

## Mental Health in Schools

At the DAGB Open meeting on the evening of Thursday March 21<sup>st</sup> 2019 the session on the topic of Mental Health and Wellbeing was presented by Angelina Robin-Jones, Executive Leadership Consultant with Dudley Academies Trust. Angelina based her presentation on her experience in schools both in the past and those being faced today. Angelina had started her teaching career in difficult inner city schools in Birmingham and had supported pupils in some extreme situations. As she moved Authorities she came to realise that pupils from all backgrounds suffered from mental health issues and had worked with young people in desperate situations, even including suicide and murder. As has been all too often the case, mental health services were often not readily available. As a consequence, she appointed Counsellors to work with young people at different levels of need. This helped to plug the gaps and provide some support whilst appointments with mental health services were awaited. The stigma associated with poor mental health was in part tackled by referring to it instead as emotional well-being. Angelina had an article "Focus on Wellbeing" published in the NGA magazine, "Governing Matters" in Autumn 2017. The width of strategies developed to support young people made significant differences to their lives. A crucial element in this success was that staff knew the young people well, understood their needs and took action when there were warning signs that there may be issues arising that might lead to a deterioration of mental health.

As many as 75% of youths in the criminal justice system are understood to have a diagnosable mental condition, although the reverse is most certainly not true.. For children and young people, a diagnosis of cancer or bereavement within a family often contributes to a deterioration in mental health. Dudley's Local Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing document reports a plethora of facts and figures related to mental health issues across all age ranges. For instance in the 2-5 year age group as many as 20% already experience some element of diagnosable mental condition, including 4% with hyperactivity issues (this is a meaningful and easily recognisable condition) . Within the Primary age range a total of 1734 would experience some, possibly low level, element of mental illness – within this number 541 might have some emotional problems, 360 have hyperkinetic issues (including ADHD) and 220 meeting the threshold for autism. At the Secondary level, these figures rise; the total now exceeds 2000, with 895 having emotional issues, 251 having hyperkinetic issues (still including ADHD), 143 meeting the autism threshold. Other facts highlighted from the document indicated that there has also been a growth in cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (54 cases) and eating disorders in males(72). On average 1 in 20 young people in Secondary schools in this Borough self-harms on a regular basis according to a Dudley survey in 2016.

Analysis of the equivalent potential figures for the 16 to 24 age group indicates a total in excess of 6500, (of whom about half are likely to suffer from common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression). It is anticipated that 1561 will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, 365 from ADHD and 1163 from eating disorders. Adolescent years are the peak age group for exhibiting the first indications of serious mental health problems. Some 75% of psychiatric conditions become evident by age 24 (Kessler et al, 2005). Equally well there is evidence that early intervention is very important giving potentially long-term benefits to the young person, to the public purse and to society more broadly. Governors should make themselves familiar with this document\*.

Governors need to be mindful of the fact that the internet provides a wealth of information for emotionally distressed young people who are intent on self-harm. This is despite all child protection

policies applied in schools. In order to limit access, the Dudley Academies Trust, for example, have banned the use of mobile 'phones in schools; the impact of this has been that young people now talk to each other or participate in other activities during their non-class time. This has made a massive difference in communication and understanding between students.

Two web sites were mentioned. <https://www.kooth.com> is promoted as a safe site for young people to talk about their mental health. <https://papyrus-uk.org> has a strong focus on supporting anyone considering suicide.

Mental health issues cannot be seen in the same way as a physical problem. The same principles of child protection need to be applied by staff, but once concerns are raised the young person needs to be encouraged to talk. A child may approach an adult and ask for time to talk; this **must** be given. Schools should take steps to reduce the stigma attached to mental health issues. Successful approaches have included PSHE (to help build resilience), mental health focus week, directing those in need to appropriate support, communication with parents and carers. Governors know that schools often have to deliver health and social care provision, but if this is not through school then it may not be available at all. There is however, the associated impact on school budgets.

Dudley Council has produced a vision for mental health and wellbeing. Governors will have to ensure that there is a clear plan underpinning the vision as there are many real obstacles to be overcome in order to deliver this – funding; lack of provision; lack of specialist health staff. *At the time of writing the new OfSTED framework is expected to be child orientated and include a focus on well-being.* Schools will have to ensure that provision is appropriate for need, and within Multi-Academy Trusts this may vary from school to school.

Engaging parents can be challenging for schools, as they can interpret the school's concerns as a reflection on their skills as a parent. This is usually not the case and school staff should not avoid having the difficult conversations.

Governors should also be aware of the mental health and well being of staff. Some schools have chosen to train an adult in Mental Health First Aid for Adults (available through MIND and other agencies). There is a cost linked to the provision of training, but staff often face difficult situations and should work in an environment where it is acceptable to talk about emotional well-being concerns and that support is available.

Mental Health Awareness week (hosted by the Mental Health Foundation) Monday 13<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019, this year the theme will be Body Image – how we think and feel about our bodies. Governors were asked to ask in schools how this event would be promoted.

Governors were also asked to monitor how many children were taken out of school to be home educated\*\*. This had been a growing trend, but was wholly unregulated and there was no assurance of the quality of education, no child protection and once off roll no checks as to where the young person is. Schools had attempted to implement managed moves to avoid permanent exclusion or home education.

Angelina was thanked for her informative and thought provoking presentation.

*\*Local Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing 2015-2020, Dudley: Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group.*

*\*\* This issue is being raised by DAGB locally and will be reported upon in due course as it represents a local issue of a growing national problem.*

Jill Snow  
Clerk to the Association

*[We are now aware that FREE training will be available during the 2019-2020 Academic Year for Mental Health First Aid for Young People, a full one-day course, costs of training being borne by the Health Service, leaving schools to fund cover costs.- Ed]*