



Youth mental health in Norfolk.



Swan Youth Project support young people and their families with a variety of needs. Getting to know their young people really well and understanding what works for them is key to all of their support.

*Spark reports
don't shy away
from the big
questions.*

We chose to explore the issue of young people's mental health in this edition.

Sparks shine a spotlight on a subject in Norfolk. From this small but mighty publication, we hope to inspire conversations and action in our community.

This Spark captures our work and the work of our partners in a moment of time.

A huge thank you to all of our contributors, and especially to Interprint for bringing our words to life by printing this magazine.

We are always delighted to hear your thoughts or answer any questions you may have.

Please share this report with those you think may also find it of interest.

Claire Adams.

SPARK

/spa:k/ noun

- 1. a quality that makes something interesting, successful
- 2. an action that causes something larger to happen

Norfolk children
miss more
school

than the national average

5%

OF 16-17 YEAR-OLDS
ARE NOT IN
EDUCATION
EMPLOYMENT
OR TRAINING

1 in 3
grow up in
poverty

94% REDUCTION
IN PER-HEAD SPENDING
ON 5-17 YEAR-OLDS
BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES SINCE 2010

8% have mental
health needs

ALMOST 1 IN 5
NORFOLK CHILDREN HAVE

SPECIAL
EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS

ONE CHILD IN EVERY
CLASSROOM IS A
YOUNG CARER

Norfolk children
underperform
at every educational level
compared to the national average

17%

of Norfolk children are
eligible for free
school meals

Behind the
numbers,
Norfolk's young
people are
suffering.

Half of all lifetime mental health problems start by the mid-teens, and three quarters by the mid-20s. It is estimated that 1 in 5 children and young people in 2023 suffered a probable mental disorder. It is difficult to define what good and bad mental health is when it comes to young people. There is no comprehensive, regular, national measurement of children's subjective wellbeing, equivalent to what is in place for adults. Broadly, we might say that good mental health is when young people can think positively, feel confident, and act calmly. Bad mental health, conversely, could be defined as when young people's feelings, thoughts or actions become too difficult for them to cope with.

The mental health and wellbeing of a

young person is impacted differently by life's challenges, which affect them differently depending on their household income, level of disability, education or what support services they can access. Our modern age presents new and evolving challenges that will require different support to overcome.

In this report, we cannot cover all the issues affecting young people, and we cannot explore all the different solutions and opportunities communities have created to support them. We hope, however, to give an overview of young people's lives, a flavour of the challenges they face, and a look at the innovative and unique solutions supporting them that we are delivering in Norfolk with our charity partners. ♦

“Good mental
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01

Norfolk's distinctive character can present unique challenges for the mental wellbeing of its young people.

The problem in focus

Young people in Norfolk showed the highest levels of anxiety around returning to school nationally.

A generation in crisis:

why is it tougher here?



Claire Cullens,
Chief Executive

We all want our children to be happy.

Good mental health allows children and young people to develop resilience and grow into well-rounded, healthy adults. Our children's social and emotional wellbeing is important in its own right but is also important because it affects their physical health and can determine how well they do at school. Good social, emotional, and psychological health helps protect children against emotional and behavioural problems, violence and crime, and the misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Young people today experience the same things we did when we were young. They laugh with their friends, they get scared when they start new schools, they get upset if they are bullied, they experience the distress of poverty, and they feel the joy of good exam results. We, as parents and carers, can feel their joy and hurt, and we relate

this to our own formative experiences – but do we really understand the full picture?

In August last year, YoungMinds analysed NHS data and what they found was shocking. They revealed a threefold rise in urgent mental health referrals for under-18s in England over the past 4 years. Open referrals to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services peaked at 466,250 last May, highlighting the increasing youth mental health crisis nationwide.

It's no secret that we are currently facing a mental health emergency. Countless young people are being made to wait for months, if not years, after reaching a crisis point before being able to access the help they desperately need. Others are being turned away for not meeting the referral threshold for services, leaving them trapped in a vicious cycle where support is only available when it is too late.

The report released by YoungMinds has highlighted a range of challenges that have impacted young people's mental health over the past few years:

The increased use of social media and technology has led to the development of cyberbullying and the constant comparison to others online. Social media becoming more ingrained in everyone's lives means children cannot step away from negativity even when alone.

