

A report on the awareness of, and possible need for, extended provision of both mental health and counselling services for secondary school students in Hertfordshire.

A report commissioned by St Albans Youth Council

Supported by Youth Connexions



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Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to write a brief foreword to this excellent piece of research and look forward to hosting its launch in County Hall at the end of June.

The Report is one of a number of excellent examples of young people in Hertfordshire working together to research, understand and then influence the delivery of services that impact on their lives and that support them to achieve their potential.

It demonstrates a good understanding of the issues that impact on mental health and recognises the context in which difficult decisions on priorities for funding are made.

Youth Connexions is one of the services that I am responsible for and I am very pleased that Debi from our St Albans Team and Alex from our Participation Team have been able to support this work – it is exactly the kind of activity that can make a real difference to the lives of young people and enable them to become active and influential young citizens.

Finally, I want to give my thanks to the young people who are members of the St Albans Youth Council. This is an excellent piece of work that you can be very proud of contributing to. You have my commitment that the report will be used to improve services to young people.

Andrew Simmons

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

**Deputy Director – Services for Children & Young People
Hertfordshire County Council**

*This report is
dedicated to those
young people who
could see no other
option but to take
their own lives.*

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank:

Joyce Wellings from Youth Talk,
Maria Nastri from Hertfordshire County Council,
and Alex Ferguson and UKYP Herts -

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for all their support.

**We would also like to especially thank
all the schools and pupils who took
part.**

**Thank you for taking the time to share
your experience and your thoughts.**

**We hope that in doing so, you will
make a difference to others.**

Preface

Mental health is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Yet, it is still a hidden issue – an often stigmatized and difficult subject for public discussion.

This report, undertaken by young people for young people, is not only a brave initiative but also a critical study of the mental health issues facing the next generation of this country.

Young people are facing an unprecedented level of insecurity around their future. Uncertainty is rife, covering every part of society. From the economy to the environment, from a shift in social rules and privacy due to the Internet through to mobile devices requiring us to be permanently switched-on.

The pressure this is putting onto young people is immense, which coupled with the day-to-day challenges of exams and peer-pressure to conform naturally leads to a range of manifestations from low-level stress through to the severity of suicide.

That is why this report is an important indicator for the whole of the UK, not just Hertfordshire. Having seen the passion behind this report first hand, and read the findings gleaned from a sample size of over 1,800 young people, it must not be ignored.

This is not just a calling-cry for support, but an insightful guide to what can, and should be done. Our young people are the future of this Country – they are our next generation of workers, parents and leaders. If we fail to act now to tackle mental health issues head-on we are simply delaying far greater issues which if ignored now will become increasingly more difficult to deal with the longer they are left.

So I applaud the St Albans Youth Council for producing this excellent report and I truly hope that it is read beyond the borders of Hertfordshire alone.

We have an opportunity right now to put this issue high on the agenda. If the outcome helps stop just one young person from ending his or her own life, then it will have been successful.

Though I believe it can do even more than that. Those of us in positions to support the actions of the report should take some of the burden of responsibility to make this change happen – whether as politicians, parents, educators, health professionals or simply the friend of someone in need of support.

This report has laid down the gauntlet; it is now up to us to take it up.

Cllr Dean Russell
Chair, St Albans Health & Wellbeing Partnership

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Executive Summary

Having conducted a paper based survey of over 1800 pupils in and around the St Albans District, this report will highlight;

- Issues faced by many young students
- What prevents or deters students from seeking counselling

This report will also offer low cost recommendations to improve both the communication and provision of counselling services and talking therapies for young people with a particular focus on those in education.

Having analysed the data collected, the authors can provide evidence that;

- High numbers of young people suffer routinely from stress associated with school life (bullying and exam pressure)
- A smaller but significant number of young people within the District may be in need of support for more serious issues such as self-harm and eating disorders
- Based on our sample, over half of all secondary students are unaware of any provision in their school for counselling
- Poor signposting and long waiting lists will prevent many young people from getting the support they need.
- A significantly high proportion of school pupils would consider their teachers a first option when asking for advice should they require support with a personal issue.

This report highlights an interesting situation; currently many pupils do not feel comfortable to engage in school based counselling and yet high numbers of pupils stated that they would ask their teachers for advice should they require support with a mental health or personal welfare issue.

