

BRIEFING:
**Reducing mental health
stigma and discrimination in
schools – the benefits of
a local authority approach**

November 2020

Authors: Dr Pamela Jenkins, Jo Finlay and Julie Cameron / The Mental Health Foundation



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Research suggests that one in ten children and young people aged between five and 16 years old have a clinically diagnosable mental illness,¹ and that one in seven 11-19-year olds report their mental health as either poor or very poor.² Further, 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24.³ Mental health stigma and discrimination afflicts the lives of many young people and can prevent them from talking about mental health and seeking the help that they may need. It is widely recognised the removal of stigma and discrimination is foundational and creates the best conditions for mental wellbeing, preventative action, early intervention, personalised support, care and treatment and for recovery.

The See Me programme in Scotland is at the forefront of international efforts to eliminate mental health stigma and discrimination. See Me's ambition is to create lasting positive change towards mental health inclusion; to reduce stigma and end discrimination related to mental health. See Me combine community development, equality and human rights principles and approaches to influence change in policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours within a range of domains at national, local and community levels. The See Me programme works on an evidence-based, social contact model, with the voice of lived experience at the core. Education and Young People (EYP) is one of five core programme areas within See Me.

The See Me Education and Young People (EYP) programme provides training and resources to increase mental health literacy and tackle mental health stigma and discrimination amongst young people. The See Me EYP intervention is a targeted, systematic intervention, that aims to build capacity and agency in education to tackle stigma in schools over several years. The See Me intervention is available to all schools in Scotland. In 2018-2019, See Me delivered their cascade training model of Enhanced Mental Health First aid to teachers and senior pupils at 22 schools, in four local authority areas in Scotland.

See Me are currently building on this approach and are piloting a structured 'Toolkit' delivery model, offering a sustainable intervention for mental health and stigma reduction in education.

The See Me programme evaluation, Phase 2 (2016-2019)⁴ was carried out by the Mental Health Foundation Scotland, to critically evaluate the See Me programme and to provide insight into key successes and areas for growth within the programme. This briefing presents a key finding of the EYP evaluation – **the benefits of a local authority approach** to reducing stigma and discrimination in schools, based on evidence of the success of the See Me EYP programme in North Ayrshire. The briefing takes an appreciative stance; the focus is on an approach to stigma reduction that is working well in one local authority, with a view to highlighting how and why a similar approach may also work well elsewhere. Further information on appreciative approaches can be found here: www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/

Successes of Delivery

Figure One details the successful reach of the See Me EYP programme in schools from November 2016 to September 2019. The See Me evaluation found that the EYP programme has been welcomed by schools across Scotland. Findings suggest that the See Me EYP programme training improves mental health literacy amongst pupils and builds confidence to talk about mental health and to identify and approach sources of support. Participants were supportive of the See Me training and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Teachers and senior pupils said that the See Me training was engaging and empowered them to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination in their schools. Further, the evaluation uncovered strong evidence of the positive implementation of learning through school activity, and progress towards the reduction of stigma and discrimination in schools across Scotland.

Figure One: Reach of See Me EYP programme, Nov 2016 - Sept 2019

30 schools engaged	420 teachers trained
27,059 pupils reached	1047 School Champions trained

Barriers to Implementation

The See Me evaluation also highlighted several challenges and barriers to implementing the See Me training programme in schools across Scotland. These include:

- Challenges associated with engaging schools and the uptake of the See Me programme training, including obtaining senior leadership buy-in at individual school level.
- Barriers to implementation of See Me training within schools, including resistance from teaching staff to engage and reluctance to engage their pupils.
- Lack or loss of leadership in schools who take part in the See Me programme, where the lead contact leaves post.

