



Closing the employment gap for young people

A toolkit for those supporting 16–25 year olds experiencing common mental health problems to gain and stay in work.



About this toolkit

This resource has been developed by a group of organisations from the Health and Wellbeing Alliance led by the Young People's Health Partnership. It aims to improve understanding about the link between common mental health problems and employment for 16–25 year olds, and to support effective practice by those working with young people experiencing these difficulties. The work has been funded by Public Health England (PHE), NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

What has informed the toolkit?

The toolkit draws on a scoping review undertaken as part of the project which collated official statistics and relevant existing reviews^{1,2}. It also includes findings from focus groups and interviews with 44 young people, 12 employers, 13 mental health providers, feedback from a PHE regional Health and Work event and an apprenticeship scheme, and examples from practice submitted via an open call for evidence.

There is recognition that some groups of young people are affected disproportionately by mental health issues and/or struggle to access work. The project explored these barriers in focus groups with young carers, young LGBT people, young people who have experience of the criminal justice system and young Gypsies and Travellers. The toolkit highlights the impacts of some specific issues on these groups and how support can be tailored to meet their needs.

Who is it for?

The target audiences for the resource are mental health and employment support staff across statutory, voluntary and independent sectors and staff providing support and care to vulnerable young people.

Using the toolkit

The contents should be used flexibly to help improve understanding and inform strategies being developed to address needs.

Evidence statement

This toolkit presents a range of resources, from academic publications to examples of interesting practice that might stimulate thinking. It does not represent a systematic review of the resources available, and inclusion in the report does not mean that the resources have any kind of official endorsement from the Health and Wellbeing Alliance and its members, Public Health England, NHS England or the Department of Health and Social Care. The intention is to draw as widely as possible on interesting ways forward. Many of these will require further trial and evaluation to confirm effectiveness.

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Introduction

Why is this important?

Having meaningful work is widely recognised as a key part of wellbeing and some young people can face particular difficulties in finding their place in the labour market.

A significant proportion of the 16-25 age group are affected by common mental health issues. For many these occur at the time when they are entering the labour market for the first time.

Data from 2018 highlighted that 50% of all ages claiming Employment Support Allowance were doing so due to mental or behavioural disorders. For those under the age of 24 this increased to 70%³. This is a concern given that we know that those who are out of employment for a substantial period are less likely to find work later in life, and more likely to experience poor long term health⁴.

Helping young people to establish themselves in the workforce is critical to their successful transition to adulthood. They need help in overcoming barriers including the challenges of applying for and starting work, as well as the challenges of adjusting to the workplace and finding the support they need to keep going. The benefits of engaging in work are clear, and it is worth investing in new ways of providing this support.

70% of young people under the age of 24 receiving Employment Support Allowance do so due to mental health or behavioural disorders³.

Key terms

Young people: The focus of this toolkit is on 16-25 year olds as this is the age that the majority of young people make the transition into employment.

Mental health problems: The toolkit should be relevant to young people facing any common mental health problem.

NEET: Not in education, employment or training. Young people in England are legally required to participate in education or training until they are 18.



Section One:

What do we know?

In total in mid-2018 there were 783,000 young people aged 16-24 who were defined as **Not in Employment, Education or Training** (NEET) in the UK⁵. In addition, the UK has the third highest percentage of early leavers from education and training in the EU². Some groups of young people are more likely to become NEET than other young people their age, for example, young adult carers⁴.

Three quarters of **mental health problems** start by the age of 24⁶, and young people’s mental and emotional wellbeing can significantly affect their ability to apply for, obtain and maintain work. Young people from deprived areas and some other groups of young people are more likely to have poor mental health than their peers². For example this includes looked after young people, young adult carers, LGBT+ young people, young Gypsies and Travellers and young people with special educational needs.

The **quality and security of work** is extremely important for wellbeing, with permanent work identified as a protective factor. IPPR research found that younger workers in temporary jobs were 29% more likely to experience mental health problems than those in permanent jobs. It also highlighted that 1 in 5 (19%) younger workers aged 16-24 are underemployed – more than double the rate among workers aged 25 and above⁷.

