

Healthwatch 2021: An investigation into the accessibility of Mental Health and Wellbeing Services in Bath and North East Somerset

By

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&

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(with support from Louise Stone and George Saunders - Youth Connect South West)

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Introduction

The purpose of this Healthwatch project was to investigate the accessibility of mental health and wellbeing services for young people in Bath and North East Somerset. Two 'Health Inspectors' were recruited from the NEET cohort to carry out the research and were supported by project leaders George Saunders and Louise Stone. It quickly became clear that the Health Inspectors would require more support than anticipated to carry out the research and evaluation tasks due to a variety of factors and the project developed very much as a 'team effort'. This report has been co-produced by the Health Inspectors and project leaders, reflecting the collaborative approach taken throughout the project. However, the conclusions and views expressed in this report are those of the health inspectors and the young people surveyed, not the project leaders.

The Healthwatch team received some really valuable support and advice from the professionals who were invited to join the Healthwatch Steering Group. We would like to thank Bath Mind, Off The Record, CAMHS and Claire Laker for their contributions during the project.



Meeting with the Healthwatch Steering Group October 2021. Left to right: Becky Hughesman (Bath Mind), Louise Stone (YCSW), Louise Reeves (Off the Record), Clare Laker (BANES Council), Kieran Rooker (Health Inspector), Louise Allen (Health Inspector), George Saunders (YCSW)

Planning and preparation

Before starting our research, we wanted to understand more about mental health and wellbeing and why it is important. Bath Mind and Off The Record came to do some workshops with us where we learnt about mental health and wellbeing and also found out about their services. We also did our own research online to get an idea of what is offered locally and in other areas.

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In addition, we talked about what '**accessibility**' means and decided that, for the purposes of this project, we would interpret this as '**how easy it is to get help when you need it**'.

Scope

Once we had a good understanding of what wellbeing and mental health is, we started to think about what our research into local services should cover. We discussed various things that we could focus on. E.g. online information, one to one support etc. However, we decided we wanted to look at all aspects of mental health and wellbeing support as young people need to be able to access support in different ways depending on their needs.

We did some initial research to find out which services offer wellbeing and mental health support in B&NES and decided to focus on the following services:

- CAMHS
- Off the Record
- Bath Mind

Meeting with the steering group

After deciding on the focus for our research, we met with the steering group, which included Clare Laker (B&NES Public Health and Development Commissioner), Becky Hughesman (Wellbeing Manager at Bath Mind) and Louise Reeves (Volunteer and Networking Supervisor at Off The Record). CAMHS were invited to attend the steering group but, unfortunately, could not attend. The steering group gave us some useful tips about things we could look at as part of our research and we were asked to include Kooth and Chathealth in our questionnaire as these are services that the council pays for.

Research methods

We carried out a variety of activities to find out about the accessibility of mental health and wellbeing services for young people. These included:

- Visits to the services (with a checklist)
- Looking at website and social media (with a checklist)
- Questionnaires to young people
- Online Instagram polls
- Google searches
- Online chat

The majority of our research took place over a 3-week period between October 18th and November 5th 2021.

Limitations

We acknowledge the following limits in our research:

- We only gave questionnaires to young people who were in contact with Youth Connect South West. We could have widened our research by including other groups and individuals or by distributing the questionnaire in schools.

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- We had a disproportionate number of 14 year old respondents - it would have been useful to have a more even distribution of ages.
- Not all young people answered all of the questions – perhaps they did not understand the question / needed help to write an answer / couldn't be bothered
- We did not carry out any 'mystery shopper' activities – all the services knew when we were coming and were prepared for our visit / questions which may have altered how we experienced them.
- The questions in the online poll were worded slightly different to the ones in the young people's questionnaire and had more limited options for responses.
- We did not carry out any face to face interviews with young people because we did not feel comfortable doing it.

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1. Summary of Key Findings

- Mental health and wellbeing support is available to young people in B&NES but it can be hard to access and waiting times for specialist support are too long.
- A lot of mental health and wellbeing support is online and involves navigating different websites and interpreting information. This could be difficult for some young people.
- Most one to one support is time-limited which means that some young people still need help when it ends.
- Most face to face support requires young people to travel, which some find difficult.
- Young people want to be supported in places that are friendly, welcoming and comfortable.
- Young people want to be able to access support in a variety of ways.
- Young people value one to one support from someone they trust.
- Clinical services are important but many young people want to be able to access mental health and wellbeing support more informally.

