

Access to counselling *key findings*

An evaluation of the relationship between YIACS and CAMHS identifying CAMHS commissioners' expectations of YIACS and YIACS' needs in approaching CAMHS commissioners

1 Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of an evaluation examining the relationship between Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services (YIACS) and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The aim of the investigation was to produce a solid evidence base to inform the development of a programme of information and resources to support and improve the relationship between CAMHS commissioners and YIACS.

The briefing provides a summary of the background and context to the investigation, the methods used, selected key findings and recommendations made for the development of a programme of resources and support.

2 Background and context to the evaluation

The evaluation is part of the 'Access to Counselling' project (a2c), a two year project running from 2005 to 2007, funded by the Department of Health. The overarching aim of a2c is to improve young people's access to mental health services by enabling voluntary sector youth counselling organisations to be effectively integrated into the planning and commissioning of services. The project promotes the expansion of youth counselling provision, including new pathways for young people who are 'harder to reach'. The intention is to tackle the barriers and blocks to YIACS' inclusion in the development of the comprehensive CAMHS agenda by developing new national resources.

YIACS are specifically designed to meet young people's needs. The 'under one roof' model of

service provision of YIACS is a proven method of reaching out to young people, particularly those that other agencies may find difficult. YIACS provide a young people-friendly setting with informal, self-referral access to the early intervention and prevention services of counselling offered alongside for example internet cafes, sexual health clinics, rights-based advice on benefits and housing.

Despite the strengths of the YIACS model, the absence of a coherent policy to secure youth counselling services has meant a reliance on short-term, one-off funding. YIACS need a more secure funding base if they are to offer a reliable, consistent quality service and maximise their contribution to a comprehensive CAMHS, particularly for those aged 16+ and in 'harder to reach' groups.

The a2c project was developed in the context of mental health policy which includes the National Service Framework (NSF) for Children and Young People, the development of comprehensive CAMHS by 2006, the Framework for Joint Planning and Commissioning of Children and Young People's Services and Youth Matters.

Current policy recognises that no single agency can meet all young people's needs and that a multi-agency approach is required based on commitment from the highest level in all agencies. One of the key messages in the CAMHS NSF standards is the importance of partnership working and the need to develop a shared commitment to improving young people's mental health services in order to transcend organisational boundaries.

About the study

Youth Access commissioned Harrington Young to undertake the evaluation. It was undertaken between September and December 2005, via a questionnaire survey of YIACS in membership of Youth Access, and telephone interviews with a selected sample of responding agencies and key individuals including CAMHS commissioners.

Youth Access distributed 95 questionnaires and achieved an 83% (79 agencies) response rate. Telephone interviews were also conducted with

staff at a selected 15% (12) responding agencies, plus telephone interviews with other key individuals including CAMHS commissioners.

The findings from the questionnaire survey and telephone interviews have identified CAMHS commissioners' expectations of YIACS and YIACS' needs in approaching CAMHS commissioners.

3 Snapshot of key findings

YIACS' relationship with CAMHS

The majority of relationships between YIACS and CAMHS were primarily based on making referrals. However, in a smaller number of agencies where other relationships exist, the opportunity for improving services to young people is clearly demonstrated.

- f** 39% of respondents indicated that they have no or limited relationship with CAMHS.
- f** 27.8% of respondents currently attend CAMHS planning groups. This has resulted in more services for young people, better identification of young people's needs, improvements in joint working arrangements, and strategic planning.
- f** A number of barriers are identified by respondents who do not have a contractual relationship with CAMHS: lack of time/resources; the voluntary sector not being involved enough; lack of recognition by potential funders of young people's mental health needs where they have not received a diagnosis and also of the agencies working with young people's general emotional and mental health needs, and YIACS' lack of knowledge of CAMHS and the commissioning process.
- f** Those organisations who have been successful in approaching CAMHS for funding cite the following factors as enablers: strong partnership links; providing evidence of needs and how they can be met; meeting the requirements of local CAMHS strategy; a good reputation of the agency at local level; an understanding of policy; openness/commitment to partnership work.

An established or contractual relationship between YIACS and CAMHS appears to benefit young

people's access to counselling and other mental health services.

YIACS currently funded by CAMHS

Of the 79 YIACS who participated in the survey just under a quarter are currently in receipt of CAMHS funding at Tiers 2 and 3.

- f 18 (22.8%) of the responding agencies currently receive CAMHS funding for counselling services.
- f Of these, funding from CAMHS ranges from £2,000 to £113,225 per annum.
- f Of the 18 agencies receiving CAMHS funding twelve deliver services at Tier 2 and seven at Tier 3.

