MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS

2022-2023
Summary Report

Overview

Mental Health Champions is a youth-led project delivered by e-wellbeing in partnership with **Public Health Schools at Brighton and Hove City Council** and **YMCA DownsLink Group**.

Running for over five years, our youth-led mental health and emotional wellbeing workshops – delivered in schools and colleges across Brighton & Hove – have empowered young people to tackle mental health stigma and take meaningful action towards improving student wellbeing within their school community.

Who participated this year?

We engaged Champions and school leaders from 7 schools and 1 college within Brighton & Hove. Each school was asked to recruit up to 12 Champions to participate in the project and create their student-led action. Around 85 Champions and 20 school leaders took part.

A key aim of the project is to ensure vulnerable groups are represented; this includes young people from global majority communities, those identifying at LGBTQIA+, young carers, and young people who are neurodiverse or having different accessibility needs.

The following schools participated in Mental Health Champions 2022-2023:
- BACA
- Blatchington Mill
- Cardinal Newman Catholic School
- Kings School Hove*
- Patcham High School
- PACA
- Varndean College
- Varndean School

Students were supported by staff from e-wellbeing (YMCA DownsLink Group) and Brighton & Hove Public Health Schools, along with e-wellbeing Youth Ambassadors (young volunteers). These Ambassadors helped to co-deliver the project, including facilitation of workshops and co-production of project materials.

Kings School Hove participated in the 2022-2023 project until March 2023. They decided to withdraw from the project this year due to their school lead's extended absence, and a lack of school staff availability to support with workshops.

Launch Workshops

This year, we offered all participating schools and colleges a personalised Launch Workshop. This workshop was separate to their 'main' workshops (which took place between November 2022 and June 2023). In this workshop, e-wellbeing staff introduced the project to the Champions, facilitated mental health activities, and provided wellbeing materials to use in class.

The Project

From November 2022 – June 2023, Mental Health Champions took part in a series of peer-led workshops, which aimed to:

a) identify issues around mental health that most affect young people in their school or college; and

b) develop a student-led action to address an identified issue, make a difference, and promote positive mental health and wellbeing among students and staff.

This year, we introduced a theme for all student-led actions, because we received feedback from school leaders during previous years that it was difficult for Champions to narrow down what they wanted their action focus to be. We chose the theme of 'Community' to encourage Champions to create an action that could align with their school's whole-school approach, while still having autonomy over the development of the action.

Issues addressed during the 2022-2023 project included:

- Addressing homophobia and transphobia in school
- Pitching and developing a new wellbeing space for students
- Improving working relationships between staff and students
- Reducing stigma associated with seeking support (e.g. using Exit Passes)
- Educating SLT about issues affecting student wellbeing (e.g. bullying, homework, toilets)

Delivery of Mental Health Champions 2022-2023

Champions started their workshops by exploring the key issues they felt were affecting wellbeing in their school or college. Following this, they collectively wrote a Mission Statement to represent the aim of their action. Further workshops focused on creating their action, which involved an activity or event that aimed to address their chosen issue. While devising the action, e-wellbeing staff and school leaders encouraged Champions to reach as many pupils as possible within their school or college and helped to evaluate the outcomes of their student-led action.

All participating schools and colleges received 6-8 in-person workshops during the project. To ensure all Champions could contribute to the planning and delivery of their action, the workshops involved a range of participatory methods, such as group discussions, voting systems, and opportunities for feedback. Surveys were used across several schools to gain insight from the wider student population, which was used to inform action development.

In their final workshop, Champions provided feedback about their experience of the workshops, including how far their understanding of mental health, and their confidence addressing wellbeing issues, had improved because of the project.

As a result of participating in the project:

92% of Champions agreed that they know more about issues that can affect student mental health and wellbeing

78% of Champions agreed that they knew where to get support if they are struggling with their mental health

74% of Champions agreed that they know more about how to improve their mental health

68% of Champions agreed that their understanding of mental health had improved

2022-2023 Student-Led Actions

School/College	Theme	Action
BACA	Addressing homophobia and transphobia	Distributed a survey and analysed the key results, to later be shown to SLT.
Blatchington Mill	Improving wellbeing support in school	Pitched a new wellbeing space called 'The Cloud' and presented to SLT.
Cardinal Newman Catholic School	Building SLT understanding of how school impacts wellbeing	Distributed a survey and planned to meet with SLT to discuss ideas from the results.
PACA	Creating safe spaces within school for students	Used previous years' survey results to pitch a new wellbeing space to the Principal – this later turned into weekly 'drop-in' wellbeing sessions run by students (and a school leader).
Patcham High	Reducing the impact of bullying, toilets, and homework on student wellbeing	Distributed a survey for KS3 then met with SLT to present their findings.
Varndean College	Developing a new social space for students	Distributed a survey to gain insight from other students and pitched the results to SLT, resulting in Champions working with SLT to redesign the canteen space and create a new outdoor social space.
Varndean School	Reduce stigma linked to accessing support	Distributed a survey and created a presentation with he results to show to SLT.