The pressure to succeed in school and future careers has caused 92% of young people to worry about finding a job and progressing in their careers. The cost-of-living crisis coupled with the competitive nature of education and the job market has caused many young people to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

The legacy of disruption caused by Covid-19, along with bereavement and trauma, has

adversely affected young people's mental health. Interruption to education was especially harmful, as schools are one of the main routes through which mental problems are identified and young people are supported. The pandemic has worsened the backlog of young people requiring support.

These challenges have affected children and young people nationwide, but they do not exist in a vacuum. Analysis has revealed that young people in our region suffered more than young people anywhere else in the country during the pandemic – but why?

Our county poses unique challenges that are not faced by young people everywhere. At the Foundation, we hear from young people and those who care for their wellbeing, and we take time to understand the challenges they face.

We are seeing a decline in youth mental health because of the absence of timely, local provision. Youth mental health in Norfolk has been made worse by poor access to local mental health services, and despite taking strides to improve, services still have a long way to go. Waiting times for help with a non-urgent mental health condition are still too long, and there have been reports that some children and young people can wait for over a year before they get their first appointment with a specialist. When children and young people are kept waiting, their mental health can deteriorate further, entrenching the problem.

Even when young people can access this support, it usually means having to travel. We know that transportation in Norfolk is poor, especially in rural areas. This

“Our county poses unique challenges that are not faced by young people everywhere.”

can leave young people physically disconnected from their friends and activities in nearby towns as well as mental health services. Digital workarounds commonly used elsewhere, such as online counselling, are also more challenging in Norfolk due to our much slower-than-average fibre internet and poor mobile internet coverage.

The impact of the pandemic was also felt more acutely here. Local domestic abuse charity Leeway received three times their usual number of calls during lockdown, and many young people in Norfolk witnessed or experienced domestic violence. We also heard from young people with special educational needs who felt the impact more acutely. They told us they had to face their own daily challenges alone, cut off from their communities and support networks. The psychological consequences of this are only beginning to emerge.

A mental health summit for community organisations hosted by the Foundation during lockdown revealed that some

Norfolk charities experienced a 70% increase in demand for their youth wellbeing services. More recently, the Foundation has seen this increase in need reflected through requests for funding. Funds for youth mental health projects are regularly oversubscribed, sometimes by up to 200%.

It is important that we, as a society, recognise these challenges and work to provide support and resources to help young people manage their mental health. At the Foundation, we have been supporting children and young people's wellbeing for almost two decades, but over the past 3 years, we have ramped up our activity to respond to this crisis. We actively consult not just with groups that support young people, but with young people themselves. Young people tell us that they don't want to be medicalised or taken away from a familiar setting; they want a place near them where they can go to see somebody who they trust, who believes in them, and who wants what is best for them. We are told time and time again what they want and need. The solution is clear.

The answer lies in our communities.

Local charities and voluntary groups tailor their support to the needs of the community and provide a personalised approach that makes sense to local people. Whether they support young people who require specific support based on their age, culture, ability, or background, or whether they just need a local place to go and have their voice heard, these organisations are vital. If young people can receive support within their community, we can address their emerging mental health needs before they get to crisis point. ♦

WHY DON'T YOUNG PEOPLE JUST...

Young people have always faced challenges, stress and worries. So why is their wellbeing under more strain now?

- THE PROBLEM IN FOCUS -

In a world where young people are increasingly in front of screens, those who grew up in the 70s, 80s and 90s might suddenly be reminded of the familiar catchphrase: 'Why-don't-you-just-switch-off-your-television-set-and-go-and-do-something-less-boring-instead?' The programme encouraged children to explore the world outside of their TV, and some would argue this premise needs a 21st-century revival.

Recent figures from Ofcom suggest that 1 in 5 16-to-24-year-olds spend as many as 7 hours online every day. This big change coincides with a huge decline in the mental wellbeing of Britain's young people. It would be naïve, however, to suggest that technology is solely to blame for the rise in mental ill-health among young people. So what is on those screens? And what lies outside of them? And how does this hold back young people's mental wellbeing?

Young people in Norfolk are not held back by a lack of ambition or initiative. We know this first-hand from the work we do with them on funding panels and community projects. They are not fundamentally different from young people 30 years ago when 'Why Don't You...?' stopped airing. What does hold them back, however, are new and unprecedented challenges. As well as online pressures, young people are living in a present where they feel disconnected from their communities and are looking to a future where the economy and their future job prospects do not look promising. And, of course, this affects their mental health and wellbeing.

Drawing on our combined expertise and experience of working with young people, we asked our team and wider network for their thoughts on the challenges children and young people are facing today.