Evidence also suggests that 33% of young people aged 16-24 are on zero hour contracts compared with 12% for all people in employment⁷. While these might work well for older people approaching retirement, they can be poorly suited to young people, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged groups².

“Mental health affects 1 in 4 in the UK in their lifetime, it affects us all directly or indirectly. How would you want to be treated in such a scenario? How would you like your son or daughter to be treated? To move forward we must all move together.”

EMPLOYER, Interview



Section Two:

What are the obstacles?

Many things can prevent young people with mental health difficulties getting into and staying in work, education or training. These obstacles operate at individual, family and wider societal levels. In this section we share feedback about these issues from focus groups and interviews.

Common themes from focus groups and interviews

Inflexible and restricted job roles, terms and conditions can be problematic for young adult carers for example and/or those needing to attend clinical appointments. There can also be **too much flexibility** e.g. zero hours contracts which can lead to financial insecurity.

Discrimination and stigma can exacerbate mental health issues and reduce the capacity to find or continue with work e.g. fear of discrimination is profoundly felt by young transgender people. Young Travellers can resort to hiding their ethnic identity in the workplace to escape being bullied.

Balancing the different priorities and needs of the business, the team and the young person can be challenging, and may result in needs being missed or not met.

Different groups of young people may face particular obstacles due to their particular circumstances.

Inadequate access to support services for young people, staff and families may mean that problems escalate.

Obstacles created by young people's circumstances

- Many of the young people in focus groups spoke about having **low levels of self-confidence** and undervaluing their own talents and skills. In general having mental health problems can make managing social scenarios, tasks and workloads challenging.

*“ We run a young person’s transgender group and have had a lot of feedback from participants that they find it harder to get work. Many are out of work and suffer from depression. There is widespread **discrimination** against this group the result of lack of awareness about trans issues, compared to say greater acceptance of gay people in the work force. ”*

VCSE ORGANISATION, INTERVIEW

- There are **significant additional challenges for some groups of young people**. A family history of long-term unemployment, record of criminality, parents/carers with substance misuse problems and, sub-standard accommodation are all issues which affect both young people's mental wellbeing and access to work. For these same groups of young people their aspirations, ambitions and goals are often restricted by their family and social circumstances and sometimes compounded by disengagement with the education system.

“ It was an office job. I said because of counselling and therapy, I wouldn't be able to make it in all five days a week. I ended up leaving that job after a day – they said on the phone that there was plenty of flexibility, but then said I'd have to cancel my appointments if I wanted to continue. ”

YOUNG PERSON, FOCUS GROUP

- Young people **fear disclosure** of their mental health difficulties due to stigma, discrimination and a lack of understanding. Many young people expect that employers will not want to take on people with mental health problems.

“ We had careers advisers at school but like, they were useless. When I put forward what I wanted to be, I was just told 'be more realistic and come down to something that you're capable of. ”

YOUNG PERSON, FOCUS GROUP

Obstacles in relation to employment

- **A lack of company wide approaches** to working with young people with additional needs.
- **The size, nature and culture of the business** – for example, smaller employers may lack the resources to be flexible or offer support, others may be under pressure because of service cuts.
- **Limited, inflexible and/or poorly paid employment options** – Retail or service jobs are more available but long hours and physical demands can make them hard to sustain for people with health problems.
- **Apprenticeships can be inadequate** with training and support not always delivered and they do not necessarily lead to a permanent job.
- **Rigid recruitment processes and qualification requirements** – prior work experience, completion of lengthy forms, CVs or group interviews are very challenging to those who have missed education and who have social or generalised anxieties. In addition a lack of clarity about what young people need to disclose in recruitment processes can result in further barriers to employment.

Obstacles in relation to employment support services

- **Complex systems and processes** are hard to navigate. Bureaucracy, the threat of sanctions and a lack of additional support can create stress and reinforce barriers to getting into and staying in work.
- **Intimidating culture and environment** -security guards, formality, repeated questioning or staff lacking mental health awareness means that for some young people attending an appointment can trigger an anxiety attack.
- **Poorly located and/or inaccessible offices** particularly for those in rural areas and/or with neurodevelopmental and other disabilities.