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2. Location and premises

We went to visit the services that provide face to face support to assess their location, premises and accessibility. We considered how easy it is to get to there, how safe the location feels, how easy it was to find, what it looks like from the outside, what it looks and feels like inside (see 'Service Checklist' in Appendix A). These were our observations:

Kooth:

Kooth provides online support only so no location assessment was completed for this service.

CAMHS:

Positives: The office is not on the main road, which is good for privacy. We were welcomed by staff.

Negatives: Keynsham is not a central location in B&NES and could be difficult to travel to for some young people. We also felt that the office could be hard to find if you didn't know where it was. The waiting room feels like a 'doctor's surgery' - it was not very comfortable or relaxing. Some of the leaflets and posters were out of date.

Off The Record:

Positives: The office is located in Bath, which is easy to get to by public transport for most young people. Support can also be accessed in other locations around B&NES. Friendly welcome. Lots of posters and information.

Negatives: The Bath office is not wheelchair friendly (but spaces are available to see young people with disabilities). The environment outside doesn't look great and people hang around the entrance, which could be intimidating for young people arriving on their own. One of us felt that there was a lot of rainbow / LGBTQ+ material in the entrance hall and this could be off-putting for some people.

Bath Mind:

Positives: The main office is located in Bath, which is easy to get to by public transport for most young people. We received a friendly welcome. There is lots of information (leaflets, posters etc.) in the office. Groups can be accessed in other locations around B&NES.

Negatives: The central office is not used for drop-ins or group sessions. One to one meetings are occasionally offered there but it is mostly used for administration. The majority of Bath Mind's support for young people is currently via groups held in various locations and online.

3. Face to face support

All the services except Kooth offer some kind of face-to-face support. We were encouraged to carry out 'mystery shopper' activities to evaluate and compare them but decided not to do this as we felt uncomfortable pretending. It would also not be practical within the timescales as CAMHS, in particular, has a long waiting list (currently 18 weeks). This section will therefore detail what services are available face to face and how accessible they are to young people based on the information we have received, our own past experiences with the services and feedback received from young people in the young people's questionnaire.

Off The Record

Off The Record provides short-term counselling and listening support for young people aged 10-25 as well as access to various groups and advocacy. Their wellbeing provision includes the Okay Café, which is an

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informal wellbeing group open one evening a week in Bath. Young people can access support in schools, several locations around B&NES and at the central office in Bath as well as by Zoom and telephone. There may be a short waiting time but most young people can have an initial meeting to discuss their options within a couple of weeks. Listening Support sessions aim to help the young person to understand where their feelings are coming from and what they can do to support themselves. However, they are very short – only 20-30 minutes at a time and usually limited to 8 sessions. Counselling sessions are longer but also time-limited in terms of the number of sessions. This could be problematic for young people needing help over a longer period. Anxiety is the top issue for young people accessing OTR services. We felt that young people who are very anxious might not want to travel into Bath (telephone support is offered). Off The Record do not offer practical outreach support. E.g. to access groups, activities etc.

CAMHS: Young people can access a wide range of specialist mental health services via referral, including Community CAMHS, TEDS (eating disorders), OSCA (Outreach), Learning Disabilities etc. However, waiting lists are long - currently a minimum of 18 weeks – which means that many young people are unable to get the support they need when they need it. In addition, some young people we spoke to said they didn't meet the threshold for CAMHS' support or were told they couldn't access it because they were using drugs and / or alcohol. The 24/7 liaison service visits young people who have presented with self-harming / suicidal behaviour at the Royal United Hospital. This service does not require a referral. Out of hours support is also available 24/7 for young people, families and professionals via their telephone helpline.

CAMHS Mental Health Support Team, which includes Education Mental Health Practitioners, is working with schools and in the community to provide earlier access to mental health and wellbeing support. Students can be referred for one to one or group support.

Comments about CAMHS during our research were numerous and largely critical – young people mentioned issues with confidentiality, long waits for service, the clinical feel of the rooms and waiting area and being given advice that did not help. In addition, some young people told us about workers who listen but don't respond or offer feedback: many say they prefer a more informal and relaxed approach to one to one support.

Currently CAMHS support ends when young people reach the age of 18 but the service recognises that young adults often still need help when they leave: they are in the process of developing their transition service to include young people up to 25.

