

Learning Hub on 'WELLBEING: self-harm and suicide'. May 2019

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The Hertfordshire Learning Hub

The Learning Hub is an important two-way feedback loop between front line practitioners and the Strategic Safeguarding Partnership/Board, ensuring learning on priority local issues is shared and acted on at all levels in a timely way.

The Learning Hub in May 2019 is on the theme of wellbeing: self-harm and suicide and this newsletter provides key information about evidence and initiatives in Hertfordshire. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview, but it aims to stimulate discussion about the issues, what is working well locally and what could be improved.

Please respond to our [online survey](#) to feedback your views on wellbeing in Hertfordshire.

1. Wellbeing, self-harm and suicide in Hertfordshire

Adults

Who dies by **suicide**
in Hertfordshire



Each death by suicide impacts as many as 130 people and costs the UK an estimated £1.67 million.

- Hertfordshire has lower rates of suicide than regionally or nationally and the trends are broadly stable.
- The latest suicide audit revealed the need to prioritise prevention work on men aged 20-29, those involved with the criminal justice system, and single men.
- 11% of adults in Hertfordshire are estimated to suffer from depression or anxiety (GP Patient survey, NHS England, 2016/17)

“The fact that people choose to harm themselves and take out their hurt, pain or anger on themselves is heart-breaking”

(17-year-old from Hertfordshire)

Definitions...

Self-harm: is often a response to overwhelming feelings or situations. It is most commonly described as a person choosing to inflict pain on themselves in some way. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) describes self-harm as *‘Intentional self-poisoning or injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act.’* Self-harm is not a mental illness in itself, but it is a sign that something is wrong. Self-harm can have a number of functions for a young person; it can become a way of coping and be hard to stop.

Wellbeing: can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole (New Economics Foundation).

Children and young people

- **11.2%** of 5-15-year olds in Hertfordshire are estimated to have a mental disorder (approximately 18,600 young people).
- In 2018, **4,335 school pupils** in Hertfordshire had identified social, emotional and mental health needs. This level is higher than the England average.
- **14%** of year 8 and 10 female pupils in Hertfordshire (and 9% of males) self-reported that they had self-harmed in 2018 (Health Related Behaviour Survey, 2018).
- Out of those young people reporting self-harm, **13%** said they had no support.
- **46%** of looked after children have self-harmed compared with 13% of other pupils.
- In 2016/17, there were **110** hospital admissions as a result of self-harm in 10-14-year olds in Hertfordshire and this rate has been increasing.

What are we already doing about it?

The refreshed [CAMHS Transformation Plan](#) sets out a comprehensive plan for improving the emotional and mental wellbeing of the county’s children and young people. This includes a focus on improving the availability of early help, expanding support for children and young people with autism and/or ADHD, and a whole system support for those with more complex needs. A new ‘Children and Young People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Hertfordshire’ is also currently being drafted, which will provide more detail on the preventive and universal work aiming to improve mental wellbeing amongst all children and young people as well as targeted work for those at risk and those with early and mild symptoms.

The Suicide Prevention Network was set up in 2017 to deliver the Hertfordshire Suicide Prevention Strategy. The Network involves more than 80 people from 20-plus organisations working in focused groups, including many people who have been bereaved by suicide. The vision is to make Hertfordshire a county where no one ever gets to a point where they feel suicide is their only option, and to support those bereaved or affected by suicide where it does happen. A [suicide audit](#) is carried out annually as part of this work

Mental Health Support Teams are currently being piloted in Hertfordshire, using trailblazer government funding provided to only 25 areas in England. 40 schools will be supported by two teams of support workers, which will include youth workers as well as mental health practitioners. They will provide evidence-based support in community venues, not just schools, and the programme will also include parent education programmes provided by the voluntary sector. Overall the teams will provide early help to pupils, support school staff and ensure children and young people with more severe needs can access the right support by providing a link to specialist NHS services.