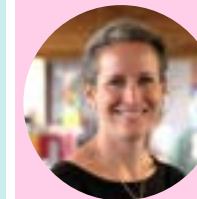
**Simon Bailey, Former
Chair of Norfolk
Community
Foundation
and former member
of the National
Police Chiefs' Council**

'From smartphones and social media to TV and tablet-based games, technology has also become an integral part of young people's lives. Although it's crucial for children and teenagers to become tech-savvy since they will use electronic devices throughout their lives, there are growing concerns around the impact on their wellbeing.'

The US-based Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) carried out research recently that showed that TikTok's 'recommendation algorithm' pushes self-harm and eating disorder content to teenagers within minutes of them expressing interest in the topics. It is evident that immediate action is needed to protect young individuals from harmful content related to self-harm and eating disorders. The passive exposure to such damaging material highlights the importance of educating and empowering young people to navigate the digital world safely.

Creating safe spaces outside of traditional environments like home and school is crucial in addressing these issues. By partnering with youth organisations and identifying knowledge gaps, we can offer targeted solutions to equip young individuals with the necessary skills to recognise and respond to online dangers. We need to empower communities to safeguard vulnerable young people and foster a supportive network that actively combats harmful online influences. We were able to offer training through the NSPCC to 9 youth groups in Norfolk to better equip them with the skills they need to protect young people online.

"Creating safe spaces outside of traditional environments like home and school is crucial in addressing these issues."



**Katy Rutherford,
Director of
Innovation &
Insight, Norfolk
Community
Foundation**

'When we think of loneliness, we almost immediately think of older people. Perhaps surprisingly, however, young people are over five times more likely to be chronically lonely than those aged 65 and over. The detrimental effects of loneliness are far-reaching and can contribute to mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Preventing loneliness is therefore a key area where communities can provide support to prevent harm to young people.'

Young individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) are twice as likely to be bullied as their non-LGBT peers. Some experience rejection when coming out to friends or family members, so having a space where they feel safe and comfortable to be themselves is essential. We have helped to fund Norfolk LGBT+ project's BLAH LGBT Youth Groups, which allow young people to truly be themselves in a supportive environment. This not only reduces their loneliness and isolation but also increases their confidence and self-worth.



**Jessica Middleton,
Norfolk Community
Foundation Trustee
and Insight
Manager for BBC
Children in Need**

'Not being able to afford enriching and fun

activities can mean that children's essential and transformational relationships with peers, family members, and trusted adults are impacted, affecting their wellbeing, the opportunity to experience new things, and to develop core skills.'

The proportion of children living in poverty has been steadily increasing for decades. Often, things that are so often seen as nice-to-haves, such as days out and after-school clubs, are the very things that make life worth living and act to bolster good mental health and wellbeing. When families are struggling financially, spending priorities are stripped back to the essentials of food, fuel, and accommodation. The cost-of-living crisis, however, means that even these basics are under threat, putting more strain and pressure on families near the breadline. It is essential that young people are afforded the opportunity to experience new things and develop the core skills they need to become physically and mentally healthy adults.

Young people feel the benefit of many of our projects, such as Nourishing Norfolk which supports families with one of the absolute basics: food. Through both these local food hubs and local youth groups we work closely with, young people have had a fantastic opportunity thanks to repeated donations of tickets from Norwich City Football Club. Hundreds of young people have been able to see professional games for free thanks to the scheme. Heidi, at the Food Pantry, said: 'We gave a grandma football tickets. Her 6-year-old grandson lives with her and life is tough. She was moved to tears, absolutely overwhelmed. Never would they be able to do something like that without this offer.'

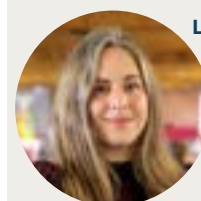


Catrin Hamer,
Senior Programmes
Advisor, Norfolk
Community
Foundation

'Grant funding applications are increasingly coming in to provide support for young

people who are presenting with moderate-to-severe mental health problems. A few years ago, charities would not have been applying for grants for this kind of work; it was thought of as the role of mainstream medical services. We have become almost desensitised to seeing it.'

