

Investing in Children Membership Award™

Re-evaluation of Young Healthwatch Bedfordshire (HWCB)



Introduction

Healthwatch was created by the Health and Social Care Act, 2012. They are part of a network of local Healthwatch which helps to ensure that the views and feedback from patients and carers are an integral part of the design and delivery of local services. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high-quality health, social care, and wellbeing services for across Central Bedfordshire.

Young Healthwatch facilitates volunteering opportunities for children and young people from 13-25 who have something to say about the health and social care services they use – that's everything from their school nurse or GP to their local hospital and support services.

The activities and projects developed by Young Healthwatch volunteers helps to inform young people in Central Bedfordshire on what is happening locally within health and social care services.

Young Healthwatch volunteers share tips they can pass on to other young people, including information about local support groups, and their experience of how to get the support they need.

HWCB champion the voice of the young person and are guided by what they think, feel and believe.

For this re-evaluation, both myself and Beth (IiC Sessional Worker) met with the following young people via a Zoom call to hear all about the work they do and the ways in which they have a voice that leads to change.

I would like to say a BIG thanks to Elli (18), Jeevan (17), Abi (18), Emily (15), Grace (17) and Khyem (17) and Anna (The Youth Engagement and Volunteer Co-ordinator for helping me gather the evidence to write this report.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Evidence of Dialogue resulting in Change from Children and Young People

To start our discussion, each volunteer said a good thing about the project and their involvement:

“It is good how YHW meet regularly (monthly) to talk about our own experiences or to hear from people who want our help. We do projects and our own voice is involved in them!”

“I really enjoy being a part of YHW as its for different ages so we get a variety of different opinions.”

“I really enjoyed the project investigating Autism/ADHD and how we helped feedback to neuro services.”

“When we gave feedback on the Mental Health badge. This is a badge for those who are qualified in mental health so that people know they are trained! We said what the badge should look like and be called.”

“Joining with other organisations such as South Bank Universities and the mental health evaluation. We have an abundance of opportunities.”

“When I first started, I did it so I could add more to my CV but the more and more I got involved, I did it because we get to feedback and meet others from different backgrounds.”

“It has given me the confidence to start my own project around the benefits going to the gym and exercising has on your mental health.”

“At the end of last year, we attended the ‘Voice for Change Conference’. It was mainly aimed at Primary age children. We got to run a table and talked about relationships and came up with scenarios to discuss. We helped a bit with these and assisted in the delivery of the session.”

“I really enjoy YHW as it’s the freewill to do anything you want. There are loads of things we talk about like one time it might be about smoking and vaping and the next around breast cancer.”

“It has helped me on the social aspect.”

“One thing is that the projects are so flexible and generally interesting. We are able to communicate on a regular basis in different areas.”

We then went on to talk about the agendas and the group explained who decides what is discussed: ***“It is a bit of both. Sometimes they come with ideas and other times we can bring things up.”***

“It’s equal in what we do!”

Emily said: ***“One of the projects was about GP appointments and I asked people’s opinions”.***

Elli then went on to say: ***“I asked about doing a project in the Summer and they got me the connections”***

Medequip project

Medequip are commissioned by Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Community Equipment Service (BLMK CES) to provide a range of equipment to help people live independently.

The team approached Young Healthwatch volunteers as they have recently moved into new offices and were looking for young people to provide artwork to go on the walls.

The artwork was a young person's design of their choice but needed to be created by the young people of Central Bedfordshire. Young Healthwatch were keen to support such a key community service and express their views and thoughts through a different medium; art and drawing.

“We were asked to create something using an A3 sheet showing the things that make you happy.”

“I drew nature and my friends. Other members of Healthwatch also did things.”

Artwork is now displayed on the walls created by YHW which creates a more pleasant and visual experience for visitors and service users whilst collecting their equipment.

Time out Cards

Following on from the previous Investing in Children Membership Award™, YHW volunteers wanted to look further into how 'Time Out' cards were used in schools.

'Time Out Cards' are colourful cards that can be used as part of a behaviour management system. When a child feels the need to leave an activity in class, they can show the 'Time Out Card' to communicate their request.