Triggers for self-harm in young people:

- > family relationship difficulties
- > difficulties with peer relationships
- > bullying/cyberbullying
- > significant trauma
- > self-harm behaviour in other students
- > identification with a peer group which promotes self-harm
- > self-harm portrayed or reported in the media
- > difficult times of the year
- > trouble in school or with the police
- > feeling under pressure from families, school and peers to conform
- > exam pressure
- > times of change (e.g. parental separation)

Warning signs associated with self-harm in young people:

- > changes in eating/sleeping habits
- > increased isolation from friends/family
- > excessive and secretive use of the internet
- > changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive than usual
- > lowering of academic grades
- > talking about self-harming or suicide
- > abusing drugs or alcohol
- > becoming socially withdrawn
- > expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- > giving away possessions

2. How it is Impacting on Young People, Families and Vulnerable Adults

Secondary school girls who said they had self-harmed in Hertfordshire were more likely to:

- Be unhappy with life.
- Smoke or have been a smoker.
- Have been bullied.
- Worry about the way they look and want to lose weight.
- Know someone who uses recreational drugs.
- Have drunk alcohol at home in the last seven days.

(Health Related Behaviour Survey, 2018)

Feedback from young people engaged with YC Herts projects, collected in May 2019:

"I think there is not enough awareness being made on the PREVENTION of mental health or how someone who is feeling suicidal or self-harming can be helped"

"Telling someone to speak to a teacher or an adult isn't enough"

Feedback from parents and carers of children accessing CAMHS, collected in May 2019 via the CAMHS parent forum:

*"Supporting a young person with low wellbeing is **extremely stressful** and shouldn't be underestimated. You are constantly looking for certain behaviours and potential triggers both day and night"*

"Every minute of every day I am on alert!!! When does it end...."

*"It has **impacted on other members of the family's mental health** due to the levels of stress within the home. I currently do not work due to the levels of support my daughter has needed...which has resulted in financial pressures"*

*"The process of **what happens in a crisis** and having to go through A&E has often been very unhelpful... The lack of communication between services and school and college has often increased the stress and risk"*

*"[Support is] there when a suicide attempt has been made but as parent/carers **we are trying to prevent getting to this point**"*

*"For parents it is exhausting being a carer with no previous knowledge of this health issue. **You are left to 'get on with it.'**"*

*"[There was a] huge stress/ massive **effect on younger siblings** to witness their sister in hospital for 3 months"*

3. Examples and Resources

Warning signs that could indicate someone is experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings:

- talking about feeling hopeless and that life is not worth living.
- saying that friends and family would be better off without them.
- talking about death and plans to take their own life.
- a sudden and seemingly full recovery after a period of severe depression.
- looking into methods or the means to end their own life.
- putting all their affairs in order and seeming to be preparing to die.
- giving away prized possessions and saying goodbye to loved ones.
- saying that they can hear voices telling them to end their own life.

Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do

Local practice

Spot the Signs campaign

Spot the Signs is a local suicide prevention campaign, helping to remove the stigma of talking openly about suicide. It delivered suicide prevention training to 1,161 professionals in 2018 and also supported Barhale Construction with their in-house mental health training for construction staff, sharing messages with this key target group. The campaign supports the [Stay Alive App](#), which has tools to help keep people safe in times of crisis and details of the emergency and support services to contact in Hertfordshire. It can be used by people who are experiencing difficulties with mental health or having thoughts of suicide, or for those who are concerned about someone else who may be considering suicide.

Self-harm toolkit for schools

A toolkit has been produced for schools in Hertfordshire to help them to identify students at risk of self-harm and provide the appropriate support. The toolkit can be accessed through the [Healthy Young Minds website](#) and includes: detailed information about self-harm written specifically for school staff, signposting and coping guides for young people and parents, a template letter for parents, guidance for running focus groups for students, and safeguarding forms and checklists.

