

Mental Health CHAMPIONS



23-24
Project
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 meaning action towards improving student and staff wellbeing.



Who participated this year?

We engaged Champions and school leaders from 7 secondary schools, 1 college, and – for the first time – 2 primary schools and 1 Pupil Referral Unit within Brighton & Hove. As per previous years, each educational setting was asked to recruit up to 12 Champions to participate in the project and create a student-led action. Around 150 students and 25 school staff engaged with the project.

The following schools participated in Mental Health Champions 2023-2024:

- Benfield Primary
- Blatchington Mill
- Brackenbury Primary
- Cardinal Newman Catholic School
- Central Hub Brighton (PRU)*
- Hove Park
- Longhill High
- PACA
- Patcham
- Vardean College
- Vardean School

Students were supported by staff from e-wellbeing (YMCA DownLink 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.

**YMCA e-wellbeing staff engaged with school staff at Central Hub Brighton to arrange an introductory workshop so the students could meet the team in a relaxed, informal manner. Staff discussed issues affecting wellbeing with the students, and identified that the project structure would need to be adapted to suit their needs. YMCA e-wellbeing had further discussions with the school lead about how to engage with the school in a different capacity next year that is safe for students and staff.*



The Project

From November 2023 to June 2024, 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.

As per previous years, the secondary schools and colleges attended 1.5 hour workshops on a monthly basis between November 2023 and June 2024. Following discussions with primary school leads and professionals from Brighton & Hove City Council, primary schools received 45-minute workshops held on a fortnightly basis between February - June 2024, as it was agreed that shorter but more frequent sessions would be more suitable for primary-aged children.

Issues addressed during the 2023-2024 project:

- Improve communication around reporting incidents of bullying or discrimination
- Increase awareness of wellbeing support available in school
- Create wellbeing and signposting resources for students to access in school
- Improve support facilities in school such as toilets and sanitary products
- Educate students and staff about the importance of sleep and reducing anxiety



Delivery of the Project

Champions started their workshops by exploring the key issues they felt were affecting wellbeing in their school or college. They then 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 were offered up to 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.

Champions provided feedback about their experience of the workshops at the start of the project, half-way through, and in their final workshop. By collecting this data at multiple stages, we were able to gather valuable insight into how far Champions' confidence was improved as a result of the project.

2023-2024 Student-Led Actions

<p>Benfield Primary</p>	<p>Learning: Champions have learned about emotions we all experience, how these can be felt or seen (e.g. how we might feel these in our bodies), and why we experience Anxiety (Wizard and Lizard Brain / Fight, Flight Freeze).</p> <p>Themes: Understanding how friendships and stress can affect mental health and ways to manage this</p> <p>Action: Present to the Headteacher with ideas for introducing more Brain Breaks during class, students having more access to green spaces, and making a new quiet area.</p>
<p>Blatchington Mill</p>	<p>Themes: Help students feel more comfortable reporting incidents of bullying or discrimination to staff.</p> <p>Action(s): Champions delivered a survey to peers to gather insight about student experiences of bullying and reporting issues. Champions will pitch to SLT about creating a new anonymous reporting tool for students to help reduce anxiety around reporting, and encourage better communication from staff.</p>
<p>Brackenbury Primary</p>	<p>Learning: Champions have learned about emotions we all experience, how these can be felt or seen (e.g. how we might feel these in our bodies), and why we experience Anxiety (Wizard and Lizard Brain / Fight, Flight Freeze).</p> <p>Themes: Improve understanding of wellbeing tools that can be used at school, and raise awareness of how kindness can improve mental health</p> <p>Action Ideas: Create a survey to find out how students feel about Reset Time and help teachers use this more consistently. Champions also want to create a video about how using kind behaviour over bullying behaviour can improve wellbeing in school.</p>
<p>Cardinal Newman</p>	<p>Themes: Improving access to support in school.</p> <p>Action(s): Champions will create a support booklet to outline support in school, including new peer-led homework club, and support triangle of where to go and when. They also plan to re-launch the 'I Need to Talk' button to explain what happens when students use it.</p>
<p>Hove Park</p>	<p>Theme: Improve support for stress management in school.</p> <p>Action(s): Gathered insight from peers through a survey and presented to SLT. As a result, Champions will create resources for students about stress, which will be put into a Stress Management Pack. Champions will also present in assembly, and plan to introduce a Stress Management theme day at school.</p>