Bath Mind:

Bath Mind offer mental health and wellbeing support to people of all ages. They provide information and resources as well as emotional support via telephone, groups, one to one meetings and counselling (paid service). Their Safe Space group (for 16-25 year olds) meets online once a week and in person once a month. They also have the all-age Breathing Space service which provides face to face (and / or telephone) support 365 days a year from 18:00 to 22:30 for those in serious emotional distress. The Bath Mind office in central Bath is not really suitable for seeing clients (particularly those who are disabled as there are lots of stairs!) so groups and one to one meetings for young people are usually held online, via telephone or in host locations (e.g. Safe Space meets at Bath College once a month).

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Bath Mind are developing their services for young people and have recently recruited a number of volunteer peer mentors. These mentors will work with young people aged 16-25 for 2 hours per week for up to 12 weeks. The peer mentors are people from a variety of backgrounds who can offer emotional and practical support (e.g. to travel to groups) based on the 5 ways to wellbeing.

Young people aged 18 and over can also access the other groups that Bath Mind runs in locations around B&NES. There isn't much provision for the younger age group. The only support for school-age young people is Room 267, which helps children in Years 6 with the transition to year 7.

Many of the young people we asked had not heard of Bath Mind and did not know about their services. We felt that young people who are unwilling or unable to travel and those experiencing anxiety and or low mood are unlikely to access Bath Mind's services because most of them are group-focused. The Peer Mentoring programme may help with this as the peer mentors will be able to meet with young people and help them to access groups. Bath Mind are also starting to do more outreach work in partnership with youth groups in the local area, which may raise awareness of their services and encourage young people to use them.

4. Websites, online support and visual marketing

Each of the services we investigated has its own website where young people can find information and resources. We assessed the services against a checklist (Appendix B). Here is a summary of our findings:

Off the Record:

Positives: The website is straightforward and unfussy. The colours are bright but also soothing. It is easy to navigate the support and information. The site is 'mobile-friendly' and feels quite 'neutral'.

Negatives: when we clicked onto the resources (e.g. for anger), they felt too 'wordy' - we thought they were probably more suitable for professionals than young people. Advice regarding crisis support was not obvious. We didn't like the big 'donate' signs. There is a lack of audio-visual resources.

Kooth:

Positives: The Kooth website has a messaging / chat facility and some discussion boards and articles.

Negatives: Chat is not instant and there isn't much else on the website to look at while you are waiting. It looks a little 'bare' and dull. The colour scheme is uninspiring. It is quite 'wordy' and there are no audio-visual resources. Signposting for urgent support is not obvious. It's not easy to find what you need and there is no 'search' option.

CAMHS:

Positives: The CAMHS website looks quite 'friendly'. It has lots of useful links and resources and really clear advice about what to do if you need urgent help.

Negatives: The website looks a bit childish and the photos felt a bit cliched. It takes time to find the B&NES website unless you know what you are looking for (we found it via the main NHS page).

Bath Mind:

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Positives: The general Bath Mind website has lots of helpful advice and resources about mental health and wellbeing. The young people's section is helpful and relevant when you find it.

Negatives: The website seems more geared towards adults (e.g. pictures of gardens). You need to search to find the pages about support for young people. We didn't like the big 'donate' signs.

5. Online Chat

The only service to offer online chat for young people in BANES is Kooth.

Kooth's chat and messaging service is available 12pm-10pm on weekdays and 6pm-10pm at weekends. In our experience, it is often after 10pm that we need this kind of support so we felt this cut off point was too early.

We tried to use the chat service twice but had to wait and found ourselves disconnected. This was frustrating. Another young person commented on this in the questionnaire.

Some young people said they like the anonymity of the service, being able to access it anywhere and the fact it is online while others did not like the fact that support was only available online. One user commented:

'I have dyslexia and it was too much – too complicated. I don't like online things. It felt unsafe.'

This shows that it is important to have this service in addition to face to face services as young people want to access support in different ways.

6. Social media

We looked at each service's presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and Tiktok):

Off The Record: OTR is active on all platforms apart from Tiktok. They post regularly about wellbeing and services. They have a few videos on Youtube.

CAMHS: CAMHS is not directly active on social media but Young Voices participation group has a presence on Facebook and Twitter and plans to develop its use of Instagram.

Kooth: Kooth is active on all platforms apart from Tiktok. They post regularly about wellbeing and services.

Bath Mind: Active on all platforms apart from Tiktok. They post regularly about wellbeing and services.

The most noticeable thing for us during our investigations of social media was that none of the services are using Tiktok, which seems like a missed opportunity as this is the social media platform that most young people are using at the moment.

