Tackling the Stigma of Mental Health

Agenda Day Report

14th July 2010
Introduction & Summary

Investing in Children is an organisation based in County Durham (UK) concerned with the human rights of children and young people. Since 1995 Investing in Children has developed lots of different ways in which children and young people have been supported to say what they want to say, and to improve services used by them, by talking to the adults who run the service.

An Agenda Day is a research model for working with children and young people. The idea is to give the opportunity to large groups of children and young people to meet in adult-free environments to express their views. Agenda Days are planned and delivered by young people, who act as the facilitators.

On the 14th June 2010, young people who have been working on the Tackling the Stigma of Mental Health project as part of a national pilot, met with approximately 60 students aged 13-14 from Greencroft Comprehensive.

The main issues to come out of the Agenda Day are that young people:

- Had a range of views of what mental health was, a lot of which was negative, stigmatizing and extreme.
- Linked mental health problems with a wide range of reasons, with some focusing on personal problems, such as family breakdowns, loss and abuse, while some others associated it with negative thinking or due to genetics.
- Identified ways to prevent poor mental health, such as through ‘blocking everything out’, talking to people, praying, a ‘nice long bath’, to medication (prescribed and self medicated), and professional help.
- Described some very positive ways to support people with mental health problems, with a few saying that people with mental health problems should be “put in a cage before talking to them and make sure that it is locked.” This statement could be viewed as young people joking around, or could also be seen to reflect their views about mental health.
- Found out about mental health through personal experience (e.g. within families) and through conversations with friends and others, the media, and through health messages.
- Said that mental health problems would get worse if not treated.
- Identified what people think of them, social and peer pressures, money, family problems and relationships, and health and death, as major causes of stress.
- Identified a wide range of appropriate help.
- Commented that young people don’t read posters or leaflets, but highlighted that they want more information through books, magazines, posters, leaflets, the Internet, etc. which may suggest that what is currently being used is not working as well as it could be.
- Highlighted family, friends, friendly teachers, youth workers, and a local mental health doctor as the people they would like to receive support from, and identified that this support should be local and include meetings, workshops and activities to improve their understanding of mental health issues.

The young people also highlighted a number of things that can give good mental health and this will support the project board to identify the ‘five-a-day’ message for the Tackling Stigma campaign in Durham and Darlington.
As Agenda Days are ‘adult-free’, I was able to observe the groups at a distance. The young people were generally quiet at first and after a while become more comfortable talking about the subject. At the end of the Agenda Day, I saw some of the young people’s work (see the appendices) and asked them what some of their comments meant. One group of young males had written almost nothing about their ideal service. When I asked them about this, I was simply told that “if I had a mental health problem, I wouldn’t want anyone to know” and therefore didn’t want a service. Another mixed group of young people had written “regular meetings” and I asked what this meant. One of the young people explained that they have people talking to them about sexual health, drugs and alcohol use, but no one talks to them about mental health and felt that having meetings where young people could talk about these issues would be helpful.

The report that follows is written by the young people who facilitated the Agenda Day and recorded the views of the young people. A draft of this report was sent to the young people who provided us with their contact details to check that the comments were accurate.

We would like to thank the young people who contributed to this work and to Greencroft Comprehensive who supported this Agenda Day to take place.

Darren Howell
Project Worker
Young People’s Report

We wanted to find out what the views were of young people of Greencroft Comprehensive School.

1. **We asked the young people what they thought mental health was. They told us that …**
   - It is something wrong with you in your head.
   - You can’t see it.
   - It can’t be helped.
   - They described them as ‘crazy’, ‘nutters’, ‘go a bit crackers’.
   - Your health.
   - How you feel about yourself.
   - Something is wrong with you.
   - Not being in control of what you do.
   - Depending on what your mental health issue is you could have a disability.
   - Self harming.
   - Things wrong with your brain.
   - People that go to mental homes.
   - They don’t know what they are doing.
   - Confused.
   - Your brain goes slowly.

2. **We then went on to ask the young people do you know anybody who has had mental health problems.**
   - Most young people said they do and described celebrities or people that had been in the news recently.
   - Few others said they hadn’t.

3. **We asked the young people who it is most likely to effect. They answered…**
   - Older people.
   - Anyone/any age.
   - People that have had things happen to them.
   - People with depression.
   - People around them.
   - Broken down families.
   - Family loss.
   - Family disability.
   - People that get abused.
   - People that are stressed.
   - People that get bullied.
   - Negative thinkers.
   - People are born with it.
4. The next question we ask the young people, why does it happen and how do you think it happens?

- Something you’re born with.
- If you’re grieving.
- If you’re getting bullied.
- If you have a bad past.
- People that don’t do much.
- If you have nobody to talk to.
- If you have bad influences in your life.
- Stressed, depressed, from Xbox, school work, etc.
- Working to much, not enough sleep.
- Things keep running through your heads.
- Thinking about doing things.
- Getting revenge (e.g. killing people).
- Taking drugs and drinking.
- Could happen for no reason.
- Everyone has different thoughts.
- Something bad happens.
- It can’t be helped.
- Don’t share there feelings.
- Genetics.

5. We then went on to ask the young people, how can you prevent it?

- Counselling.
- Tablets and medications from doctors.
- Can’t be prevented.
- Trying to block everything out.
- Therapist.
- Talk to somebody close to you.
- Pray.
- Nice long bath (relaxing).
- Have a tab.
- Take drugs (relax).
- Try to be as happy as you can.
- Talk to your friends.
- Do activities.