2023-2024 Student-Led Actions (continued)

<p>Longhill High</p>	<p>Themes: Help student voice get heard more in school and improve sense of safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>Action(s): Conducted a survey and results will be presented to SLT. Champions want to increase sanitary products in school, organise a Uniform Swap to help with costs (as over 70% students would want to use this), and discuss ways to improve feelings of safety within school.</p>
<p>PACA</p>	<p>Themes: Improve student and staff understanding of how sleep affects wellbeing, and improve staff understanding of youth mental health issues and how these can appear.</p> <p>Action(s): Pitched a new 'Sleep Buddies' pilot to track sleep and how this impacts student wellbeing through assemblies and tutor time. Created a presentation to be shown in a dedicated Staff Meeting around student mental health issues (e.g. anxiety) and how staff attitude's towards this can be improved.</p>
<p>Patcham High</p>	<p>Themes: Help students feel safe and comfortable at school.</p> <p>Action(s): Gathered insight from a new survey and the results from 2022-2023 about issues affecting student wellbeing. Champions will deliver a presentation to SLT about how to address issues around toilets (vaping/cleanliness), improve feelings of safety in changing rooms, and update communication to supply teachers about Exit Passes to make sure this is consistent.</p>
<p>Varndean College</p>	<p>Themes: Improve awareness of wellbeing support available within college.</p> <p>Action(s): Champions have created a 'digital cheat sheet' FAQ page to go on the college website, with signposting information for different types of support in college. This page can be used as a more accessible 'host' page to link out to other pages that are regularly updated.</p>
<p>Varndean School</p>	<p>Themes: Improve wellbeing spaces and strategies available in school.</p> <p>Action(s): Presented survey findings to SLT, lack of relax/safe space in school away from busy corridors, new policy for fidget toys in class - school is going to buy more benches for outside to improve quieter spaces, open to discussing how to improve fidget toy approach (Champions to create a more formal proposal), create posters to address issues around vaping.</p>

To find out more about this year's student-led actions, including the issues that were identified and how this action aims to improve student and staff wellbeing, [**click here to watch the 2023-2024 Video Presentations.**](#)



Teacher Engagement

Following feedback from last year's project, we reached out to the RSE (PSHE) Leads of schools and colleges (if they weren't already an existing school lead). We collaborated with Hannah Kinchin-Frost, Families Children and Learning Lead at Brighton & Hove City Council, to promote the project and recruit school leads. By doing so, we acquired 6 new PSHE school contacts and recruited Central Hub Brighton and Hove Park, who previously had not engaged with the project.

We engaged participating schools and colleges through:

- An email invite in September 2023 to sign up using a short online form
- Distribution of a new 23-24 Information Pack and materials for schools to use to recruit Champions
- An individual online meeting at the start of the project (after sign-up) to book workshops
- New workshop learning materials, including psychoeducational resources developed by e-wellbeing and the BHCC Schools Mental Health Service
- Networking and feedback opportunities during the project and at the Celebration Event

At the 2024 Celebration Event, school leaders, Public Health Schools staff, and YMCA DownsLink Group 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 creating a new 'School of Belonging', creating a Play-Doh wellbeing space to have in their school/college, sharing their highlights and feedback about the project, and building connections with other schools.

Champions were also invited to participate in an e-wellbeing Youth Research Project (in collaboration with Health Innovation KSS), which aims to explore young people's experiences of belonging and loneliness. One of the Youth Researchers gave a speech about the project during the Celebration Event, and Champions were given the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey, which would be used as a sample of data for the Youth Research group before they undertake their wider data collection. 50 out of 65 secondary school students completed the survey, with 22 opting to be contacted about participating in a focus group for the Youth Research Project.



Champions and schools all received an e-wellbeing goodie bag and certificate for their hard work throughout the project, which were presented by Sarah Colombo, Programme Manager for Starting Well at Brighton & Hove Public Schools, and Shaun Polley, Head of Therapeutic & Wellbeing Services at YMCA DownsLink Group.



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+, young carers, and those with different accessibility needs.

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

- 41% of Champions were from global majority backgrounds
- 46% of Champions identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 15% identified as young carers
- 23% of Champions stated they had a health condition; of these Champions, 34% identified as having a learning difficulty or disability, a neurodiverse condition, or other developmental condition.

