
Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Youth Counselling Services and CYP IAPT – Understanding the Role and Contribution of Youth Counselling Services

Youth Access

Contributors

Alyson Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Streetwise, Newcastle

Barbara Rayment, Director, Youth Access

Bodhakari, Counselling Coordinator, Off the Record, Croydon

Chris Jacob, Head of Services, 42nd Street, Manchester

Harriet Williams, Service Manager 42nd Street, Manchester

Karen Stott, Agency Director Off the Record, Croydon

Keith Coulston, Head of Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing, Young Devon, Devon

Kim Bennett, Director, Drop In, Croydon

Monique Collier, Chief Executive, Young People's Advisory Service, Liverpool

Rhona Kenny, Counselling Manager, Drop In, Croydon

Tonia Mihill, Therapeutic Services Team Manager, MAP, Norwich

Published by:

Youth Access

2 Taylors Yard

67 Alderbrook Road

London SW12 8AD

Tel: 020 8772 9900

admin@youthaccess.org.uk

www.youthaccess.org.uk

Researched and written by:

Lisa Malangone, Freelance researcher and Coordinator, Jump Start, Sutton

Introduction

The development of the Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (CYP IAPT) programme has been welcomed by many for its inclusion of voluntary sector youth counselling. Since its inception, Youth Access, as the national membership body for youth information, advice and counselling services has had the opportunity to contribute to a number of the advisory groups established by the Department of Health and latterly NHS England. While this has been an unprecedented opportunity for youth counselling, the collaborative approach between statutory and voluntary sectors at national level has not been consistently reflected in the implementation of the programme in all areas.

During 2013, a group of VCS youth counselling agencies came together at Youth Access to share and reflect on their experiences of being partners in the CYP IAPT programme. There were some common themes; many of which stem from a lack of awareness and understanding about the role and contribution of VCS youth counselling to young people's mental health. It is an experience which spans the past four decades, and youth counselling services have developed a considerable track record in understanding how to respond to young people. This briefing is intended to help those in Higher Education Institutions who are engaged in the training, as well as statutory CAMHS partners to understand the potential contribution of the VCS to the programme as well as identifying some of the barriers.

Barbara Rayment, Youth Access

VCS Counselling Services

Most counselling services for young people are voluntary sector organisations or have charitable status while others (a diminishing number) are part of local authority, typically youth services. Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) counselling services have grown in number over the last 30-plus years. It is hard to be specific as to the exact number, because some counselling is offered as part of wider provision and not always listed as a specific service, but there are around 400 community-based, VCS-provided counselling services for children, young people and young adults in England.

Historically, the majority of these organizations have provided their services through significant numbers of volunteer counsellors, typically counselling students, with smaller numbers of qualified counsellors and counselling supervisors. The size of a counselling service, its funding and the numbers of staff can vary considerably. There are also many variations in what youth counselling services offer and the age range they work with.

Some VCS youth counselling services are standalone and provide only counselling; others offer counselling alongside a portfolio of information, advice and general support services – the YIACS (Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support) model. Some VCS counselling provision sits within projects that have a specific focus, for example young people who have been sexually abused, refugees or asylum seekers, young people who are bereaved, black and minority ethnic groups, or those who are young carers. In some, mental health work is explicit and may be the subject of a service level agreement with the local CAMHS or children's services, whilst other providers have contracts in place to offer counselling to local schools and colleges, alongside providing centre-based counselling, typically high street or youth centre locations.

What are YIACS?

YIACS grew out of a need to bridge both the gaps and sometimes the failings of statutory and generally adult-orientated voluntary services in meeting the needs of young people. They are an important element in the local delivery of integrated youth support services through a variety of service models. YIACS combine both prevention and early intervention services and offer:

- **Information**
The provision of systems and processes which make comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible information available to young people. This can include signposting to other services and provision of resources that allow young people to make their own decisions, choices and actions.
- **Advice**
Helping young people to change or cope with practical issues and problems. It seeks to widen the young person's choices by providing accurate and relevant information about their rights, options and potential courses of action.

- **Counselling**
An activity voluntarily entered into by a young person who wants to explore and understand issues in their lives which may be causing difficulty, pain and/or confusion. The boundaries of the relationship are identified and an explicit contract agreed between the young person and counsellor. The aim is to assist the young person to achieve a greater understanding of themselves and their relationship to their world; to create a greater awareness of their personal resources and of their ability to affect and cope with their life.
- **Personal support**
A general term which embraces a range of helping activities, including befriending and both individual and group work. The activities are frequently aimed at reducing young people's sense of social and personal isolation and may help with practical needs.

