

Counselling Workforce Development Project (*CwdP*) *key findings and recommendations*

A national survey and consultation with YIACS and young people mapping the counselling workforce and recording young people's experience of counselling.

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for YIACS who predominately work with 11 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.

If you want to know more about the *Cwd project* please contact Catherine@youthaccess.org.uk or go to the Youth Access website at www.youthaccess.org.uk

1 Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of a national survey and consultation with Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services (YIACS) and young people mapping the counselling workforce and gathering information about young people's experience of counselling. The survey and consultation aimed to gather up-to-date information about the counselling workforce in YIACS: their needs, concerns and aspirations for the delivery of high quality youth counselling provision – alongside information about young people's experience of counselling.

The briefing includes a summary of the project, survey and consultation, the methods used and selected key findings and recommendations,¹ which will inform the development of the strategy.

2 The project, strategy, survey and consultation

The national survey and consultation is part of *CwdP* – taking place February-July 2008 – and funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)'s Workforce Strategy Partners Programme. The main aim of the *CwdP* is to help improve the capacity of the youth counselling workforce in YIACS by developing a national youth counselling strategy. This is intended to support, develop and equip the counselling workforce in the local commissioning and delivery of targeted and specialist services, as well as in wider reforms, such as the impending regulation of counsellors.

The *CwdP* sought to achieve this by:

- Conducting a national survey to map the current counselling workforce in YIACS and the benefits and barriers to their engagement in local integrated working arrangements.
- Consulting young people about their views of youth counsellors.
- Using the data collected to make recommendations to

¹ To access the full report which contains all of the *CwdP* findings and recommendations go to www.youthaccess.org.uk

enable VYS counselling agencies to improve their training and workforce planning and strengthen their position in targeted and specialist commissioning activities.

The *CwdP* survey and consultation findings will inform the development of a national strategy to improve the capacity of youth counselling providers and will include recommendations and actions for CWDC, policy makers, commissioners, higher education providers and Youth Access. Youth Access commissioned Dr Cathy Street (Health and Social Policy Consultant) to undertake the national survey and analysis of the data and her colleagues Brenda Allan (Mental Health Consultant) and Judi Barker (Counselling Consultant) to facilitate the young people's consultation.

The survey and consultation took place between April and June 2008. Data was gathered from:

- 42 counselling service managers (a return rate of 46% based on a sample of 92 managers from Youth Access member agencies (YIACS) identified as currently providing youth counselling services).
- A further 27 YIACS' counselling service managers were approached to complete the service manager's questionnaire *and* distribute a practitioner questionnaire to their paid and unpaid counselling staff (The 27 agencies were a random sample across all 9 Government Office Regions of England). 21 of these 27 managers returned questionnaires.
- 145 counsellors (a return rate of 64% based on distribution of 226 questionnaires across the random sample of 21 YIACS).
- 23 young people from five YIACS.

The findings from the survey and consultation fall into three main areas: results from the managers of counselling staff surveys; results from counselling practitioner surveys and the feedback from the young people's consultation.

The information gathered through the survey covered a wide range of issues from the types of counselling offered to why young people access counselling and the type of training needed. The young people's consultation feedback covered: finding and getting a counsellor; young people's views of counsellors; the benefits of counselling and suggestions for improving or keeping a service a good one.

3 *CwdP* snapshot of key findings

3.1 Counselling manager findings

Qualifications and experience of counselling service managers – from 63 YIACS

- f Managers of counselling services' qualifications include: post graduate 33%, supervision 16%, degree/diploma 75%, managers with non-counselling specific qualifications 5%.

- f Qualification areas breakdown into: therapeutic counselling, person-centered counselling, psychotherapy, family therapy, psychoanalysis, CBT, coaching, management and childcare.
- f Managers prior experience of working with young people includes: youth work, foster care, homeless support staff, drugs officer, bereavement support and child minder.

Characteristics of practitioner workforce

- f Characteristics of youth counselling workforce includes:
 - Age:** 20-30yrs – 9%, 30-40yrs – 35%, 40-50yrs – 32%, 50+ 22%.
 - Ethnicity:** Black UK – 3%, Black African – 0.4%, Black Other – 0.10%, Asian – 2%, Irish – 2%, other European – 2%; White UK – 77%, White Other – 3%, Other – 1%, Not known – 9%.
 - Disability:** 28% of YIACS employ one or more disabled employees.
 - Sexual orientation:** Lesbian – 2%, Gay man – 2%, Prefer not to say – 16%, Heterosexual – 23%, Not Known – 56%.