7. Instagram poll

We held an Instagram poll to widen our research. This involved posting the following questions about Young People's awareness and experience of local mental health and wellbeing services (one per day over 4 days):

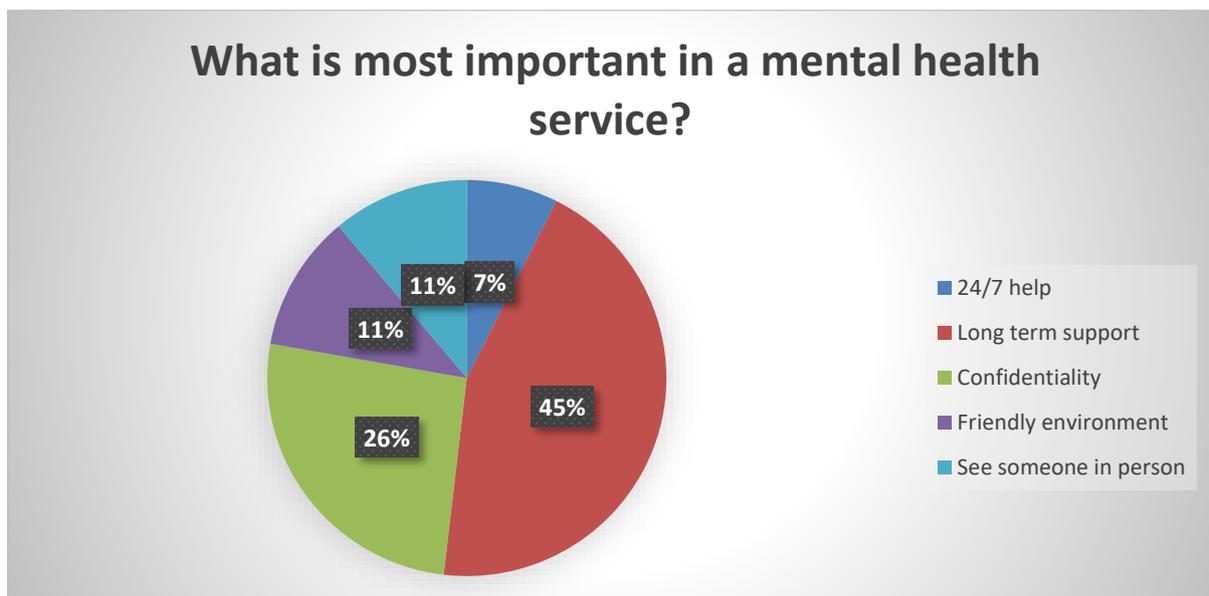
1. If you were struggling with your mental health, would you know where to go for help? (Yes/No)

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2. Which service have you heard of the most? (CAMHS / Bath Mind / OTR / Kooth)
3. If you needed help with your mental health, how would you want to get it? (Message or text / GP / look online / talk to school nurse / call someone / other)
4. What do you think is most important in a mental health service? (Help available 24/7, confidentiality, long term support, friendly environment, see someone in person)

Results:

- 50% of young people said they would know where to go for help if they had a problem with their mental health.
- CAMHS was the most widely known mental health and wellbeing service, followed by Off The Record.
- Young people want to access help in different ways. No one means of accessing help stood out.
- The things young people think are most important in a mental health service are long-term support and confidentiality.

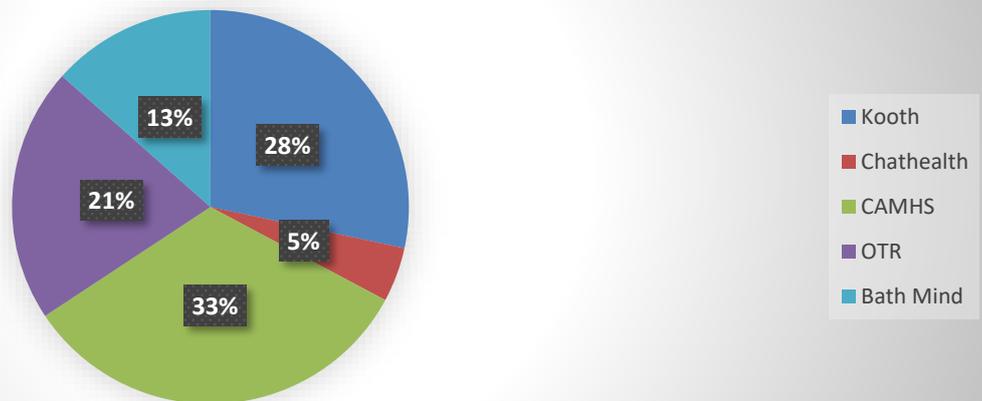


8. Young people's questionnaire

We created a questionnaire (Appendix C) and distributed it to 32 young people via Youth Connect South West's youth groups, the Learning For Work programme and young people accessing one to one Targeted support and groups.