What do YIACS offer young people?

Open to all young people, YIACS offer a universal access point to targeted and specialist services either through self-referral or with the support of friends, family or another professional. YIACS recognise that adolescence is a developmental process and are focused on the particular developmental needs of adolescents and young adults. They address not only the transition to employment and independent living but also the other transitions young people experience in the transition to adulthood. While agencies operate a variety of service delivery models, the following factors have been identified as those that enable services to remain responsive to the needs of young people:

- **Free, professional service**
A range of free services under one roof, delivered by professional and trained staff (paid or voluntary) who understand young people and who have good links with other services that young people may also want help to access.
- **Young person-friendly**
A young person-friendly environment offering a flexible and accessible mix of drop in and appointments, and with help available on a one-off, occasional or regular basis, and over the short, medium and long term.
- **Impartial**
Impartial help that works alongside young people at their own pace; helping each young person to identify and understand their unique needs and aspirations, supporting them to make their decisions and achieve their goals.
- **Confidential**
Respect and recognition of every young person's right to privacy and confidentiality within a framework that promotes the safety and well-being of all young people.

- **Wide age-range**
Help to negotiate and reduce the gaps and age barriers present in other services by being available to a broad range of young people, often up to 25 years.
- **Young people's participation**
Accountable services that secure young people's participation and involvement in supporting and evaluating their continued quality and effectiveness and ensuring they deliver the best outcomes for young people.

The majority of YIACS are members of their national association, Youth Access, which has consistently asserted young people's right to access specialist information, advice, counselling and support services founded upon the belief that services must:

- respect the dignity and self-worth of each young person
- respect and value individual differences
- recognise and be sensitive to the growing autonomy of each young person
- respect every young person's right to be a voluntary participant in any helping process
- recognise the potential of each young person

Case study: Off the Record

Off the Record, established nearly 20 years ago, is a highly regarded local service offering a range of free, confidential support services to young people

Croydon Counselling Services

The self-referral service offers 100 counselling sessions weekly to 14-25 year olds to promote mental health and well-being. Offered through a team of experienced paid clinicians and volunteer counsellors, the service also offers twice weekly 'Walk In' sessions, when young people can wait for an assessment without a prior booking. In 2012/13 the service offered over 3000 counselling sessions to 393 young people.

"When I came here I was feeling suicidal. I felt like I was losing it but at Off the Record I began to feel differently."

Community Development Workers (CDW)

In partnership with Croydon BME Forum, the CDWs provide outreach activities to offer a bridge between statutory mental health services and local BME communities. Their work involves changing attitudes towards mental health amongst BME communities; improving BME access to, and experience of, existing services; building capacity within community organisations and developing mental health services.

"When I came to Off the Record I didn't really know exactly what was bothering me but I felt lost and lonely... now I feel more confident about where I want to go in life."



Compass Refugee Project

Compass offers individual counselling and group work to young refugees, asylum seekers or forced migrants. Counselling is generally short-term and delivered through schools and colleges using interpreters where requested. Support is also offered to new arrivals, age disputed young people and refused or destitute asylum seekers. A weekly Boys Group offers support alongside activities and sports where trauma, loss and mental health needs are supported. 95% of members are unaccompanied minors and alone in the UK.

Young Carers' Project

The Young Carers' Project is for children and young people from age 8 who are caring for family members, as a result of physical or mental illness or disability. A multi-disciplinary team co-located with other carers services offers holistic carers assessments; educational support; information and key working; counselling and mental health support; and respite social and leisure activities. At the end of the March 2013 463 Young Carers registered with the project with over 1500 interventions carried out by the team.

"Without the Young Carers Project I would never have been able to sort out my education and wouldn't be where I am today."

Family Navigator Project

Part of a wider Croydon initiative, the project works with 'just coping' families where the youngest child is 5 -10 years. It delivers short-term interventions by identifying needs and supporting families to access appropriate services. Off the Record's Family Navigator has a specialist focus on working with young carer and refugee families.

Mental health Group Work

A 12 week mental health group work programme targeted at young people aged 11-19 in the North of the borough. This is an open group for young people who want to support their mental health and wellbeing and build strategies and goals for the future.

Jump Start, Sutton Counselling Service

A new development to plug a gap in provision in the neighbouring borough of Sutton, Jump Start began taking referrals in April 2013 to its free, confidential counselling for young people aged 11-21. Currently offering 12 clinical hours of assessment and ongoing counselling sessions per week, by the end of its first year it expects to offer 24 clinical hours.