To find out more about the Champions' student-led actions, the issues that were identified, and how this action impacted student and staff wellbeing, **click here to watch the 2022-2023 Video Presentations**.

Teacher Engagement
During this year's project, school leaders were engaged through:
- An individual meeting at the start of the project (after sign-up)
- Distribution of the 22-23 Sign-Up Guide and Starter Pack (including recruitment guidelines, workshop framework, and outline of expectations)
- Distribution of the 22-23 Staff Learning and Wellbeing Pack (including digital and printable resources for use in and out of the classroom)
- Networking and feedback opportunities at the Celebration Event

At the Celebration Event in July 2023, school leaders and Public Health Schools staff were invited to take part in a Staff Networking and Feedback session. During this session, individuals shared their experiences of this year's project, and how their existing school environment impacts this. School leads also shared what they have learned from this year's project and made pledges for how they will develop their Champions' action within their school or college.

Celebration Event
At the end of the academic year, all participating schools and colleges were invited to an in-person Celebration Event in Hove. This event celebrated the Mental Health Champions' success, showcased each school or college's student-led action, and gave Champions and school leaders the opportunity to take part in a series of wellbeing activities.

The event was hosted by e-wellbeing staff and featured video messages from e-wellbeing Youth Ambassadors. Activities included group discussions about what a 'supportive community' can be, creating a Play-Doh community, sharing their highlights and feedback about the project, and building connections with other schools.

Champions and schools all received certificates for their hard work throughout the project, which were presented by Shaun Polley, Head of Therapeutic & Wellbeing Services at YMCA, and Katie Bates, Health Improvement Specialist at Brighton & Hove Public Health Schools.

Champions also received a goodie bag – designed by e-wellbeing Youth Ambassador, Jasmine – which contained stress balls, stickers, leaflets for the e-wellbeing Youth Ambassador Programme, and wellbeing support information.

Reflections and Key Findings

During this year's project, we wanted to ensure the voices of young people from minority groups were heard. We were keen for the project to be inclusive of young people from Global Majority Communities, young people identifying as LGBTQIA+, and those with different accessibility needs.

Key statistics* from this year's student population are:

- 29% of Champions were from global majority backgrounds
- 42% of Champions identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 13% identified as young carers
- 42% of Champions stated they had a health condition; of these Champions, 41% had experience of a mental health condition, and 39% had a sensory impairment, learning disability or difficulty, or neurodiverse condition

29% of Champions were from global majority communities

42% of Champions stated they had a health condition

42% of Champions identified as LGBTQIA+

13% of Champions identified as young carers
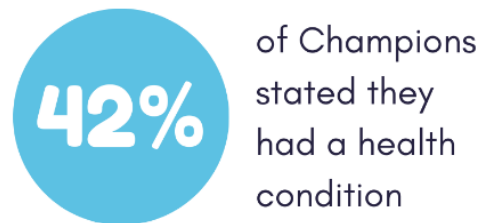
*These statistics are based on 79 responses to the 22-23 Equality & Monitoring form, which was distributed and collected in the first workshop for each school or college. For the full data, please see Appendix ___.

Project Feedback

To evaluate the success of this year's project, Champions, teachers, and Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHWs) were asked to provide feedback about what they enjoyed, and what could be improved about the project. This feedback was gathered through a survey, as well as activities during the Celebration Event.

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What Champions enjoyed about the project:

I felt like I was part of the change; I had a say and an opportunity to do something about my concerns.

I felt a great sense of achievement before of what I was doing to improve the school.

It's a great community experience and it's nice to have a voice in how the school approaches mental health.

I learnt more about mental health and ways to help others.

The team were so friendly, encouraging, and welcoming. I loved the opportunities to create change!

What staff enjoyed about the project:

I learned that the students were pleased the headteacher was ready to make changes.

This project helped to reveal how much work needs doing.

My students are more confident discussing their mental health as a result of this project.

