

## **Children and young people's mental health – role of education**

Dr James Palfreman-Kay, Equality and Diversity Adviser, has written this submission on behalf of Bournemouth University, which is based on feedback from the following individuals:

- Mandi Barron, Head of Student Services
- Dr Andrew Mayers, Principal Academic In Psychology
- Ian Jones, Head of Regional Community Partnerships

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Bournemouth University (BU) has made the submission because of its strong commitment to promoting a positive approach towards mental health issues.

### **1. Executive summary**

We are sharing with members of the Health Committee how the University and other local organisations have worked together to raise awareness of mental health issues within and outside Dorset. The submission shares the impact the work has had on school students, teachers, parents and the wider community.

The benefit of the evaluation videos and feedback is that it shows what staff and students gained from attending the events. We can also see how it sparked their thinking about mental health. In addition, it was interesting to see how the experience encouraged them to consider what they would like to do next in terms of studying and then careers. The submission also considers the resilience of individuals coming into higher education and the challenges of moving from child to adult mental health services. A number of recommendations are made for the Committee to consider.

### **2. Mental health events**

2.1 To promote a positive approach to mental health issues, BU has run a number of events to mark World Mental Health Day and Eating Disorder Week. This has involved working with organisations such as Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust, statutory agencies and local mental health charities to deliver a series of events which have been open to schools including teachers, students and parents.

2.2 The aim of the programme of events, which has taken place for a number of years, is to change how we all think and act about mental health issues. BU is doing this work to show its core commitment to equality and diversity and respond to guidance

provided by sector bodies such as the Office For Fair Access (OFFA).

### **3. Impact of the mental health events on students and parents**

3.1 Evidence of impact is shown through video interviews:

- [Attendee feedback video on eating disorder week 2013/14](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Poole High School staff and students talk about attending the World Mental Health Day 2015 programme](#) (hyperlink to video)

3.2 A case study provided by one of the speakers who supported World Mental Health Day 2015. It outlines the impact the talk has had on students and parents.

#### **Case study World Mental Health Week – October 2015**

*For BU Mental Health awareness week 2015, I gave a talk [‘Reclaiming the ‘wasted’ years: one person’s journey from mental illness to employment’](#), where I gave a candid account of my personal journey of many years experiencing mental health difficulties and the pathway back to employment. My aim was to increase people’s understanding of mental illness and to challenge the stigma that still exists and to offer hope; that out of a seemingly dark and hopeless place, recovery is possible. I did not know most of my audience and was unaware of the impact that my talk would have.*

*There were some colleagues, with whom I work every day, and I saw tears in their eyes as we came to the end. Their response to me was only positive; reflecting on my strength and honesty. I had a number of people come and speak to me afterwards. There were three 6<sup>th</sup> form students who came and told me of a friend who had self-harmed and wanted to know how to support her. A couple of weeks later I received an e-mail from one of the students asking me if I would be a case study for her Health & Social Care course. We met at BU, where she ‘interviewed’ me in depth and also disclosed that someone she knew was experiencing some of the issues I had described.*

*After the talk, there were opportunities for questions and a gentleman asked me a question which seemed a little strange at the time. Two days later I met him again at another event for mental health awareness week and it was there that he and his wife poured out the story of their son and their struggles in seeking to care for him and support him back into employment.*

*I gave a brief interview after the talk with Tristan Pascoe from Radio Solent and a close uni friend from Southampton (who stood by me when it was really tough) phoned me the day after to say how proud she was to hear me on the radio; reflecting on how far I had come. A*

*friend from Church spoke to me on the Sunday to say that she had no idea what I'd been through and this opened up another conversation.*

*By far the most incredible response to that day was from a couple who hadn't attended the talk but heard the relatively short piece on the radio and wrote a long letter to me, addressed to BU, Fern Barrow. Miraculously it found its way to my Lansdowne office and I was filled with emotion as I read the story of their daughter and her battle with mental illness. This led to a meeting with the couple, in a local hotel, where we were able to talk further over a cup of tea. Afterwards, it felt like I'd known them for a long time as I'd heard about their family; the brother; the mother's current fight against cancer and their hopes and dreams for their daughter.*

*Some of the written feedback for my talk indicated some peoples' minds were 'opened up' and their views had changed. Others had said yes to the question about whether what they had heard would influence the way they will work, live or think in the future.*

*All these very tangible accounts of the impact my story had mean a lot to me on a personal level but also highlight the importance to keep talking about mental health.*

3.3 Evaluation of Eating Disorder talks undertaken at local schools. Some of the key points to emerge from one talk during 2015/16 are shared below:

- Knowledge in the area of Eating Disorders had increased from 50% to 70% after attending the talk.
- 76% of the attendees felt they had learnt something new
- In response to the question, 'What impact the event had', the attendees provided the following responses:

*"More knowledge about eating disorders"*

*"I understand how eating disorders affect athletes"*

*"Given me more knowledge of eating disorders"*

In response to the question, 'What 3 actions will you take after attending the talk', the attendees provided the following responses:

*"Eat properly"*

*"Look out for mates, to see if they have a disorder."*

*"Sleeping better"*

*"Talk about it more"*

A total of 43 students provided feedback on the event.

#### **4. Other work with schools**

4.1 To complement the above work, BU students undertook a project which looked at the topic of mental health and young people. This link shares the students' work: [Mental health and Young People](#)

4.2 The timings 41:59-42:37 talk about the work undertaken with schools. Please note the video is currently unlisted, therefore not available to the public.

#### **5. Students studying within HE**

5.1 Whilst the above programme of events has helped to raise awareness of mental health issues and challenge the stigma, we have seen University students displaying a lack of resilience. In addition, we see problems with transitioning from child mental health services into adult ones (although the latter is probably more of an NHS issue).

#### **6. Resources to support compulsory/post-16 education and the wider community**

6.1 We have looked to provide a number of mental health resources to support schools and the wider community. These have included recording talks or undertaking specific projects which have individuals talking about their own lived experience. Some of these projects have individual school children talking about their own lived experience.

6.2 All talks have been made available on the BU [Equality and Diversity YouTube](#) playlist. A selection of resources are listed below:

- [Managing Eating Disorders within a School Setting](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Realising I have an eating disorder](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Recovering from an eating disorder: hope, strength and life](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Speaking up - Time to Change Dorset \(TtC\) Film 1](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [You can recover - Time to Change Dorset \(TtC\) Film 2](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Stronger, better, person - Time to Change Dorset \(TtC\) Film 3](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Being a Mental Health Carer](#) (hyperlink to video)
- [Becoming a Mental Health Carer](#) (hyperlink to video)

6.3 To complement the recordings, individual Storify stories have been developed which can be seen at:

- [World Mental Health Day 2016](#)
- [Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2016](#)

## **7. Recommendations**

- Encourage the partnership working undertaken between Bournemouth University and other local agencies to encourage more open conversations about mental health issues. We would be happy to provide further evidence to the committee about how this works.
- Reflecting on the work undertaken at BU, it is recommended that a more positive use of language is used such as 'mental health issues'.
- Encourage schools to promote Wellbeing and talk openly about mental health through talking about budgeting, cooking and shopping and the importance of eating healthily.
- Encourage UCAS to work with the education sector to establish what more information could be provided to enable HE to be aware of the support needs of students with mental health issues.