The Empathy Project

This Project was set up and run by YC Hertfordshire and funded by Health Education England. It is a peer-to-peer befriending and social prescription scheme that has been piloted in the children's emergency department on three nights of the week at Watford General Hospital and the Lister Hospital in Stevenage. Volunteers between the ages of 17 and 21 provide social support to children and young people who attend the department to let them know them about local services, community projects and guidance they may find helpful. Empathy workers have relieved pressure on hospital staff and boosted the commitment of staff to prioritise mental health and emotional wellbeing. In addition the volunteers have gained useful work experience.

"When we hear 'self-harming', we think we will get C-CATT and CAMHS involved and probably admit them to hospital while we get their assessment sorted out. And those young people get sent on their way along the CAMHS pathway. But the Empathy volunteers will think about social support and community and peer support, which is really helpful. We don't think about that". (Staff, Watford General)

Resources

[Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

[Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

[HSCP self-harm procedure](#)

[Healthy Young Minds website](#)

[Hertfordshire Suicide Prevention Network](#)

[Spotting the signs training](#)

[Hector's House suicide prevention charity](#)

[Prevention of Young Suicide website](#)

www.newleafcollege.co.uk
Free wellbeing courses for Herts residents over 18

[Community perinatal team](#)

www.nspcc.org.uk

[Just Talk website](#) Campaign for young people

www.childline.org.uk

[Samaritans](#)

www.anxiety.org.uk

www.childbereavementuk.org

[YC Herts Supporting You programme for young people showing early signs of distress](#)

[Safe Space service – counselling in schools and mentoring](#)

Call 0300 123 4043 if you are concerned about a child's safety

Wellbeing Boxes for Care Leavers

More than 50 care leavers benefitted from wellbeing boxes recently. The wellbeing parcels included word search books, pens, mindfulness colouring books, herbal tea, shower gel, a mental health handbook from MIND, a list of NHS approved apps and tips for when a young person is having a bad day. Supported by YC Herts, the boxes were distributed by Care Leaver Personal Advisors working with children and young people in care. A member of staff said: *"I had some young people who are feeling pretty low and delivering the wellbeing box made a real difference."*

My Teen Brain

My Teen Brain aims to provide practical information and strategies to both parents/carers and professionals which will enable them to support adolescents through this time of change. It focuses on a key stage of brain development and shows how changes in the adolescent brain, in conjunction with experience and environment, can affect emotions, relationships, behaviours, sleep and attitudes to risk. Over 900 professionals have been trained in My Teen Brain, and a lesson plan for schools to deliver to young people has also now been produced. The feedback received shows that professionals felt they had a better understanding of how the developing brain affects teen behaviour and were better equipped to have conversations with both parents and young people, and ultimately reduce conflict in the family home and improve outcomes for families.

Mental Health in Schools Training

There are over 600 trained Mental Health Leads and Deputy Leads in Hertfordshire schools. In addition, the Health Young Minds Accreditation was launched in April and will be awarded to schools and colleges that demonstrate a commitment to supporting pupil's and teacher's emotional wellbeing and mental health. Schools and colleges embarking on the accreditation will engage in reviewing their practice and cover 11 elements, from school leadership, ethos and staff wellbeing to teaching students about staying well, seeking help and targeted support. Following achievement of the accreditation, schools can also work towards gaining the Suicide Awareness Status award.

Suicide prevention in partnership with National Rail

Network Rail has implemented an 'escalation process' which involves notifying the local lead for suicide prevention if there are more than three suicide/injurious attempts in a 12-month period within the area of a particular train station or local area. After an escalation at Elstree and Borehamwood Station, colleagues from partner organisations were invited to attend a Rail Industry Suicide Prevention working group to discuss a community approach to suicide prevention. The group developed a Community Action Plan to target Potters Bar train station and the wider area. The Plan included the priority to raise awareness of mental health and suicide prevention support with the local community. One of the ideas implemented was Walk About in the local area, which aimed to start a positive conversation about mental health with the local community; residents, employees and businesses. It also provided local businesses with the right information in case they identify a vulnerable person and let people know what support, training and help was available for themselves and others.