"We have referred 6 students to Jump Start since it came to Sutton in April 2013. I have been impressed by the professional and speedy response to referrals. Feedback from students and parents has also been positive and all referrals have led to ongoing engagement by students. Jump Start has been an invaluable resource at a time when other support has been reduced. It has been particularly useful for students who need additional support, but who do not meet the threshold for CAMHS."

[School referrer, Jump Start @ Off the Record]

Skyline, Online Counselling Service

A dedicated and secure online counselling service for young people in Croydon set up in April 2013 and built in partnership with the Beat Bullying charity who have been delivering online support for young people for many years. The site went live in September 2013 and provides an alternative route for accessing support for some of Croydon's most isolated young people.

What is the impact of the VCS?

Historically there has been little national data about young people's use of YIACS and the outcomes of the interventions made. The problems of sustaining services and, in consequence, the relatively low profile experienced by YIACS over the years has contributed to a field that has been poorly researched. The relatively small amount of data has been further compounded by the lack of a universal and systematic method for collecting information on either a local or national basis. Most YIACS have, however, developed systems to monitor some aspects of their client base and there is evidence that they have a crucial role to play in:

- improving mental and emotional health
- improving physical and sexual health
- reducing NEETS
- improving well-being and building resilience
- tackling youth poverty and improving financial capability
- improving housing situations
- reducing crime
- strengthening relationships, families and communities

"I feel more positive and trust more... I am now much more confident and I don't worry like I used to. I can make friends more easily. Thank you very much for helping me and my problems."

14 year old female

Increasingly VCS counselling services monitor outcomes using a range of measures, including validated outcome tools such as the SDQ, CORE-10, GAD-7 and PHQ-9. Some services also use the IAPT suite of tools. However, a weakness that besets the sector is variability in the outcome data that are collected, as a result of using different measures, and whether that data collection uses validated tools. The very limited capacity that affects many VCS services is a key factor in this situation, and there has also been some fear among professionals that outcome monitoring may interfere with the therapeutic counselling relationship.


The Youth Access evidence report 'A proven early intervention model: the evidence for the effectiveness of Youth Information Advice Counselling and Support services' also discusses the efficiency of YIACS. The unit costs of YIACS are frequently lower than those for a counselling session in primary care and where agencies implement nationally validated outcome tools the resulting evidence shows they support improvement in young people's mental health. The characteristics of YIACS may also contribute to their efficiency:

- **Ease of access:** Young people are able to self refer. They can often access counselling via drop in services or an appointment system that tries to accommodate a first appointment within a two to four week cycle or sooner.
- **Open access:** Young people who may not meet the thresholds for statutory mental health services will find help. Youth counselling services are highly responsive to any young person in need and will work with them to ensure they receive the help that is right for them.
- **Engaging disadvantaged young people:** The non-stigmatising, young person-centred ethos of counselling in YIACS settings means they often attract young

people who would not otherwise get help, including young men and some Black and minority ethnic groups who may be more reluctant to engage in more formal statutory services.

- **Initial assessment to engagement:** Young people make a positive and voluntary choice to enter into counselling, encouraging their ongoing engagement in the process. The strength of relationships services build with young people also supports their engagement. Their flexibility in offering appointments at the times that suit young people, including evenings and weekends also helps, as does the range of strategies employed to help young people maintain their appointments e.g. texting reminders.

Over the last decade the research and practice evidence base concerning the style of service that works for young people has grown considerably and encompasses evidence for early intervention approaches and the important role played by the VCS. However, much of YIACS activity, in common with other areas of youth provision, has been conducted in the absence of consistent and “joined up” policy, leading to difficulties in providing the reliable and consistent level of services young people need, whilst also contributing to the ad hoc pattern of provision of YIACS across the country. All too often YIACS are dependent on short-term, project funding, often leading to persistent and ongoing funding crises. Yet despite these difficulties, some YIACS have been remarkably resilient, developing the ability to shift and change to match the backdrop of the current political and funding agenda.



“My counselling sessions have been very useful. I have learnt different ways of thinking about how to respond to others. It has encouraged me not to use.”