Obstacles in relation to mental health services

- **Postcode lottery of services** waiting lists and restricted appointment times, high thresholds for statutory support, oversubscribed and underfunded services and inappropriate support all limit access when needed.
- **Inconsistent, abstract advice** from multiple, fragmented services with poor communication links can create problems.
- **Many face lengthy journeys to access support** as a lack of early intervention services including the demise of structured Youth Services has left a huge gap in provision.

“ There is a lack of staff’s understanding about mental health and associated difficulties. This can lead to inappropriate communication, conversation and advice ... Prejudice against young people and people with mental health issues results in staff being impatient and not ‘bothered’ to offer the extra support. ”

SUPPORT WORKER, INTERVIEW



Section Three:

What can help?

In this section we share practice suggestions for support services, employers, employment support services and mental health providers to consider. All suggestions have arisen from conversations with young people, employers and service providers.

Common themes from stakeholder engagement

Some common themes emerged from conversations with young people, employers and service providers about what helps young people with common mental health problems access and stay in work;

- **Clear leadership** which encourages partnership working and enables well coordinated systems and services that are responsive to young people's needs.
- **Services that offer extensive, in-depth and long-term personalised support.** Comprehensive one stop shop models that enable access to help with benefit and money issues, employment rights advice, housing, mental health, special educational needs and disability (SEND) and/or specialist support services for particular groups of young people.
- **Staff with a positive attitude to young people** who can provide encouragement and help them to navigate the system. Flexibility, knowledge about mental health, employers expectations and young people's personal circumstances were particularly valued.
- **Mental health training and awareness** for all staff in companies and institutions.
- **Flexibility** regarding roles, hours, supervisory arrangements, clinical and other care and support appointments.
- **Access to tailored 1:1 support** within and outside of work and from someone other than the young person's line-manager.
- **Importance of involving young people** in policy and service developments.

Practice tips for all support services

- **Recognise and involve informal sources** of advice and support, such as family and friends
- **Provide practical advice and help** – CV writing, interview practice, help to access support travel, food, interview and work clothes. The need for help in getting more specialist support e.g. housing, financial, social care, adult mental health, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities was also highlighted.
- **Work to reduce stigma** around mental illness
- **Help to build confidence** and develop social skills and focus on positive thinking.
- **Reach out to employers** and act as a bridge between young person and employer and be on hand to get early alert should difficulties emerge.
- **Provide flexible support** that responds to the needs of young person and employer.

“ My support worker... helps me to get out more. That helps you to see what life is really about. I also get support from [another voluntary sector service]. They focus on positive thinking. They get your mind positive, instead of negative stuff. Ready for jobs and stuff. Active and ready to work – so you can get a job in the future. ”

YOUNG PERSON, FOCUS GROUP

“ Consideration of all possible barriers that they may experience, a named support person to challenge and reduce these barriers, compassion, encouragement, an informed employer, support to reduce barriers outside of the work place, supportive systems to access easily when things go wrong. ”

SUPPORT WORKER, INTERVIEW

“ We started small with one and a six-month pilot and regularly monitored and evaluated it with the employer, and made adjustments to the offer as we went. We have focused on quality not quantity of opportunity. We are able to offer the employer the support of our workers to support young people into their work placements and shadowing and they liaise with one point of contact with that employer. Our staff are also benefit advisers and are able to effectively liaise and advocate with Jobcentre Plus and the Department of Work and Pensions. We have worked hard to develop a more positive relationship with the local job centre as well. ”

VCSE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT ORGANISATION, INTERVIEW

Practice tips for employers

- **Develop and promote a culture of mental health awareness**, knowledge and practice across the whole organisation and at all levels. Ensure staff have access to helpful practical resources such as the *PHE BITC Mental Health Toolkit for Employers* and are clear about young people's rights to request flexible working (Work and Families Act 2006) and reasonable adjustments (Equality Act 2010).
- **Deploy imaginative recruitment methods** and be flexible on qualification requirements e.g. recognising skills gained outside education, job trials, shadowing opportunities, work experience and volunteering roles. Such approaches can help support young people facing greater challenges.
- **Be flexible** regarding roles, hours, supervisory arrangements where this better meets the needs of marginalised young people.