I'm proud of my students being empowered to speak up.

The project is brilliant; having an external voice provides students with a fresh perspective.

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What Champions felt could be improved:

More meetings with school leaders, so the project action moves on more quickly.

I think the project itself is great and is run by lovely people. I'd just like to feel like we are tackling other issues too, such as help at the college and why it can be unhelpful.

The project could be improved by including more people, as it helps people's understanding on mental health.

We need better help from the school to see our actions make a change.

What staff felt could be improved:

It would be good to utilise the project as a way to facilitate meetings with the Senior Leadership Team.

It's difficult to create a balance of allowing students to express their ideas, while also giving them realistic expectations of what's possible within school.

It could be improved by giving more input or examples to shape the project at the start; students have big ideas!

Training within the project could be a more tangible achievement for Champions

Improvements and Recommendations

Recruitment of school leaders
Following feedback from this year's project (and previous years), school leaders who are in senior positions (e.g. Deputy Headteacher, Head of Year, Safeguarding Lead) have found it difficult to engage with workshops due to other commitments. This has led to difficulties such as lack of support from school staff during workshops, low attendance or last-minute cancellation of workshops, and actions not being completed due to lack of communication between Champions and school staff.
Suggested solution: e-wellbeing and Public Health Schools will look into new ways to approach recruitment of school leaders (e.g. PHSE leads and governors). The new approach will focus on the best way to allow Champions to have autonomy over their student-led actions, while still aligning with whole-school approaches.

More structure for student-led actions
During feedback gathered at the Celebration Event, school leaders expressed that it would be helpful to have a more structured framework for Champions to base their action on. School leaders shared that while they wanted to support Champions and their ideas, it was sometimes difficult to manage expectations of what was achievable within the school or college.
Suggested solution: e-wellbeing will include Video Presentations from 22-23 in each school's Launch Workshop, to give specific examples of achievable actions. e-wellbeing and Public Health Schools will discuss other ways the project can be adapted to provide a more structured approach (e.g. providing Champions with options to choose from at the beginning of the project).

Training and resources within workshops
School leaders expressed the want for further steps after the project has finished, as this could provide Champions with a tangible achievement that will be beneficial in future. Some school leaders shared that their existing student wellbeing representatives or teams (e.g. Peer Supporters) could also be utilised in future projects.
Suggested solution: e-wellbeing and Public Health Schools will develop training to be included within workshops, and look into further opportunities that can be offered (e.g. Mental Health First Aid).

Recruitment of Champions
To ensure young people from vulnerable groups are represented during the project, the process of recruiting Champions needs to be updated. Recruitment materials are to be shared with all students within the school, to ensure all students are being given the opportunity to sign up to the project.
Suggested solution: e-wellbeing will take an active role in developing recruitment materials and implementing the recruitment process within schools and colleges (e.g. during assemblies, and presentations to EDI and SEND students).

Appendix 1 – Equality & Monitoring data

Age	Responses
11	4
12	16
13	24
14	24
15	7
16	3
17	1
Gender Identity	**Responses**
Male	20
Female	50
Non-binary	3
Prefer not to say	4
Other	2
Sexual Orientation	**Responses**
Asexual	2
Bisexual	10
Gay man	0
Gay/Lesbian Woman	2
Heterosexual/Straight	41
Pansexual	6
Unsure	12
Prefer not to say	5
Other	1
Do you have a health condition?	**Responses**
Yes	33
No	37
Prefer not to say	9
Please state the health condition:	**Responses**
Physical impairment	2
Sensory impairment	8
Learning disability or difficulty	2
Long-standing illness	1
Experiencing pregnancy	0
Mental health condition	24
Neurodiverse condition	13
Other developmental condition	0
Prefer not to say	4
Other	5
Are you a carer?	**Responses**
Yes	10
No	68
Prefer not to say	1

What is your ethnic background?	Responses
Asian/Asian British	
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	4
Indian	1
Other Asian background	2 (Indian/Middle Eastern, Chinese and White Asian)
Black/Black British	
African	2
Caribbean	2
Other Black background	1 (not specified)
Mixed	
White and Asian	2
White and Black African	1
White and Black Caribbean	2
Other	3 (Black African/Arab, Black/French)
White	
British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	41
Irish	
Gypsy or Traveller	2
Other	1
	6 (White/South African, White/Canadian, White European, White British/Indian, South American/British, American/British)
Other	
Arab	1
Other	1 (Latino)
Prefer not to say	6