

Katherine Christie
Scottish Government Health Directorate
Reshaping Care and Mental Health Division
Mental Health Service Delivery Unit
3 ER, St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG



10th December 2011

Dear Ms. Christie,

**Mental Health Strategy for Scotland: 2011-15 A Consultation
Response from Scottish Youth Parliament Health and Wellbeing Committee**

The Scottish Youth Parliament's vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is democratically elected to represent Scotland's youth. We listen to young people, recognise the issues that are most important to them, and ensure that their voices are heard.

In that light, we feel that it is important that young people's views on supporting mental health are taken into account. To inform this response, the SYP's Health and Wellbeing Committee convened a meeting at the SYP Sitting in Saltcoats on 30th October to discuss the provisions of the draft Mental Health Strategy. This response is a summary of the key points agreed by the Committee at that meeting around the topic.

We have elected to respond to address outcome 2: "Action is focused on early years and childhood to respond quickly and to improve both short and long term outcomes", as this is the area we believe we can provide a unique insight into from a young person's perspective. We considered this outcome broadly, and while some of our key points may well fall under the remit of consultation question 7, our aim is more to give an overview of the most important issues with regard to CAHMS.

The first, very general point is about consultation with young people about the services which affect them. One of the key challenges you have identified is "understanding what makes a difference for children's mental health", and one of the best ways to do this is ask service users and those who could be service users in the future. In order to better inform the decisions which are made about CAHMS it should be a priority for the Scottish Government to involve young people in the decision-making process, whether this is at a national level or whether it is through increased youth representation on NHS Boards. It is of course important that this is not a tokenistic exercise and that the young people are valued and the issues explained clearly. This committee could conceivably assist with both

providing the contributions and/or assisting with the procedures which might be put in place to ensure that young people are able to contribute fully from an informed position.

Secondly, the committee wishes to express its concern that some mental health services appear to be only available through a referral from school, or that other ways of accessing services are poorly advertised and not understood. It is important to recognise that young people often do not feel comfortable discussing issues of a personal nature with any adults who work within the school, and that it is often preferable to discuss the situation with a health professional working independently of the school.

Finally, it is of the utmost importance that access to the appropriate CAHMS services is available to every young person who needs it and that no vulnerable young people are treated in an environment which is inappropriate. The committee had both personal experience and had heard from constituents that had been treated within various areas of the health service (including mental health units) in a way which was unsuitable. For the most part this was either being treated in an environment designed for children and being patronised or being treated in an environment designed for adults and feeling intimidated and lonely.

The committee recommends that the procedures for deciding the environment and the way in which a young patient is treated should be reviewed and that the opinion of the young person and their maturity should always be more important than their age in making the decision of how to proceed.

If you have any comments or queries regarding this response please contact Rob Gowans on 0131 557 0452 or rob.g@syp.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Deans MSYP
Convener
Scottish Youth Parliament Health and Wellbeing Committee