Of the 32 young people surveyed, 59% had experienced mental health problems themselves and 63% knew of at least one mental health or wellbeing service in B&NES. We discovered that CAMHS and Kooth were the most widely known of the services. Chathealth and Bath Mind were least well known.

Have you heard of these services? (Yes responses)



In addition to the services we asked about, young people mentioned getting support from the following places:

- School Counselling
- Friends / family
- Mentoring
- GP
- The Bridge
- Music
- College
- Hospital
- Youth Connect (LFW, Targeted Service, Youth Worker)

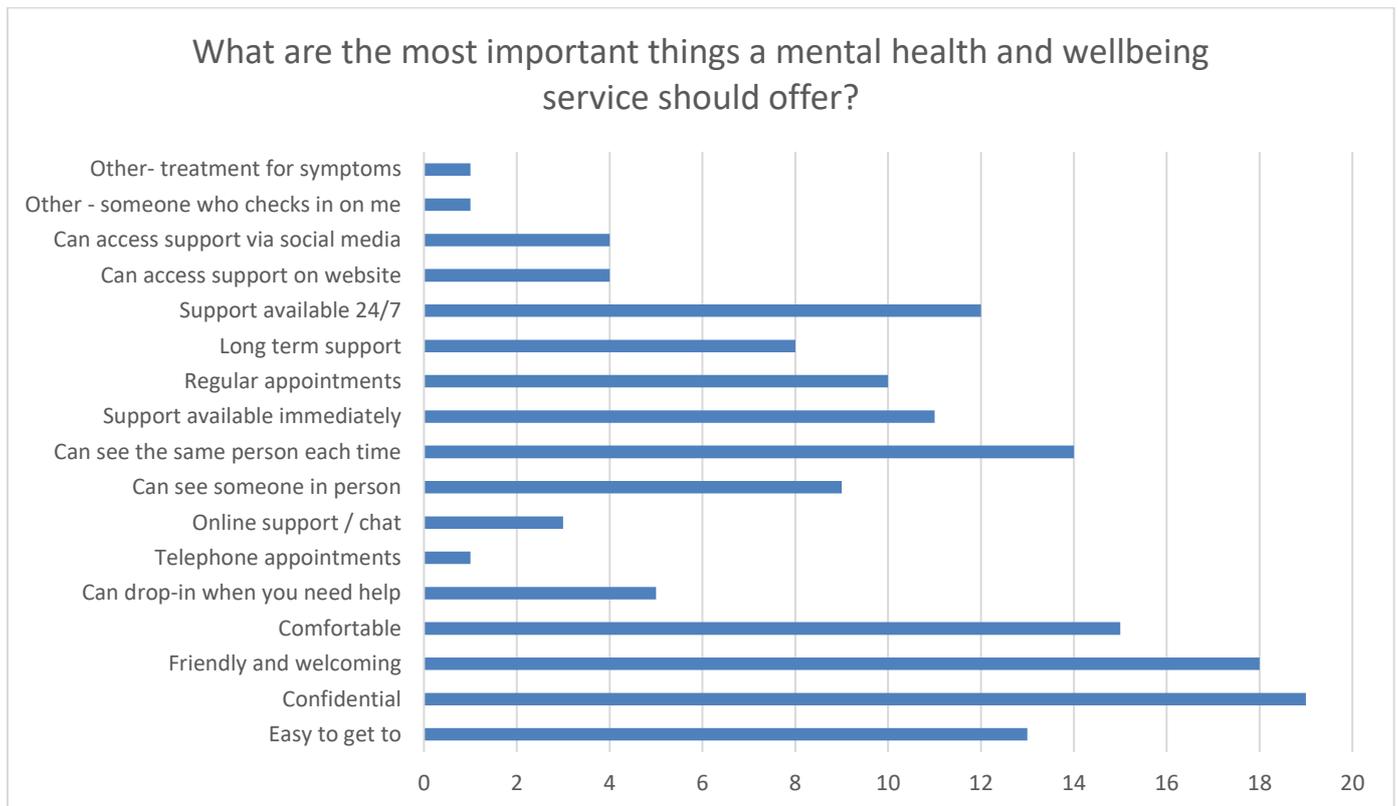
Young people found out about mental health and wellbeing services in a number of ways including word of mouth (friends and family), through school, posters and being told about them by their Engagement work or teacher.