YHW volunteers felt the 'Time Out' cards could be used more effectively in schools by teachers and young people.

The young people designed a survey which is currently being publicly promoted.

Khyem told us: ***“Me and Grace made a survey for young people involved in using time out cards.”***

“We discussed the questions we were going to put in the survey so they were easy to understand. We compiled it and sent it out.”

I asked the young people what were the results of the survey and was told: ***“The main one was that people don't feel they can leave or use them all the time and that not everyone knew what they are fully used for.”***

Feedback from the survey was analysed and recommendations created to send to local stakeholders and schools in the area. ***“We fed this back to Eleanor (worker at Young Healthwatch)”***

By schools acting on YHW's recommendations, young people will be more aware of 'Time Out' cards which will improve their overall classroom experience and help to reduce anxiety.

Get Active: Summer Project

Over the summer the group will be working on projects along the theme of "*what makes me happy*". They hope to encourage members to engage in activities that help them to feel active, for example, sports, volunteering, baking, walking.

One young person in the group talked about how being involved in the group has given her the confidence to do her own project in the summer. ***"I now have the confidence to start my own project. I spoke to Young Healthwatch about it and they told me it was a really good idea and offered me support."***

"It's about how doing exercise and going to the gym can improve your mental health!"

Following on from working in partnership with the READY trial (exercise for young people with depression), Young Healthwatch are looking to develop strategies to support mental health, fitness and wellbeing that are low-cost and accessible for young people.

"We are going to be doing a mini campaign."

This will be youth-led and supported by the Young Healthwatch meetings that will provide opportunities for young people to engage, as well as regular projects, feedback opportunities and events for young people sent via WhatsApp.

Lumi Nova Mobile Game

The young people told us that they have been using testing a gaming application for young people and have fed back on this application to ensure it is age appropriate, fun and something helpful and interesting.

Lumi Nova: Tales of Courage is an engaging child-led, parent/guardian supported therapeutic intervention that can be used on most smartphones or tablets. It facilitates graded exposures (the active ingredient of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) with psychoeducation to empower 7–12-year-olds with mild to moderate needs to learn to self-manage fears, worries and anxiety.

By feeding back on this resource, young people have ensured its continual improvement and success.

"It's an app for younger children. We were asked to play the game and then review it."

"We looked at the formatting, how useful it is and what improvements."

We asked the group what changes they suggested and did these happen; **“Yes, we made quite an impact on the changes. Anna (our worker) was great at communicating.”**

“It was sort of formatted like a game and had a text box with information in but we asked for them to change the typing speed.”

“There was a lot of information so we said to keep people interested they needed to condense it and not make the sessions as long.”

“We also fixed some of the bugs and changed the layout of it.”

Health and Wellbeing Conference

Young Healthwatch volunteers were keen to create an event that addressed the challenges and highlighted the struggles that young people experienced during the Pandemic but which also allowed them to do so in an interactive way that supported their mental health journey.

Since the Pandemic, the mental health of young people locally has been seriously affected by home schooling, lack of social interaction and huge upheaval. Young Healthwatch volunteers were keen for young people to experience an informative and action-packed day which also provided an educational element about local services available to support them.

On 24th October 2023, the Young People’s Health and Wellbeing Conference took place at Centre Parc’s, Bedfordshire. The day included a wide variety of workshop sessions from the Central Bedfordshire Council Careers team, local healthy lifestyle partners, Cambridge Children’s Hospital and CAMHS. As well as a comedian with lived experience of mental health and an interactive theatre company.

The full report can be found using the following link:

[Health and Wellbeing Conference for Young People 2023 - Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire \(healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk\)](https://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

You can also find a short video here:

[Health and Wellbeing Conference for Young People \(youtube.com\) https://youtu.be/WSIfKfQ8Q5Q?si=vRKE2_gekWHxnQvO](https://youtu.be/WSIfKfQ8Q5Q?si=vRKE2_gekWHxnQvO)

Unfortunately, none of the young people present, were involved in the conference but you can see their involvement via the above links. **“It was the previous young people that were involved.”**

Delegates feedback included how, **‘interactive’, ‘helpful’, ‘fun’,** and **‘even better than I thought’,** the day was. This was also reflected in the facilitators feedback who said how empowering it was to speak to so many engaged young people and to be able to offer support to young people on their mental health journey. They all felt the conference was well organised within a great venue.

