trust <p>Art-based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to Listen (school delivery) • Theatre Troupe (community delivery intervention) <p>Outdoor-based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avon Tyrell • The Wave • Down to Earth 	<p>Digital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slepion App • MoodHwb • Stressbusters • The Brave Programme • BFB Labs <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headstart • Army Cadets <p>School Based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WE Schools • Place2be <p>One to One</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Social Prescribing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Minds • UK Youth • A Million and Me – BBC Children in Need • Barnardos

This report outlines learnings from each category providing a summary of the interventions and of pertinent impact results where they exist.

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Key findings

- 1** Many interventions seek to engage and support children and young people's mental wellbeing in the UK. Effectiveness and impact are variable.
- 2** Preventative measures are important to stop risk factors to poor mental health escalating into mental disorders. Early, preventative intervention is an effective way to address a very real and growing need among children and young people.
- 3** Focusing on interpersonal and emotional skills is the most successful way to support positive mental health in children and young people.
- 4** There are a large number of interventions in a school environment. **Community-based delivery can reach children and young people who may not have support networks at school or at home.** Harnessing the whole community creates a positive experience for children and young people; programmes that seek to engage multiple stakeholders as well as participants achieve greater engagement and impact.
- 5** Involving a diverse range of children and young people from the start will benefit the individuals involved and maximise the resonance, value and effectiveness of the intervention. Children and young people should be given a central role to ensure they feel ownership of the intervention.
- 6** Engaging children and young people to become role models and peer mentors will increase traction and provide examples of relatable success stories.
- 7** Understanding the context of children and young people's lives, in all their diversities, and the pressures they already face will make interventions more compelling – they should be fun and offer energising, uplifting experiences.
- 8** Interventions that focus on the positive aspects of mental wellbeing will help to dispel stigma around mental health.

1. Interventions focused on specific target audiences

Everyone experiences mental health issues and challenges differently. Everyone has intersecting identities; an individual's identity consists of multiple intersecting factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnicity, sexual expression, disability, socio-economic status, which shapes an individual's experiences and needs. Therefore, different groups of individuals may need a tailored approach to the type of intervention that would reach, engage and support them.

1.1 Gender focus

1. **UK Youth EmpowHER¹** aims to improve the health of young women and girls by empowering them to speak up, be heard and contribute to their communities. The intervention is supported by the British Red Cross and the Young Women's Trust.

- The programme comprises of face-to-face activity sessions delivered through a network of youth organisations.
- It is for young women and girls aged between 10 and 20 years old who are referred by schools, youth centres or health professionals.
- The young women and girls shape the content of what they want to discuss.

Impact:

- **683 young women and girls engaged with the intervention between 2019 and 2020.**
- **The intervention successfully engaged young women and girls at risk of developing poor mental health:** more than half came from deprived areas and three out of four had at least one personal barrier.
- Two thirds felt their social action efforts had benefitted their community.

Success factors:

- Three main factors were identified as contributing to the success of the programme:
 - Having a longitudinal programme.
 - Enabling the young women and girls to lead the discussion and decide how they want to contribute to the community.
 - Having smaller groups of young women and girls with common issues and of a similar age / background.

¹ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EmpowHER-Cohort-Four-Report-July-2021.pdf>

2. **Girls Out Loud**² delivers programmes that empower girls to channel their potential and make better life choices. It focuses on early intervention delivered in schools in the Greater Manchester area.

Interventions include:

- Big sister: pairing girls with adult women role model mentors for twelve months with regular meet ups and workshops.
- Role model relay: speed mentoring within schools.
- Stardom: one-to-one and group sessions in schools targeting at risk disengaged girls.
- Super 7: group workshops covering a variety of topics from mindfulness to better decision making.

Impact:

- **Confidence** improvements for 100% of participants.
- **Academic engagement:** 50% improvement in school attendance and 90% of girls on target to achieve three levels of attainment improvement.
- **Life choices:** no anti-social behaviour or pregnancies among attendees.

Success factors:

The programme delivered mentoring, role models and a positive, safe place for girls to explore their views and ambitions. This network of support was critical at a time when vulnerable girls were suffering the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns.

