



Kayleigh Frost, Head of Clinical Support, Health Assured

Case Study

We spoke to Kayleigh Frost about the importance of providing mental health and wellbeing support for young people in secondary schools, before they head off to university. Kayleigh is Head of Clinical Support at Health Assured, the UK and Ireland's most trusted independent health & wellbeing provider. Health Assured partners with Endsleigh to provide Endsleigh's wellbeing services to secondary schools, universities, and colleges.

“A lot of this support needs to be driven by the caregivers. Those adults that are responsible for the support, guidance and nurturing of these individuals, whether that be a parent, guardian or school staff.”



Kayleigh explained that many school age children don't know how to ask for help. They don't know how to articulate the emotions they might be feeling and because many adults either aren't attuned to such nuanced approaches or feel uncomfortable talking about emotions, it's easy to brush off or invalidate what could be a cry for help.

“We need to talk about our mental health and not shy away from coming forward with our challenges. The issues still seem to come from adults. They get scared that they're going to say the wrong thing that they're going to offend the person.”

It's a jigsaw with many pieces that need to fit together. Caregivers need to learn to open up conversations with younger people so that talking about mental health doesn't become a taboo subject. It may not be something that comes naturally, so that's just as important to address as is access to professional support when it's needed.

“Normalising how important it is to talk about if you're sad, or if you're angry because when you're young you don't necessarily understand what anxiety is, but you can feel sad and you can feel angry and you can feel upset - and it's about opening up those conversations. I do see change though within the student community. They are more liberated and more empowered to talk about their mental health – we just need caregivers to hear what they are saying,” said Kayleigh.

Adults: teachers, parents, guardians, and caregivers need to step out of their comfort zone and provide the right environment to help empower these young people to speak up. Charities like Young Minds have lots of practical advice and tips on how to encourage your child to open up about their feelings, and services such as Endsleigh's Pupil Assistance Programme provides access to professional support and advice for teachers, parents and caregivers.

Sadly, communication between adults and young people is only part of the problem. Long waiting times for professional mental health support means the help isn't there when needed. A report this time last year by the Royal College of Psychiatrists¹⁴ said that extensive wait times meant more than three quarters of mental health patients were seeking help from emergency services, with 43 per cent saying long wait times lead to their mental health getting worse.

“It can be months and months before you can access help via the NHS and that depends if you meet certain thresholds. If you have what they determine to be low level depression or anxiety but are high functioning, it's unlikely you'll be offered support. But these are the people that are really at risk of developing serious mental health conditions. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provided by the NHS for example, I think the waiting list goes up to 24 months in some areas and to qualify you might have to be at 'severe' level. It also depends on where you live, some areas are more affluent and so access to support is a lot easier.”

“That's why services like Endsleigh's Pupil Assistance Programme and their Student Assistance Programme are so valuable,”* says Kayleigh. *“When a young person feels empowered to speak up there's someone they can talk to who can support them with whatever they need.”

¹⁴ Hidden waits force more than three quarters of mental health patients to seek help from emergency services (rcpsych.ac.uk)

University students might be more empowered to speak up about the mental health concerns, but they live in an environment which can compound their problems; drug and alcohol use, financial and academic pressures - and they need to be able to access support easily, and be assured they are speaking to professionals who understand their situation.

Young people who have learned the tools they need to cope with pressures, may find it easier to transition from school to university and from university to work life. While trauma you experience as a young person will not be the same as traumas you may face as an adult, it's easier to retain information when you're younger. Your brain has the capacity to absorb and be receptive to the skills you learn through counselling that will help you in later life.

Sadly, there is still a discrepancy between the number of men and women who seek support from counselling. "We see this right across the board from school age children up to adults," explains Kayleigh. "Figures are massively weighted towards that and what we see with male callers in our Employment Assistance Programme world is when it's at crisis point. It's men who are the ones with the trauma related cause, and we're going to be stuck in a bit of a cycle because they are a large proportion of the caregivers of the young people of today."

There is change afoot. We're helping to ensure younger male parents are going to be typically more liberated and empowered with their children in speaking freely about what they're feeling and offering support. But the generational issue that we've got here and now is something that really needs attention.