Clearly schools are places of learning, yet increasingly they have an important role to play in supporting students with mental health issues and personal problems. However, our report makes clear that many of these issues are the result (directly or indirectly) of attending school. Therefore this report hopes to encourage schools to reflect on and acknowledge the stress being a student can cause and commit to improving both as organisations and as individual professionals, how they engage with students in need of mental health support, counselling or simply the need to be listened to.

To this end, our report offers simple, low cost solutions to ensure many of the problems highlighted can be significantly improved by enhancing teacher training and that the provision of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers includes local mental health options along with improved collaboration with service providers.

Introduction

During the autumn of 2010, at the height of concern as to how austerity measures would impact local services, and in consideration of the number of young people in the local area who depend on these services, members of St Alban's District Youth Council (SAYC) decided to look at the availability of mental health provision for young people. We wanted to explore how our peers perceived those provisions and whether those provisions were adequate. We narrowed our focus investigating specifically the awareness and perception of counselling within schools.

One particular concern was the impact on counselling services once schools took over responsibility for their budgets. We wondered if schools had sufficient data to support an informed decision in relation to buying-in counselling services and whether counselling services would still be provided if there were budget constraints, particularly if they were seen as an add-on rather than a 'need.'

We hoped that an investigation would produce data that could inform an argument for or against on-site counselling and thus aid both the County Council and schools in their consideration of counselling services both on and off site. We also hoped that our investigation would lead to an enhanced working relationship between youth counselling providers such as charities and County's service for counselling and schools.

But how did we come to consider mental health provision in the first place? As a Youth Council we raise money for a youth charity each year and in 2010 had elected to support Youth Talk, a charity that provides a free and confidential counselling service to anyone between the ages of 14 & 25 who lives, works or receives education in the St Albans and Harpenden District. We had elected to raise money for Youth Talk after becoming aware of what seemed like a high incident of suicides among secondary school pupils in the area. At the time, Youth Talk had a waiting list of many months. By January 2012 this list had become untenable and Youth Talk had to make the difficult decision to temporarily close their waiting list.

We were alarmed to hear from Youth Talk that by the age of 14, half of all people who will experience long-term mental illness will have shown signs of early symptoms. We were also extremely troubled to hear that most of the young people in the district who have taken their own lives, were not receiving counselling.

It was clearly evident to us that not all young people needing support were able to access it.

Objectives

SAYC had several objectives for investigating and subsequently writing this report. SAYC hoped to establish;

- if our peers felt there was sufficient provision for them when confronted with a personal or mental health issue
- what mental health issues young people were faced with
- if counselling was available in schools
- if pupils were aware of that provision, where it existed
- if young people have a need to simply 'talk things through'
- whether there was awareness of facilities and guidance available from charities such as Youth Talk or via Public bodies like Youth Connexions Hertfordshire
- the need for the current level of services so they can be protected, reviewed or enhanced.

Methodology

We sought advice as how best to engage with young people in order to secure the information we required. It was decided that the quickest and most economical way to reach the largest amount of young people was by conducting a schools based survey. Quantitative analysis from data obtained through a survey would be used to inform and substantiate our point of view.

Before embarking on any formal consultation, we invited Joyce Wellings from Youth Talk and County Council's Counselling Specialist Services Manager, Maria Nastri, to talk to us about their professional understanding of the problems faced by young people in the district. We were disheartened to hear that in their experience, the 'need' was far greater than the provision currently available.

Research Design

We spent a considerable amount of time creating a questionnaire and trialling it with a small sample group – UKYP Herts. and ourselves. In doing so we highlighted several areas for improvement and amended the questionnaire accordingly.

We decided to target our questionnaire specifically at two year groups; Year eight (aged 12 and 13) as they would have been at secondary school for over a year and thus, more likely than year 7 to be settled, and year ten (aged 14 and 15) as they would not be under the same exam pressures as the years above and consequently would have more time to complete the questionnaire.

Our report was conducted via paper questionnaires handed out in schools during the summer term of 2011 (see appendices). The sample was made up of a total of 1809 responses, 799 from the St Albans District and 1010 from surrounding areas.

There were however constraints in working with schools; we were confined by the school calendar and the schools' ability to factor in time to allow the questionnaire to be completed. This constraint may have been the reason that not all the schools we approached felt able to participate.

Ethical Considerations

We continually reviewed our questionnaire with our Youth Connexions Support Workers, Debi Roberts and Alex Ferguson and periodically with Maria Nastri, Counselling Manager at Herts County Council and Joyce Wellings from Youth Talk.

A letter was initially sent to all Head Teachers detailing the research and its objectives (see appendix 2). By taking the questionnaire to their pupils we assumed that the questionnaire met individual school's ethical requirements.

