



A service evaluation of Upturn Young Person's Service: preliminary results **H. J. Christopher, & S. Easton. (2017).**

Introduction

The mental health of children and young people (CYP) is deteriorating and is now seen as a public health concern in the UK¹. One in ten CYP across the UK are experiencing clinically diagnosable mental health (MH) difficulties², which are in turn affecting their social, educational and economic outcomes¹. 50% of mental health problems emerge by the age of 15³, and many conditions then persist into adulthood⁴. Intervening early and providing support for CYP at a young age is therefore the best way to prevent these conditions from developing⁵.

However, due to funding cuts and large increases in referrals⁶, statutory NHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are unable to provide services to the large number of struggling CYP⁷, leading to as many as 70% of CYP experiencing MH difficulties not able to access appropriate support⁸. Many CYP are now gaining wellbeing and MH support from voluntary organisations⁹.

Despite CYP gaining support from voluntary-sector services, at present a lack of evidence-based research exists into how these services help CYP to cope with and overcome MH difficulties. Good quality service evaluation is important in order to understand what works for CYP and

what needs improvement in order to support the work of other voluntary-sector services and share good practice.

Upturn Young Person's (YP) Service run through MH charity Solent Mind in the South of England is one such voluntary-sector service that provides MH and wellbeing support to young people. The current report presents the preliminary results of a service evaluation conducted in partnership with the University of Southampton.

Design of Upturn YP Service

A pilot project operating from June 2016 – November 2017, now extended to March 2018. The Service is currently seeking funding opportunities.

Two members of staff work with 14-18 year olds with MH difficulties and parents struggling with a child who has MH difficulties. Staff members provide one-to-one sessions teaching resilience-building techniques with YP and group sessions teaching YP *The Decider Life Skills*¹⁰. A monthly parent group provides peer support for parents struggling to support their child who has MH difficulties.

Upturn has had 237 YP referrals since June 2016 (self-referral, GP, CAMHS), and discharged 166 YP as of 28th September 2017.

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REPORT TITLE

A service evaluation of Upturn Young
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Service evaluation design

YP who had accessed the Service attended qualitative interviews and parents attended a focus group with researchers to talk about their experiences of the Service. Additionally, some YP filled out questionnaires when they were assessed and again at discharge. These outcome measures were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests in SPSS for any improvements between the two time-points:

PHQ-9¹¹ (depression)

GAD-7¹² (anxiety)

Mental Health Recovery Star¹³ (recovery)

Results

Feedback from CYP

YP said that the Service provided them with vital support that CAMHS were unable to provide them with. The **short waiting times for an assessment** meant that YP felt able to get help instantly, and all YP said the atmosphere of the Service was welcoming and relaxed. YP described staff as **friendly, welcoming** and **passionate**. The group sessions were viewed as **fun and engaging**.

Accessing the Service and learning the skills led to many positive outcomes for YP, namely an ability to **control symptoms** of anxiety and depression. YP felt **able to now manage** worsening life events and **to accept and no longer feel ashamed** of MH issues. YP spoke of being **better able to cope with exams** and **achieve** at school or college. They **gained confidence, increased motivation** and were able to **make positive changes to their important relationships**, namely improved communication with family and friends.

YP stated, “**The Service changed my life**”; “**My whole life has changed**”.

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Feedback from parents

Parents felt that accessing the group **normalized** the issues and concerns they were experiencing, helping them to **feel less isolated** and that they weren't alone. Parents stated they **gained confidence** and faith in themselves as parents. The group was described as a **positive environment** to communicate with other parents and share ideas. Parents **did not know of any other service like this** in the area. All parents wanted **fortnightly group sessions** rather than monthly in order to gain more frequent support.

The **preventative approach to YP mental health** and a **joined-up approach** including improved communication between schools, CAMHS and other Services was discussed as vitally important.

Statistical analysis of outcome measures

PHQ-9:

Preliminary t-test results show that since accessing the Service, young people's depression scores significantly reduced ($p = .002$) from a mean score of 11.06 to a mean score of 6.88.

GAD-7:

Preliminary t-test results show that since accessing the Service, young people's anxiety scores significantly reduced ($p = .004$) from a mean score of 11.88 to a mean score of 7.5.

Mental Health Recovery Star:

Preliminary t-test results show that since accessing the Service, young people showed significant improvements in their: **management of mental health** ($p = .000$), **self-care** ($p = .007$), **living skills** ($p = .02$), **social networks** ($p = .005$), **self-esteem** ($p = .002$), and **trust and hope** ($p = .000$).

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These preliminary results indicate that YP feel **significantly less depressed and anxious** after accessing the Service, alongside **significantly improving** in many important areas of their life.

Conclusions and strengths of the Service

The service evaluation demonstrates that Upturn Young Person's Service is an essential service for struggling YP and parents in the Fareham and Gosport area, enabling them to learn how to cope with their difficulties and move forward with their lives. Upturn Young Person's Service provides a welcoming and friendly atmosphere that YP appreciate. The Service has low waiting times which was very important to YP, and the Service supports YP who are not eligible for support from CAMHS in addition to parents who cannot find any other means of support. The Service as a whole fills a large gap in current service provision in the area.

Recommendations

It is clear from the preliminary results that this type of voluntary-sector service is highly valued by CYP and parents and provides vital support for those who cannot access help elsewhere. Other CYP voluntary-sector services should consider setting up a parent support group, as this is a key unique strength of the service, and to ensure that Services are welcoming and relaxed. Teaching resilience-based skills such as *The Decider Life Skills*¹⁰ is useful in helping YP learn to cope.

Keeping waiting times low and increasing the monthly parent group to fortnightly would be encouraged, however this would need increased funding and at present the Service is due to end in March 2018. To lose this Service would be highly detrimental to the YP and parents in the area. Therefore, commissioning the Service is of paramount importance.

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Please note: data collection is ongoing and an updated report will be circulated imminently.

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