Mental Health CHAMPIONS

24-25 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 since 2019, 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 and staff wellbeing.

Who participated this year?

We engaged Champions and school leaders from 6 secondary schools and 1 primary school in 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 70 students engaged with the project, along with around 40 professionals, including:

- 9 school leads
- 6 representatives from Senior Leadership Teams
- Staff from school IT and Communications departments
- External stakeholders from organisations including NHS Sussex, Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex, Brighton & Hove City Council, Community Works, and West Sussex County Council
- Internal staff from YMCA DownsLink Group, including Emily Brock (CEO of YMCA DLG), Charlotte Carp (Head of Impact & Improvement), and the Communications Team

For this year's project, schools that participated were Blatchington Mill, Brackenbury Primary, Dorothy Stringer, Longhill High, PACA, Patcham High. 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 delivery of the Celebration Event.

The Project

From October 2024 to June 2025, 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.

Following feedback and engagement analysis from previous projects, the frequency of workshops was increased to 2 per month from October 2024 to February 2025. From March to May 2025, workshops were reduced to 1 per month, with time in June 2025 for top-up sessions if required. Secondary schools were offered 1.5 hour workshops, while primary schools received 45-minute workshops, as it was agreed with school leaders that a shorter session was more suitable for primary-aged students.

Issues addressed during the 2024-2025 project:

- Improve experiences of accessing wellbeing support through the school intranet
- Adapt classroom activities to reduce anxiety and increase engagement in lessons
- Create guidance for being safe and respectful during play time
- Introduce more in-person wellbeing support within school
- Improve school assemblies by including more diverse and inclusive topics and resources

Delivery of the Project

Champions started their workshops by exploring the key issues they felt were affecting wellbeing in their school. 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 and helped to evaluate the outcomes of their student-led action.

All participating schools 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.

2024-2025 Student-Led Actions

Blatchington Mill	**Theme:** reduce anxiety in the classroom **Action(s):** Created and distributed a survey to all year groups, gaining 389 responses. Using the results from the survey, Champions met with SLT to provide a recommended list of 'Dos and Don'ts' to help support mental health in the classroom. Champions were also asked by SLT to lead Mental Health assemblies to the whole school cohort. SLT plan to implement the 'Dos and Don'ts' list for staff in 2026.
Brackenbury Primary	**Theme:** Make playtime more safe and enjoyable for students **Action(s):** Champions conducted a Playground Observation, where they observed examples of safe and unsafe play. From the results, they developed the school's new 'Golden Playtime Rules', which will be displayed in the playgrounds. Champions are also working on creating a Calm Corner in both playgrounds, which can be a safe space for students who need some time away from the play area.
Dorothy Stringer	**Theme:** Improve student access to wellbeing support in school **Action(s):** Champions invited their peers to share their experience of getting support via the school intranet's 'Are You Worried' button, and received 605 responses. Champions worked with IT and SLT and updated the button, based on feedback and suggestions from the survey results. This was promoted by running assemblies and designing posters to be displayed around school.
Longhill High	**Theme:** Reduce anxiety around homework and exams **Action(s):** Created a survey for peers to share what makes them feel anxious or 'fizzy' in school and provide suggestions for what can help students feel more at ease. Using the results, Champions created a Dos and Don'ts list for help with assessments and supporting wellbeing in lessons, which was shared with SLT. It has also been agreed that SLT will provide additional computer room time for completing homework. SLT will implement changes in 2026.
PACA	**Theme:** Make wellbeing support in school more accessible **Action(s):** Using feedback from all year groups about seeking wellbeing support in school, Champions worked with IT and SLT and created a button on the Student Portal where students can request a wellbeing check-in with a school staff member. Students have the option to specify a staff member they'd feel comfortable speaking to, and Champions worked with SLT to establish a safeguarding procedure for the sessions.
Patcham High	**Theme:** Improve diversity of school assemblies and resources **Action(s):** Champions created a survey for students to share which topics they'd like to be covered in assemblies, and which staff members could run these. 58% of students wanted a wider variety of topics, including mental health, LGBTQ+ issues, neurodiversity, and Minority Ethnic Groups. Champions met with SLT and agreed that an Awareness Assembly will run every term, each focusing on a different topic with a suitable staff member.

Teacher Engagement

Following feedback from last year's project, contact with SLT at each school was established from the start of the project. Schools were made aware that it was a requirement for at least one member of SLT to attend at least two workshops during the project; one to contribute to the student-led action discussion, and one to share feedback following action delivery and pledge next steps.

