




Early evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer programme

A summary of interim findings



What is the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer Programme?

The Trailblazer programme, launched in 2018, is led by the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education and NHS England and Improvement. It is funding the creation of mental health support teams (MHSTs) and training education mental health practitioners (EMHPs) to work directly in educational settings. The MHSTs have three core functions:

-  to provide direct support to children and young people with **mild to moderate mental health problems**
-  to support educational settings to **introduce or develop a whole school or college approach** to mental health and wellbeing
-  to **give advice to staff** in educational settings and liaise with external specialist services to help children and young people get the right support and stay in education



What are we investigating?

We are undertaking an early evaluation of the Trailblazer programme to examine the:

- 1** development
- 2** implementation
- 3** early progress


of MHSTs in the first 25 areas participating in the programme (called Trailblazer sites).


Methods


-  Interviews
-  Surveys
-  Document review
-  Programme monitoring data





What have we found so far?

 Schools and colleges **welcomed the funding of additional capacity** to provide in-house mental health support, and the programme's focus on prevention and early intervention.

 Prior to Covid-19, Trailblazers were making **good progress implementing MHSTs**. The recruitment, training and transition into practice of the first cohort of EMHPs was widely regarded as a major achievement and all teams were operational by early 2020.


 Covid-19 had a **major impact, both on programme implementation and on day-to-day delivery** of the MHST service. Coupled with the impact of lockdown, some MHSTs found it harder to build relationships with staff in schools and colleges and establish the new service.


 MHSTs responded to the challenges that lockdown presented in three main ways: **using communications** and working with other services to try and increase referrals; switching to **remote delivery of support**; and **changing or expanding the support** they could offer.


 Early positive impacts reported by Trailblazers included **better partnership working, schools feeling more supported and school staff feeling more confident talking about mental health issues**.




What were the challenges...


 The **remaining gaps in support**, with particular concerns raised about a lack of support for children whose needs were not 'mild-moderate' but also not serious enough to meet the referral criteria for specialist mental health support.


 **Retaining EMHPs** was widely reported as a challenge. It appears that the EMHP role is seen as a stepping stone into other careers.

 There were **limitations in the reach and effectiveness of digital and online interventions**. Some children and young people were unable to access support online, and these were often the same children and young people whose lives and mental health had been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

...and enablers?

 A **receptive local context** and, in particular, pre-existing experiences of partnership working across health and education.

 **Co-production of the MHST service** and approach with children, young people, parents and carers.

 **Collaboration** between MHSTs and other local mental health services.



Where next?

In the next phase of the evaluation, we will be speaking to a wider range of stakeholders in six case study Trailblazer sites and undertaking focus groups with children and young people. Alongside this, we will undertake a second round of surveys with educational settings and key people involved in the set up and delivery of MHSTs. **Our findings will be shared in a second report to be published in summer 2022.**

Read more about the evaluation at:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/BRACE/trailblazer.pdf>

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