



Talking Schools

Autumn/Winter 2016

Welcome to Talking Schools, your Youth Mental Health First Aid newsletter. Since our spring/summer issue, we have been busier than ever with some fantastic events in the world of young people's mental health. Read on to find out more about what we've been up to and what's coming up, including an exclusive discount for the upcoming Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools conference. In this issue you will also get an insight into the life of a Youth MHFA instructor and a spotlight on the mental health work taking place at the inspiring Leeds Inclusive Learning Service.

Life as a Youth MHFA instructor

To give an insight into what it's like to be a Youth MHFA instructor, we bring you a Q&A with **Belinda Heaven**, a member of our National Training team. You can learn more about Belinda's consultancy services or contact her through her website alphawellbeing.com.

What inspired you to train as a Youth MHFA instructor?

I was working with the Healthy Schools team in Gloucestershire as the lead for emotional and mental wellbeing and saw MHFA courses being promoted. It seemed to provide me with the ideal opportunity to add to existing knowledge gained during my many years as a school nurse. I have always enjoyed learning and extending knowledge and have also discovered how much I enjoy delivering training!

Describe a typical 'day in the life' in your work.

This is a difficult question to answer as I don't have a typical day and that is what I love about working independently. I wear three hats, one being my role as a National Trainer for MHFA England delivering Youth MHFA instructor training courses around the country (Bristol last week, then York followed by London). My second hat is contributing to my Local Authority's version of Healthy Schools and varies from supporting schools following bereavement to working directly with young people and promoting staff wellbeing (a particular passion of mine). Thirdly and probably because I have been around for a long time in various roles, schools ask me to work with them and I speak at conferences too. I have regular input at the University of Gloucestershire on their PGCE programme.

What do you find most rewarding/enjoyable about the work?

I think the variety is something I find particularly appealing. I enjoy the challenge when meeting new groups all the time and when there is a real connection for a person who finds the courses especially helpful either on a professional level or personally, that is enormously satisfying. I truly believe MHFA training makes a huge difference and the feedback is quite humbling at times.

What is challenging about the work?

Working with people can be challenging as you never know what they might be bringing to a course or what their expectations are. I also find it difficult to practice what I preach and achieve work /life balance as I find it hard to say no when asked to be involved in projects that interest me.

What do you do to look after your own wellbeing day-to-day?

I am a very sociable person and like to plan so that I have something to look forward to. I am very good at combining work and pleasure. For example, when I'm delivering training in London I like to make the most of its wealth of theatre opportunities. I enjoy cooking, drinking a nice glass of wine and also on the physical front find Zumba great fun for the comedic value as much as anything! I am extremely fortunate to have close friends and family for support and to talk to sharing both the good and the not so good times. I love travelling and usually have my next holiday destination in mind if not already booked.

What are you working on at the moment?

Lots - I am part of the Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) project with the University of Bristol. Currently I am developing some more resources for schools having had two books published. My son Philip is training to be an MHFA instructor this month and I'll be delivering a workshop with him. I am also mentoring Natasha Devon, DfE's former champion for mental health in schools, as she trains to be a Youth MHFA instructor.



TAKE 10 TOGETHER AT SCHOOL

Starting the conversation

Why it's important

We believe talking about mental health can help you and those around you to be happier and healthier. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England is calling on schools to 'Take 10 Together' – for staff members to have a 10 minute conversation with a pupil or student about their mental health.

Mental health and emotional issues often develop during adolescence. Social media, academic pressure, bullying, family units breaking down and an increased number of children in the care system have all been suggested as contributing factors to the rise in mental health issues in younger people.

Schools have the opportunity to take an active role in guiding a young person towards the appropriate support for recovery. The statistics below underline why it is so crucial for schools to pay attention to mental health.



1 IN 10

children and young people experience a mental health issue at any one time

20,000

young people contacted Childline with suicidal thoughts – that's more than double the number five years ago.

In an average class of 30 15-year-olds:

- 10** Ten are likely to have watched their parents separate
- 6** Six may be self-harming
- 7** Seven are likely to have been bullied
- 1** One could have experienced the death of a parent



Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches people the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and effectively guide a young person towards the right support. Having a 10 minute chat is the first step on that journey.

We don't often talk about our mental health so it might seem a little daunting to start a conversation about it but it's important to remember you don't have to be an expert. Giving a young person the opportunity to open up and have a conversation about their mental health can play a vital role in reassuring them that help is available and then signposting them to appropriate support.

MHFA England has put together some ideas for how you can start the conversation

Creating a safe space



Give yourself plenty of time so you don't appear to be in a hurry. 10 minutes may be enough but if you need longer than go ahead



Meet outside the classroom in a neutral space such as a quiet room or pastoral room



Sit down even if the other person is standing – it will make you seem less intimidating. Make it clear that they are not in trouble

How to ask the questions



Keep your body language open and non-confrontational



Be empathetic and take them seriously



Do not offer gifts advice such as "pull yourself together" or "cheer up"



Take into account cultural differences in communication styles e.g. how much eye contact is appropriate



Keep the chat positive and supportive, exploring the issues and how you may be able to help

Useful questions to ask

How are you feeling at the moment?

Who do you feel you can go to for support?

Are there any factors outside of the classroom which are contributing to how you are feeling?

How can I help you?

How long have you felt like this – is it an ongoing issue?

What kind of support do you think might help you?

Free mental health materials for schools