We engaged participating schools through:
- An email invite in September 2024 to sign up using a short online form
- Distribution of an updated Information & Recruitment pack for staff, with key information about the project (including new workshop timetable, with increased frequency of sessions during Term 1)
- Provision of a letter for parents/carers, along with a Media Consent Form
- Psychoeducational workshop learning materials, including resources developed by e-wellbeing and the BHCC Schools Mental Health Service
- Feedback and networking opportunities at the Celebration Event

Peer Sessions with Feeder Schools

A new element of the project this year was to pilot peer sessions with feeder schools; the model used was co-designed with Primary and Secondary school staff and included two contact points:

- Session 1 – Primary students visited Secondary school, where students met with Champions and Head of Year 7. e-wellbeing facilitated mindfulness activities and Champions gave a peer-led tour of the school to the primary students

- Session 2 – Secondary students visited Primary school for a Q&A session with the whole of Year 6

Brackenbury Primary and PACA were offered the additional peer-led sessions; this was introduced to help reduce student anxiety around transitions and feelings of belonging, which was an issue raised in the latest Safe and Well at School Survey (SAWSS) data*.

Promotional Material for Schools

To increase awareness and encourage further staff and student engagement, at the end of the project each school received promotional material to showcase their Champions' student-led action and changes the school has made - or plans to make - to improve wellbeing in their educational setting. It also included quotes from students and staff sharing feedback about this year's project.

This bespoke resource was distributed to all involved schools, their Senior Leadership Teams, and Communications Teams. The promotional material can be shared digitally on the schools' websites and social media accounts, and can be printed and displayed around school buildings.

*For more information about the Safe and Well at School Survey (SAWSS) 2023, click here to visit the BHCC website.

Celebration Event

At the end of the academic year, all participating schools were invited to an in-person Celebration Event in Hove. Following feedback from previous years, it was decided that this year's event would be updated into a 'Mental Health Champions Showcase' where each school had a dedicated stand for Champions to promote their student-led action, to showcase their hard work and share their school's plans for continuing to improve student wellbeing.

Champions and staff were invited to visit each stand, including stands run by e-wellbeing Ambassadors and NHS Sussex, through the use of a Scavenger Hunt. Each stand had a hidden answer for Champions to find, and each of them received a prize once they collected all answers. This encouraged Champions to hear from other young people taking part in the project, and share ideas for improving youth mental health in schools. Staff were provided with feedback forms to share their experiences of participating in this year's project, and make suggestions for next year. All Champions received an e-wellbeing goodie bag and certificate for their hard work throughout the project, which were presented by Meg Lewis, Health Improvement Specialist for Brighton & Hove Public Health Schools.

External stakeholders were invited to attend as a guest or host their own stand at the event; attendees included Becca Randell, Mental Health Lead at Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex, Matthew Thomas, Senior Children's Mental Health Commissioner at NHS Sussex, and Vicky Lyons, EMTAS Advisory Teacher at West Sussex County Council. YMCA DownsLink Group staff also attended the event, including Emily Brock (CEO), Charlotte Carp (Head of Impact & Improvement), and the Communications Team.

The event was hosted by e-wellbeing staff and five Youth Ambassadors, including three speakers and one photographer. Ahead of the event, e-wellbeing staff met with Youth Ambassadors so they could decide how they wanted to take part, and create materials to support their role (e.g. prompts cards if they chose to be a speaker). Youth Ambassadors were given a £30 gift voucher for their contribution to the Celebration Event.

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 Minority Ethnic Groups, 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 Minority Ethnic Groups
- 34% of Champions identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 10% identified as young carers
- 29% of Champions stated they had a health condition, including a learning difficulty or disability, a neurodiverse condition, or other developmental condition

2024-2025 Impact

- **98%** reported that they knew where to access mental health and wellbeing support in their school by the end of the project
- **93%** reported feeling more confident about their knowledge of mental health compared to at the start of the project
- **93%** reported feeling more confident about creating action to improve mental health compared to at the start of the project
- **81%** reported feeling more confident talking about mental health with others compared to at the start of the project

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:

- 98% said they knew where to get mental health support in their school
- 93% felt more confident about their knowledge of mental health
- 93% felt more confident about creating action to improve mental health
- 81% felt more confident about talking about mental health and wellbeing with others

These statistics are based on 59 responses to the 24-25 Equality & Monitoring questionnaire (out of 67 students) and 59 out of 67 students who provided updated confidence ratings by the end of the project. For further information about data collected, please see Appendix 1.

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 student survey during the final workshops, and staff survey at the Celebration Event.

What Champions enjoyed:

- Taking part in improving the school to help benefit everyone's mental health, and learning about different types of mental health. Izzy is amazing!
- Talking about mental health in a welcoming and safe environment.
- Learning about mental health and stepping out of my comfort zone and presenting to people.
- Being able to change something in my school, especially something I'm passionate about. Also, Harriet was very good at making you feel heard and comfortable.
- Creating stuff that can improve our school facility. We could all share our opinion and we were all listened to.