Reasons for not accessing help included the following:

- 'CAMHS said I didn't need it'
- 'Meeting new people'
- 'When I was in school, I felt like I needed help but didn't know how to ask for it'
- 'I needed good friends to help'

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We asked young people what the most important things a mental health / wellbeing service should offer to young people. This table shows the results:



We discovered that the things that young people most value in a mental health service are:

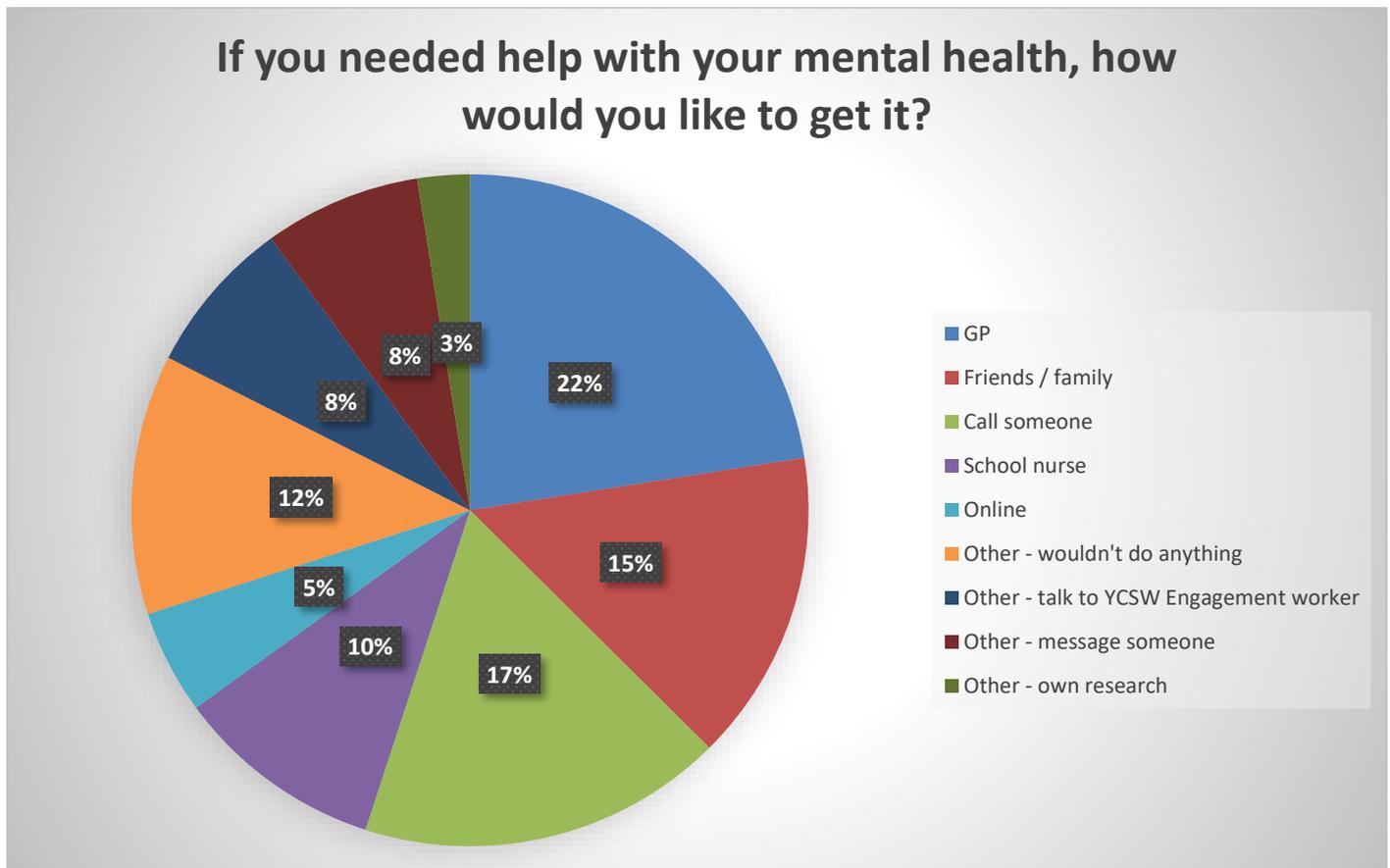
1. Confidentiality
2. Friendly and welcoming
3. Comfortable
4. Can see the same person each time
5. Easy to get to

