

New research reveals the impact of Youth Mental Health First Aid training for school staff

[Tuesday 9 October, 09:00 BST] New research published on the eve of World Mental Health Day has revealed the impact of Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training on secondary school staff throughout England. The study, conducted by a team of researchers from University College London (UCL), involved over 1,000 school staff and evidences a significant increase in confidence in knowledge, skills and awareness to support a young person struggling with their mental health.

Prior to undertaking Youth MHFA training, only 30% of staff reported feeling knowledgeable, skilled and aware to support a young person experiencing mental ill health. After acquiring Youth MHFA skills, 59% of staff said they felt highly knowledgeable, aware and confident to support a young person – this increased to 87% up to three terms later, highlighting a sustained improvement as staff put their skills into practice and had time to reflect on their training. This represents a near three-fold increase or a relative 190% increase.

Caroline Hounsell, Director of Communities and Content Development, Mental Health First Aid England, commented: “Schools routinely provide physical first aid and reassurance if a child falls ill or is injured - and there’s no reason why this shouldn’t be the case if they are struggling with their mental health. Today’s report findings demonstrate that skilling school staff in Mental Health First Aid is having a really positive impact on their confidence around interacting with students.

“Whilst this programme is the first step in addressing the mental health training gap in schools, we hope to build on its success by continuing to give access to these skills to school staff across England.”

The research was commissioned to evaluate the first year of the Youth MHFA in Schools programme, a nationwide initiative funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, which aims to train a member of staff in every state secondary school in the country in mental health awareness by 2020.



In the first year of the programme over 1,200 school staff participated in a Youth MHFA One Day course, qualifying them as Youth MHFA Champions – someone who is skilled in understanding how to spot the signs and symptoms of mental health issues in young people and who has the confidence to guide a young person to a place of support. So far in year two of the programme, a further 929 staff have received the training.

Research by The Teacher’s Union NASUWT last year revealed that although 98% of teachers have contact with pupils who they believe are experiencing mental health issues, 46% report never having received any training on youth mental health,¹ highlighting a clear point of need. This also adds to a wider recognition of the need to improve mental health provision in schools, with an estimated one in ten children experiencing a mental health issue at any one time.²

Barnardo’s Chief Executive, Javed Khan said: “It’s so important children get timely support to help them tackle any mental health issues they may be experiencing. We know first-hand, from delivering school programmes like PATHS, where children learn to talk about their feelings, that these lessons can make a huge difference in reducing the stigma around mental health and empower them to seek help.

“We have also long argued that the UK is sleepwalking into an ever-deepening crisis in children’s mental health unless action is taken. This is why we wholeheartedly welcome the research by Mental Health First Aid England and University College London showing the positive impact of Mental Health First Aid training in secondary schools. It’s vital these skills are given to school staff across the country so they can intervene early and help children get the support they need.”

An infographic with further information on the programme can be found here ([PDF download](#)) and you can find out more about Youth MHFA training [here](#).

The UCL report will be published in full on 9 October at 9AM here:

<http://mhfaengland.org/youth-mhfa-in-schools-UCL-report>

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Notes to editors

- For interview requests and school case study information please contact the MHFA England media team on media@mhfaengland.org or call 020 7250 8321.
- Caroline Hounsell, Director for Communities and Content Development, MHFA England, is available for interview on Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 October.
- Videos of school staff and students sharing their thoughts on mental health and Mental Health First Aid can be found below:
 - <https://youtu.be/2Z6fC9Mu-qc>
 - <https://youtu.be/tUhHvLNvh7Y>
- For World Mental Health Day 2018, MHFA England has launched the #HandsUp4HealthyMinds toolkit – a set of free resources to support school staff
- MHFA England is a community interest company (CIC), established in 2009.
- MHFA is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training and provides participants with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and effectively guide a person towards the right support, be that self-help or professional services.
- To date over 300,000 people in England are trained in MHFA skills.
- The core principles of MHFA include: spotting the signs of a mental health issue, helping to prevent issues from getting worse and giving confidence in helping someone who is experiencing an issue.
- As well as the Adult MHFA course, the organisation runs a number of tailored courses including Youth MHFA, Higher Education MHFA, Armed Forces MHFA and Workplace MHFA.
- MHFA England has a vision to normalise society's attitudes and behaviours around mental health by developing the skills we need to look after our own and other's wellbeing.
- More information about MHFA England and its courses can be found at www.mhfaengland.org or by emailing info@mhfaengland.org.

References

¹ Schools need support to deal with mental health upsurge among pupils. NASUWT survey, 2017. Available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/schools-need-support-mental-health-upsurge-pupils.html>.

PRESS RELEASE



MHFA England

² Green, H., McGinley, A., Meltzer, T., Ford, T., Goodman, R. 2005 Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain: 2004. Office for National Statistics.