

# Your Mind, Your Say

Young people's views of  
mental health services in Dorset

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October 2023



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# About us

Healthwatch Dorset is your health and social care champion.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

As an independent statutory body, we have with the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Dorset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Dorset, which includes the unitary authority areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Dorset.



## Introduction

NHS Dorset want children and young people to have the best mental health and wellbeing, so they are reviewing mental health services to make them better for young people. They understand that people and communities have the experience and expertise that can help shape what mental health services might look like.

### **2020: Review of children and young people's mental health services**

To help develop mental health services for children and young people, NHS Dorset ran some public engagement events and an online survey in February and March 2020 called #YourMindYourSay.

To complement their findings, we visited youth groups and local organisations to gather feedback and seek the views of young people who don't always have a strong voice. We published a report based on our findings in February 2020, which included recommendations for change: [Your Mind Your Say: Young people's views of mental health services in Dorset](#). Unfortunately, after our report was published, the review of children and young people's mental health services was put on hold due to Covid-19.

### **2023: Restarting the review**

NHS Dorset have restarted their review of children and young people's mental health services. They ran 'Check and Challenge' engagement events during May-July 2023. To complement their findings, in June-August 2023, we revisited some of the groups from our 2020 project to talk again to children and young people.

We wanted to check if our 2020 recommendations are still relevant and find out if there is anything else important to young people that needs to be highlighted. This was an opportunity for young people to make a real difference to the way mental health services are set up and delivered in Dorset.

## What we did

We visited local organisations and youth groups across Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset, to speak directly with young people who don't always have a strong voice.

This included young people who have experienced trauma, young refugees, young people who are outside of mainstream school, young LGBTQ+ people, young offenders and previously looked after children.

We asked three questions to find out about their experiences of using children and young people's mental health services and what they thought would make these services better.

1. What do you think is good or helpful about current mental health services for children and young people in Dorset?
2. What do you think could be made better?
3. What would make the biggest difference to mental health services for children and young people?

We also attended a workshop at Future Roots, where we asked three different questions.

1. Can you share a memory of when a service was involved with you and you felt happier, calmer, hopeful and positive?
2. Can you share a memory of when life was a struggle and services were involved?
3. Is there anything that could be done differently which would make a positive difference?

## Who we spoke to

We spoke to 25 young people aged 13-23 and one support worker at the following groups.

- **International Care Network** – Spoke to one person
- **Separated Child Foundation** – Case study by one person
- **Future Roots (Ambassadors Group)** – Spoke to six people
- **Weymouth College** – Spoke to three people
- **Space Youth Project** – Spoke to three people
- **Dorchester Learning Centre** – Spoke to nine people
- **Life Changing Choices Boxing Gym** – Case study by one person
- **Dorset Mind Young Ambassadors** – Spoke to one person.

Full contact details of these organisations are listed in Appendix 2 (page 10).





# Key messages

Several common themes emerged from the feedback we gathered during our conversations with young people.

- Long waiting times to access services.
- Being unable to see the same support worker.
- Not having one person as a point of contact.
- Being unable to access services when desperate for support and before reaching crisis point.
- Sessions being held in a clinical environment that makes young people feel uncomfortable.
- Unhelpful treatment plans and 'self-help' suggestions from support workers.
- Generalising and not treating people's individual needs.
- Better communication between patients and support workers.
- A lack of empathy and knowledge towards trauma.
- No check-in with patients between sessions or after treatment.

## What people told us

Here's a summary of what people told us in response to the questions we asked.

### One-to-one conversations

#### 1. What do you think is good or helpful about current mental health services for children and young people in Dorset?

Overall, people spoke of how nice and friendly some of the counsellors and support workers are. They also told us they felt listened to by some of the support workers and that some of them tried to really help.



My support worker was easy to talk to and it was nice that they listened to me.



#### 2. What do you think could be made better?

There were various suggestions and ideas as to how services could be made better.

Long waiting times was mentioned over and over again; young people told us they would like shorter waiting times for the initial appointment and for a diagnosis.

Another recurring theme was the lack of continuity among support workers. We were told that a lot of the young people never got to see the same support worker, so it was hard for them to build any level of trust.

Some young people told us they found it hard to talk face-to-face and they felt it would be easier for them if they were allowed to do an activity while talking. We were also told that some support workers lacked empathy and knowledge.



More knowledge, sensitivity and empathy is needed. The support worker told me off for crying too loudly once and threatened to call security.




I only saw them twice in two years and all they gave me was a form to fill in.



