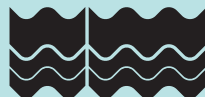




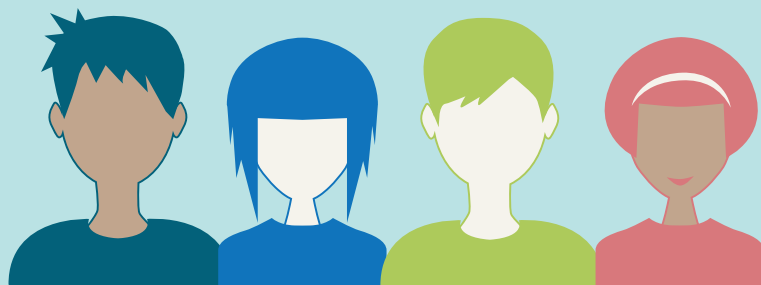
University of Brighton

East Sussex
County Council



Listening before commissioning

**Young people's views on health
improvement in East Sussex**



SUMMARY

What we set out to do and why

- This project aimed to engage with a range of young people from schools and other youth spaces across East Sussex.
- We were asked by East Sussex County Council to explore with young people their views and experiences of health and wellbeing, both in and out of school. We wanted particularly to understand how young people can improve their health in school and gather some ideas on what seems to work and what doesn't.
- We focused on three topics:



Whole-school approaches to health improvement



Emotional wellbeing and resilience



Sexual health

Who did we speak to?

We engaged a total of 109 young people in the project as follows:

97

young people took part in participatory focus group discussions

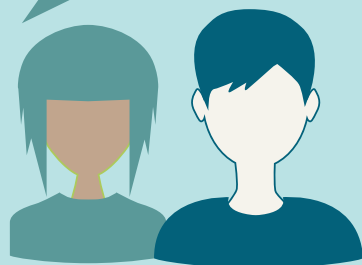
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young people took part as members of the project steering group

8

young people took part by helping us develop the project recommendations

Activities were held at various different sites such as academies, youth centres, and community schools/colleges from across all five boroughs and districts of East Sussex.



What did we find?

We found lots of interesting things - much more than we can write about here so this is just a very short summary:



Whole-school approaches to health improvement

Young people told us that:

- Schools should pay more attention to health, not just on getting educational results;
- Many young people don't know about their school nurse, including where to find them or what they could offer. Those who did know about their school nurse said they didn't see them because they did not know them well enough;
- Schools should give young people more opportunities to find out about, take control of, contribute to, and feedback on, health improvement initiatives.

"I don't think that they give us enough detail... one lesson a week is not enough to go in depth about the [health] subjects that you're learning about"



Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience¹

Young people told us that:

- Most young people are not familiar with the term 'resilience' or why it's useful to know;
- Some young people use strategies to achieve resilience both in and out of school;
- There are lots of ways that schools could help support resilience in young people, e.g. providing relaxation or 'time-out' spaces, opportunities for different physical activities, and peer support systems such as buddying or mentoring.

"...we do stuff here like art... I take that home and if I'm feeling upset, then I'll do some drawing or some painting or just write down how I feel and that helps quite a lot if I'm feeling stressed. Or like doing exercise and stuff like that"



Sexual health

Young people told us that:

- Young people want more teachers with specialist knowledge or skills, more opportunities for in-depth discussion, and more strategies on how to take control of and improve their sexual health;
- Young people really learned from, valued, and enjoyed, the Safe Around Sex programme;
- Young people were often aware of the Condom Card or C-Card but were not always clear on how to get one (for information on the C-Card and how to get one, see www.c360.org.uk);
- No young person in this project had heard of any sexual health campaign aimed at young people.

"Some of the teachers we had were very awkward how they taught it [Sex and Relationships Education] because they didn't really want to teach it but they had no choice."

¹ Resilience is the idea that young people can bounce back from adversity or difficult circumstances or doing well 'against the odds' and even changing those odds.

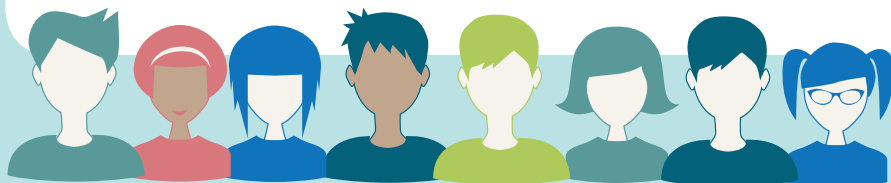
What did we recommend?

We were asked to make recommendations based on our discussions and other research evidence, and some young people helped us to prioritise these into a 'Top Three' in each of the key areas.



Whole School Approach to Health Improvement

- 1** Schools should continue to show young people how to prevent illness or poor health, but should also include positive ways in which they can improve and take control of their health.
- 2** Schools should make the school nurse easier for young people to find and talk to by giving out better information about where to find them and the things they can offer, and by having more regular contact between them and young people.
- 3** Schools need to ensure that *all* pupils have equal access to sports and physical activities regardless of whether they are a boy or a girl, and that a range of activities are available beyond traditional school sports (e.g. consider skateboarding, climbing, cycling etc.).





Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience

- 1** Schools should provide a physical space / de-stress room where young people can go if desired (this space should be separate to any existing exclusion / isolation room).
- 2** Schools should consider how physical activity can be encouraged as an individual strategy to cope resiliently with stress - to help young people calm themselves when they need to.
- 3** Schools should talk and listen to young people's views and ideas when developing health improvement initiatives, e.g. by setting up a Health Promotion School Council with professionals, teachers, young people, and other representatives.



Sexual Health

- 1** Schools should have a strong new starting point when thinking about health; recognising positive individual and social responsibility for sexual health rather than just focusing on avoidance / abstinence messages.
- 2** Schools should start talking about sexual health when young people start secondary school, in part to help normalise the issues, and then to increase understanding of the complexity and depth of these discussions over time.
- 3** Schools should ensure that their staff have the specialist knowledge to develop and teach high quality Sex and Relationships Education (SRE).

What happens next?

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) asked us to do this work and will now look at our findings more closely. In the coming months ESCC will use these findings to work with schools and others to look at how health and wellbeing in schools can be improved.

Where can I find more information?

We have produced a full report with a lot more detail. There are several ways you can find out more by asking for a copy of the report from your school, downloading your own copy here (www.brighton.ac.uk/healthresearch/research-projects/health-improvement-commissioning.aspx) or by contacting Nigel Sherriff from the University of Brighton on **01273 644539** or by email at n.s.sherriff@brighton.ac.uk

A big hearty thank you!

We would like to say a big hearty 'thank you' to all the young people who participated in this project from across East Sussex! We have learned a great deal and had fun doing it. We hope that those of you who took part also enjoyed and benefited from the experience.

And finally, where can I go for support?

There are a lot of organisations that provide excellent support on many related issues, so if you would like further support please try some of the following:

- **Stonewall** - www.stonewall.org.uk
- **NHS Choices** - www.nhs.uk
- **Youthnet** - www.youthnet.org
- **Mind** - www.mind.org.uk
- **Young Minds** - www.youngminds.org.uk
- **Frank** - www.talktofrank.com
- **Bullying UK** - www.bullying.co.uk
- **C360** - www.c360.org.uk

This summary was written by Dr Nigel Sherriff from the University of Brighton. The project team included Liz Cunningham, Lester Coleman, Chris Cocking, John Kenneth Davies, Laetitia Zeeman, and Kay Aranda. We also had help with this summary from the East Sussex Youth Cabinet, as well as Bev Amaechi, David Bishop, and Victoria Hamer.



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