Pupil's consent was established by their agreement to take part in the survey.

Due to the nature of the questionnaire (being schools' based) the school and year group were identifiable. Beyond that however, the questionnaires were anonymous.

Limitations of Questionnaires

As a method of collecting data, we were aware of the limitations of questionnaires. Pupils might not answer sensibly or might not trust the anonymity and therefore not answer honestly. 'Faking' is a phenomena also seen when questionnaires are answered in group situations. Faking is defined as answering questions in a way that the respondent believes is more (or indeed less) favourable even if it means self-enhancement or exaggeration (Davies et al 2005). However, because anonymity was assured, (bar school, year group and gender, if they gave that information) and because questionnaires were carried out in class time as a formal exercise, we feel most respondents felt confident to answer truthfully and in a safe atmosphere.

Our observation, having read over 1800 questionnaires, is that not only did most pupils take this seriously, some took the opportunity to give additional information and wrote about situations that concerned them. Because of the anonymity of the respondent we were unable to address these 'alleged' disclosures, however Youth Connexions were made aware of the schools these questionnaires originated from.

A very small amount of questionnaires were returned with every possible answer box ticked. This may suggest the respondent did not take the questionnaire seriously, however it could also mean the respondent did not understand how to fill it in correctly or had trouble reading or interpreting it.

In other types of self-report questionnaires aimed at young people, researchers have noted a discrepancy between the view of the self and the experience of that person by others (De Los Reyes & Kazdin 2004, Roberts 2010). This phenomena may be seen in our analysis regarding alcohol use – see page 15 and 16 of this report.

There were clear time constraints with this questionnaire as we were confined by the school calendar. Efforts to engage with all our target audience were also hampered due to pupils within the target group being absent or engaging in out of class activities when the questionnaires were carried out.

Our choice to only engage with school pupils meant we did not reach all the young people who fit within the age groups being surveyed because they were currently home schooled or out of education. Their input would have been extremely valuable, providing insight into any variations of need. We note and acknowledge this limitation.

Findings.

The findings across both genders and age groups highlight many issues we believe demand attention and will be pertinent to many.

1. *Awareness of on-site counselling*

Pupils were asked whether or not they were aware of on-site counselling services available to them at their school. The following table analyses the responses received.

To ensure confidentiality, each school is listed as a number. Each school that took part is in receipt of the data relating to their school. This information has also been shared with the Head of Children's Services Herts.

School		Had counselling provision in 2011	% Pupils aware of provision	% Pupils unaware of provision	Has counselling provision in 2012
St Albans District					
W. Herts					
E Herts					
1		Yes	32	68	Yes
2		Yes	34	66	Yes
3		Yes	20	80	Yes
4		Yes	53	47	Yes
5		Yes	29	71	Yes
6		Yes	54	46	Yes
7		Yes	14	86	Yes
8		Yes	56	44	Yes
9		Yes	43	57	Yes
10		Yes	30	70	Yes
11		No	22	78	No

As you can see, awareness across all schools was very low. Only 25% of schools scored over 50% with no school scoring higher than 56%.

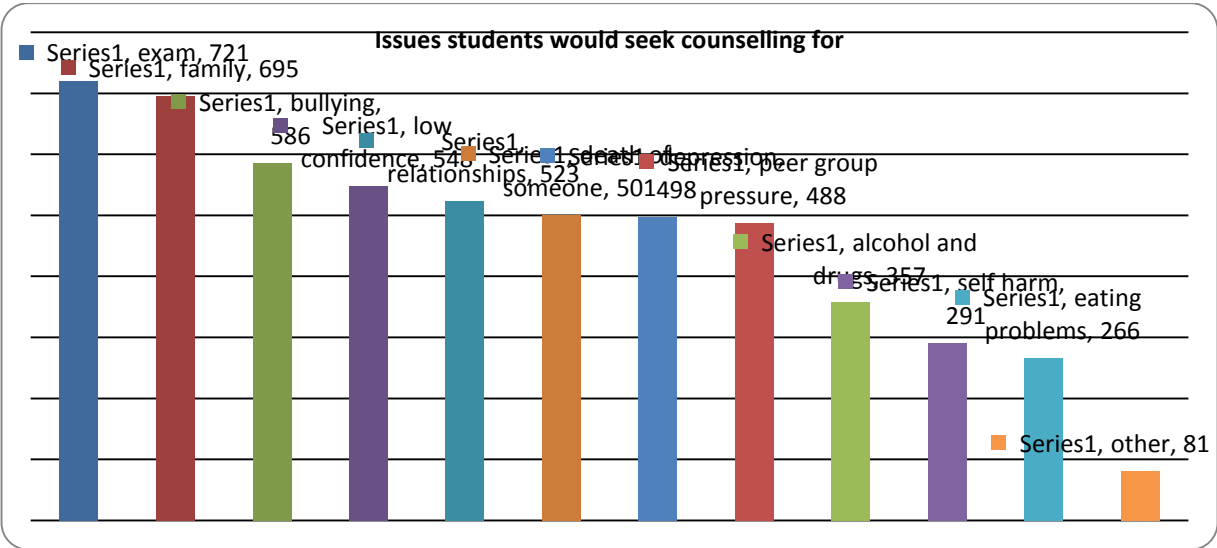
On average, 65% of pupils were unaware if counselling provision was available at their school. Although some may argue that pupils who do not need counselling are unlikely to be aware of the support services available, we feel these results are not 'good enough' considering the high number of suicides amongst Hertfordshire pupils within the last five years. If schools feel confident they have been robust in advertising counselling services, they may wish to review their communication choices and explore how they can be improved.