The delegates were given a 'goodie bag' at the end of the day filled with information leaflets all donated from key services in Central Bedfordshire, as well as those services who attended on the day. The young people have been given ammunition to tackle the next step in their mental health journey as well as being able to spread the knowledge they gained from the conference amongst their peers.

Feedback from all those that ran sessions included:

Cambridge Children's Hospital:

'The young people were brilliant, and we were able to gain more feedback and more detail than expected, which was fantastic and that will be fed back into the project as we move through the next design and development stages.'

Central Bedfordshire Careers Team:

The feedback from the Careers groups showcased that young people felt they had, *'very little help or support in school, no real understanding of who their careers co-ordinators are or how to book appointments, little knowledge of apprenticeships or exploration of options other than 6th form. Parent carers who attended also felt like they didn't have much insight'*.

The Careers Team have received vital information they will use to enhance and develop the guidance young people are exposed to in school.

Discovery College and Better Dayz:

Discovery College and Better Dayz team said, *'engagement with the young people went really well during the conference and we got great feedback to use in our service improvement.'*

'In one of the sessions there was a young person who had previously attended a wellbeing session in one of the schools we worked with in Central Beds. Even though during that school session they did not engage that much, during the Healthwatch event there was a significant growth in participating alongside other young people. The reason they shared was due to the fact that we were a familiar face, and this environment was more casual. The young person also shared feedback about our delivery in that school, which is helpful for our School Project'.

'Another example is in the value of having young people and adults around the table, a space where listening, sharing and learning from each other can add great value to someone's toolkit when dealing with challenges. As we do invite parents/carers and other professionals to attend our community workshops, this was nourishing to see, and we will keep having that approach'.

MoreLife - Healthy Lifestyle:

'The age group we had at the sessions are ones we struggle to engage with. We received very positive responses from the following question- If you needed to access a weight management service, would you like a physical activity programme or sessions? They included what we already offer in our programmes which was reassuring. The responses from the questions will help

us shape future programmes and gave us good insight into what CYP would like support with.'

Sign Language Introduction Workshop

The young HW volunteers wanted to learn more about how to communicate with the seldom heard, deaf or hard of hearing community. The recently published Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan set out how all children and young people, including those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, will get the support they need to succeed in their education. The government have now introduced a GCSE for sign language with the aim to start first teaching from September 2025.

The young volunteers wanted to be able to support their peers with hearing disabilities and be more prepared. Therefore, on 5th March Young Healthwatch organised a training session for young volunteers to attend as an 'introduction to sign language course' facilitated and managed by 'Access Bedford' at the YHW offices. During the course, volunteers learnt how to sign the alphabet, basic sign phrases and the history behind the different methods. The course was managed by a deaf volunteer from Access Bedford.

"We were invited to take part in the workshop as we had a speaker come in who was deaf and they had an interpreter with them. It was something we all thought would be a good thing to do!"

All YHW volunteers felt the workshop was a 'real eye opener' and they very much enjoyed attending the workshop with adult volunteers from Healthwatch Central Beds, staff and Directors.

The course enabled the volunteers to really understand the day to day lives of a deaf, or hard of hearing person. It helped them to appreciate how to communicate and respect both young and older members of the community who may be deaf or hard of hearing.

"It was really good and we learnt a lot about inclusivity. We played lots of games like the alphabet game and it was really informative and opened a lot of discussions."

Given recent changes in legislation, YHW volunteers felt this course represented key learning to take forward and support their peers in school.

Another YHW volunteer who attended the course but was not online said:

"During the sign language meeting I got to learn some basic idioms such as "how are you?" and "can you help me". I found this very useful as you never know when you should need it. I also learnt how to spell out my name in BSL which is a cool skill to have."

Eating Disorder podcast

For some time eating disorders amongst young people has been increasing, even more so during the pandemic. The YHW volunteers were keen to raise more awareness and understanding of young people with eating disorders. This project was developed initially because a member of the group had a personal experience of eating disorders within their family. They wanted to raise awareness of the challenges, issues and concerns this can cause. They also wanted to help support other young people who were going through a similar experience, by raising awareness, understanding and support for the condition.