**These statistics are based on responses from any student who completed the 23-24 Equality and Monitoring survey at any point during the project. For further information about EDI data collected during the project, please see Appendix 1.*

2023-2024 Impact

Out of 170 Champions who engaged with this year's project:

41% of Champions
from Asian, Black,
Mixed or Other
backgrounds

46% of
Champions
identified their
sexuality as
LGBTQIA+

15% of
Champions
stated they were
a young carer

Based on anonymous EDI data collected from all students who engaged with the project between November 2023 - July 2024

Champions provided feedback about their experience of the workshops at the start of the project, half-way through, and in their final workshop. By collecting this data at multiple stages, we were able to gather valuable insight into how far Champions' confidence was improved as a result of the project.

By the end of the project, Champions indicated that:

- 88% felt more confident about their knowledge of mental health
- 89% felt more confident about creating action to improve mental health
- 84% said they knew where to get mental health support in school/college or elsewhere
- 82% felt more confident about talking about mental health and wellbeing with others

Project Feedback

To evaluate the success of this year's project, Champions and school leads were asked to provide feedback about what they enjoyed, and what could be improved about the project. This feedback was gathered through a survey at the end of the project, as well as activities during the Celebration Event.

What Champions enjoyed:

Helping others with their mental health and making the world a more supportive place to be.

The community feel, working together to help others, and being listened to by school.

I enjoyed it because now I feel more confident and reassured in mental health in general.

I liked introducing more ways to get help in school as it is very well needed.

I enjoyed being able to create and implement solutions with a team to fix the problems within our school.

Champions shared that they enjoyed being able to share their voice and make a difference in their school, work as a team with their peers, and that they felt listened to by the school staff. Their suggested improvements focused on more workshops, and more engagement from school staff to help make their actions more impactful.

Champions' suggestions:

Having more choice about our action and being able to make our ideas more real.

More regular sessions (more than once a month) and more open discussions with the group.

More time to spend on the project and create things that will be better for us as well as others.

More teacher help in understanding what we can do to help people who struggle with their mental health.

More engagement with the people who completed our survey or watched our assembly.

What School Staff enjoyed:

A great project to be involved in - the primary school children loved the Celebration Event!

Charlotte is amazing! Love the project, keep up the good work.

Having early guidance for engaging SLT was positive to agree what was possible.

Inviting SLT into the workshops made it much easier for Champions to present their ideas!

Leon was fantastic and really helped Champions to shape their ideas.

School staff shared that having more support with engaging SLT during this year's project was really helpful for managing Champions' expectations and allowing their action to be implemented. Their suggested improvements included opportunities for internal staff to review progress part-way through the project, and building connections between primary and secondary school students.

School Staff suggestions:

More inspiration from previous years to set framework for what can be done.

Build links between primary and secondary students, such as delivering assemblies to primary schools

Have an internal meeting part-way through for staff to discuss barriers and find solutions.

Some action outcomes delayed to next year; these could be continued with the next group.

More strategies for schools. to demonstrate their investment in mental health and wellbeing

Improvements and Recommendations

Collaboration with primary schools

The inclusion of primary schools during this year's project received positive feedback, from primary leads as well as secondary and college staff. Staff shared that the primary school students really enjoyed talking about their wellbeing in school, and there was a noticeable increase in confidence from several of the students. As a result of introducing 'Peer Mentors' at the Celebration Event, where secondary school Champions from PACA joined the primary school Champions to support them during the event, staff shared that building links throughout the project could be a useful tool (e.g. to improve student experiences of transitioning from primary to secondary).

Recommendation: 1. Acquire uplift of money to support recruitment of more primary schools. 2. Introduce secondary students attending primary workshops and delivering assemblies.



Engagement from Senior Leadership Teams

Following feedback from previous years, e-wellbeing invited members of Senior Leadership Teams to attend at least one workshop during the project and have a discussion with students about how their action could be taken forward. Students provided positive feedback about this, sharing that they enjoyed being able to voice their ideas and implement solutions, and they felt they were listened to by staff. School leads shared mixed feedback regarding SLT involvement; some indicated that SLT engagement made it easier for students to present their ideas and helped students take their action forward, while others shared that they would like further action from SLT and evidence that changes are actually being made.

Recommendation: 1. e-wellbeing to make having a specific SLT contact a requirement at the start of the project. E-wellbeing to liaise with SLT contacts and ensure that they take responsibility for attending two sessions: one to contribute to the student-led action discussion, and one to share feedback following action delivery and pledge next steps.