- **Show cultural awareness and understand needs of different groups** e.g. be aware that young Travellers hide their identity for fear of discrimination and bullying; recognise that flexibility is particularly important to young adult carers and that young LGBT people place a high premium on confidentiality.

“ My last employer actively sought out young people who were not in education or employment and who may have come from a chaotic home life..... opened up jobs specifically for young people with additional needs and ended up offering jobs because they were really good. ”

EMPLOYER, INTERVIEW

- **Cultivate creative support and development systems** with emphasis on 1:1, tailored support which is patient and flexible. This can take the form of:
 - Mentoring/peer-mentoring or buddying system where buddies or mentors are outside the immediate work team and are themselves knowledgeable, skilled, valued and well supported.
 - Specially selected line-manager or supervisor with the right skills, patience and understanding.
 - Contracting 1:1 support from a specialist external organisation.
 - Individualised plans which tailor support to goals and circumstances.
 - Meaningful tasks and opportunities which help learning and development, build confidence, trust and aspirations.
- **Consider providing safe spaces for staff to take time out**- designated wellbeing/chill out spaces/contemplation rooms.

Employment Support Services

- **Improve mental health awareness within services**, through training and collaboration with specialist local organisations, mental health services and primary care etc.

- **Develop staff with skills and qualities** to work flexibly and sensitively even from within restrictive services and policies. Some young adult carers had positive experiences with Job Centre Plus as staff had provided flexibility regarding job search requirements and their caring role. Some young people welcomed hubs where services were easily accessible.
- **“Access to work” sessions** for young people or services such as Assist Cafes at the Job centre. These can lead to funding for adjustments to be made in the work place.
- **Create opportunities to share good practice** and innovations between services.

Mental Health Services

- **Be flexible** about appointments including times and and locations.
- **Provide accessible and responsive services**
- **Co-locate services** – Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) therapists in job centres and colleges, training and employment advisors delivering support in IAPT services.
- **Work in partnership** with local voluntary organisations e.g. those supporting young adult carers.
- **Develop effective knowledge and links** with employment support services for this age group.

“ [The service] only works with NEET young people and it’s a bit more flexible. They’re very good at being carer aware... they will come to our centre and meet the young adult carer here,..... , if like, someone is willing to come somewhere that you are familiar and comfortable with – it makes it a bit easier. It kind of gradually works them into accessing support – instead of ‘okay, the first thing you need to do is come to a formal meeting’. ”

SUPPORT WORKER, INTERVIEW

Supporting young people's pathway into work

Some key considerations for those supporting young people into and at work.



Examples from practice

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT & CONFIDENCE BUILDING – PRINCE'S TRUST TEAM PROGRAMME

Working with NEET young people 16-25 in Wigan, Leigh, Chorley, Warrington, Blackpool and Southport, the Prince's Trust TEAM Programme provides adaptable support, while partners such as fire services, colleges and Groundwork operate the programme. Young people on the programme face multiple challenges: financial; undiagnosed conditions; low self-esteem and confidence; poor education and qualifications. It is inclusive and welcomes but is not specifically targeted at those with mental health difficulties.

The bespoke programme begins with a team building phase, including a residential experience followed by a community project and a work placement before reaching an exit-planning phase. There is a team challenge before a final presentation to an audience including referral agencies and family members. A three week exit placement was added two years ago giving young people a chance to showcase their talents to an employer while still part of the programme.

Further information:

www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/clm/Website/princes-trust-lww

Case Study of Joe, a Warrington Teenager:

Joe has overcome severe anxiety to follow his dream and study vehicle maintenance at college. He was 16 when he went along to see the Prince's Trust team at Groundwork in Warrington with his dad. He'd missed the last year of high school due to anxiety and rarely came out of his bedroom. He completed the programme, did some volunteering with Groundwork and went to college to enrol on a motor vehicle course.