The young people felt they could spread the message and educate their peers through a podcast which is a popular platform to reach young audiences.

On 25th February 2023, the Young Healthwatch volunteers met with colleagues from a local charity, Hear2Listen, at their podcast studios in Shuttleworth, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. Staff at Hear2Listen spent the morning supporting the young people in how to host and record their podcast.

Young Healthwatch volunteers subsequently created four podcasts by interviewing the following:

- Service user Evie, aged 17, and her Mum
- Service user Oliver, aged 14, and his Dad
- Kathy, local teacher
- Marie, CAMHS eating disorder specialist nurse

The podcast included in-depth questions about how eating disorders has affected each of them in different ways, and each episode offered advice and support for others who may be in similar situations.

The full report of the project can be found here:

[YHW Eating Disorder Project - Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire \(healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk\)](https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

A link to the podcast has been widely shared with the young volunteers, local schools, Central Bedfordshire Council, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), CHUMS, East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT), youth groups, local charities, and other key stakeholders. In addition, the podcasts have been promoted via social media, Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire website and in Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's (HWCB) weekly Ebulletin and Newsletter.

None of the young people present were involved in the work but were aware of young people that were. ***“There were four others involved!”***

One member did state: ***“I did write the leaflets after though detailing things like signs, long term consequences, who it affects and the different types.”***

As a follow up to the podcast, the young volunteers designed and created a leaflet and an A6 booklet which has been shared with local schools and youth groups. These include key information, and signs to look for, relating to eating disorders in young people, 'how you can help', and key signposting to support groups. One leaflet is a shorter fold out leaflet and the other is a more detailed A6 booklet.

The podcasts:

[Healthwatch - Central Bedfordshire - YouTube](#)

The leaflets:

[YHW-Eating-Disorder-A6-Guide.pdf \(healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk\)](#)

[YHW-Eating-Disorder-Leaflet.pdf \(healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk\)](#)

Feedback received from Marie, the CAMHS Eating Disorder nurse:

"I would like to say that the podcast on eating disorders was an excellent idea and one that will be very useful to young people and parents. Increased awareness of eating disorders and the varieties is something I am very passionate about. The more people that are aware, means hopefully it will not be a taboo mental health subject and will be picked up by parents and professionals equally. Undertaking this podcast was fantastic and great to see the young people I work with speak passionately about their illness and this will be very useful for young people going forward".

Additional evidence of Dialogue resulting in Change provided by the organisation

15 Steps visit to Bedford Hospital

Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust comprises of Bedford Hospital and Luton and Dunstable University Hospital (L& D Hospital). In October 2019 YHW volunteers had undertaken an 'Enter & View' visit to Bedford Hospital to review services provided on their Paediatric wards. On 1st August 2023, YHW volunteers wanted to re-visit Bedford Hospital to see if they had acted on their previous recommendations.

Using their Enter and View Training and supported by the 15 steps Challenge, (which is an approach to service/quality improvement that focuses on 'walkarounds' and their first impressions of the service from both a visitor and patient perspective), the YHW volunteers developed several surveys to engage with patients, staff and parent/Carers about their experiences of the wards and services provided. The volunteers also made general observations on the Paediatric wards and general building, as well as sampling the patient food.

The full report can be found using the following link here:

[YHW 15 Step Visit to Bedford Hospital 2023 - Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire \(healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk\)](https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

Following their visit, the young volunteers wrote an extensive report which included key recommendations on how the patient experience can be improved from a young person's point of view. These included better food options for the patient, clearer descriptions for meals, allergy menu, promoting play specialists more widely around the hospital and more decoration on the ceilings in some of the Paediatric wards.

The hospital had also clearly made changes following the visit and report in 2019 and the volunteers observed that a post for a senior Mental Health Nurse to work with young people had been created. The hospital has also employed a psychologist who is supporting staff with wellbeing sessions. Hearing loops had been brought in for both Luton and Bedford sites, and the Patient Safety Matron has been training staff to use the equipment.