We feel it is important to note that the two lowest scores (14 % and 20 %) were both produced by single sex schools. We would hope this disappointing statistic will encourage single sex schools across Hertfordshire to review and reflect on ways they can communicate information regarding counselling options more effectively with their students.

Building awareness of services relating to mental health and personal problems is, we believe vital. Creating such awareness supports young people in a variety of ways, including supporting concerned friends to sign post accordingly. We feel this is very important as we have learnt that too often close friends are aware something is wrong with their friend but don't know what they can do. This is particularly relevant when you consider that the majority of teen suicides within the County, were not receiving counselling at the time of their death.

2. *Issues which most respondents reported they would be most likely to seek counselling for.*

Respondents were asked to consider what issues they might seek counselling for. (Depression, self-confidence, self-harm, eating disorders, drugs and alcohol, family issues, exam pressure, peer pressure, death of someone, relationships or other).



Taking the top three issues cited from each school, we see that ‘family and ‘exam pressure’ give the most concern to students. This is perhaps not surprising and arguably typical, considering the demographic of the respondents; school pupils studying for internal exams and preparing for subject choice selection and ultimately external exams, and as teenagers, perhaps more likely than other age groups to have family issues.

Regardless of these pressures being viewed as typical for this demography, we hope that schools will acknowledge these results and consider what more they can do to support students, particularly as stress can often reduce a pupil’s ability to engage and achieve.

It is worrying to see that bullying is still cited as one of the most common issues, suggesting this is still a big problem for a lot of school pupils. It is perhaps not surprising that the same number of pupils who cited bullying as an issue also cited ‘low confidence’ as a reason to seek counselling.

We acknowledge that most schools are robust at dealing with bullying and that the questionnaire did not differentiate between cyber bullying and any other form of bullying. Although 'bullying' was not the focus of the enquiry, we recognise that it would have been useful for third parties to have this differentiation.

When we asked respondents what issues they might see a counsellor for 81 replied 'Other'. If this questionnaire was repeated we recommend the authors consider adding; ethnicity, sexuality, gangs, abuse, contraception, pregnancy, loneliness, cyber-bullying, proficiency with basic English/Maths and money to the list of reasons a young person would seek counselling for. We would recommend still offering 'other' as an option but to ask respondents to give further details.

We also acknowledge that if young people struggle with literacy they would find this or any written survey challenging.

We offer the above data with a small proviso. On reflection, the wording; '*What issues would you be most likely to talk to a counsellor about?*' was ambiguous. It generated responses that leave us uncertain if respondent's answers were hypothetical; what they believe they might contact a counsellor about if they were to experience this particular problem in the future, or what issues they were currently experiencing that might lead them to contact a counsellor. With this in mind we are reluctant to use this particular data to make definitive statements, however we feel it provides a snapshot of the issues that were likely to be most prevalent at the time this questionnaire was conducted.

Although 'self-harm', 'eating disorders' and 'alcohol and drug abuse' did not rank as highly as 'family', 'exam pressure' or 'bullying', we feel the numbers are still significant, particularly if we consider the possibility that respondents interpreted the question to be asking 'what issues do they *currently* have that they would seek counselling for.'

We cannot afford to ignore this data as it may mean that in actual terms;

357 young people (20%) in year eight and ten, across the schools surveyed may be in need of support for substance misuse.

