

Case for support

Children & young people's mental health and wellbeing support

June 2023

Background

The number of children and young people experiencing mental health issues is rising. A record number were referred to NHS youth mental health services in England last year: 1,239,838.

This rise has been fuelled in part by the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

The situation in Kent and Medway

Here in Kent and Medway, the situation looks even bleaker.

The number of children and young people identified with having a social, emotional or mental health need is getting worse.

Many young people with an autism spectrum condition diagnosis, or those waiting for an assessment, are struggling to get the support they need due to long waiting lists. For many, this is likely to further effect their emotional wellbeing.

When it comes to young people being hospitalised for self-harm, the admission rate in Kent is significantly higher than the figure for England as a whole.

In short, services in this county are struggling to cope with demand.



- **Many young people referred to NHS Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services aren’t getting the treatment they need.** 27,320 young people were referred to services in Kent and Medway in 2021-22. Nearly half (12,805 young people – that’s 46%) had referrals closed before treatment. The English average is 36%.
- **Waiting times for mental health support are increasing.** In 2021-22, only 16% of young people referred to NHS Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services in Kent and Medway were seen in less than four weeks. 1,425 young people waited longer than 12 weeks and 4,525 received no contact at all (for example, they may have had a letter to say their referral had been accepted but had no contact in terms of intervention).¹
- **Waiting times for autism spectrum condition assessments are even longer.** More than 9,000 young people referred for assessments and support in Kent and Medway had not received an appointment after 13 weeks.

Porchlight’s plan to tackle this issue

Porchlight will put extra support in place for young people by expanding its adolescent wellbeing service.

Porchlight’s adolescent wellbeing service gives 10 to 18-year-olds support to overcome mental health and wellbeing-related issues that are affecting their education, home life or relationships with family and friends.

It currently operates in Ashford, Deal, Dover, Folkestone and Thanet. The service is made up of six wellbeing workers and a service manager.

By increasing the service’s size and reach, it can work with more young people who wouldn’t be considered appropriate for support from NHS Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services.

What this will mean

Porchlight will increase the reach of its adolescent wellbeing service, allowing it reach more 10 to 18-year-olds.

Porchlight will also strengthen the support it gives to young people with autism spectrum conditions. This will ensure they get help when it’s required.

The service is already successful at reaching young people experiencing the greatest inequalities. In 2022/23:

- it supported 163 children and young people
- worked with them for an average of 95 days each
- just over a third of them lived in the county’s 20% most deprived neighbourhoods.



¹ [Waiting times for children and young people's mental health services 2021 - 2022](#)

65% of these young people supported by Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service experiencing 'low overall wellbeing' reported 'improved wellbeing' by the end of their time with the service (measured using the Good Childhood Index).

Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service is having to work with young people for longer due to the increasing amount with suspected or diagnosed autism. There has been a 14% increase in the number of young people who need to be supported more intensely due to the complexity of their needs.

Our three-year plan

This autumn, Porchlight will launch a three-year programme to grow the adolescent wellbeing service. It will:

- expand the workforce and begin supporting young people Canterbury and Swale
- build on staff members' skills and knowledge so they can respond to changing needs of young people they're working with
- strengthen relationships with other organisations to make it easier for young people to access our services, and to get the support they need
- develop the service so that it works with a young person's whole family (this is proved to be particularly important when working with autistic young people)
- work with a significantly higher number of young people.



Years one and two: Porchlight will recruit eight additional staff. It will introduce new training and tools to help them support young people who are autistic and / or have mental health needs. This will allow Porchlight to work with an additional 240 young people.

Year three: an anticipated 448 families will benefit from the new family-centred approach to supporting children and young people.

Costs

Making these changes will cost £865,549 over a three-year period. In the first year, it will cost £145,000. The remaining two years will cost roughly £360,000 each.

| | |
|------------|----------|
| Year one | £146,519 |
| Year two | £362,074 |
| Year three | £356,956 |

Case studies

Young person 'W' - aged 15

'W' identifies as non-binary and uses the pronouns they / them. They were referred to Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service following a meeting with NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services. 'W' has struggled with anxiety for a number of years. It has resulted in them being unable to cope in a school environment.

'W' has an identical twin called 'K'. Unfortunately, 'K' has struggled greatly with their mental health which has led them to be forcibly hospitalised on several occasions. 'W' tends to focus on the needs of their sibling rather than their own and often acts as a conduit between their parents and 'K' during those distressing and challenging times, particularly when K becomes non-verbal. 'K' has recently received an autism diagnosis and 'W' presents with significant autism spectrum condition traits but has opted not to be assessed.

'W' has struggled to connect or engage with other services. Their Porchlight adolescent wellbeing support worker built a rapport with them. It was hard because 'W' struggles with social communication and was very socially isolated. Eventually, 'W' was able to begin working on addressing some of the triggers for their anxiety.

'W' reports that this has changed their perspective and mindset in different areas of their life. As 'W' has grown in confidence and begun to see themselves as a person in their own right, they have slowly begun to try new things. This includes catching the bus alone and planning short day trips to the cinema. These are huge strides for 'W' who previously struggled to leave the house.

'W' has reported that the support they are receiving from Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service is very important to them. They say it has allowed them to understand themselves better and express themselves openly.

Young person 'X' - aged 13

'X' has attended nine Porchlight adolescent wellbeing service sessions and is due to finish soon. He attends Folkestone Academy and had a difficult time transitioning from primary school to secondary school during the pandemic.

'X' was referred to Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service for anxiety related to school and food. 'X' struggles to eat, drink, and use the toilet at school. He experiences a lot of anxiety around large crowds and open spaces, and struggles with too much noise. 'X' only feels safe to eat and drink at home. 'X' was also socially isolated outside of school as his school friends do not live locally to him and due to his anxiety about being in public without his family.

When he first started Porchlight adolescent wellbeing sessions, 'X' would set small weekly goals to try and eat safe foods and to sip some water. He also set goals around washing his hands in the bathroom. 'X' is making good progress in these areas.

'X' had previously been to a football club but had stopped attending. 'X' and his Porchlight support worker have worked on building his confidence so he can return to football – he recognises this helps him with his mental and physical wellbeing. Due to his mother's financial situation, 'X' was very concerned about not being able to afford to attend the club.

His Porchlight worker secured £270 of funding to help buy him a football kit, football and pay for a taxi so he can be part of the sessions.

'X' has very recently started to go into town on the weekends with his friend which is a big step for him. His confidence is continuing to grow as he pushes himself to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and achieve his goals.

Testimony from young people

“Receiving support has let me know there are people who want to help. They have shown me a way to tackle my anxiety.”

“It made a difference because I learned about my triggers and how not to respond to them so quickly. I got to really understand the self-harm part, and now I have stopped. I feel much more in control of my emotions. I like coming here - you are not judged.”

“Things that would have made me anxious don't anymore. I can just get on with them. I don't freak out anymore. I wouldn't change anything about the support.”

“This service was amazing. At the start I felt like a 2 out of 10... now I am a solid 8 out of 10. Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service have been extremely supportive.”



Testimony from parents

“Porchlight's adolescent wellbeing service has made such a difference to my daughter and given her a spring back in her step. I cannot see anything that can be done differently to improve the service.”

“Whatever it is you are doing, it is working. Our son trusts you.”

“The service has really supported our son. He has developed strategies to deal with his anxiety. From his first session, he felt at ease and able to share his thoughts and feelings. His worker has been kind, patient, compassionate and a support to both our son and family.”