

YMCA Downslink Group: e-wellbeing youth research project



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YMCA DOWNSLINK GROUP

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) funded three organisations that provide support for young people - up to the age of 25 - to engage in, get involved with, co-produce and co-design health and care research in relation to children and young people's mental health.

These Youth Research Partnerships include a range of research projects from a host of different organisations working together to improve the way children and young people's mental health services are delivered and run, across Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Project summary

The e-wellbeing youth research project is a youth-led mental health research initiative designed to empower young people as co-researchers and decision-makers.

Led by YMCA Downslink Group, in partnership with West Sussex Mind and West Sussex County Council, the project focused on youth voice by putting young people as experts by experience in the driving seat of mental health research.

What did the project involve?

The project trained young people aged between 13 and 25 through a co-produced programme that covered research methods, ethics, data analysis, and public speaking.

Once trained, the researchers led two pilot studies, focusing on how belonging and loneliness affect the mental health of young people in Brighton and Hove and how waiting times impact therapeutic outcomes.

They designed and conducted a mixed-methods study that included surveys with secondary school students and focus groups, targeting young people who had accessed mental health services.

As well as conducting research, the young people also co-designed training for professionals on how to engage youth in research and contributed to the creation of a research hub on the e-wellbeing website. They participated in local and regional research networks, shared findings, and helped shape future research directions.

Dissemination

The project had a significant impact on the youth researchers, who gained valuable research skills and experience and has contributed to the development of a regional youth research network and provided insights into engaging young people in research.

The research hub on the e-wellbeing website, designed with help from the young researchers, includes training materials, toolkits, and a guide for involving young people in research.

Updates and findings were also shared through newsletters and meetings with local and regional Youth Research Networks, which brought together universities, charities, and public health teams to keep the conversation going and build new partnerships

More than 90 young people took part in the project, developing skills in research, teamwork, and public speaking. Their contributions helped shape new research directions and inspired other youth-led initiatives across West Sussex.

The project has demonstrated the powerful potential of youth-led research and has influenced how organisations approach the involvement of young people in mental health research.

To find out more about the e-wellbeing project [click here](#).

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