

Mental Health in Oxfordshire: Children & Young People



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This report aims to explore whether a new mental health service for children and young people, using the 'Discovery College' model would be of benefit to children and young people in Oxfordshire. We looked at national and local data, current guidance and research, and mapped some of the services already available. Ultimately, we believe that the idea of establishing a Discovery College in the county should be explored further but read on to find out why we think so, and to learn more about just what a Discovery College is.

What's the state of young peoples' mental health nationally & locally?

1 in 8 children and young people have at least one mental disorder according to the Mental Health of Children and Young People 2017 survey, and the prevalence is rising.

75% of mental illnesses (excluding dementia) in adulthood started before the age of 18.

Only 1 in 4 children with a diagnosable mental health condition access treatment and evidence-

based care. We're seeing increases in the number of referrals, increased wait times, and increasingly complex and severe cases.

There are 14,000 children with mental health problems in Oxfordshire, and that number is rising. Referrals to CAMHS for 15-19 year olds increased by 80%, and by 67% for 10-14 year olds, between 2011/12-2016/17.

We also know that, whilst Oxfordshire is thought of as a very affluent county, this assumption actually hides the pockets of significant deprivation we have, particularly in parts of Oxford City. This means that the needs in these deprived areas can often go unnoticed and unmet. Oxfordshire ranks below the national average for NHS funded community mental health service provision.

In line with a current government green paper, a pilot is currently taking place in Oxfordshire to explore the impact of improving the links between health & education with an aim to improve mental health support for children and young people.

What do we know helps young people with their mental health?

Work with parents has been shown to be very effective, particularly evidence-based parenting programmes working on an early-intervention basis. Universal, community-based services, particularly ones that deliver mental health promotion and community-based mental health services are particularly effective.

What do we have locally?

Some fantastic groups and services, eg: One-Eighty, Oxfordshire Mind, Talking Space Plus (for ages 16+), and CAMHS are working hard to make improvements. Local open-access groups are also doing great work independently to support the wellbeing of the young people they work with. With the closure of many of the children's centres across Oxfordshire, support available for parents has been greatly reduced.

In some areas there's relatively little provision for LGBTQ+ -specific support, despite this being a group particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.

We also found that a lot of the services are quite city-centric, meaning that they're focused around Oxford City rather than the surrounding rural areas.

What is a Discovery College?

A Discovery College is brand new and totally different! Discovery Colleges provide mental health and wellbeing support to children and young people; friends, family and carers; and professionals and volunteers, all in one setting. They don't provide any clinical or therapeutic care (no diagnoses, no medication, no talking therapies), but instead aim to sit alongside all of those services, and to help young people and the people around them to better understand what's happening to them and to learn some skills and strategies to help them to take care of themselves. This is all done in an educational setting, through workshops or courses, and everything is co-produced. This means drawing on both lived experience and professional expertise to make sure that information being passed on is both accurate and authentic. It creates a community around the individual, and can provide lots of opportunities to move on through volunteering and peer support.

Now as we said, this model is still very new, so there's a limited evidence base to date. However, there's emerging data from the adult service equivalent (Recovery Colleges), and this is encouraging; showing improved wellbeing, positive outcomes, and reduced pressure on other services. If you'd like to know more about existing Discovery and Recovery Colleges, you can find case studies in the full report.

The model is still developing, but this provides an excellent opportunity to shape it as it grows, rather than this being a reason to avoid initiating it!

Summary

The limited evidence associated with this emerging international model is in favour of the Discovery College model, and we feel the establishment of a Discovery College within Oxfordshire could be beneficial. It's in line with government guidance, and would help to meet some of the local needs identified (eg: alleviating pressure on CAMHS, community-based and universal services, support for parents and families, and extending out across the county providing specific support to different vulnerable groups).

We at the Oxfordshire Discovery College therefore believe that a Discovery College would add value and complement existing services. We intend to work closely with other Discovery Colleges nationally to develop the evidence base, and to collaborate with other local organisations to ensure that we maximise on resources, avoid duplication, and ensure accessibility of service.

We're really excited to start this journey, and invite you to get involved!