Needs identified by YIACS

YIACS identified a range of information and training needs to support their approaches to CAMHS commissioners: procedural issues, policy and presentation skills.

- f Issues for YIACS in approaching CAMHS commissioners include perceived differences between the medical model and person-centred or developmental model of mental health, and difficulties over procedural issues, for example, confidentiality.
- f Agencies which have not been successful in approaching CAMHS for funding suggest the following would be helpful: information and training about CAMHS funding and the process; negotiation skills; opportunities to share experience with others who have been successful; better understanding of policy; access to CAMHS commissioners; support to demonstrate effectiveness and outcomes of service.
- f In the context of these issues, interviewees stress the importance of staying true to their own principles and providing evidence that their work is preventative and focused on a holistic approach to meeting a young person's needs.
- f YIACS identified the need to demonstrate how the services they offer address the current policy agenda (e.g. Every Child Matters, NSF) as well as CAMHS objectives and priorities.

CAMHS' issues and expectations of YIACS

CAMHS commissioners and representatives identified a number of areas that are key to YIACS getting ready to apply for funding and commissioning.

- f YIACS need to demonstrate to CAMHS commissioners what they know, have in place and are able to do as their main challenge.
- f Relationships are critical to successfully securing funding. Organisations therefore need to ensure that they have a seat at the table of appropriate local partnerships and strategic groups, and are actively engaged in networking.
- f Partnership is key: recognising that different partners bring different strengths.
- f Yet, while counsellors may have a role in supporting young people's mental health and emotional well-being, it was also felt that the term 'counselling' may suffer from prejudicial views within the medical hierarchy. To overcome this it is important for YIACS to demonstrate that counselling can provide a supportive and therapeutic environment for young people to reflect on and work with their issues.
- f To increase their chances of success in funding, YIACS' bids need to be short and focused and provide evidence against NSF objectives.

4 Recommendations

In order to develop an effective programme of information and support, a number of specific recommendations are highlighted:

- Promote YIACS' work through a national campaign to raise the profile of the level of training, supervision and support of counsellors working with young people; the values and principles that underpin effective counselling with young people; the uniqueness and importance of the voluntary sector contribution and YIACS' contribution to partnership work.
- Promote the professionalism of YIACS through exploring the possibility of developing an accreditation scheme for counselling services based on the Youth Access Quality Standards and aimed at increasing quality and consistency.

- Explore routes to assess and externally validate YIACS' achievement of the Youth Access Quality Standards.
- Make available materials promoting the holistic approach to counselling within the social model of mental health.
- Promote the work of YIACS (who they are and what they do) through promotional materials that illustrate good practice and the potential contribution of YIACS to meeting the outcomes of ECM and Youth Matters, as well as the targets of the NSF and comprehensive CAMHS agenda.
- Support YIACS' involvement at local level through facilitating and supporting:
 - opportunities for YIACS to network together and also with potential funders (including CAMHS commissioners), to share information and engage in mutual learning about the commissioning process;
 - YIACS' participation in CAMHS planning groups and other local strategic planning and implementation groups;
 - the building of YIACS' networks and local infrastructures for better information sharing, joint initiatives, and collaborative engagement with local planning, commissioners and commissioning processes;
 - training for YIACS on various aspects of the commissioning process.
- Support YIACS' approaches to commissioners through the development of resources including guidance on commissioning; protocol templates; and promotional resources.

Youth Access Next Steps

Youth Access plans to use these findings to strengthen YIACS' ability to approach CAMHS commissioners and also to support CAMHS commissioners to understand and appreciate the significant role YIACS can play in meeting the targets of the National Service Framework (NSF) and the comprehensive CAMHS agenda. This will include:

- workshops for YIACS managers to support their engagement in commissioning activities;
- seminar for CAMHS commissioners to share information and showcase good practice in the delivery of youth counselling services;
- the development of good practice guides.

Contact details

If you want to know more about the a2c project and its programme of information and resources please contact catherine@youthaccess.org.uk or go to the Youth Access website on www.youthaccess.org.uk for information about other emotional and mental health projects.

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for young people's information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) who predominately work with 13 to 25 year olds. Youth Access believes that all young people have a right to locally accessible, free and impartial information, advice, counselling and support. We work in partnership with our members, the National Youth Agency and other organisations to promote the development of high quality, young people-friendly services.

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