The Bedford Hospital visit, and report, has enabled the young people to influence change and improve children and young people's experience during their stay in hospital. It has also given them additional confidence in reporting and communicating their views, and empowered their voice.

The final report was sent to staff at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, local authorities, key stakeholders, and published on their website and via social media.

The Paediatric Matron from Bedford Hospital also gave their feedback on the visit by YHW volunteers:

“We were so pleased to welcome Young Healthwatch back to our Riverbank Children's Ward, Meadowbank Special Care Baby Unit and Children's Outpatients – it was a great opportunity to show them that we have acted on their recommendations, and more, since their visit back in 2019. A great deal of work has been done to improve facilities and experience for the children and young people we care for and their families, with a fully refurbished playroom and a dedicated ‘chill’ zone with gaming and entertainment for our older patients. The input from Young Healthwatch is invaluable in informing our vision for the future and continuous improvement to ensure we meet all our patients’ needs.”

This piece of work has been continuously developing over the years and it was great to hear about the changes that have been made. None of the young people I met with were able to comment as it was a previous group involved, however, over the years the various young people I have spoken with as part of the membership process have been able to share their experiences and recommendations which are detailed above.

Ongoing work

The group are interested in developing a project around the rising rates of autism diagnoses and why young people feel the need to have a diagnosis. Discussions have started to investigate interest with young people, co-design a project, develop research questions and implement awareness campaign on autism. The group plan to do this in partnership with Autism Bedfordshire who they have connections with.

“We had some reps come in to talk about Autism and ADHD. They asked us for feedback on how people are treated, relating to your own experience. We feedback shared messages and directing them to the NHS and GP’s.”

They are also interested in the question of why cavities are so high in children which was raised by one of the volunteers. The group plan to establish connections with local dentists, engage in a visit to learn about cavities to co-create a project with young people and dentist.

“Recently we started looking at a dentistry project.”

Another volunteer shared how going to the gym can help to support your mental health and wellbeing. The group are now looking to develop work from the READY trial to develop this project and have connections with University of Hertfordshire and Be Active Bedford to facilitate.

St. John’s Hospice

Staff at St. John’s Hospice had heard of Young Healthwatch and their activities and asked if the young volunteers would visit the Hospice and review their services from a young person’s perspective.

St John’s Hospice is in Moggerhanger in Bedfordshire. They provide expert palliative and end-of-life care in the hospice and the community. They support patients and their loved ones, with everything from pain and symptom management to emotional and practical help. The hospice is keen to improve the service and the support they provide for young people when visiting family and friends in the hospice.

YHW volunteers are keen to visit and to see first-hand the support for young visitors to St. John’s Hospice. Prior to the visit they will develop questionnaires to help engage with patients, staff and relatives/Carers, and an observation form to review the different type of services available. In addition, they will review the variety of food available for the visitors as well as the general reception areas.

The young volunteers will review the Hospice website before the visit to see how user friendly it is and what support is offered to visitors.

The young people told us ***“We planned to go in April but it got postponed and we are just waiting for another date to be set.”***

Recommendations

Recommendations from children and young people

When the young people were asked if they would like any changes /recommendations to be made to the project, the only suggestion raised was to have more interaction with the Healthwatch.

Everyone agreed with the following statement: ***“It was really good when we met with the adult Healthwatch group and we should have more opportunities throughout the year to do this and work together. Every 3 months we should all meet up and discuss what we are working on and if there is any joint work we could be doing”***

liC recommendations

I agree with the recommendation made above and have no further recommendations.

Conclusion

It was incredible to hear all the ways that young people continue to have a voice within YHW. Over the years, the projects they work on have been decided and led by the group and they ultimately decide what goes on the agenda and is discussed. There is now equal balance within the project and this was great to see.

My report clearly demonstrates the ways their voice and other young peoples voice influences decisions that are made within services and the projects they are involved with.

When I asked the group if they felt Young Healthwatch should have its Investing in Children Membership renewed, everyone said yes 100%. I completely agree!

Well Done!

Endorsement by Young People

This report has been endorsed by the young people I met with.

***Eleanor Seed
Awards Manager
October 2024***

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