The results tell us that it is important to young people that they can speak openly about their problems without worrying that what they say will be passed on to parents / carers unless it is absolutely necessary. Several young people mentioned this being an issue at CAMHS, including one of the Health Inspectors. (When this was raised with CAMHS, they expressed concern and said they plan to address this via refresher training to ensure that all young people are clearly advised about the boundaries of confidentiality at their first meeting).

The results also indicate that most young people want to be able to access face to face support from someone they trust in a place they feel comfortable in and can get to easily.

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In response to our question about how young people would like to access help, we got the following results:



From this, we can see that the top methods young people would use to seek help are:

1. Go to GP 22%
2. Call someone 17%
3. Speak to a friend or family member 15%

Interestingly, most young people would still choose to go to a 'real' person for help rather than looking online.

When we asked if there was anything else young people would like to tell us about mental health and wellbeing support in B&NES, the most frequent comments were around awareness-raising (See Appendix D). Many young people still feel there is not enough understanding of their issues. This was particularly apparent among school-age respondents. Some young people we spoke to felt that their mental health difficulties had sometimes caused problems in school that were interpreted as behavioural issues and were met with punishments (such as detentions) rather than understanding or support.

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9. Feedback from Participation Group

We (Health Inspectors) weren't keen to speak to other young people about their experiences of mental health so project leader George did this. He spoke to the Participation group who gave him the following feedback:

- Services need to do more outreach work. E.g. with youth groups / schools etc.
- Young people want to feel 'safe' when they are finding out / learning about mental health and wellbeing – they don't want to be singled out for support so group sessions are a good way for them to find out about the issues and available support.
- Young people need help to make / get to appointments and access mental health support.

10. Summary and Conclusions

We discovered that there is a lot of mental health and wellbeing support available in B&NES from different services but it can be hard to find what you need when you need it. There isn't one obvious place or website to go to when you need help. We think it would be much easier to access help if it was centralised.

We discovered that accessing mental health and wellbeing support in B&NES often requires a lot of reading to find the right information. If you are a young person who has learning difficulties or who doesn't like reading, especially if you are in the middle of a mental health crisis, this could be really challenging.

There is a lack of audio-visual support for young people on the services' websites. On social media, this is not such an issue; we noticed that most services are using platforms like Facebook and Instagram very effectively to promote mental health and wellbeing. However, none of them are using Tiktok, a platform that is widely used by young people, which seems like a missed opportunity.

Most young people we questioned are aware of at least one mental health and wellbeing service but don't know about the full range of services and don't always want to access the ones they know about (e.g. CAMHS). Bath Mind, for example, has lots of resources and information but they need to make it easier for young people to find. In general, young people feel that they need more information about what is available and that people need to be more aware of mental health and wellbeing issues.

We also think that there are gaps in existing mental health and wellbeing services for young people in B&NES. Firstly, a lot of the available support is online but most young people say they want to be able to talk to someone in person in a place they feel welcome and comfortable. In addition, most of the services offer short-term support but some young people need help for longer, especially those with anxiety, low mood and other mental health issues. We think it would be better to stay with one worker that you trust and who understands your 'issues' rather than having to change services / workers every few months because they can no longer work with you.

If you do want to see somebody in person, you usually have to travel which can be difficult for some young people, especially those relying on public transport, those who have anxiety about travel and those from low income households.

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11. Recommendations

Based on our conclusions, we would like to make the following general recommendations for improvement to Mental Health and Wellbeing services in B&NES:

➤ Create a central website or resource that brings all mental health and wellbeing services together so young people can find information and support easily.
➤ Promote awareness of services and support via pop up ads on Youtube and Tiktok.
➤ Make support available at places that young people access – e.g. in schools, youth clubs and community centres
➤ Provide more one to one and / or longer term support
➤ Reduce waiting times for CAMHS / or make help available to young people who are on the waiting list.
➤ Make waiting rooms comfortable and have things to do while you're waiting. E.g. fiddle toys
➤ Have more audio and visual options on websites for YP who struggle to read
➤ Do more outreach work with young people. E.g services to do sessions with youth groups etc.
➤ Raise awareness of existing services and resources

In addition, we have the following recommendations for the individual agencies we looked at:

Kooth

- Make sure young people can get through to the chat facility when they need it
- Have more resources on the website / app or activities to do while you are waiting to chat.