291 (or 16%) of these young people may be managing issues around self-harm.

A further 266 (15%) are potentially dealing with eating disorders and may not be getting any professional support

Multiply this by the number of secondary schools and colleges in Hertfordshire and you begin to see the size of the problem facing the county now and in the future.

This data provides a snapshot in time and does not tell us if things have improved or declined, or indeed, as pointed out earlier, if these are actually current issues.

It may well be that what looks like a shocking figure is in fact a great improvement on earlier years. However, those supporting pupils within these schools may want to urgently review their support if they are not happy with these figures.

Alcohol and drug misuse is widely recognised as a problem for many teenagers by the agencies that offer support in these areas. We were interested to consider that although this data suggests that alcohol and binge drinking are a concern, it was in fact one of the issues least likely to motivate a young person to seek advice or help. This leads us to consider two important but very different points;

Firstly, that most teenagers do not consider their own alcohol use to be a problem. This may be because it is indeed the minority who have a problem or because teens do not recognise their drinking habits as problematic. However, it is beyond the scope of this report to answer which it might be and so we hope that those who can, will look into this matter further.

Secondly, the behaviour displayed by young people that has an impact on others or their property (such as alcohol related crime and violence) not surprisingly generates significant attention. However issues that are of much greater concern to the individual young person (exam pressure, low confidence, bereavement etc) that don't typically result in negative consequences for the community, do not seem to generate the same corporate response or incentive to intervene. Although it's not difficult to understand why this would be, it is truly sad to consider just how many young people are feeling unsupported, highly stressed and in some cases, suicidal. We should perhaps remind ourselves of the wealth of research that suggests a correlation between alcohol abuse and poor mental health. So perhaps by improving the support available to young people to discuss their problems or simply talk things through, would over time reduce the wider communities experience of alcohol related crime and violence perpetrated by young adults.

We would like to use this last point to illustrate why we feel such concern that counselling in schools may be reduced or abandoned if there is no statutory requirement to provide it. Mental health is often a hidden problem that tends to affect the individual and possibly those very close to the individual. Typically it does not disturb the majority and yet, left without support, it's a problem that tends to degenerate. When it does, it can be devastating for the community.

It may seem provocative to suggest, but it could be argued that if school waits long enough, the problem may well become someone else's. Certainly, academics such as Hayes and Ecclestone (2009) have suggested that schools are for the transfer of knowledge and warn us about the dangerous rise of therapeutic education. Although Hayes and Ecclestone were more concerned with teachers providing support when they are not trained to do so (something we agree is a concern) their argument focuses more on PHSE curriculum. That said, we hope that in exposing how many young people are in fact suffering from a variety of issues within the district, that Hertfordshire schools and County and District Councils will be inspired

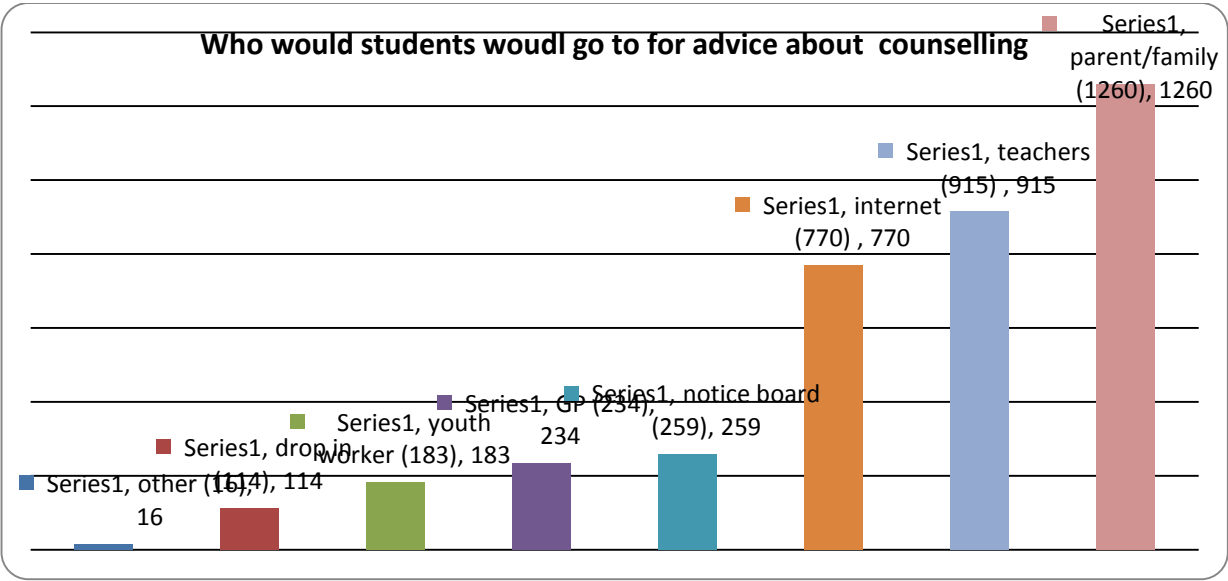
to continue the good work they already do and explore how it can be enhanced. In doing so, we would hope that students in Hertfordshire will feel they live in a County able to respond well to their needs, address their anxieties and confident that should the occasion arise, they will get the support they need, when they first need it and not when it's too late.