Counselling offered, age range and young people's reasons for wanting counselling

- f Range and combination of counselling offered to young people in YIACS includes: Person-centered 91%; Humanistic 71%, Integrative 62%, Cognitive 52%, Psychodynamic 48%, Analytic 21%, Geldard and Geldard 21% and Cross-cultural 10%.
- f 81% of YIACS offer counselling to 11 to 13 year olds, 98% to under 16's, 100% to 16 to 19's and 88% to 19 to 25's.
- f The most common reasons young people said they wanted counselling for were: 88% family and relationship difficulties, 76% general mental health (depression, anxiety, low self-esteem), 48% challenging behaviour, 34% self harm, 33% abuse and neglect, 29% bullying, 22% bereavement, 17% suicidal feelings, 12% eating disorders and 3% substance misuse.

Training offered by YIACS to counsellors

- f Training offered by YIACS to counsellors working with young people included: 91% child protection, 83% self-harm, 69% mental health, 64% drugs and alcohol, 55% young people's development and 48% counselling outcome data collection. Other areas included: working with young people; managing challenging behaviour; eating disorders, working creatively, abuse, suicide, supervision and management.

Training gaps

- f Counselling service managers identified a number of training gaps including: Attachment issues and theories; Trans-cultural counselling; Skills for engaging with young people; Autism and ASD; Working with young refugees and asylum seekers; Working with gay, lesbian and

bisexual young people; Safeguarding; Multi-agency working; Ways to work more creatively, Boundaries and ending the counselling process.

- f Lack of affordable post qualification training since most certificate/diploma/degree courses are primarily adult focussed.
- f Too many courses in London which part-time/unpaid staff cannot afford to access in money and time.

3.2 Counsellor practitioner findings

The views of 145 counsellors working in 27 YIACS.

Qualifications and experience of counsellors

- f Counsellors qualifications include: counselling degree or diploma 73%, counselling certificate 39%, post graduate counselling diploma 19%, psychology degree 5.50%. 9% had a qualification in an allied subject, such as psychology/psychotherapy.
- f Counsellors reported a variety of past experience of working with young people including: volunteer counsellor, youth worker, teacher, nurse, telephone counsellor, foster carer and working with social, emotional and behavioural issues.

Training attended by counsellors

- f A snapshot sample of counsellors' training showed attendance at: child protection 21%, substance and alcohol misuse 19%, self harm 19%, working with young people 14%, mental illness general 14%, working with strong emotions and challenging behaviour 14%, working with creativity 12%, bereavement 11%, eating disorders 11%, SEN 10%, CBT 10%, abuse 9%, suicide risk 9%, art therapy 7%, play therapy 6%, attachment 5.5%, psychosis 3%, domestic violence 3% and bullying 1%.
- f A small number of counsellors had received no training or less than three days since qualifying or in the last five years.

Supervision and support

- f Counsellors accessing supervision reported seeing: external supervisor 66%; internal supervisor 39% and counselling services manager 12%. Frequency included: monthly 51%; fortnightly 33% and weekly 14%.
- f Counsellors described other forms of support as: staff meetings 43%; support from supervisor/line manager on ad-hoc-basis 39%; formal peer group supervision/support 24%; informal peer group support 14%; residential weekends 12%; none 10%; other support groups 8% and additional clinical supervision 2%.

Training and skills needs

- f Counsellors identified a number of training needs including: self harm 12%; abuse 12%; training specific to

young people 12%; eating disorders 11%; drugs and alcohol 10%; specific disorders 10%;challenging behaviours 10%; general mental health issues 8%; bereavement 7% and suicidal tendencies 3%.

- f Counsellors identified a wide range of skills needed to work specifically with young people, including the ability to: communicate well, work flexibly and with a wide range of physical, emotional, language and developmental stages; work with chaotic behaviour; set and hold boundaries and communicate across agencies and work collaboratively.

Suggestions for improving youth counselling

- f Just under a third said counselling services could be improved if there was adequate and guaranteed funding for services, staff and training.
- f More research and evaluation of counselling services.

3.3 Young people's findings

All of the 23 young people involved in the consultation reported very positively their experiences of counselling and had a variety of suggestions for improving services.