Champions shared that they enjoyed:

- "Taking part in improving the school to help benefit everyone's mental health, and learning about different types of mental health. Izzy is amazing!"

- "Being able to change something in my school, especially something I'm passionate about. Also, Harriet was very good at making you feel heard and comfortable."

- "Talking about mental health in a welcoming and safe environment."

- "Learning about mental health and stepping out of my comfort zone and presenting to people."

- "Creating stuff that can improve our school facility. We could all share our opinion and we were all listened to."

Other feedback about what Champions enjoyed included being able to spend time with new people, presenting assemblies in school, helping others, and enhancing skills such as empathy, negotiation, and raising awareness of mental health.

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Champions' suggestions:

Perhaps next year doing sessions after school or at lunchtime would be more efficient to avoid missing on lessons, especially if students are prior to attending their mocks and need the knowledge taught in lessons to do well in their exams.

Potentially more sessions to help us achieve more.

Have a more clear idea of the aim of the project and better communication.

It was great, but the timing was sometimes inconvenient because of missing some vital lessons.

More content on strategies on how to cope with mental health.

To improve the project in future, Champions suggested:

- "Perhaps next year doing sessions after school or at lunchtime would be more efficient to avoid missing on lessons, especially if students are prior to attending their mocks and need the knowledge taught in lessons to do well in their exams."

- "More content on strategies on how to cope with mental health."

- "It was great, but the timing was sometimes inconvenient because of missing some vital lessons."

- "Potentially more sessions to help us achieve more."

- "Have a more clear idea of the aim of the project and better communication."

Staff feedback for what they enjoyed about the project included:

- "It has been great to see the impact that mental health champions has had on our school. The students have really grown in confidence over the year and their determination to respond to student voice has been amazing!"

- "It was great to be able to follow up the work with the MHC that was done the previous year. All the children wanted to be MHC this year because they had seen what the previous cohort had done."

- "I really liked giving the students the opportunity to have discussions and meetings with staff and achieve real change. Everything was led by them, and YMCA staff were engaging and helpful."

- "This was another fantastic year of MHC! This new celebration format is a great improvement, keep innovating."

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What staff enjoyed:

It has been great to see the impact that mental health champions has had on our school. The students have really grown in confidence over the year and their determination to respond to student voice has been amazing!

It was great to be able to follow up the work with the MHC that was done the previous year. All the children wanted to be MHC this year because they had seen what the previous cohort had done.

This was another fantastic year of MHC! This new celebration format is a great improvement, keep innovating.

I really liked giving the students the opportunity to have discussions and meetings with staff and achieve real change. Everything was led by them, and YMCA staff were engaging and helpful.

Staff suggestions for how to improve the project in future included more activities at the start, organising more visits between secondary and primary students, after school follow-ups between facilitators and Champions, and bigger groups due to increased interest from students.

Staff suggestions:

It would be good to have some secondary schools visit us (primary) during the project to share ideas and get to know each other before the celebration event.

I think it's more around what we need to do as a school to ensure YMCA can effectively deliver the programme – thank you for bearing with us and for being so efficient and accommodating.

More activities at the start of the project.

Maybe some after school follow-ups between facilitator and the Champions for more consistency.

We could have had a bigger group based on the interest, particularly from previous Champions.

Improvements and Recommendations

Increase intake of primary schools and reinstate offer to colleges

Due to funding, it was decided with e-wellbeing and Public Health Schools that the 24-25 project would have a limited intake of schools, focusing only on primary and secondary settings. However, following an uplift in funding and expansion of the project, e-wellbeing will aim to recruit more primary schools for 25-26 and reintroduce the project offer to colleges. A meeting with Varndean College was held in July 2025 to confirm their involvement in next year's project.

Recommendation: During secondary school recruitment, e-wellbeing will ask school leads to share contact details for their primary feeder schools, so they can also be recruited for the 25-26 project. E-wellbeing and school leads will work together to build a stronger relationship between feeder schools, which has been requested by school staff during feedback from previous years.

Enhance peer sessions offer for feeder schools

During the 24-25 project, e-wellbeing introduced a pilot for peer sessions between one primary school (Brackenbury) and one secondary school (PACA). These sessions took place after the main project workshops had ended and were co-designed with e-wellbeing staff and school leads. Feedback from school staff expressed that having more contact between schools earlier in the project would be helpful, especially for making primary students feel more at ease when the sessions took place.

Recommendation: Peer sessions will take place from the start of the project and increase to three contact points; the first session will be an introductory session for primary and secondary students to introduce themselves, followed by two more sessions (one involving a peer-led tour of the secondary school, the other involving a peer-led Q&A with Year 6 at the primary school).