“ I'm now attending college and looking forward to developing skills in motor vehicle mechanics. If it wasn't for Groundwork and the Prince's Trust, I think I might still be spending all my time in my bedroom. ”

YOUNG PERSON



ADDRESSING SKILLS GAPS FOR UNEMPLOYED 16-24 YEAR OLDS – ELEVATE BERKSHIRE

Elevate Berkshire, a European Social Fund programme involving six authorities and charities, created a programme to address skills gaps for unemployed 16–24 year olds. Since 2015 the programme has supported 2082 young people.

Elevate aims to address the needs of young people and the skills required by local businesses. Providing personalised support highlighted the complexity of the issues facing some young people.

Evaluation suggests that the hubs most able to bridge the gap between young people's needs and employers' requirements use a combination of supported employment and outreach work.

The Ways into Work model is used to support young people with disabilities. Staff get to

know the individual well and develop individual action plans. They engage with employers, advocating for the young person's skills and for more creative recruitment methods, such as work trials. Ongoing support for employers and young people is essential for sustainability.

“ Two years ago I wasn't ready for this [educational experience] and Elevate has given me the confidence to leave home and move onto a great life, which before I couldn't see as an option. I am a new person, with skills and ready to take on the world! I now no longer dream of being a tattoo artist, but a concept artist. ”

YOUNG PERSON

Further information: www.berkshire.elevateme.org.uk

DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS AND RESILIENCE – MST4LifeTM

MST4LifeTM is a West-Midlands based programme, developed and delivered by St Basil's and the University of Birmingham (UoB). It is a 10-session Life Skills intervention, including a 4-day outdoor adventure residential for homeless young people aged 16-24 who experience many barriers to living independently.

The programme is informal with supportive and flexible facilitators. It is underpinned by sport and strengths-based psychology, promoting self-discovery, emotional control, teamwork, problem-solving and organisational skills.

The programme offers long-term follow-ups (three months or more after programme

completion) and evaluation showed improvements for young people in self-regulation, self-confidence, and more frequent and higher quality social engagement. The number of NEET young people was more than halved at follow-up. The strengths-based approach has been engaging and empowering and has produced positive outcomes.

“ Well my confidence ... is shooting straight up. The way I speak to people, the way I'm working in a team. I've learned that I can handle myself in those situations a lot better, than what I thought I could. ”

YOUNG PERSON

Further information: www.stbasils.org.uk/how-we-help/our-services/mental-skills-training-for-life/

CREATING LOCAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – GREEN FUTURES PROGRAMME, YORKSHIRE DALES MILLENNIUM TRUST

The Dales and Fells Training Scheme, delivered across the Yorkshire Dales National Park and surrounding areas (e.g. Forest of Bowland, Cumbria, Nidderdale AONB) is an adaptation of a long-standing apprenticeship model targeting young people aged 16-24 who are/are at risk of being NEET, in temporary / seasonal employment, experiencing mental health problems, rural isolation and lack of local employment. It aims to create local rural employment opportunities and to upskill young people in countryside skills. Young people are placed with local rural employers and work

towards a Level 2 certificate in Environmental Conservation / Countryside Worker and other relevant training and certificates

The programme has helped young people to gain certificated skills and training and to develop soft and additional skills. It has created direct support and opportunities for a range of young people in the local area. Young people have moved on to rural employment or further education and increases in self-esteem, well-being and confidence have been demonstrated.

Further information: www.ydmt.org/what-we-do/green-futures

BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE HEALTH AND WORK SYSTEM TO BETTER SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE, PHE – EAST OF ENGLAND

To increase understanding and support better provision for young people not in employment, education or training, the East of England Public Health England regional office has been leading work to promote effective partnership working across the health and work system. This has been both at a regional level and sub regional level (Norfolk & Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes, Luton, Essex, Hertfordshire). They have also ensured links with PHE and the DWP's Health and Work Unit nationally.

