

# In conversation

At Bath & North East Somerset's Third Sector charity conference & expo - 19 May 2022



# Contents

Introduction.....	2
Mental health needs of children & young people .....	3
The need for trauma informed support.....	4
Experience of learning disability in hospital .....	6
'New to us' connections .....	7
Connecting for volunteering at Healthwatch.....	8
Next steps.....	9

# Introduction

## The Business Exchange in partnership with 3SG Bath & NES charity conference & expo

After many months of relying on Zoom and Teams, Healthwatch B&NES was delighted to be part of The Business Exchange in partnership with 3SG Bath & NES charity conference & expo at Bath Racecourse, on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, experiencing the benefits of casual chats and chance meetings alongside planned and purposeful engagement that has been missing during much of the pandemic.

Two members of the Bath & North East Somerset Healthwatch team, Development Officer, Sue Poole and Ann-Marie Scott, the Volunteer Support Officer, took part in the day, sharing the work of Healthwatch through our information stall, gathering feedback from a number of delegates and holding in-depth conversations on topics including the mental health needs of children and young people and the importance of support and services for people who have experienced trauma.

We found out about the valuable work of many 'new to us' organisations and made helpful connections to support volunteering at Healthwatch B&NES in conversation with delegates from Bristol and Bath universities.



This report offers brief highlights from a very rewarding day.

# The mental health needs of children & young people

We had conversations with representatives from Youth Connect South West ([Youth Services | Youth Connect South West | Bath and North East Somerset](#)) and the Children and Young People's Network - [Bath Area Play Project - CYPN \(bapp.org.uk\)](#), which included the following points:

- The 'massive increase' in Educational Healthcare Plans centred on children coming out of hospital due to mental health admissions.
- 'School refusers' have increased significantly over the past 2 years including as a result of mental health anxiety due to the pandemic, but there is a lack of mental health support for home schooled children
- The potential that 'social prescribing' could have for young people instead of medication as the first offer
- Children with an official learning difficulty diagnosis are unable to access support for mental health as all support is directed via the SEN service, reported anecdotally with regard to autism
- The transition for care leavers and SEN children and young people, even though at 25 years, is too sudden to move to no support being provided



“Referrals are increasingly for mental health needs in place of the ‘traditional grazed knees (school nurse)’”



# The need for trauma informed support

Healthwatch has received feedback from individuals, who have experienced trauma in their lives, and who have described how their experience of trying to engage with mainstream mental health support has itself had a negative impact as the support has not been 'trauma informed'.

We were therefore very interested to have conversations with representatives of the Genesis Trust and their Gateway Project ([Life Course - Genesis Trust Bath](#)) and Trauma Breakthrough ([About - Breakthrough \(traumabreakthrough.org\)](#)) both of which work in this area to help meet the needs of people who have experienced trauma.

They have been able to help people who are not able to access Talking Therapies, which offers 6 weeks only of CBT, due to their needs being too acute or their being in crisis, and whose only other offer from statutory services is medication.

## The Gateway project – Genesis Trust



96% of people coming into the Gateway Centre (Genesis Trust) have an experience of Early Childhood Trauma and the Life Course, which is one of the projects run at the centre by the Genesis Trust offers a free ten-week (18 sessions) Life Course which supports people to recover from trauma, as well as addiction and poor mental health.

Referrals are received from GPs and Talking Therapies, amongst others and there is a constant demand for places on each course.

The Genesis Trust recognise that the course is not suitable for all including for example, people with learning difficulties due to the demands of the course, so that there are still gaps around people with both learning difficulties and trauma and/or poor mental health.

## Trauma Breakthrough

Breakthrough are a charity based in Bath and covering the South West of England. They provide specialist mental health services and support for adult survivors of abuse and all forms of trauma. They also offer training and consultancy to organisations and individuals who want to learn to support survivors more effectively.

