



Young People's Rights Review

Angus MacDonald MSYP - Mental Health

I'm Angus MacDonald, and I'm here today to highlight the importance of mental health with relation to rights for young folk in Stirling and across the country.

I drew my consultation primarily from the Stirling Youth Gathering, which drew in over 200 young people, as well as a number of other conversations and correspondences with constituents in the student body and schools in Stirling.

I believe that the rights laid out in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provide a vital framework, not only for protecting the mental health of young people, but also for broaching and explaining a difficult topic in universal terms. Put simply, article 24 grants young people the right to live free from harm and access the best available healthcare - a right we, as a society, are unfortunately failing to uphold.

It'll come as no surprise to anyone aware of the state of our mental health institutions that CAMHS services are consistently failing to reach young people in good time - almost half of all admissions in the Forth Valley area in the most recent statistics took over 18 weeks to be seen, and several constituents have had to wait much longer still. One constituent was in fact on the CAMHS waiting list for a number of weeks before turning 18 and immediately being transferred to the even longer list for adult services, highlighting the issues with transitioning between support. Furthermore, there appears to be a persistent problem with visibility and understanding among young folk - only a minority of young people in Stirling feel they would know where to seek help, echoing the overall figures as found by SYP during the Speak Your Mind campaign.

The flipside to this is that mental health is a complex issue which can't be solved in isolation. Eradicating stigma and raising awareness are arguably just as important as improving support, and are vital for encouraging young people to access available services. In this light I'm pleased to report that one high school in Stirling has been working with SeeMe to implement a 'mental health champions' scheme - a peer support network for struggling pupils to talk to somebody they can trust - a scheme which will hopefully be replicated in other schools over the forthcoming years.

It's been observed by many that educators can play an important preventative role in identifying signs of mental illness and taking action before more serious issues occur. Indeed, as of last Saturday it is now SYP policy to provide training in dealing with mental health for all teachers in line with that undertaken by lecturers in most universities. Properly implemented, this would ease pressure on CAMHS services and help to ensure that young people don't slip under the radar.

Of course, rights play a huge part in forging the path towards this. I'd hope that properly implementing the new Mental Health Strategy and SYP's own recommendations from the *Our generation's epidemic* report will help.

In particular, SYP recommended that Education Scotland work with existing partners to develop a resource outlining young people's rights while accessing support.

SYP have also been active in creating resources to aid the transition between CAMHS and adult services in line with Action Point 21 in the Mental Health Strategy; given the feedback from my constituents, I would strongly urge the government to not only continue to support this work but to take specific action to address the concerns of those accessing services around the age of transition.

I would also back SAMH's suggestions of providing funding for counsellors in every school and doubling funding for CAMHS.

To conclude - all the evidence suggests there is no one silver bullet to the mental health epidemic my generation is growing up with. However, with the right willingness and imagination, there are straightforward steps which can be taken to ensure Scotland's youth are guaranteed the quality of life Article 24 of the UNCRC promises.

Thank you.