3. **Up My Street**³ is a series of three interventions in Birmingham, sponsored by Mind, aimed specifically at strengthening the resilience of young African Caribbean men. The interventions were created in response to growing evidence that men from African Caribbean communities experience higher levels of severe mental illness than their peers from other communities. However, at the age of 11, levels of poor mental health in black boys are no different to that of boys from other backgrounds.

Early interventions to prevent the escalation of mental health issues included:

- **Resilience building workshops** with 155 young people.
- **Community activities** to address young men's resilience including 278 community members.
- **12 young men became peer champions** and were involved in research, support work and mentoring.

Success factors:

Assessment of the interventions identified the key positive aspects that boosted participants' mental wellbeing included:

- **Providing a safe place** that encouraged positive relationships with peers.
- **Positive role models** who had overcome diversity – and the opportunity for participants to become such mentors.
- **Experiences which were creative, engaging and created a sense of social commitment** while achieving specific goals.

² <https://girlsoutloud.org.uk>

³ <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4300/ums-report.pdf>

4. **The Kite Trust, a charity for LGBTQ+ young people in the East of England, provides residential trips for LGBTQ+ young people, as part of a programme of youth work activities.** The vast majority of The Kite Trust's service users identify as trans, non-binary or gender questioning (hereafter 'trans+'), meaning that nearly all who attend residential are trans+. Young people are supported extensively before and during the trip, with tailored group and 1:1 sessions to address any potential challenges and ensure they are appropriately prepared and supported. Residential are 'pay what you can afford' with no minimum price, and aim to be accessible to all. At a recent residential, 60% of young people reported that they were disabled, and 90% reported that they were neurodivergent.

The Kite Trust residential provide unique opportunities for trans+ young people to experience a new environment, engage with nature, make new social connections, try new activities, and develop new skills. Residential are supported by a majority trans+ team of trained staff and volunteers, and attention is paid to trans+ young people's specific needs and experiences. The trips provide space for trans+ young people to think about their gender expression and identities in a safe environment. Young people can express themselves however they wish, and many find that they feel safe to try a different name or pronoun, or wear gender-affirming clothes, for the first time. At a recent residential, a young person expressed their curiosity in exploring their feminine side and had their nails painted, which they would not have been comfortable to do at home, and also chose to try a different name. Following the trip, the young person continued to think about their gender identity and expression, with ongoing support at regular youth groups. At an event later in the year hosted by The Kite Trust, the young person felt confident enough to wear a dress, the first time they had felt comfortable to express themselves in this way.

Success factors and impact

The residential are a vital and rare space for trans+ young people, who frequently experience discrimination, stigma and poor mental health, to simply relax and have fun. They provide a unique opportunity for trans+ young people to spend time in a safe and supportive environment, have a break from difficulties at school or elsewhere in their lives, and forge social connections that last long beyond the residential. For many trans+ young people, residential support them to feel comfortable to engage with regular services from The Kite Trust, meaning they continue to receive appropriate and inclusive support.

Trans+ young people attending The Kite Trust residential describe them as 'life-changing' and 'life-affirming', spaces they feel safe and valued. One young person attending a recent residential reported that ***"I made friends at a time when I had none. I felt I could be my true self and I had a brilliant time"***. Another explained that ***"The Kite Trust camps have delivered me a supportive environment where I can be entirely myself and socialise with people like me without having to worry about the normal stresses of my everyday life. They've been invaluable in my pursuit of making friends and helping me build my social skills, and I'm forever grateful for the resources and experiences they have provided for me."***

Parents and carers also report positive impacts on their children, with the parent of one young person explaining:

"Our child was experiencing poor mental health and was feeling very isolated. The Kite Trust residential was a safe place for them. They were supported to engage in activities, make friends and feel part of a community. They came back from the residential with a new found confidence. It truly was an invaluable experience for them and it gave our child that sense of belonging that they desperately needed."

1.2 Disadvantaged communities and ethnic minority communities' focus

Four interventions that targeted disadvantaged communities and ethnic minorities were explored:

1. Surviving to Thriving⁴

A project supporting refugees and asylum seekers aged 11 to 25 across three UK areas. It involved offering life skills, advice, mental health support, and leadership opportunities through group sessions.