Learning from North Ayrshire

In 2017, schools in North Ayrshire were enrolled on the See Me EYP training programme. At that time, preparations for staff and senior pupil training delivery were undertaken. Due to unforeseen circumstances, North Ayrshire temporarily withdrew from the See Me programme. See Me maintained a close relationship with the local authority however, and in May 2018, they held a development day with intersectional and multi-agency partners. The aim was to share good practice on school mental health activity across the local authority. See Me facilitated the day and drafted a follow-up report.

Creating a Strategic Direction

Subsequently, in February 2019, North Ayrshire's Education Service created a Mental Health Operational Group (MHOG). The group aimed to demonstrate rationale behind key mental health deliverables and a sustainable approach to mental health intervention delivery in schools. Multi-agency partners and representatives from the health, education, third and social care sectors sit on the group. The group brings together professionals and practitioners who have a role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, parents/carers and staff, and in creating opportunities that allow schools to implement universal mental health approaches within the curriculum alongside more targeted support measures. The MHOG facilitates a coordinated approach amongst senior leaders in the local authority, to address mental health and to tackle mental health and stigma and discrimination in schools, as part of an overarching mental health and wellbeing strategy.

See Me are a core strategic partner of the North Ayrshire MHOG. See Me ensured that anti-stigma and discrimination was designated an essential function of the group and facilitate the embedding of anti-stigma and discrimination practice in mental health delivery in schools in North Ayrshire.

In North Ayrshire, participation in the See Me EYP programme training is strongly encouraged for all schools. This is supported and overseen by the MHOG, which works in partnership with schools to deliver the programme. The group and strategic partnerships have been essential to delivery of the See Me programme in schools in North Ayrshire:

We needed buy in from senior management in the authority...we didn't want a situation where we said to schools, yes, you can do this and then we had [just] two schools buying in.

(MHOG member)

Establishing a strategic operational group for mental health, underpinned by anti-stigma and discrimination, has been positive for mental health delivery in education in North Ayrshire. The group facilitates learning across the sector and aims to ensure equality of mental health service provision in the local authority.

Figure Two: MHOG Aims

North Ayrshire Mental Health Operational Group Aims

- To provide consistency of MHWB activities and initiatives implemented in schools and the wider community in North Ayrshire.
- To coordinate mental health activity in schools in North Ayrshire.
- To support positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes in schools.
- To influence and oversee operational delivery in schools and to engage external partners, where relevant.
- To support a culture of effective implementation within education and between agencies.
- To minimise duplication of activity and develop a sustained approach to implementation.
- To ensure ongoing action and the reduction of multiple levels of planning.

Successful Partnership Working

Close partnership working between school leads for the See Me programme and the lead contacts on the MHOG has resulted in the successful implementation of the See Me programme for two consecutive years, and despite the COVID pandemic.

Participating teachers in North Ayrshire said that local authority collaboration and partnership working was key to successful implementation of the See Me programme training and learning within their schools. One teacher reflected:

I... like the fact that... it's from above the school, so they [the teachers] have to support it.

The relationship with See Me has been pivotal in North Ayrshire for building capacity to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination in schools. Operational Group members attribute this to See Me being core to the group from the outset. MHOG members also attributed successes to having a lead contact at each school who is motivated and engaged to tackle stigma and discrimination and address mental health. They also felt that the local-authority

wide structure overcame previous reluctance by some schools to participate, as it was encouraged centrally, more practicable and involved less time, money, and staff commitment.

Implementation and Outputs

Figure three highlights See Me programme delivery in North Ayrshire to date. Most recently, in October 2020, senior pupils from every mainland secondary school in North Ayrshire engaged in the pilot of the See Me Toolkit - the most recent iteration of the See Me EYP programme training. Further output successes in North Ayrshire include:

- Improved and transparent planning and communication across the local authority, including the delivery of the See Me programme and school counselling services.
- Strategic sharing and distribution of information across the local authority.
- Collaboration with agencies delivering programmes in other local authorities.
- Multidisciplinary learning and influencing.
- Implementation and evaluation of new initiatives, including See Me.
- The implementation of training programmes in schools, including See Me.
- The embedding of the health sector, public health and CAMHS, to provide updates on current practice and resources for schools.

