

Early Action Mental Health Programme

Mancroft Advice Project



In brief

The Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) was one of the first three beneficiaries of the Early Action Neighbourhood Fund (EANF), a funding pilot set up by the Early Action Funders Alliance who formed following the publication of the Early Action Task Force's second report, '[The Deciding Time](#)'. Although MAP has been focussing on early action for many years, its EANF-funded project specifically aims to shift Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) spending in Norwich even earlier, as well as improving children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and reducing the number of young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training). It is doing this by targeting 11-16 year olds in three schools with a range of interventions, including youth work, counselling advice and

We have one young lad who the only thing that keeps him coming into school is seeing his MAP worker.

Jack

Head Teacher

Why is this early action?

An estimated one in ten young people aged 5-16 have a mental health problem and in Norfolk, where MAP is based, referrals to CAMHS for under 18s rose by 84% between 2011 and 2015. Higher level mental health provision is costly - whilst tier 2 community-based services cost £1.3m, tier 3 acute services cost around £11m per year¹. MAP is working against the 'medicalisation' of mental health interventions and acting earlier to prevent mental health problems arising. Reducing mental illness and promoting mental wellbeing is crucial in ensuring the healthy functioning of families and communities, and has a number of emotional, social, and economic benefits for society as a whole². Through its early action mental health programme, MAP is delivering primary, secondary and tertiary prevention schemes which aim to increase young people's social and emotional wellbeing and improve their future prospects whilst reducing the need for acute mental health services.

How does it work?

MAP was set up in 1991 as a youth advice, information and counselling service, designed to serve as a one stop shop for young people in need. Young people would present at the centre with a problem, and the MAP staff would work with them to

Having MAP is huge – having you on site is a godsend. Getting through CAMHS takes ages! ...It is the immediacy of being able to support students in self referring. Whereas it was a big barrier to say go to town to self refer, or get your mum to take you to the GP, that didn't happen. And just the awareness of students in school, around support for support for MH concerns. The fact the school are recognising it.

Geraldine
Deputy Head Teacher

I walked away from [counselling] sessions feeling a bit better each time and I was able to not feel alone in exploring my emotions and thoughts. It helped me to find methods to help with dealing with anxiety and gave me a place to talk to someone .

Lucy
Student

prevent the problem from getting worse. Yet MAP recognised that they could always be helping young people a stage earlier by preventing these problems from arising in the first place, leading them to develop a youth work programme that targeted young people within schools.

This work has since evolved into a five year pilot of an early action mental health programme, funded by the Early Action Neighbourhood Fund. The pilot operates in three schools in West Norwich, two in deprived wards with over 30% of children in poverty, and one in a more affluent ward with only 5% of children in poverty. The performance of these schools ranges from Requires Improvement to Outstanding. This was in recognition that despite differing levels of deprivation, access to mental health services is still limited and mental health promotion is essential for all young people.

MAP's early action mental health programme takes a comprehensive approach, splitting services into primary, second and tertiary prevention, enabling young people to attain and maintain positive mental health whether they are currently experiencing problems or not. . At the primary level, it offers a support network and training for schools and local practitioners on promoting emotional wellbeing, assistance in setting up wellbeing activities in local organisations such as youth clubs, a PHSE wellbeing curriculum, and a participation programme to increase student engagement in school decision making. These primary services are universal, promoting wellbeing and building young people's resilience to pressures on their mental health.

MAP is also running a general drop-in within the three schools for young people to come and discuss their issues, delivering a programme of activities to build confidence and self-esteem, and working with teachers to identify young people who may be in need

of their services. For those young people with emergent issues, counselling and specialist advice is offered to help them overcome their problems. MAP has found that an early action approach cannot simply focus on service delivery, but must be embedded within strategies and systems and embraced by leadership, in order to be truly effective. To this aim, MAP is working closely with schools' senior teams in order to ensure buy-in and implement a 'whole-school' approach. MAP believes that its understanding of how schools work and its highly-trained professional staff have lent the project credibility in the eyes of school leaders and ensured that the three schools are fully on board with the programme.

MAP also recognises the need to be flexible, enabling it to adapt the programme to the needs of the schools and their pupils, as well as continuing to identify areas where support can be provided earlier. For example, MAP noted that a number of young people were being excluded for swearing in school. Given the high financial, educational and emotional costs of exclusion, MAP worked with the schools to devise a positive language programme, enabling young people to express their concerns and needs in other ways and preparing them for the workplace. This flexibility is also supporting its primary prevention work to increase young people's stake in the school, transforming



Conservation projects help promote wellbeing

[We have] some children with some quite serious issues and our staff go to MAP staff and MAP will say have you tried this and this and we can do this. There is a real collaboration there. And often for those whose behaviour means they were on the verge of permanent exclusion it has kept them in learning and it has stopped them from being excluded.

Terry

Deputy Head Teacher

students from passive recipients of education to positive contributors to school decision making. The nature of this programme means it is changing all the time as students are consulted on what their needs are and what will work for them.

What has it achieved?

MAP is one year into its Early Action Mental Health Programme and is already seeing positive effects. MAP are already well integrated into the schools, with teaching staff reporting that they feel supported by MAP staff and can go to them for advice on children who are struggling or presenting challenging behaviour. MAP are perceived as independent from teachers and other school staff, increasing students' trust in them as a source of confidential support. At the individual level, MAP has seen a number of successes through interventions such as counselling and one to one support for students. In order to capture the wider impact of the Early Action Mental Health Programme, particularly the primary prevention elements, MAP have completed Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale activities with the Year 7 classes in each school. The data from these 1033 young people's opinions of their own wellbeing will provide a baseline of statistical data for comparison with future data, enabling MAP to quantify the impact of their work over the coming years.

MAP hopes that the five year pilot will provide a strong evidence base for their early action project, particularly on proving the positive correlation between improved emotional wellbeing and attainment. This is essential, given the current pressure on resources, to persuade other stakeholders that this kind of primary prevention work is worth funding. Other schools have already expressed an interest in the programme and, depending on funding, MAP is hoping to extend the programme to other areas.

Find out more

Dan Mobbs

CEO, Mancroft Advice Project

You can visit MAP's website here.

What can we learn?

MAP is embedding early action in all its programmes by consistently asking, 'how can we address this issue one stage earlier?' It recognises that improving mental health means taking services out of hospitals and into schools and the local community, combatting medicalisation of mental health and positively promoting wellbeing. By taking a comprehensive approach, MAP are creating a continuum of support for young people and maximising positive outcomes. MAP is highlighting that flexibility in responding to the needs of young people is key to effectiveness, whilst school and community leaders must be fully on board as the drivers of institutional change.

Notes

¹ Norfolk and Waveney CAMHS (2015). Local Transformation Plan 2015.

² Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008). Final Project report – Executive summary. The Government Office for Science, London.