2. Tulloch Futures⁵

A project working with disadvantaged young people in West Dunbartonshire. The interventions included group work, placement and training opportunities, health and effective living workshops, and community projects.

3. Sharing Voices⁶

A project supporting diverse minority ethnic communities in Bradford. The project provided group and one-to-one sessions, consultancy, and advice in education settings.

4. Black Thrive⁷

Black Thrive works with black communities in south London. The project is a collaboration between communities, voluntary and private sector to address inequalities black people face in mental health care services.

Success factors across these interventions included:

- **Involving young people in the development of the interventions was critical** – to ensure authentic insight into the experiences and needs of the communities was always at the centre of programme, which increased engagement.
- Schools can be safe places for many, but not all, vulnerable young people so **reaching them in an alternative space provided better access to at-risk groups**.
- **Involving parents can** enhance the impact of the intervention.

⁴ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/surviving-to-thriving>

⁵ <http://www.tullochan.org/tullochan-futures>

⁶ <https://sharingvoices.net/>

⁷ <https://lambeth.blackthrive.org/>

2. Interventions focused on activities

2.1 Sports-based interventions

Evidence shows that physical activity impacts on mental wellbeing – primarily through improvements in physical self-perceptions and enhancing self-esteem.⁸

Taking part in physical activity also increases social interaction, self-efficacy, perceived competence and positive body image and autonomy.

The sports based interventions covered by this review include:

1. **Doorstep Sport** is a community-based intervention which uses sport based activities to create positive change in the lives of disadvantaged children. The Doorstep Sport intervention is a programme of varied, easily accessible and affordable activities that Street Games ran from 2013 to 2017 in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.⁹

Analysis of the programme showed that all StreetGames projects **showed an increase in wellbeing for participants with positive effects on happiness, confidence and life satisfaction.**¹⁰

2. **The Youth Sport Trust (YST)**¹¹ is a children's charity that uses sport to improve the wellbeing of young people. Interventions delivered in schools include:

- **Active healthy minds:** a whole school approach delivered in collaboration with local partners.
- **Active in mind:** an intervention that uses psycho-social tools, peer mentoring, stress relief strategies and physical activity.
- **Girls active:** interventions that support schools in increasing participation and encouraging girls to become ambassadors and coaches.
- **Living for sport:** an intervention involving a world class athlete to work with a target group of young people resulting in increased confidence and resilience.

An independent analysis of the impact of YST's interventions showed they helped young people to **build confidence and skills around resilience and self-motivation.**¹²

Success factors:

- **Involvement of young people as champions,** peer groups and ambassadors.
- **Ensure young people's voices are heard.**
- Activities should be **fun, accessible and based on friendship participation.**
- **Removing barriers** such as time, cost, accessibility and mental health stigma is critical.

8 Lubans, David, Justin Richards, Charles Hillman, Guy Faulkner, Mark Beauchamp, Michael Nilsson, Paul Kelly, Jordan Smith, Lauren Raine, and Stuart Biddle. "Physical activity for cognitive and mental health in youth: a systematic review of mechanisms." *Pediatrics* 138, no. 3 (2016).

9 https://network.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/DSC-Lessons-A4-Full-Report-web-version_0.pdf

10 https://network.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/Brunel_University_London_Safe_Fit_and_Well_Case%20Study%20Research%20Report_Aug2018_0.pdf

11 <https://www.youthsporttrust.org>

12 <http://impact.youthsporttrust.org/improving-mental-and-physical-wellbeing/>

2.2 Arts-based interventions

The evidence of impact from arts-based interventions on mental health and wellbeing is mixed. A report by the WHO,¹³ which reviewed over 3,000 studies in Europe, identified a role for the arts in the prevention and management of ill health, including the mental wellbeing of young people.

A case study report commissioned by the Baring Foundation¹⁴ into initiatives working in the field of arts and mental health with a focus on young people concluded that art and creative programmes had a positive effect on self-confidence and self-esteem, relationship building and a sense of belonging.