Figure Three: See Me Delivery in North Ayrshire

See Me Delivery in North Ayrshire, to date:

- In 2019, 240 senior pupils and 18 teachers, from all eight mainland North Ayrshire secondary schools, took part in the See Me schools training.
- Currently, all eight mainland schools in North Ayrshire are taking part in the pilot of See Me's new 'Toolkit' programme in schools.
- In June and October 2020, over 100 senior pupils and 26 teachers took part in the first stage of the training and completed an online module on mental health, stigma and discrimination. The pilot is due to run for six months.

Key Success Factors

Several key elements are relevant to the successful implementation of a local authority approach in North Ayrshire. As well as urging that all schools participate, a local authority approach can build capacity within schools to tackle stigma and discrimination. North Ayrshire demonstrates that a local authority approach can ensure that programme delivery is coordinated and overseen in a manageable way in every secondary school and has the potential to affect change over several years. A local authority approach also makes anti-stigma and discrimination work in schools scalable. By embedding See Me in the operational group, providing See Me training to all schools and strategically coordinating mental health service provision across schools in the local authority, a foundation of anti-mental health stigma and discrimination has been established, upon which to build further activity and programmes of work.

Benefits of a local authority approach

- A local authority approach helps to remove barriers to implementation of mental health and wellbeing programmes of work in a sustained way.
- A local authority approach provides schools with a directive to act to reduce mental health stigma and discrimination and improve mental health and wellbeing.
- A local authority approach is the first stage in establishing sustainable and scalable anti stigma and mental health and wellbeing intervention programmes in schools.
- A local authority approach can build capacity within schools to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.
- A local authority approach can link across local authority services, to better target wider mental wellbeing and issues of stigma and discrimination, for example in workplaces and the community.
- A local authority approach that links services offers a holistic method to mental health stigma and discrimination that is better placed to target intersectional issues.

Recommendations for Local Authority Senior Leadership in Education

- Explore current mental health and wellbeing work ongoing in schools across the local authority.

Map what is happening and where and use this information to identify potential partners, to highlight gaps in delivery and to develop solutions.

- Make contact with senior education leaders, school staff and partner organisations within the local authority and invite to form a strategic mental health operational group for schools. This should include See Me.
- Backing from Head of Schools, Director of Education, or equivalent for local authority is required to drive work forwards and ensure sustainability.
- Direct mental health and wellbeing work collaboratively from the operational group, across schools in the local authority.
- Underpin activity with a mental health and wellbeing strategy, developed on a foundation of anti-stigma and discrimination.
- Link services across the local authority, to target wider issues of mental health stigma and discrimination and create a holistic approach.
- Mandate, or strongly encourage schools to take part in See Me programme training.

A local authority approach to the reduction of stigma and discrimination and to mental health and wellbeing in schools, such as that established in North Ayrshire, has been successful and demonstrates good practice. Similar implementation may be achievable and successful in other local authorities in Scotland.

A big thank you to the North Ayrshire Mental Health Operational Group and the staff of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mental Health and Wellbeing workstream. Thank you also to our wider, multidisciplinary pool of public, private and third sector partners.

Endnotes

¹ Audit Scotland (2018) Children and Young People's Mental Health. Accessed 14 July 2020: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180913_mental_health.pdf

² Mind (2019) Three in five young people have experienced a mental health problem or are close to someone who has. Accessed 14 July 2020: www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/three-in-five-young-people-have-experienced-a-mental-health-problem-or-are-close-to-someone-who-has/

³ Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. (2005). Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Archives of General Psychiatry, 62 (6) pp. 593-602. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593.

⁴ The full reports for the See Me, Phase 2 programme evaluation can be found here: www.seemescotland.org/about-see-me/how-we-are-making-a-difference/three-year-evaluation-reports-2016-2019/