

Mental Health Strategy for Scotland 2011-2015

Student Response

Introduction

As a student I welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and the Scottish government's commitment to identifying the action that needs to be taken in Scotland for the next four years to improve Scotland's mental health.

However I believe the consultation doesn't go far enough into engage with wellbeing and promotion of preventive measures to support those with mental health issues. This consultation focuses on the services that are available such as the NHS which isn't solely responsible for sending out this message of good mental health.

Furthermore there is no specific question around student mental health and the impact this has on this community. Following the research conducted by NUS which details that students are at a high risk of experiencing mental ill health.

It is encouraging that this consultation explores a wide range of proposals but I believe that there is still a lot more could be done to advice, support, develop and set out guidelines for colleges and universities in Scotland to allow them to insure that students have the support they require.

The Importance of student mental health

Student mental health is a growing issue in Scotland which I believe doesn't receive enough attention and is overlooked. Following the governments proposals to reform education in Scotland, it is important that learner's mental health does not suffer and the correct amount of support is in place to allow student to be mentally healthy.

Mental health illness has a massive impact on student retention and achievement in Scotland. The impact on mental health in students does effect the individual in different ways from confidence to self esteem to the social aspect of being a student leaving students less likely to complete their course or drop out, to being less able to participate fully in the social aspect of studying and less likely to obtain the qualification the set out to do. Which will in turn have a knock on effect to the college or university?

We need to adopt measures in which we can educate students on mental health. From looking after their own mental health, to identifying the triggers not only that but to be able to ask for support and get the support they require there and then.

Barriers facing students

In recent years yes the support being given to student has increased but with the proposed to cuts student support this would suggest that student will not receive the same level of support in the coming years

'As a student myself I have used these vital services as I am lucky to have good support at my college but with the cuts I worry that student will no longer have this access.'

Some of the barriers that stop student coming forward and talking about mental health care;

Stigma attached to mental health

Waiting lists

Lack of knowledge e.g. where to go for help

The new mental health strategy need to be clear and needs to recognise that the education around mental health must be rolled out across the board from a young age and continued through life to an adult to increase understanding of mental health.

Waiting lists in the community are far too long so developing on campus service and proper advertising of this service needs to be clear and transparent.

What I've found is that students don't and are afraid of coming forward due to the stigma attached to having mental health issues. The new mental health strategy needs to challenge this stigma as it is preventing students from coming forward to receive treatment/support during this difficult time.

Below is a case study from one of the student I represent and these echoes what I have stated above.

I've suffered with bipolar for over 3 years and I went undiagnosed for through school and my late teens which was a very difficult time for my family and me. Before I made the decision to go to college to study photography which was my dream from a young age my condition was under control with my medication. It took allot for me to make the decision to go to college as my confidence wasn't very good and I worried if I would fit in.

The first two months I felt quite good in the class and I was coping well with the work load and getting good feedback on assessments so everything was balanced. After the first block the work load increased and the fact I had to get two trains everyday just to get there was starting to have an impact on me I was tired and abit stressed.

Over the following weeks I became much stressed and I failed an assessment. I was told I would have to reset it and I was the only one in the class that failed which then made me feel really stupid and I started to become really quite again which made me angry because I had been doing well. I was still going to classes and had only missed a couple due to me having *a really bad* day which meant it look like I was coping but the truth was I wasn't.

Following this I stopped enjoying college which meant I wasn't putting my full effort in which meant I wasn't getting the most out of my education. I felt I couldn't talk to my tutor as I thought they would put me off the course if I told them I suffered from this condition due to the stigma attached to mental health. I was also scared that my class mates would find out and they would pass comment on my condition.

This case study clearly demonstrates how the stigma affected this student as they felt like they could speak openly about their condition.

The strategy must recognise that stigma effect different students in different ways. Gender, age, sexually, disability and race.

The research that NUS Scotland have conducted 'breaking the silence' and 'think positive' these both demonstrate how mental health effects students and highlights barriers and stigma to name just a few . There research will be a vital part in putting the issues affect students out there and should be used to help the government build their research into the new mental health strategy to ensure the student mental health is of high importance over the next four years.

Furthermore the new strategy should build on the work of other organisations out there that challenge the stigma of mental health like 'See Me' and encourage colleges universities and associations to take up the pledge.

Suicide

Suicide prevention and awareness must be a key priority in this new strategy and must develop how suicide prevention work is pursued in the voluntary sector and what is been done within intuitions.

Student suicide is an important issue and should be recognised in the new strategy .There are serious concerns around student suicide rates in Scotland which has been backed up by information from on campus counsellors and support staff.

My concern as a student is that the sector is now facing potential cuts to these services and student who need this support will potential not receive it in time.

Training could also play a part in being a preventative measure with the likes of SAFE talk across colleges to ensure through other members of staff they would have the knowledge and vital skills to approach student who they believe could be in this distress.

Support services

Through my experiences with working with student and suffering mental issues myself I believe that that colleges and universities don't go far enough to maintain and develop these vital service e.g. on campus counselling , drop in centres and student support groups. I believe now is the time to make this one of the main focus and areas for development.

Conclusion

Barriers

There is a number of barriers student face when thinking about coming forward to ask for support. This could be improved by working in partnership with external services and voluntary services in the community.

Tackling Stigma

The new strategy must work to tackle the stigma attached to mental health issues and work with the voluntary sector to tackle the multiple layers of stigma.

Suicide

The student suicide in Scotland need to be addressed and must be recognised that institutions should engage in suicide awareness and prevention. Vital training need to be a priority so institutions can ensure that their students have the crisis support they need.