1. **Time to Listen,**¹⁵ a longitudinal study across 33 secondary schools 2015-2018, concluded that studying the arts promotes better mental health for young people:

- Arts lessons help to build self-belief and confidence.
- The arts produce a sense of wellbeing and are a valve for releasing pressure.
- Young people have a greater sense of agency and independence in arts lessons than in other lessons.

Research projects commissioned by the **Arts Council England**¹⁶ showed that young people place significant importance on arts and culture for wellbeing – arts provide a form of escapism, a chance to collaborate and an opportunity for self-expression.

For young people, arts and culture go beyond a traditional understanding of the terms to embrace forms of expression that are relevant to their lives including social media, vlogging, and make-up.

2. **The Theatre Troupe** offers theatre and arts-based interventions in South London aimed at improving the mental wellbeing of young people aged 9-19 years who experience emotional and social difficulties. The organisation's approach is based on attachment theory and centres around the hypothesis that young people who have experienced trauma find it hard to form the kind of emotional attachments that are important for mental wellbeing.¹⁷

A qualitative assessment of the impact of The Theatre Troupe's interventions with participants, parents, social workers and teachers shows that **all young people who have taken part had experienced a rewarding journey** – building trust, confidence and forming positive social connections.

“I remember one girl who had experienced trauma in her life who came to the programme not speaking or interacting even though prior to the trauma she loved drama and theatre. By the end of the year, she had a small speaking part in our production. It was a small step but a massive achievement for her confidence.”

Depth Interviewee

13 Fancourt D, Finn S. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019 (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67).

14 https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded/?gclid=CjwKCAjwh5gLBhALEiwAloods5mzlj9pB78EBdOL6JF3selYDGMcXaVaE31uMpLep_ERaivPh6xjYBoCrUoQAvD_BwE

15 <https://researchtale.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/time-to-listen-tale-project-final-report.pdf>

16 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ART31%20-%20Young%20People%20and%20Arts%20Engagement_0.pdf

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Beatfreaks%20-%20Marbleous%20Insights%20Report_0.pdf

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/BTBD%20-%20What%20Arts%20and%20culture%20means%20to%20young%20people_0.pdf

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Sound%20Connections_Youth%20Consultation_0.pdf

17 <https://www.theatretroupe.org>

Success factors:

Learnings from the arts-based interventions analysed suggest that key factors in success include:

- **Young people choosing the activities they do** – this builds commitment and ownership.
- **Working in partnership with other stakeholders** including professional bodies (schools, and health bodies including Children and Young People's Mental Health Services).
- **Involving parents** helps to engage them in encouraging and supporting their child.
- **Community approaches** are more flexible than delivery in schools, with participants being more committed as they have chosen to take part.



2.3 Outdoor and nature-based interventions

The evidence linking outdoor interventions to an impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is inconclusive. More research is needed to clarify exactly if, how, by how much and why this type of intervention affects children's and young people's wellbeing.

1. Avon Tyrell¹⁸

- **Focus:** Disadvantaged young people.
- **Approach:** Increase the emotional wellbeing and social capabilities of participants through a range of outdoor, physical activities such as canoeing, climbing, archery and wellbeing workshops.
- **Impact:** Increase in overall emotional wellbeing of participants. (Warwick-Edinburgh emotional wellbeing scale).

2. The Wave Project¹⁹

- **Focus:** Young people aged 8-21 years facing mental health issues referred by health, education or social services.
- **Approach:** Increase the emotional wellbeing of the participants through one-to-one surfing coaching.
- **Impact:** Increase in all measures of wellbeing (Stirling Children's Wellbeing scale).

3. Down to Earth²⁰

- **Focus:** 93 young people, mostly young men, from three at risk groups:
 - Not in employment, education or training (NEET)
 - Asylum seekers
 - Unemployed young men with long-term depression.
- **Approach:** Taking part in group-based sustainable building projects for a full day a week over eight weeks. Group and individual tasks based on construction skills.
- **Impact:** Positive impact on feeling connected to the community. Improvement in those with most severe mental health issues

Success factors:

- **Social engagement and fun** contributed to the overall experience.
- **Groups based on bringing together children and young people from similar backgrounds and needs** were the most successful.
- **Young people should be involved in the development of the interventions** and outdoor activities.