In our conversation we discussed the lack of early diagnosis of trauma which can lead to years of hidden problems – so more support for diagnosis of Early Childhood Trauma in schools, and other settings, would help prevent problems accruing later in life, which would be much better for the individual, and also for other service providers.



Data shared by Breakthrough:

- Trauma and abuse has been experienced by 1 in every 5 adults in the UK
- 50% of drug users fit the main criteria of PTSD
- Only 1 in 8 victims of childhood sexual abuse ever come to the attention of statutory authorities and it takes on average 26 years for male survivors of sexual abuse to come forward (recorded by Survivors UK)

# Experience of learning difficulty in hospital

We met with a representative of The Life Project ([Who we are - The Life Project, Bath \(lifeprojectbath.org.uk\)](http://lifeprojectbath.org.uk)) and heard about an experience of one of their members in hospital at the end of life, and how the support provided by The Life Project helped.

The Life Project representative was able to give one to one support during the individual's time of need, including access to the hospital, as they were known to them and already involved with the Project.

The Life Project has noticed that lots of people with Learning Difficulties attend different groups but no-one is providing an overview to connect up the support they need. In this instance the Life Project were able to support the person by coordinating the help needed through their network of staff and volunteers to ensure that hospital visits could be made daily and that support was provided during medical consultations. Without this additional support their experience would have been more challenging and very likely to have had a more negative impact.

The Life Project is a Christian charity which enables and supports people with learning difficulties through a variety of daytime activities and groups where the core belief is acceptance and being like a family.



“when there are difficult conversations to be had, for example, about ‘DNR’, a person with learning difficulties (whether the patient or family member) needs someone to be with them and to help explain this”



# 'New to us' connections

## Designability

Designability had one of their 'wizzybug' powered wheelchairs on display and were promoting their service which matches specialist equipment to people's needs, as they were not receiving the expected level of referrals.

[Home - Designability](#)

## The Woodworks project

The Woodworks Project – based in Bath have a new well-being service getting underway alongside their woodwork and upholstery courses which are aimed at adults facing challenges in their lives. The new website is now live and includes information about eligibility and courses.

[The Woodworks Project](#)

## Clean Slate

Clean Slate, who offer debt advice also aim to tackle digital exclusion through the provision of refurbished computers. They have a number of drop-in sessions in Bath and Keynsham.

[Contact Clean Slate - Clean Slate Train-ing & Employment \(cleanslate ltd.co.uk\)](#)

## Youth@Heart

Youth@heart were promoting their service which offers support, awareness and opportunity to teenagers, young adults (15 to 24) and their families across South Wales and the South West of England, born with Congenital Heart Disease (CHD).

[CHD Charity | Congenital Heart disease | Youth at Heart](#)

# Connecting for volunteering at Healthwatch B&NES

We spoke with delegates from both Bath and Bristol universities about potential opportunities for students to volunteer with Healthwatch B&NES either as an integral part of their degree or higher courses or as community volunteers.

Research, community engagement, administrative and representational roles are available within Healthwatch in addition to the statutory 'Enter and View' role. During the pandemic some roles, such as 'Enter and View' were temporarily suspended whilst others, such as representing Healthwatch at meetings could be continued via virtual meetings.

As we emerge from the pandemic the need for engagement to hear the voice of our communities can be very much more effective with the support of volunteers.

## **Next steps**

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### **Following the conference, we have**

- **promoted the services we connected with through our newsletter & social media**
- **met with Bath University to develop a volunteer role for their students**
- **recorded feedback received to help build the local picture of the 'patients voice'**
- **continued to expand our engagement with local voluntary and community organisations to reach more people across B&NES**



# healthwatch

Healthwatch B&NES  
The Vassal Centre  
Gill Avenue  
Bristol  
BS16 2QQ

[www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

t: 01225 232401

e: [info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

 [@hwatchbathnes](https://twitter.com/hwatchbathnes)

 [@healthwatchbanes](https://facebook.com/healthwatchbanes)