18 year old male

What the VCS offers to the CYP IAPT programme

One of the reasons that VCS counselling services are so effective is that they are popular with young people. There is clear evidence from young people that they value and benefit from:

- young person-centred approach
- free and independent services
- holistic approach, meeting multiple and complex needs
- voluntary participation in services
- a range of interventions delivered ‘under one roof’
- choice and flexible access routes e.g. self-referral and open access services
- multi-disciplinary teams providing wrap-around support
- services open to a wide age range
- responsiveness and availability, including faster first appointments, fast tracking of urgent cases, other services such as drop in sessions while clients wait for counselling
- informal, non-stigmatising settings that facilitate access
- a respect for confidentiality that is hard to provide in a statutory or mainstream setting

- strong relationships of trust with non-judgemental staff
- continuity of staff and one-to-one relationships
- flexibility and willingness to be accommodating
- youth participation

The VCS can offer a wealth of knowledge, vast experience and success in all of the above. They are keen to share and utilise this valuable resource to ensure that appropriate and relevant services continue to be available and accessible to young people and further measures can be taken to strive towards reaching those that currently find it difficult to engage.

What VCS would like from CYP IAPT training providers

Experience of the CYP IAPT programme has shown benefits for many VCS providers, including:

- successful referral pathway through joint partnership with CAMHS
- access to support and treatment within a supportive, accessible environment for young people
- the ability to offer a responsive service for very specific issues which respond well to the particular intervention of CBT
- flexible work that is at the young person's pace

However, there are challenges, which VCS partners in the CYP IAPT programme believe training providers may be able to help address. Despite a wealth of expertise and experience in working with a diverse range of young people, regrettably VCS services both locally and nationally have struggled to find recognition and value over the years. It is important to them that this does not continue to be the case. Whilst welcoming the opportunity to be partners in CYP IAPT and benefit from the training opportunities available, it is also important for the VCS to retain its own distinctive ethos, values and organizational culture to ensure that young people continue to have a choice in the local services they approach for help. One of the major concerns for the VCS is to maintain their ability to offer a degree of confidentiality that much of the statutory sector find difficult to offer and where young people actively choose to work on their dilemmas and difficulties.

VCS partners would therefore like the CYP IAPT programme to:

- Actively recognise and reinforce the history and experience that already exists within the VCS and strategically incorporate this valuable resource into the training
- Recognise the role VCS services already play in meeting the current health policy agenda – easy access, choice of treatments, personalised approaches, young person-centred, youth participation, value for money etc
- Challenge any notion that the voluntary sector are low-level need or inferior to statutory sector partners in terms of what they can bring to the table
- Foster and encourage relationships and understanding between the voluntary and statutory sectors while enabling VCS organisations to maintain their 'difference'

from statutory organisations, maintaining a significant level of choice for service users

- Provide representation of those experienced in delivering therapeutic interventions through the VCS to participate in the training, as well as shaping the CYP IAPT roll out
- Reflect the voluntary sector in terms of structure and use of learning in the curriculum and workbooks; currently geared at CAMHS transformation
- Pay attention to the language used and ensure it does not exclude the VCS; e.g. 'young person' or 'client' (VCS-based) versus 'patient' (CAMHS-based)

As already mentioned, despite considerable progress over the last decade in developing systems of outcome monitoring, there is ongoing variability in both the quality and quantity of data that are collected across the sector as a whole. This is, perhaps, an area that can be improved on a national level by participation in the programme but there still remains the dilemmas that individual organisations face in terms of capacity, funding and knowledge to make this a reality. Although we recognise that the following are beyond the scope of CYP IAPT, it is worth mentioning that the VCS has also highlighted a desire for:

- Help with creating a statistically significant outcome measure from a social, not a medical perspective, as VCS generally work with social rather than diagnostic models
- Understanding of the structural struggle of IT provisions and minimum dataset requirements (that are not yet compatible with those of CAMHS) and extra support with incorporating these systems into their services
- Addressing the issue of disparity across the voluntary sector in terms of CYP IAPT implementation and management support including training and development
- Help to think about sustainability, e.g. how to maintain partnerships between voluntary/statutory sector and issues like clinical supervision which incur costs beyond the training course and secondment arrangements in place

The VCS is passionate about its work, which is marked by a considerable diversity of services that are highly valued by those who use it. A wide range and complexity of needs that spans health, mental health, social care, education, housing and financial issues, often accompanying high levels of risk, are typically presented by the children, young people and young adults using these services. This highlights the need for both a skilled counselling workforce but also robust partnership working. It is the hope of the VCS that the CYP IAPT training will help dispel some of the myths and preconceptions held about the VCS and recognise and incorporate the valuable work that is already happening in the sector. A better understanding of the cultural differences and improved communication/links between the statutory and voluntary partners enables important and strong two-way working relationships to be forged that ultimately benefits both sectors and, most importantly, the service users.