¹⁸ <https://www.avontyrell.org.uk/index.html>

¹⁹ https://www.waveproject.co.uk/project-locations/london/?gclid=CjwKCAjwh5qLBhALEiwAloods7wKU804RHibMSdBpx2RO7Y2s3juHlqJa4e7HAbDOxROPXpwceMH3BoCewQQAvD_BwE

²⁰ <https://downtoearthproject.org.uk/eco-building/down-to-earth-construction>

3. Delivery method focused interventions

The interventions analysed as part of this study covered a range of delivery methods:

Looking at the different forms of delivery, there are clear roles for each, evidenced in academic research, and impact analysis of current UK interventions



Face to Face 1-2-1



Group



Digital



Community



School



3.1 Face to face, one-to-one

1. **Youth Social Prescribing** was initiated by StreetGames²¹ and funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. A pilot was implemented in 2018 and ran for 30 months.

The aim of the programme was to target vulnerable young people who were struggling to find activities or services that could help with their mental wellbeing. They were referred by teachers, GPs or community safety officers and put in touch with a dedicated Youth Link Worker who spent face-to-face time with them advising on sources of support within the community. The Youth Worker would then refer the young person and stay in touch to support and assess their progress.

Compared to adult social prescribing schemes, there was a higher uptake from young men; mental wellbeing improved significantly; and loneliness declined.

Success factors:

- **Connections with schools, community youth workers and care providers** helped to identify young people who had fallen through the gaps of other support.
- **Involving young people in all aspects of the programme** from planning to evaluation.
- **Accessibility.**
- **Effective communications** to drive awareness.

²¹ <https://network.streetgames.org/our-work-changing-lives-health/youth-social-prescribing>

3.2 Digital

Five digital interventions were included in this analysis:

1. **BFB Labs Lumi Novais** a digital game aimed at reducing anxiety in 7-12 year olds.

A trial with 90 children showed a positive impact on anxiety reduction.²²

2. **Sleepio App** offers cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for adolescents struggling with sleep.

Evaluation showed significant improvements in depression, anxiety and measures of sleep but not all participants completed the tasks which was taken as a key learning.²³

3. **Stress Busters** is a computerised CBT platform for 12-18 year olds diagnosed with low mood / depression. Its results were compared to those of a self-help website.

There were improvements in depression and anxiety measures but no significant differences between Stress Busters and the self-help option were evident.²⁴

4. **The Brave Programme** was a digitally delivered, therapist supported CBT package for teenagers experiencing anxiety.

Half the adolescents involved had recovered from their primary anxiety disorder after 12 months, but this proportion was no greater than that seen in the control group.²⁵

5. **MoodHwb** is a digital psychosocial intervention co-designed with, and for, young people experiencing depression. It is also aimed at their families and carers.

Young people liked the design, content and usability; and their depression literacy improved. However, their depression did not reduce significantly.²⁶

Success factors and key learnings:

- **Involving young people in the design of the intervention** increased engagement and impact.
- **Personalisation** – the digital environment allows a greater opportunity for young people to personalise their experience.
- **Incentivising engagement** through gamification helped to sustain levels of involvement.
- **Striking the right tone of voice** which resonated with young people and did not feel patronising was critical.
- **Peer stories** help to create relatable experiences.
- **Digital activity lends itself to fun, creative ways to encourage people to engage** with online tools.

²² <http://www.bfb-labs.com/luminova>

²³ Cliffe, B., Croker, A., Denne, M., Smith, J., & Stallard, P. (2020). Digital Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia for Adolescents with Mental Health Problems: Feasibility Open Trial. *JMIR mental health*, 7(3), e14842

²⁴ Wright, B., Tindall, L., Hargate, R., Algar, V., Trépel, D., & Ali, S. (2020). Computerised cognitive-behavioural therapy for depression in adolescents: 12-month outcomes of a UK randomised controlled trial pilot study. *BJPsych open*, 6(1)

²⁵ Waite, P., Marshall, T., & Creswell, C. (2019). A randomized controlled trial of internet-delivered cognitive behaviour therapy for adolescent anxiety disorders in a routine clinical care setting with and without parent sessions. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 24(3), 242-250

²⁶ Bevan Jones, R., Stallard, P., Agha, S. S., Rice, S., Werner-Seidler, A., Stasiak, K., & Merry, S. (2020). Practitioner review: Co-design of digital mental health technologies with children and young people. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(8), 928-940.