As a Youth Council we want young people to feel able to go to school, do well, and achieve their potential. We believe that for most young people this is a realistic goal, however in order to achieve that goal we feel improved access to counselling, talking therapies and support whether it is on or off school sites is needed.

3. *Where to find help.*

Respondents were asked how they would find out about a counsellor or counselling.

Almost unanimously, respondents said they would seek advice from friends and family first. The first professional most students said they would ask advice from in finding counselling support was their teacher or member of school staff. The next most popular source of information was the internet.



On reflection we feel many of these are not surprising statistics considering family and teachers are the two groups of adults' that school pupils have most contact with and therefore most familiarity with. We also feel that 'friends' and the 'internet' are often important sources of information for those who have them, so again, no surprise here.

We would like to bring your attention however to a potential issue. If pupils consider their teachers to be one of the most suitable options when seeking guidance either

with a problem or in getting help for a problem, (Roberts 2010 p30.) then teachers are likely to need;

- a) awareness that they are the preferred choice for pupils seeking advice on counselling
- b) access to the information they need, to sign-post accordingly
- c) the time to advise what the best support options are
- d) training to recognise non-verbal communications of anxiety and distress.

This issue is already beginning to find headlines as the Times, this Sunday (July 1st) reports on a teacher effectively sacked for handing out their personal number to a very distressed pupil.

We must not allow our teachers to struggle with such ethical dilemmas or allow students to feel they cannot be supported by the people they trust. This conflict must be resolved and the sooner the better.

4. The Value of Counselling and what deters students from seeking school based counselling

Both male and female respondents stated the most valuable reasons for seeing a counsellor were 'impartiality' and 'confidentiality' and 'a chance to be listened to'.

Respondents were asked to consider which of the following might prevent them from seeing a counsellor;

Which of the following may put you off seeing a counsellor?

Please tick top three

• Setting in School	• Friends finding out	• Family knowing
• Information being shared / possible lack of confidentiality	• Having to wait for an appointment	• Previous bad experience
• Times/venue not suitable	• Bad experiences of others	• Fear of the unknown
		• None

Overwhelmingly, most respondents stated concerns regarding privacy. 'Information being shared' was the major concern followed by 'fear of friends finding out.' 'School setting' and 'fear of the unknown' were also major deterrents.

Because very few respondents gave answers relating to practical experience, eg, waiting time, bad experience etc, this data suggests that the majority of respondents had not actually seen a school counsellor.

Based on the clear concern for privacy we would suggest that although school based counselling appears to give easy access to those that need it, much has still to be done to remove the shame and stigma associated with receiving counselling.

In accord with Richardson (2012) from Time to Change, a charity committed to ending the stigma associated with mental health, a quarter of the young people they recently surveyed have said that the stigma attached to their mental illness has made them want to give up on life. The new research also highlights that much of the stigma that young people face comes from those who you would expect they would be able to turn to first, including friends (70%), siblings (35%) and parents (57%). Our data supports these findings as we found most of our respondents had clear concerns that their friends might find out.

Recommendations

As nobody can predict when they may need support or guidance with personal issues, we would strongly encourage schools to make every effort to ensure all their pupils are aware of both on-site services and options for support out of school, particularly important if there are no school based options.

We would like to suggest that schools who don't already, utilise their websites and newsletters more fully for sign-posting counselling information. We acknowledge that schools may be reluctant to use their website in this way if others are not also signposting. Therefore, we would like to recommend a generic information page that can be included on all school sites across the County.

