HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

YEAR OF YOUNG PEOPLE 2018

SUBMISSION FROM SAMH

Introduction

Around since 1923, SAMH currently operates over 60 services in communities across Scotland providing mental health social care support, primary care, addictions and employment services, among others. These services together with our national programme work in See Me, respectme, suicide prevention, sport and physical activity inform our policy and campaign work to influence positive social change.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence to the Health and Sport Committee as part of the Parliament’s work in relation to the Year of Young People (YYP). We welcome the work being done through the YYP, to promote young people’s contribution to communities and to create new opportunities for young people.

General Comments

We know that three children in every class will have experienced mental health problems by the time that they are 16,¹ so it is important that we give young people every chance to get the help they need, when they need it. Through our Going To Be campaign, we are building a movement of people to create positive change in children and young people’s mental health services.

Our Going To Be policy asks seek to review, refocus and invest in early intervention services for children and young people:

1. By the end of 2018, create a national programme to consistently train all school staff in mental health
2. By 2020, provide counselling services across Scotland’s schools
3. By 2020, let children and young people stay in specialist services till age 25

We want a national approach to children and young people’s mental health services, to ensure that support is consistent and effective no matter where a child is from or what their circumstances are. Our Going To Be policy asks, which will deliver a nationally consistent approach, need to be fully resourced by the Scottish Government, with a strong commitment to implement and review these actions.

How well are the views and interests of young people taken into account in health and sport policy?

The views and interests of stakeholders, including young people with lived experience of health issues, need to be at the centre of health and sport policy, in particular policy on mental health.

We know that, at the moment, young people’s experience of mental health services in Scotland is not as good as it should or could be. When it comes to finding help for mental health issues, only a quarter of young people know where to go.\(^2\) When young people are referred to CAMHS for help, almost 20% experience a waiting time over the statutory 18 weeks and around a fifth are rejected.\(^3\)

Research commissioned by See Me found that young people face a range of barriers in talking openly about their mental health, including feeling judged, a lack of trusting relationships and difficulty in articulating how they feel.\(^4\) Research by the Scottish Youth Parliament also showed that young people have concerns around a lack of confidentiality and not being taken seriously when trying to access mental health services.\(^5\)

This is not good enough and just goes to show that, to date, young people have not been involved to a great enough extent in the development of mental health services. To ensure that mental health services are accessible to and appropriate for children and young people, they need to be more actively involved in policy development.

SAMH welcomes the Scottish Government’s implementation of a Youth Commission for Mental Health Services, which signals a step change in young people’s involvement in mental health policy. This group of 22 young people, which is being led by Young Scot and SAMH, will be at the heart of shaping mental health services. They will be out gathering evidence by talking to children and young people, and will report back to the Scottish Government on how services can be improved.

We welcome this model for involving young people in shaping mental health policy. Going forward, we need to make sure that the Scottish Government reviews and takes on board the evidence provided by the Youth Commission and, where appropriate, resources the implementation and delivery of their recommendations.

What are the priorities of young people in health and sport?

The Going To Be campaign was launched by SAMH in 2017. We did this because an overwhelming number of people told us that there is a lack of mental health education and support for young people in Scotland. They also told us that it is essential for children and

\(^3\) SAMH, *Going To Be All Right?*, 2017
\(^4\) Griesbach & Associates; Survey of young people on the topic of mental health, stigma & discrimination; June 2015
young people to learn about mental health at a young age, demonstrating that the issue of young people’s mental health is a priority.

We know that young people are increasingly experiencing emotional and psychological health problems and that half of all mental health problems in adulthood start before the age of 14. We also know that one call every thirty minutes to ChildLine is from a young person experiencing suicidal thoughts, and that three children in every class will have experienced a mental health problem by the time they are 16.

Most children will never come into contact with specialist mental health services, yet all children have mental health. Diagnosis of a mental health problem should not be the only mechanism to trigger support, but it’s often at that late stage when interventions take place. We need to act faster. Improving the self-esteem, resilience and well-being of all our young people must be a priority.

We know that young people want to receive more information about mental health, including positive information about good mental wellbeing. Young people in Scotland have indicated that they would like to see teaching on mental health integrated into classes, as well as early intervention services readily available in schools.

A national training programme for all school staff and counselling services across all of Scotland’s secondary schools are two steps that the Scottish Government can take to ensure that mental health provision is consistent and readily accessible for children and young people.

Clearly mental health – which includes both positive mental wellbeing and support for mental health problems – is an issue that is extremely important to children, young people and their families. It is imperative that we provide more accessible and appropriate early intervention and preventative mental health services.

SAMH will continue to work to create positive change for all children and young people across Scotland.

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6 SAMH, Going To Be All Right?, 2017
7 Kim-Cohen et al., 2003; Kessler et al., 2005
8 ChildLine Annual Report, 2015/16
9 Young Minds Annual Report, 2015-16
10 Scottish Youth Parliament, Our Generation’s Epidemic, 2016