3.3 Community-based interventions

Two community-based interventions were included in this analysis:

1. **HeadStart²⁷** was launched in 2016 and will run for six years funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. **Its aim is to discover and assess innovative ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people and to prevent the development of significant mental illness.**

Six HeadStart community collaborations were initiated to explore, develop and deliver programmes for young people across different areas – they include:

- **Blackpool** – driving resilience and strengthening neighbourhoods through social action.
- **Kent** – intervening early to help young people whose mental health is threatened by trauma such as domestic abuse.
- **Kernow** – building a common awareness of young people's mental health across Cornwall so young people across the county can get the help they need.
- **Newham** – supporting young people with emerging mental illness through peer mentoring, social action and behaviour modification.
- **Hull** – developing a support network of trusted adults for young people.
- **Wolverhampton** – innovative communications approaches across the city to promote young people's mental health.

A qualitative evaluation of HeadStart activity involving 63 young people after the first year of its implementation found that peer support and the opportunity to meet new people and make friends had been very positive. **The intervention had led to greater confidence and young people felt more able to manage difficult emotions.**

2. **The Army Cadets²⁸** is a free, inclusive organisation open to all young people aged 12-18 years. Young people over 18 years can become volunteers and mentor younger participants.

The Cadets offers a range of activities from map reading, first aid, to practical life skills and it works particularly well for young people who find it hard to engage with school. The experience it offers is based in the community where children and young people live and gives participants a chance to develop their skills and identity away from school or home.

Participants report that the Army Cadets provides a safe space to take risks, build confidence and positive relationships but there are no formal measures to evaluate the effect of participation on mental wellbeing.

Success factors:

- **Empowering young people to take ownership of their role in the intervention** – from shaping activities to becoming peer leaders and ambassadors.
- **Tailoring of interests** across a wide range of activities to suit the needs of individuals and different communities.
- **Interventions that result in positive outcomes for the community** help to encourage motivation.
- **Building connections with other stakeholders** helps to engage hard to reach audiences.

²⁷ <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/headstart#section-2>

²⁸ <https://armycadets.com>



3.4 School-based interventions

Three school based interventions were included in this analysis:

1. **Place2Be**²⁹ is a children's mental health charity that provides counselling and mental health support and training in UK schools. **Its focus is on early prevention of mental health issues** in young people.

The type of interventions it offers include one-to-one counselling for the most vulnerable pupils, group work, training for school leaders and staff, and advice and support for parents.

70% of children who have received counselling with Place2Be report improved mental wellbeing and Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC)³⁰ results indicated they demonstrate a higher level of improvement compared to other services.

2. **The Thrive Approach**³¹ is an intervention based on attachment theory, neuroscience and child development; it draws on experience in social work, psychotherapy and education.

Thrive is a subscription package where schools can access a range of resources including teacher training and online support materials.

Thrive had a positive impact on developing resilience³² and it closed the gap for vulnerable children across a range of measures including behaviour and self-confidence.³³ However, a more recent review revealed no differences between a control group and Thrive schools on key measures.³⁴

3. **WE Schools:** the WE Feel Good campaign³⁵ was developed following feedback from young people who wanted to take more action in interventions that supported positive wellbeing, self-confidence and mental health. The aim is to empower young people to fulfil their potential, develop personal wellbeing through social action and build confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills.

Resources included workshops, design of community or school projects, buddy schemes and webinars for teachers.

Teacher surveys show a positive impact on pupil confidence, but specific mental wellbeing measures were not assessed.