### 3. What would make the biggest difference to mental health services for children and young people?

Overall, people felt that more funding would improve mental health services. They said this would allow for more support workers, which would decrease waiting times, and take the pressure off A&E services.

People also said that having more support worker continuity would make services more effective, and a nicer and less clinical environment would also make a big difference.


 The rooms are plain and boring; they look like prison cells.



## Mental health discussion workshop with Future Roots

### 1. Can you share a memory of when a service was involved with you and you felt happier, calmer, hopeful and positive?

The ambassadors said that services such as the Police, The Learning Centre, Space, Reach, Future Roots, Rendezvous Youth Club, Fire Cadets and the Duke of Edinburgh Award had made a positive difference to their lives and made them feel happier and calmer.

 The Police were always quite positive towards me; they did let me off with a lot. I saw one Police Officer recently who used to arrest me and he told me how well I'd done.



 I enjoy being at Future Roots, I have lots of happy memories and have made lots of friends. It has helped me to build confidence.




 Reach was a very good service to me. It's very well run and we would do team building, activities and learn new skills.




### 2. Can you share a memory of when life was a struggle and services were involved?


The young people spoke of CAMHS, Social Services, Youth Offending Team and the Key Workers at their schools. Some found CAMHS hard to engage with; they spoke of not being able to connect with the counsellors and only having a limited number of sessions. Some of the young people spoke of their experiences at schools and being kept in isolation for periods of time, which only exacerbated their problems.

 I was always in isolation at school, but they couldn't control me in isolation, so I was kicked out. I was kicked out of three schools and missed a lot of education in between schools.



 I refused to talk to people until I came to Future Roots, where I started talking to the animals first.



 I used to get into trouble at school and then my parents were asked to pick me up but the school never kept a record of my exclusion, so there was no documented pattern of my behaviour which then delayed my diagnosis.



### 3. Is there anything that could be done differently which would make a positive difference?

We were told that CAMHS could be made better if the service was more consistent and if they offered some alternative methods of engaging, other than just counselling and prescribing medication. The young people also highlighted the importance of having a SENCO at primary school level.

Q Support workers are old fashioned. They need new methods as they just tell me to have a bath or make a cup of tea! I climbed out of the window to get away once.



Q I only got looked at when I smashed the school window. Nothing was done quickly enough so it made secondary school harder.



## Case studies

### Robbie's story: Being listened to and given the right support might have helped prevent crack addiction and prison

Robbie is 23 and has recently been discharged from prison after serving a second sentence for theft. We spoke to him at the Life Changing Choices Boxing Gym in Wimborne, Dorset.

Robbie first tried to access young people's mental health services when he was 14. He did this independently, but to no avail, so he gave up and carried on self-harming, stealing and using drugs and alcohol. His drug and alcohol addiction progressed to using crack cocaine which he soon became addicted to. The only people who showed him support at that time were his uncle and the Reverend in his local community. They eventually managed to get him into the mental health service.

Robbie managed to abstain from using drugs and alcohol for two to three years, but then relapsed. He started stealing again to fund his crack addiction and ran up a debt with his drug dealer which he had to pay off. The stealing escalated and eventually he was caught and sentenced.

Robbie is now clean and was pleased to hear that NHS Dorset are reviewing children and young people's mental health services. Upon reflection Robbie feels he wasn't given the right level of support that he needed. He never felt listened to and he thinks support workers need more of an understanding of young people. He feels he was only ever listened to when he had his uncle or the Reverend with him.



Q I never felt that I was listened to or heard. If they were more understanding of young people and listened more then it would be better.



## Support Worker at the Separated Child Foundation: No NHS mental health support for young man on path to self-destruct



Q We've been supporting a young guy who is currently self-harming whilst he is staying in the hotel. He is completely traumatised by what he has been through. He recently carved 'I love you mum' into his arm with a knife whilst filming it; there was a huge pool of blood on the hard floor which he was using to write words on the floor with his blood.

We tried twice to get him some help from CAMHS, but he was refused both times. He was then funded privately for counselling which International Care Network (ICN) organised, but because he is now 18 they can't get the funding for him to continue the counselling sessions. Since the sessions stopped he has been on a self-destruct path and his Personal Assistant (BCP Council) is now on holiday.

ICN support him heavily, but he really needs mental health support. We just don't know what the threshold is for someone to be accepted and given support.



## Recommendations

Through this project we have highlighted possible areas for development in how Dorset's Children and Young Peoples Mental Health services are designed and delivered. The following recommendations address the issues raised and identify changes to improve mental support for young people.