Workshop frequency and structure

Feedback from staff and students indicated that adjusting the workshop timetable may be helpful for maintaining engagement and improving action productivity. Students shared that they'd like sessions more frequently, while staff shared that delays during the project (e.g. due to school staff absence) meant that action delivery has been delayed to the following academic year. They also indicated that an interschool meeting part-way through the project could help to encourage school staff to discuss the project so far, issues they need to resolve, and how this can be achieved.

Recommendation: 1. Adjust the workshop structure so the project is more 'top-heavy', with more sessions at the start of the academic year (e.g. 4-5 workshops between October and December, then the remaining workshops running from January to May). 2. Introduce midway interschool meeting for school staff and e-wellbeing to discuss project so far and next steps.

Recruitment of Champions

Feedback shared – engage with other teams (e.g. LGBTQIA+) in schools to promote to more students, encourage more PoC students to participate, engage more young carers/care-experienced young people. Also want to collab with former Champions to introduce project to new Champions, to help improve student understanding of the project and examples of achievable actions.

Recommendation: 1. Link with previous Champions to introduce the project to new recruits. 2. Create templates for newsletters and assemblies for schools to share what Mental Health Champions are working on. 3. Ask schools to include e-wellbeing on website.



To find out more about YMCA e-wellbeing youth-led projects:



website: e-wellbeing.co.uk



email: e-wellbeing@ymcadlg.org



Instagram: [_ewellbeing](https://www.instagram.com/_ewellbeing)



Facebook: [ewellbeing](https://www.facebook.com/ewellbeing)

Appendix 1: EDI data (Secondary Schools/Colleges)

Age	Responses
11	9
12	40
13	43
14	36
15	16
16	3
17	6
18	2
Gender Identity	Responses
Female	86
Male	32
Trans-female	4
Trans-male	3
Gender Queer	2
Agender	2
Demi	6
Gender Fluid	2
Non-binary	6
Unsure	4
Prefer not to say	8
Other	0
Sexuality	Responses
Asexual	3
Bisexual	24
Gay	1
Lesbian	8
Straight	68
Queer	0
Pansexual	11
Omnisexual	3
Unsure	13
Prefer not to say	15
Other	9

Do you have a health condition?	Responses
Yes No	35 120
Health conditions	Responses
Physical disability Learning disability or difficulty Experiencing pregnancy Diagnosed mental health condition Neurodiverse condition Other developmental condition Prefer not to say Other	2 6 0 3 4 2 1 2
Are you a Carer?	Responses
Yes No	24 131
What is your ethnic background?	Responses
Asian or Asian British	
Bangladeshi Chinese Indian Pakistani Other Asian background	1 2 5 1 3
Black or Black British	
African Caribbean Other Black background	8 1 0
Mixed	
White and Asian White and Black African White and Black Caribbean Other	1 0 3 3

White or White British	
White British	86
White Irish	3
Gypsy/Traveller	3
Roma	2
Other	12
Other	
Arab	8
Prefer not to say	5
Other	8
What are your religious beliefs?	Responses
Agnostic	30
Atheist	40
Buddhist	0
Christian (all denominations)	27
Hindu	4
Jain	0
Jewish	1
Muslim	10
Pagan	0
Sikh	0
No belief	28
Prefer not to say	13
Other	2

Appendix 2: EDI data (Primary Schools)

Age	Responses
7	1
8	3
9	0
10	6
11	5
What is your gender?	Responses
Girl	8
Boy	4
Non-binary	1
I don't want to say	3
Do you have a health condition?	Responses
Yes	5
No	4
I'm not sure	6
I don't want to say	1
What is your health condition?	Responses
I don't want to say	3
Other	2
Are you a carer?	Responses
Yes	1
No	12
I'm not sure	2
I don't want to say	1
Ethnic Background	Responses
Asian or Asian British	
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Other Asian background	0

Black or Black British	
African	0
Caribbean	0
Other Black background	0
Mixed	
White and Asian	0
White and Black African	2
White and Black Caribbean	1
Other	0
White or White British	
White British	6
White Irish	0
Gypsy/Traveller	0
Roma	0
Other	1
Other	
Arab	0
Any other background	0
I don't want to say	4
Do you follow any religion?	Responses
Buddhist	0
Christian (e.g. Catholic)	4
Hindu	0
Jain	0
Jewish	0
Muslim	1
Pagan	0
Sikh	0
I don't believe in any God	6
I don't know	5