²⁹ <https://www.place2be.org.uk>

³⁰ <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/impact-and-evidence/how-we-measure-our-impact/>

³¹ <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

³² <https://www.thriveapproach.com/about-thrive/impact-of-thrive/>

³³ <https://www.thriveapproach.com/about-thrive/impact-of-thrive/>

³⁴ https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/be348cfb2adc0180c2502f9d04106a6a2d6fba0dbc15b33e16a6c2f10ee88a38/105145/Educational%20Psychology%20Research%20and%20Practice%202019%205%202%20Gibby%20Leversuch_Field_and_Cooke.pdf

³⁵ <https://www.we.org/en-GB/our-work/we-schools/service-learning-campaigns/take-action/we-feel-good>

Success factors:

- Schools are a good environment for running an awareness and preventative campaign because they offer **easy access to a lot of children and young people on a continued basis**.
- **Aligning interventions with the national curriculum** makes it easier for overstretched teachers to incorporate interventions into their plans – as an in-depth interviewee said.
- Ensure children and young people are involved early on in the development of the intervention and throughout its delivery to ensure buy-in and continued engagement.
- **Provide resources** to make the intervention as accessible as possible in overstretched schools.
- **Longitudinal interventions** will have the greatest impact.
- **Offering a choice of diverse activities** will help to engage a range of pupils.
- **Recognise the pressures children and young people are already under** and ensure interventions are fun, relevant and deliver tangible value.
- **Role models are important** – young people as ambassadors and peer mentors will encourage engagement.
- **Reaching, engaging, convincing and training teachers** are all essential.



4. Charities and collaborative interventions

Four interventions from charities or collaborations between stakeholders were analysed for this report:

- 1. Young Minds³⁶** is a leading UK charity supporting positive mental well-being for children and young people. The organisation receives support from the National Lottery Community Fund and Heads Together and offers community and school-based interventions that include:

 - **Digital support** through website, social media and messenger service.
 - **YoungMinds' 360° Schools' programme** of support builds the skills and confidence of school staff so that they can put mental health at the heart of the whole school.
 - **#HelloYellow** – raising awareness on World Mental Health Day.
 - **Find your Feet** programme – supporting young people transitioning from primary to secondary school.
 - They also empower young people aged 14-25 years to become **Young Mind Activists** who share their experiences of living with mental health challenges by informing and co-creating nearly everything the charity does.
 - Young Minds publishes a yearly impact report the latest of which demonstrates:
 - Nearly 2.5M UK users visited the website (+59% compared to the previous year).
 - 16,764 conversations were held with children and young people in crisis and 242 led to an active rescue.
 - Instagram followers increased by 107% to 79,947.
 - Young Mind Activists felt more confident and knowledgeable about mental health issues.
- 2. UK Youth³⁷** is a charity dedicated to ensuring that all young people are empowered to succeed at any point of their lives. A number of organisations help fund UK Youth's interventions including Sport England, British Red Cross, National Lottery Community Fund and the programmes it offers include:

 - **Active Youth** helps young people who are typically inactive or less active than their peers to enjoy active lifestyles.
 - **Be Internet Citizens** is an educational programme that aims to encourage young people to have a positive voice online.
 - **FutureProof** helps young people stay healthy, cope with uncertainty, and develop important life skills by strengthening existing local youth programmes and upskilling youth staff.
 - **Outdoor Activators** engages young people from communities in Newcastle, Coventry, Northumberland and Leicestershire in meaningful social action and outdoor physical activity.
 - **Sound Creators** tackles the UK's worryingly low levels of health, as well as high levels of social alienation and depression among young women carers.

UK Youth developed an emotional and social capabilities framework against which all programmes are measured:

- Self-confidence
- Self-awareness
- Effective communication
- Personal responsibility
- Motivation
- Resilience
- Receptivity

88% of those involved in UK Youth Programmes experience an increase across this framework.³⁸

³⁶ <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

³⁷ <https://www.ukyouth.org>

³⁸ UK Youth Annual Review (2017) <https://ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/UK-Youth-Annual-Review-2017.pdf>

3. **A Million and Me**³⁹ is BBC Children in Need's £10 million programme which focuses on supporting children's mental health. The aim is to make a positive difference to the lives of children aged 8-13 years who are beginning to struggle with their mental health and emotional wellbeing. It seeks to collaborate with families, peer groups and communities to create a holistic support system for children with the following interventions:

- **Shout** is a texting service for people who are struggling. A free and confidential service available to young people 24/7. 38% of young people who contacted the service had never asked for help with the other half feeling they had no-one to talk to.
- **Verbal** provides young people with the opportunity to express themselves through reading groups. Sessions are managed with structured support and clinically curated literature.
- **Parentzone** provides access to a myriad of digital resources for children, parents and schools.
- **Stormbreak CIO** is committed to enhancing children's mental health by encouraging and motivating schools to integrate mentally safe movement into every child's daily routine. Research by Bournemouth University showed that schools who took part in Stormbreak showed a greater improvement in mental health than those who did not.

4. **Barnardo's**⁴⁰ is a leading charity supporting young people and families. To better understand the impact of Covid-19 and the resulting mental health needs of children and young people, Barnardo's undertook a UK-wide survey⁴¹ of over 100 people and collaborated with youth colleagues who generated feedback from over 150 children and young people in their networks.

The study highlighted six recommendations to support mental wellbeing in children and young people:

- **Prioritise child welfare and wellbeing** within the educational system.
- **Give children and young people a role in national decision making** on the policies that affect their lives.
- **Ensure ongoing co-production of local solutions** with children, young people and families.
- **Recognise the disproportionate impact of the pandemic** and lockdowns on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- **Learn from what children and young people tell us works.** Involve young people in co-designing and co-delivering services.
- **Support young people with their mental wellbeing at the earliest possible stage,** ensuring support is available within communities and does not always rely on medical interventions.

³⁹ <https://www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk/changing-lives/mental-health/how-we-are-supporting-mental-health/a-million-and-me-partners-and-collaborations/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk>

⁴¹ Barnardo's (2020) Mental Health and Covid-19: In Our Own Words

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the academic literature review of existing evidence into interventions that support children and young people's mental wellbeing, as well as the deeper analysis of interventions and their impacts.

- 1** **Involve a diverse range of children and young people in the design and development of mental health interventions** – This delivers value on a number of levels; leading to interventions that are evidence-based, engaging, acceptable to children and young people and feasible to deliver:

“The process goes beyond involving children and young people as a consultation or engagement exercise but embraces a ‘democratic partnership’ with appropriate distribution of power, jointly exploring needs and creating possible solutions with children and young people as ‘experts of their experiences.’⁴²
- 2** **Understand the context of children and young people's lives, in all their diversities**, and the existing pressures on their time, money and mental load is essential. **Programmes should be accessible, fun and offer a varied choice** of activities which can be tailored to an individual's needs.
- 3** **Focus on the positive aspects of wellbeing** – making interventions fun and friendship based avoids potentially stigmatising mental health or using daunting, clinical terminology.
- 4** **Consider a focus on interpersonal skills within an intervention – The most successful intervention content for positive mental health centred on interpersonal skills.**⁴³
- 5** **Having a community based approach** – this can reach children and young people who are disengaged from school and reflect a holistic view of children and young people's lives. Engaging a network of community support around the children and young people, such as parents, families and other professional bodies can create a broad base of encouragement for participants, making them more likely to stay involved. **Critically, community networks including youth centres, health professionals and other community organisations support some of the most marginalised children and young people** who can be hard to reach through other approaches.
- 6** **Role models and peer mentors** – are valuable in sustaining engagement through providing support and relatable examples of success stories.
- 7** **Evaluate** – Holistic, qualitative, and quantitative feedback, assessing pre-and-post measures, based on clear Key Performance Indicators is critical. This will provide robust impact data and allow an intervention to be optimised based on feedback.

42 Thabrew et al (2019) as cited in Bevan Jones, R., Stallard, P., Agha, S. S., Rice, S., Werner-Seidler, A., Stasiak, K., ... & Merry, S. (2020). Practitioner review: Co-design of digital mental health technologies with children and young people. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(8), 928-940.

43 Skeen, S., Laurenzi, C. A., Gordon, S. L., du Toit, S., Tomlinson, M., Dua, T., ... & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2019). Adolescent mental health program components and behavior risk reduction: a meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*, 144(2).

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