Our data has highlighted that many pupils see teachers as a source of information. We would strongly recommend that schools work more closely with charities and the County Council to ensure their teachers are well informed and are able to signpost accordingly. To support this, we recommend that school websites and pupil information packs highlight Channelmogo as a one stop shop for information as well as other local and national agencies who offer advice and guidance to young people. This will impact the provision Youth Connexions and County Council provide for training and information sharing, with the intention that schools and teachers stay up to date and well informed.

Just to clarify, although we found that students often see teaching staff as sources of information, we are not suggesting that teachers should ever be considered as substitutes for counselling services, even for minor concerns. In fact we would like to be very clear that our peers require counselling to be confidential and teachers although extremely well suited by time and place, do not have the entire skill set to provide counselling, or the training to maintain the appropriate boundaries needed for counselling and teaching simultaneously. Therefore teachers should not be recruited to act in this way.

In light of the data in this report, we recommend that counselling providers redeploy some of their marketing budget and strategies away from potential clients and aim instead at teachers and teaching assistants, so that they can understand that they may well be the first person a pupil turns to and most importantly, what to do if they are.

We would like to see the survey re-written taking into account the identified limitations and repeated on an annual basis so that improvements or potential hot spots can be monitored. We feel this is particularly important as schools take responsibility for their budgets and can choose to buy or not buy counselling services for their pupils. Independent annual monitoring that compares schools in this way, may help schools evaluate their provision and identify what works. It also ensures that in line with the Department of Education's recent announcements, the needs of young people are at the forefront of decision making and service planning.

The data collection for this report did not seek triangulation as we did not feel it was necessary to support our findings in this way. However we believe it would be both interesting and valid in the light of the data produced, to investigate how many teachers and support staff within schools;

- have been approached by a student seeking advice
- feel confident to support a young person seek the appropriate support needed.
- would like CPD or training that includes better understanding of local support and guidance available for young people within their community.

There are many successful initiatives across the country that this County may wish to consider. We would like to recommend that those holding a portfolio for mental health and well-being, commit to sharing and learning from successful initiatives. For example, by developing procedures that allow cross-referencing of electronic databases for children's social care and adult mental health services, an initiative SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) has recently cited as being effective. However, there is a considerable wealth of good practise within the County and so we would also recommend that schools adopt a share and redeploy initiative where a simple process is put in place that allows developments and best practice to be shared. We would recommend however that students are consulted in this regard, so it can be clarified by those receiving the support, what works well and what does not.

We would like to stress how important it is that all agencies offering counselling or advice, have access to this report. This will allow them the opportunity to consider how they can develop their links with schools and school staff in order to improve outcomes for pupils. We feel this will support all those connected to supporting young people the opportunity to explore how they can work together to support the issues raised in this report and how teachers and schools and teacher training institutes can enhance their knowledge through training, inset days and other such opportunities so that teachers can better meet the needs of their pupils.

Conclusions

The value of mental health provision and the overwhelming need for it within the District and indeed the County has become very clear to us, as has the need for appropriate access and early support. Although the savings made through preventative measures are always difficult to gauge, as a Youth Council we believe it is the moral duty of our Schools, District Councils and County Councils to ensure *suitable* and *effective* counselling provisions are available to all those for whom they have a responsibility. This is important to underline as the government has made clear it will '*not prescribe which services and activities authorities should fund or deliver or to what level.*' However, we hope the words of Children's Minister, Tim Loughton are taken into strong consideration;

"This government recognises the important role that out-of-school services play in the lives of many young people. We have therefore retained the duty on local authorities to ensure there are sufficient services locally to help young people when they need it."

We hope that this report and its recommendations will support District and Herts County Councils, as well as schools and support services across Hertfordshire to recognise the need young people have for talking services and ensure young people continue to have access to appropriate support whenever *they* need it.

Supporting good mental health can take many forms. To have the stress associated with exam pressure, uncertainty around future employment, low confidence, loss of a loved one (not just through bereavement but, divorce, and deployment within the armed services) is perhaps, the first link in the chain to

removing the stigma associated with seeking support. Building on that, we must also look at the logistics of how and where counselling is offered, as concerns regarding confidentiality and privacy have been shown to be key deterrents to potential users.

Eradicating issues that may impact a young person's mental health is, for the time being, beyond all of our combined capabilities. However, helping young people to be robust in the face of adversity shouldn't be. As Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg made clear earlier this year, when he acknowledged too many young people suffer in silence with mental health problems, "Mental health must have the same priority as physical health."