Chathealth

- Raise awareness of the service with young people

CAMHS

- Make sure confidentiality is explained clearly to all young people using the services so they know when and what kind of information will be passed on to other people.
- Make the waiting area more comfortable and welcoming
- Make sure posters and leaflets in the waiting area are up to date

Off The Record

- Make the online resources more young person-friendly
- Have less 'rainbow' stuff in the entrance hallway – not everyone is LGBTQ+

Bath Mind

- Raise awareness of services for young people
- Have a dedicated young people's website or make the young people's area easier to find on the main website

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Appendix A: Healthwatch: Services checklist

Name of mental health / wellbeing service:

	Tick / Cross as appropriate	Notes
Easy to get to		
Building looks nice / welcoming		
Area feels safe		
Friendly welcome		
Comfortable reception / waiting area		
A range of services available to suit different needs		
Can drop in		
Telephone support		
Online chat		
Can contact / access support via social media		
Can see someone in person		
Can see the same person each time		
Support available immediately		
Support offered short term		
Support offered long term		
Regular (e.g. weekly) appointments		
Support available 24/7		
Information available on website		
Confidentiality explained		
Other – please state		

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Appendix B:

Healthwatch:Online checklist

Name of mental health / wellbeing service:

	Yes	No	Notes
Easy to find online			
Email support			
Online chat forum			
Provides audio support			
Provides visual support. E.g. – videos			
Available on Social media platforms:			
Instagram			
Facebook			
Twitter			
Tiktok			
Youtube			
Clear on what service users they can support			
Clear information on how to find their location (if they have a building in B&NES)			
Telephone support			
24/7 support			
Information on mental health and wellbeing			
Information on their delivery services			
Access to book an appointment			
Marketing information – Young person friendly			
Branding			
Promotes equality and diversity			
Information about referral			
Information about emergency support			
Information about other services and support			
Other			
Comments			

Healthwatch Questionnaire



We are asking young people about their experience of mental health services in Bath and North East Somerset. We would love to know what you think. Please take a moment to answer the following questions. This survey is anonymous, and your answers are confidential.

Age: _____

Area you live in: E.g. Bath, Radstock, Twerton etc. _____

Questions:

1. Do you know of any mental health or wellbeing services in BANES? Please list:

2. Have you experienced any mental health difficulties yourself? (please circle)

Yes / No

If yes - what kind of support did you get and where from?

If no - what stopped you? Can you tell us what would have helped?

Please turn over ☺

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3. Have you heard of any of these services? (please tick the ones you have heard of) If you have used a service, please say what you liked / disliked about it:

Kooth

How did you hear about it? _____

Like:

Dislike:

Chathealth

How did you hear about it? _____

Like:

Dislike: _____

CAMHS

How did you hear about it? _____

Like:

Dislike:

Off The Record (OTR)

How did you hear about it? _____

Like:

Dislike:

Mind

How did you hear about it? _____

Like:

Dislike:

4. Please look at the following list and circle the 5 most important things a mental health / wellbeing service should offer to young people:

- Easy to get to
- Confidential
- Friendly and welcoming
- Comfortable
- Can drop-in when you need help
- Telephone appointments
- Online support / chat
- Can see someone in person
- Can see the same person each time
- Support available immediately
- Regular appointments
- Long term support
- Support available 24/7
- Can access information on website
- Can access support via social media
- Other – please state _____

5. If you felt you needed some mental health or wellbeing support, how would you like to get help? (e.g. Go to your doctor, talk to the school nurse, look online, call / message someone..)

6. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Mental Health and Wellbeing Services in B&NES? We really want to know what kind of support YOU think is needed:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your answers will help improve services for young people in B&NES.



Appendix D: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about mental health and wellbeing services in B&NES? We really want to know what kind of support YOU think is needed:

'one to one support when needed'

'Should have more active involvement in people's lives, talk with school, create enjoyment'

'Speak about it more'

'More awareness around local services and help'

'more awareness'

'We need more help and more education surrounding help and where we can find it'

'needs to be spoken to more about it in schools'

'They all need to be friendly and welcoming, offer regular appointments and long term support'

'Learn the medical side. Physical is easier to help'

More help for urgent / crisis mental health issues.

'I would like to talk to someone who isn't family, friends or school'