Improve communication within schools about the project

A key issue raised by students and staff, as well as e-wellbeing facilitators, is that there was inconsistency in awareness of the project within schools. While some schools promoted the project internally and had gained high levels of awareness and support from staff and students, other settings seemed to lack awareness of the project, and the work Champions were undertaking within the school. Lack of awareness also impacted the level of engagement from Senior Leadership Teams, and capacity for Champions to implement their actions effectively.

Recommendation: e-wellbeing to develop a template for promotional material about the project, which will be co-designed with the Champions within a workshop during Term 1. This will then be distributed by school staff, to be shared in tutor time, assemblies, and staff meetings.

Provide students with additional resources

Suggestions from students included having more materials about coping strategies and practical tips for understanding and managing mental health. While psychoeducational material was included within workshops, there is currently a gap for the addition of resources that can be taken away by students and used inside and outside of their school setting.

> **Recommendation**: e-wellbeing to develop a new Mental Health Champions resource pack, including free wellbeing resources that can be printed and/or downloaded for free by students and staff. These resources will consist of existing resources on the e-wellbeing website, as well as new resources that will be co-developed with e-wellbeing Youth Ambassadors.

Help to improve school communication about workshop attendance

An issue raised by some students during the project was that they struggled to attend workshops due either a) not wanting to miss a key lesson if they were studying for exams, or b) other school staff preventing them leaving the lesson to attend workshops. Although schools are required to manage communication about the project with the wider school, it was agreed that communication about absence from lessons needed to be clearer to ensure students were not being pressured to miss out.

> **Recommendation**: e-wellbeing to clarify during recruitment that, if school leads are recruiting from Years 10 and 11, the chosen timeslot(s) need to avoid key lessons as much as possible. E-wellbeing to offer flexible timings (e.g. different days and/or times) to help facilitate this. School staff will be required to ensure communication about students being absent from lessons is made clear to SLT and wider staff, to ensure there is no resistance to students participating in the project.
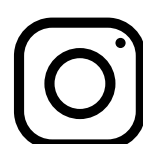
To find out more about YMCA e-wellbeing youth-led projects:

🌐 website: e-wellbeing.co.uk

✉ email: e-wellbeing@ymcadlg.org

📷 Instagram: _ewellbeing

f Facebook: ewellbeing

Appendix 1: EDI data (Secondary Schools)

Age	Responses
11	3
12	8
13	12
14	16
15	8

Gender Identity	Responses
Female	34
Male	9
Trans-female	1
Trans-male	0
Gender Queer	0
Agender	0
Demi	0
Gender Fluid	1
Non-binary	0
Unsure	1
Prefer not to say	1
Other	0

Sexuality	Responses
Asexual	0
Bisexual	7
Gay	1
Lesbian	0
Straight	26
Queer	0
Pansexual	3
Omnisexual	0
Unsure	5
Prefer not to say	5
Other	0

Do you have a health condition?	Responses
Yes	9
No	38

Health conditions	Responses
Physical disability	2
Learning disability or difficulty	1
Experiencing pregnancy	0
Diagnosed mental health condition	3
Neurodiverse condition	4
Other developmental condition	1
Prefer not to say	1
Other	0

Are you a Carer?	Responses
Yes	24
No	131

What is your ethnic background?	Responses
Asian or Asian British	
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Other Asian background	1
Black or Black British	
African	2
Caribbean	0
Other Black background	2
Mixed	
White and Asian	1
White and Black African	2
White and Black Caribbean	2
Other	2

White or White British	
White British	25
White Irish	1
Gypsy/Traveller	0
Roma	0
Other	5

Other	
Arab	1
Prefer not to say	0
Other	0

What are your religious beliefs?	Responses
Agnostic	7
Atheist	10
Buddhist	1
Christian (all denominations)	9
Hindu	1
Jain	0
Jewish	2
Muslim	4
Pagan	0
Sikh	0
No belief	7
Prefer not to say	6
Other	0

Appendix 2: EDI data (Primary Schools)

Age	Responses
8	3
9	3
10	4
11	2

What is your gender?	Responses
Female	5
Male	7
Non-binary	0
I don't want to say	0

Do you have a health condition?	Responses
Yes	8
No	4
I'm not sure	0
I don't want to say	0

What is your health condition?	Responses
Learning disability or difficulty	2
Neurodiverse condition (e.g. Autism)	3
Other developmental condition	3

Are you a carer?	Responses
Yes	0
No	12

Ethnic Background	Responses
Asian or Asian British	
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
Indian	1
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	0
White and Black Caribbean	0
Other	0

White or White British	
White British	8
White Irsh	0
Gypsy/Traveller	0
Roma	0
Other	0

Other	
Arab	1
Any other background	0
I don't want to say	1

Do you follow any religion?	Responses
Buddhist	0
Christian (e.g. Catholic)	0
Hindu	0
Jain	0
Jewish	0
Muslim	2
Pagan	0
Sikh	1
I don't believe in any God	0
Prefer not to say	9