As a Youth Council we recognise the fantastic work that is already being done to support young people by both, schools, charities and statutory agencies within Hertfordshire. We hope that by highlighting where we can still do better, we may play some small part in ensuring that as schools take control of their budgets, counselling services are preserved and indeed enhanced and that ultimately we reduce the number of teen suicides in Herts.

Appendices

Questionnaire

Letter to schools:

I'm writing to you today as the Youth Support Officer responsible for the Youth Councils in the District (St Albans, Harpenden and Redbourn)

The Youth Council's often raise money for local charities. Last autumn after much discussion, St Albans Youth Council decided to raise money for Youth Talk, a local counselling service in the area. In researching this charity they gained an insight into the overwhelming need for counselling services within the district.

They have since met with a number of professionals which left them feeling concern and bewilderment for the very high incidence of eating disorders and the tragic suicide rate within the District.

Their research to date has led them to understand that teenagers who attempt or indeed commit suicide, are more often than not, teens who have not had access to counselling services. They also understand that Youth Talk and other counselling services, at any given time have a substantial waiting list of young people, desperate to get support.

Having discussed this issue at great length they feel duty bound, as they are charged with representing the views of their peers, to investigate this matter further.

So I am writing to you on behalf of St Albans Youth District Youth Council, a group 14 young people who are all very keen to include Verulam School in a project that they feel will generate vital data that could highlight both the needs of students and the barriers they face in engaging with counselling services.

To this end, they have produced a questionnaire (attached) that they would like to take into all schools in the district with the intention of surveying years eight and ten.

The data generated will produce anonymised stats that will be compiled into a report that will be sent to County and to all the schools that took part. Data will also be collated so that it can provide a snapshot for each school should they be interested to see the data generated by their own pupils.

The Youth Council may also share the anonymised results with Youth Talk.

If you are able to support this initiative we can provide paper based copies of the questionnaire within 24 hours of hearing back from you, however an electronic version is attached should this be easier to use.

I hope you are able to support this ambitious but very worthy project and look forward to hearing from you in due course

Warmest Regards,

Debi Roberts MA Ed.

Youth Support Worker

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Mobile 07982 485 784

Hertfordshire County Council

Services for Young People

Youth Connexions

Post Point 22-AP2007, Apsley Two, Brindley Way, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9BF

List of Counselling Providers in the County

SIGN POST www.signpostcounselling.co.uk

Signpost offers a free and confidential counselling and information service available to all 11-25 year olds in Watford, Three Rivers and surrounding areas.

Locations of Counselling: **Advice Centre, Watford and Manor Way, Borehamwood**

Age Range: **11-25**

TALKTIME www.relatecnh.org.uk

Talk Time is a youth counselling project run by Relate Central and Northern Hertfordshire in Letchworth, Stevenage.

Locations of Counselling: **MS Therapy Centre, Campus 5, Letchworth Garden City Bowes Lyon Centre, Stevenage**

Age Range: **13-19**

THE BASE www.baseyouthproject.org.uk

Counselling is a confidential service provided by The Base Youth Project.

Locations of Counselling: **High Street, London Colney**

Age Range: **11-19**

TILEHOUSE COUNSELLING www.tilehouse.org

Tilehouse Counselling exists to provide professional counselling and therapeutic group work for women and young people who are unable to pay private fees.

Locations of Counselling: **Hitchin**

Age Range: **13-25**

URBAN ACCESS www.urbanaccess.org.uk

Urban Access is a free and confidential service offering counselling to all young people aged 13 -25 years in the Dacorum area. We welcome young people from all sections of the community and we do not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity, race, religion or gender.

Locations of Counselling: **Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead & Town Centre, Berkhamsted.**

Age Range: **13-25**

YOUNG CONCERN TRUST (YCT) www.youngconcern.com

YCT Counselling is free and easy for young people to access. If you would like to speak with one of our counsellors then all you need to do is to contact us and we can get things started - just phone, email or text us at our office.

Locations of Counselling: **Town Centre, Harlow, Town Centre, Bishop's Stortford, Town Centre, Cheshunt**

Age Range: **11-25**

YOUNG PEOPLE'S COUNSELLING SERVICE

YPCS is a free-standing youth counselling service run by The Base Youth Project, which is based in London Colney.

Locations of Counselling: **Breaks Manor Youth Centre, Hatfield**

Age Range: **13-19**

YOUTH TALK www.youthtalk.org.uk

The service is available to anyone, between the ages of 14 & 25 who, live, work or receive education in the District of St. Albans.

Locations of Counselling: **Spencer Street, St Albans**

Age Range: **13-25**

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