- **Shorter waiting times:** The most common concern raised with us was the amount of time that young people have to wait to access services. Young people would like to see much shorter waiting times so that they are seen before they get to crisis point.
- **Treat young people as individuals:** Don't just give the same advice and treatment to everyone who is referred for mental health support; what helps one person may not help everyone.
- **Use comfortable non-clinical settings:** We spoke to several young people who said the setting where they have their treatment/support sessions is too clinical and makes them feel uncomfortable. Young people told us they would prefer to be in an environment they are familiar with and which feels safe.
- **Better continuity of care:** Most of the young people we spoke to said that the support workers they see are constantly changing and there is not one point of contact. They would like to see the same support worker so they can build up a rapport and establish a level of trust.
- **Provide follow-up support:** Some young people told us there is no check-in after treatment. A support worker touching base after treatment would make all the difference.
- **Offer activities during talking therapy:** The opportunity to do some sort of activity while talking to their support worker would make some young people feel more comfortable. Not everyone is comfortable talking face-to-face.
- **Offer appropriate self-help suggestions:** We were told that some of the self-help suggestions were unhelpful. One person said that they were told to write to Boris Johnson because they were being bullied!



## Next steps

We have shared our findings and recommendations with NHS Dorset and Dorset Healthcare, and we will work with them to help create better mental health services for young people across Dorset.

## Stakeholder response

**Elaine Hurl, NHS Dorset, Head of Children & Young People, Learning Disabilities & Autism and Mental Health.**



“The report perfectly illustrates the need to improve mental health services for young people living in Dorset and especially for young people who experience more challenges getting the type of help they need. Getting it right for all young people is important and so this report will underpin all the work ‘Making Mental Health services better for young people in Dorset.’”

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following organisations for supporting this project and helping us reach and engage with young people: The International Care Network, Separated Child Foundation, Future Roots, Weymouth College, Dorchester Learning Centre, Dorset Mind, and the Space Youth Project.

We also want to thank everyone who participated, especially Robbie who kindly offered to be a case study. The young people we met spoke openly about some sensitive topics and we are truly grateful. This has given us a good insight into what works well and what can be improved with local mental health services for children and young people.



It was very interesting to revisit some of the groups we previously engaged with in 2020. I met a lot of people who are passionate about mental health and want to make a real difference by sharing their story. This project has given us a greater understanding of the difficulties that young people face in our community. Some of the conversations I had were quite hard to hear as the feedback was emotional, raw and at times confronting. I hope that sharing their stories has reinforced the strength and resilience of these young people, and that improvements to services are made as a result.

Lucy Cribb, Healthwatch Dorset Engagement Officer



# Appendix 1: Limitations

The following issues made this engagement work more of a challenge.

- When we visited the Separated Child Foundation, there was a language barrier with some of the clients and there seemed to be a cultural stigma around mental health. A few of the clients felt very uncomfortable talking about mental health in general, so we only managed to talk to one person.
- Arranging visits can be difficult, as people were often under pressure with their own work, so didn't always get back to us.
- Some young people find it hard to talk about their own mental health, we had to give them time and let them talk in their own way.
- We were unable to talk to the Year 11's at Dorchester Learning Centre as they had just finished their GCSE's so the academic year had ended early.
- Due to the timing of this project, we were unable to talk to the 0-19 Early Years and Family Hub as they had started their summer break.

# Appendix 2: Organisations

- **International Care Network:** Provides support to refugees and asylum seekers in the Bournemouth area. [icn.org.uk](http://icn.org.uk)
- **Future Roots:** Re-engages young people with learning when they are at risk of exclusion, non-attendance or poor mental health. [futureroots.net](http://futureroots.net)
- **Weymouth College:** Teaches a wide range of further education courses, ranging from apprenticeships to vocational courses. [weymouth.ac.uk](http://weymouth.ac.uk)
- **Life Changing Choices:** A non-contact Boxing Club, supporting young people of all ages, run by a member of the settled traveller community in Poole.
- **Dorset Mind Young Ambassadors:** Advocates that help Dorset Mind (a local charity supporting local people with mental health challenges) to challenge, educate and promote the ethos of recovery. [dorsetmind.uk](http://dorsetmind.uk)
- **Separated Child Foundation:** Offers emotional, social, financial and physical support to separated children and young people in Britain up to the age of 21. [separatedchild.org](http://separatedchild.org)
- **Dorchester Learning Centre:** For children who find themselves outside of mainstream school. [dlconline.co.uk](http://dlconline.co.uk)
- **Space Youth Services:** Offers support and community to LGBT+ young people in Dorset through youth groups and one-to-one support services. [spaceyouthservices.org](http://spaceyouthservices.org)

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