6. Next, we asked the young people, how can you help them?

- They need somebody to be there for them.
- Encourage them to see someone.
- Sit down and talk to them how they are feeling.
- Don’t push them into things.
- Makes sure safe and getting help needed.
- Don’t judge them.
- Reassure them.
- Make them think positive.
We asked the young people if they thought it could come back more than once. They said yeah it is always possible to come back once it’s with you but if it does come back them you might be able to cope better.

7. We asked the young people how they knew about mental health...

They replied that they had found out at school, from people in there family or personal experiences or from somebody else’s experiences, people that live close, news/newspaper/tele, films, also found out from the hospital, charities, radio. But they said that they do not read posters or leaflets.

8. After this we tried to find young people views on who they thought people with mental health issues could go and see. They replied...

- Psychiatrists.
- Doctors.
- Counsellors.
- Friends and family (if not disowned).
- Someone you trust.
- Youth workers.
- School nurse.
- Therapists.
- Cage maker.

They also said that if they don’t want to go and see anyone they would take drugs and do things they enjoy like go on holiday. They also feel like they couldn’t talk to teachers.

9. We then asked the young people what they thought would happen if mental health issues wasn’t treat. They said that they would...

- End up crying a lot and being upset.
- Lead to other problems such as eating disorders.
- Stop going out.
- Scared of what people and scared to talk to people.
- Isolate your self from everyone.
- Stop caring about your appearance and hygiene.
- Self harming.
- Carry on getting worse and may lead to suicide.
- Could get worse, should talk to someone as soon as possible.
- Make you do thing you wouldn’t normally do.
- Inflict others.
- Take over your life.
- Build up.
- Can’t forget about it.
- Shorten your life.
10. **We asked what do people get stressed out about. They replied...**

- School and exams.
- Appearance.
- What people think of you.
- Trying to fit in.
- Peer pressure (getting pushed into smoking, drinking, drugs etc.).
- Money problems.
- Family problems.
- Grieving.
- Relationships.
- Video games.
- Friends (e.g. falling out).
- Work.
- Sports.
- Weight.
- Health problems.
- Hair.
- Bullying (getting beat up).
- Other mental people.
- Death.
- Illness.
- Anything there uncomfortable with.
- Finance.
- People say stuff to you (bad).
- What people think what other people think.
- Having children.
- Rumours.
- Drugs/drink.
- War.
- Fighting.
- No respect.

11. **We then went on to ask what support is there for young people. They said ... (see appendix)**

- Doctors.
- Talk to your pet.
- Therapists.
- School nurse.
- Youth workers.
- Relatives.
- Friends.
- Counsellors.
- Teachers.
- Church.
- Loved ones.
- Psychiatrists.
- Local support groups.
• Help lines.
• Talk to Frank.
• School council.
• Help organisations.
• Families.
• Internet.
• Parents.
• Drop in sessions.
• Religious people.
• Youth clubs.
• Pudsey Bear.
• School.
• Pupil Support.
• Activities in and out side of school.
• Talk to yourself.
• Government Schemes.
• Drugs.
• Others with a mental health issue.

12. Then asked what support would you like? They said... (see appendix)

• Funded activities.
• More organised trips/days out.
• Family.
• Local mental health doctor.
• Friends.
• More friendly teachers.
• Concentrating on mental health rather than bullying, etc.
• Regular meetings.
• More workshops about it.
• Confidentiality.
• Make sure everyone has help and support.
• Help for all ages and problems.
• Helpful websites.
• Books, magazines, more advertising e.g. posters, leaflets, tele, radio, newspapers, letters, emails, texts and internet.
• Help lines.
• Youth workers.
• Go to sleep.
• Do things you love with people you love.
• Fun activities.
• Talk about your problems.
• More willing people to go and help people at there homes.
• More support, somebody that you feel comfortable with.
• People that have experienced a mental health problem.
• Groups of young people that also have an illness.
• Residential at outdoor activity centres.
13. Finally we asked the young people to say five things within the group, you can do to have good mental health?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Group From Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eat healthy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do things you enjoy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about it</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go out with friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be active</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore people that are bitchy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Groups</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a holiday</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat yourself</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do thing you like</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink sensibly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t go on big brother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t commit a crime</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Positive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a new hobby</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top 6 were
- Eat healthily
- Be Active
- Go out with friends
- Do things you enjoy
- Talk about it
- Ignore people that are bitchy
Conclusion

From this Agenda Day we found that some young people were negative and stigmatising of people with mental health issues. Some other young people had quite a lot of knowledge and knew people with mental health issues and knew a lot support that could be given.

They also said that there could be improvements such as having more meetings on the topic and gaining better awareness such as adverts on tele and people going into school to teach young people about the issue. Also, people were more shocked over the matter, such as hearing about experiences on the matter would get young people to listen better and have a greater awareness.

Becca Bottoms
Stuart Dixon
Leah Flecher
Laura Hornsby
Melissa Stamp
Young people from the Tackling the Stigma of Mental Health Project
Appendix – what support is there for young people? (part 1)
Appendix – what support is there for young people? (part 2)
Appendix – what support would you like for young people? (part 1)
Appendix – what support would you like for young people? (part 2)