

The Children Looked After Mental Health Project

Using co-production to develop mental health training for practitioners working with children in and leaving care

What is the Children Looked After Mental Health Project?

1. With funding from the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, the project builds upon existing research carried out by SPSW researchers, which found that:
 - Mental health difficulties were prevalent amongst care -experienced young people
 - Social workers and leaving care workers often supported young people with complex mental health difficulties in the absence of timely specialist services and could feel ill-equipped to respond to the level of need
 - Mental health awareness training that had been successfully developed for the Police could be rolled out to other services working with people with mental health difficulties
2. The project aimed to develop, test and implement a training package for social workers, leaving care workers and other children's social care professionals to better support the mental health needs of young people in and from care. Twenty eight took part in the training.
3. The training was developed through consultation with young people, front line staff and managers. It was designed to equip staff with the knowledge and confidence to identify, record and respond to signs of mental health difficulties and distress amongst the young people they work with and to be able to signpost and refer them to specialist services. The project involved collaboration between the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, North Yorkshire County Council and Young Minds. It utilised co-production methods to provide a platform for young people and stakeholders to inform the development of the training and to test out 'what works'.

“The training was extremely beneficial to my practice. I have taken away a lot of resources I will share with my team”

“Enjoyed the training, [it] was specific to care leavers and children’s social care and how we can work together to help the YP through transition with coping with mental health”

What young people and staff told us:

“Although the UK has mental health support it is still not enough and more is needed to be done across Europe”

“I feel like they [professionals] just don’t understand, they don’t, it’s, like they’re seeing past me”

“It’s not [my social workers] fault, is it? It’s no-one’s fault. There’s not enough time or resources to do it”

Co-production with young people in and from care - how did they help to develop the project?

Young people’s involvement included:

- National consultations with care and care leavers groups via Catch22 to find out what young people say about mental health
- Local consultations with NYCC care and care leaver groups to find out how young people want their workers to help with mental health issues
- Young People’s co-production workshops to help the researchers to develop the research questions
- Interviews with care leavers about their experiences of mental health and getting support
- Care leaver representative on the project advisory group
- Care leavers contributed to the analysis of findings and presented them at an international workshop

What did the young people say they gained from the project?

Increased awareness about mental health. As the project was co-produced, young people were engaged in every stage. One young person became a peer facilitator and contributed to the:

- Project advisory group
- Development of materials
- International leaving care conference where they presented to other care leavers and practitioners