A striking feature was the huge range and complexity of problems and needs that young people presented to youth counselling services, which clearly raised the issue of training and skills youth counsellors need to possess.

Young people's views of counsellors

- f Mostly young people reported very positive experiences – better than those with other professionals in other services.
- f Young people liked counsellors who gave practical advice, worked at their pace and let them stay in control, were uncritical, helped them work things out for themselves and were responsive.
- f Young people highlighted the importance of staff continuity and the one-to-one relationship offered by this form of intervention.
- f None raised any concerns about the age, gender or ethnicity of the counsellor they had seen.

The benefits of counselling were described as a process that helped young people:

- f Grow and gain confidence.
- f Develop problem solving skills and understand things differently.
- f Improve the practical things in life e.g. going to college, finding a job.
- f Prevent an over-reliance on family and friends – the importance of the non-involvement of family and a wish not to burden them.
- f And most would recommend youth counselling to a friend.

Suggestions to improve services or help keep them good

- More publicity about the projects and the benefits of counselling.
- Increase counsellor numbers and accommodation to reduce waiting lists.
- Offer flexibility for appointments and length of sessions.
- Recruit counsellors who like and are comfortable with young people.
- Be flexible to allow for attendance beyond 25 years (usual upper age limit) and keep offering a free service.

4 CwdP recommendations²

In addition to the survey and the consultation with young people, a national seminar was convened at NCVO in June '08. Staff and young people who took part in the project were invited to discuss the initial findings and to contribute to the formulation of recommendations and actions.

Recommendations to policy makers

- Central government to develop national policy to secure the provision of counselling to young people.
- Central government to strengthen its national guidance to Children Trusts to ensure PCTs and CAMHS jointly plan and commission youth counselling services.
- Central government to develop more explicit guidance for LAs, CAMHS and AMHS about meeting the mental and emotional health needs of 16-25 year olds to enable their access to community-based youth counselling provision.
- Local policymakers to improve the inclusion of the VCYS in local strategies for integrated working.
- Local policymakers to better integrate youth counsellors in the VCYS development of Targeted Youth Support.

Recommendations to commissioners

- Commissioners to ensure their practice properly adheres to the principles and practices set out in the Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework, ensuring they secure the voice of different service users and the VCYS in shaping local service provision.
- Children Trust, PCT and CAMHS' commissioners to work more effectively together to plan and secure counselling provision.
- Better joint commissioning to ensure the workforce and training needs of the counsellors are effectively recognised in contracts and agreements.
- Local service commissioning and funding to reflect the real costs of providing youth counselling services.

Recommendations to CWDC

- Use the *CwdP* findings to inform the Youth Workforce Reform programme and better meet the needs of the youth counselling workforce.
- Examine how the continuing professional needs of VCYS counsellors can be better supported in national and local programmes of training.
- Support improvements in the access and design of local programmes for integrated working, safeguarding and the CAF to enable a better fit with the needs of a voluntary youth sector working with 13-19 and some up to 25 year olds with complex and multiple needs.
- Examine how to support better access to training on mental and emotional health – taking account of generalist, as well as specialist practitioners.

Recommendations to Higher Education

- Redress the balance of largely adult-focused counselling training to offer more on the theory, knowledge and skills of working with young people.
- Work with representative bodies of youth counselling services to ensure training remains in touch with the complex needs of young people typically presenting at YIACS.
- Establish access to bursaries to enable a more diverse counselling workforce reflecting the different communities of young people accessing counselling.

Actions for Youth Access

Secure funding and resources to:

- Design and develop a national programme of induction training for local providers of youth counselling.
- Develop a national strategy for the induction programme through e.g. developing local youth counselling providers to become regional/sub-regional centres of excellence.
- Develop a national programme of CPD specific to youth counsellors with good local access for practitioners.
- As part of the development of national programmes of training, to explore and pilot various training delivery methods such as e-learning.
- Produce a video by and for young people explaining what counselling is, how it works, what it offers and what counselling is like in YIACS.
- Support the design and development of a national module for counselling training for implementation within HEIs – securing a balance between theoretical and practical approaches.

5 Youth Access Next steps

We will disseminate the project's findings nationally to members, CWDC, policy makers and commissioners with the aim of strengthening YIACS position in workforce reform.

² Ibid.