In practice staff from across the health and

work sector have been brought together at workshops and meetings. These events have focused on sharing information about how young people are being affected by these issues, some of the challenges and most importantly the opportunities to improve things. They have highlighted the importance of joining up the gaps locally between skills, employment and young people to share information and support transitions. They have also highlighted the importance of working at a local level – the barriers and solutions can differ in each locality and this approach has helped us to support effective local conversations to happen.

Further information:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/phe-east-of-england-advice-support-and-services

Resources and links

Resources to support a strategic approach

- **A review of the overlap between mental health problems and employment issues for young people age 16-24**
- **PHE Health Matters: Health and Work**
- **PHE Mental health promotion and prevention training programmes**
- **Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter**
Supporting evidence based best practice.
- **Youth Access Altogether Better Charter**
Created by young people for person centred mental health and wellbeing services.
- **PHE Guidance Movement into employment: return on investment tool**
For local commissioners to estimate benefits of moving from worklessness into employment.
- **PHE Health and Work Infographics**
Increase awareness and understanding of the relationship between health and work.
- **Apprenticeship levy Guidance**

Tools to support young people with mental health problems in the workplace

- **HSE Young People At Work**
Guidance and resources for employers.
- **TUC How are You?**
Guide to mental health at work for young workers.
- **Supporting young people with mental health needs into employment**
Practical guidance for commissioners from National Development Team for Inclusion and the Council for Disabled Children.

Supporting particular groups of young people

- **Young People's Health Partnership**
A consortium of six national young people's health and youth charities with a network of local services.
- **Health and Wellbeing Alliance**
21 voluntary sector partners representing local VCSE organisations from across England and beyond.
- **Advicenow – A survival guide for young workers**
A guide for young workers age 15-22.
- **workSMART Know your rights: Young People at work**
A TUC guide to rights for 16 and 17 year olds.
- **Getting into work: a guide for young adult carers in England**
Support with steps towards employment.
- **Know your Rights Guide**
Young people friendly guide to the rights of young adult carers under the Care Act 2014 and Children and Families Act 2014
- **Islington trauma informed practice in schools**
Resources & training materials for schools to develop and embed whole-school trauma approaches.
- **Universities UK toolkit on positive mental health**

Tools to support anyone with mental health problems in the workplace

- **DWP Remploy Access to Work Mental Health Support Service**
Free confidential service for employees with mental health issues affecting their work.
- **MIND How to be Mentally Healthy at Work**
Practical suggestions for employees to support mental health at work.
- **“Thriving at work” for employers**
Review into how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment to remain in and thrive through work.
- **Mentalhealthatwork.org.uk**
Information and resources from different types of organisations around the UK to support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.
- **TUC Mental Health & the Workplace**
Resource to increase understanding about the issues people face in the workplace and the importance of reasonable adjustments.
- **Bristol Thrive Guide to workplace health and wellbeing for employers**
How to promote positive physical and mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and where to find national and local advice for organisations.
- **London Healthy Workplace Charter Self-Assessment Framework**
Action to help employers build good practice in health and work in their organisation.
- **MIND Wellness Action Plans**
To help employees support their mental health at work and managers to help support the mental health of their team members.
- **PHE BITC Mental Health Toolkit for Employers**
To help employers build a culture that champions good mental health and provides a greater understanding of how to help those who need more support.
- **Kingston University Returning to work after mental health issues**
Guidance for employees and employers.

References

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About the Health and Wellbeing Alliance

Funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and led by the DHSC, Public Health England and NHS England, the Health and Wellbeing Alliance (HW Alliance) was established to: Facilitate integrated working between the voluntary and statutory sectors; Support a two-way flow of information between communities, the VCSE sector and policy leads; Amplify the voice of the VCSE sector and people with lived experience to inform national policy; Facilitate co-produced solutions to promote equality and reduce health inequalities.

One of the 21 members of the Health and Wellbeing Alliance, the Young People's Health Partnership led this work alongside seven other partners Carers Trust, Friends, Families and Travellers, The National LGB&T Partnership, Association of Mental Health Providers, Nacro, NAVCA and The Men's Health Forum.

For more information: www.ayph.org.uk/yphp