Community organisations are addressing increasingly complex issues. For example, The Norwich Centre was able to use funding secured by Norfolk Community Foundation from the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System to provide free counselling sessions for young people. This funding has had a huge impact on young people who otherwise would have had to wait for a long time to receive support. They told us about one young woman who felt she was at rock bottom, full of regrets, with nowhere to live and feeling desperate. There was no-one else she could talk to and she didn't want to burden friends who had their own things going on. She was delighted to be seen quickly, and that her full sessions could start the following week. She said it felt relaxed and not clinical there. The client has now settled into her sessions which she says are really helping her think things through and decide what to do next, in a safe and calm environment. Being able to quickly speak to a professional counsellor made a huge difference to this young woman, but with more and more young people requiring higher-intensity support, it is vital that help is more widely available.



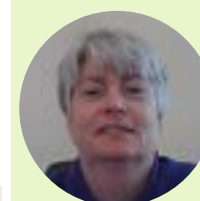
Laura Wigby, Director
of Programmes,
Norfolk
Community
Foundation

'Early intervention is about identifying and addressing mental health issues early, offering support and treatment to prevent things from getting worse. Early intervention can also help young people build resilience and develop positive coping skills that can benefit them throughout their lives. These types of

interventions are not exclusive to healthcare settings.'

We recently funded The Benjamin Foundation to help cover the core running costs for their youth projects in Watton for the next two years. Youth workers experienced in helping young people tackle everyday challenges, like bullying as well as more serious issues around mental health or drug use, are present at every session to help young people build resilience and prevent mental health problems from developing. As well as helping young people already in attendance, this funding is also helping them bring new young people in need of support to the club.

Other projects, such as EP Youth in Fakenham, have been able to take this a step further and have used funding to offer one-to-one support to young people who are showing early signs of mental ill-health. Intervening early before problems become more acute is vital. Not only does this help to alleviate long waits for support, saving the young person from unnecessary distress in the meantime, but it also reduces pressure on statutory mental health services too.



Terry Macrowan,
Manager of Great
Yarmouth and
Gorleston Young
Carers

'We've seen an increase in levels of young carers who are being referred to us, and the number of these young people coming into our service, either after or while awaiting to be supported by mental health services', explained Terry. 'This can be a result of the parent/guardian's mental health, financial struggles or housing issues. But we are all aware it is still the hidden carers who continue to suffer in silence until they reach a point where they are then identified through their behaviour, low attendance or poor schoolwork.'

Multiple studies have found that young carers experience worse mental health outcomes compared to their non-caregiving peers. Young carers often report feelings of anxiety and depression, lower levels of self-esteem, negative effects on their health-related quality of life, and can display higher instances of antisocial behaviour.

Last year, we were able to support Terry's important work at Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Young Carers with over £40,000 of support. The charity aims to offer a seamless support package to young carers (5-16) and young adult carers (17-19) who live across the Borough of Great Yarmouth to have respite from their caring responsibilities and a chance to meet and make friends with other young people in similar situations and develop a support network.

While we may be tempted to ask 'Why don't young people just go out and do something less boring instead?', we must bear in mind the challenges they are facing – both new and old. Despite the complexity and scale of the challenges facing young people today, we know that there are ways to make sure that children don't miss out and have the support they need. Each year, the Norfolk Community Foundation funds a range of vital projects that support children affected by poverty, loneliness, and the pressures of growing up. Local places where young people can leave daily pressures behind and find a supportive environment outside of home and school are key to supporting their wellbeing. If we can get these basics right, we can raise a generation prepared for the challenges of the future. ♦



Adam Baker,
Communication &
Insight Manager





When we focus on big numbers, it's easy to lose sight of the stories behind the figures. Each number represents a real person with their own struggles, emotions, and experiences. We spoke to real people in Norfolk who have been impacted by the youth mental health crisis.

02 IN THEIR SHOES

THE HIDDEN HEALTH SERVICE

What does it feel like to be a young carer in Norfolk?

Across the UK, it is estimated that there are up to one million young carers. Young carers are people under 18 who help look after someone in their family, or a friend, who has a mental illness, physical ailment, disability, or addiction. In Norfolk, it is estimated that there are over 6,000 young carers, but with many flying under the radar, the real number of this 'hidden health service' is likely to be much higher.

We must never forget that behind the numbers, there are real people who need help and support. To find out more about what it feels like to be a young carer, I spoke to 'Jake', who gets support from Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Young Carers (GYGYC)...

Jake, could you describe for us a typical day in your life as a young carer?

I need to check my mum has taken her medications and to make sure she has

not taken too many (which she does tend to do as she forgets), help with heavy lifting, check she has what she needs and the list of information about calls she needs to make. I help Dad with the housework and cooking too and help with my two little brothers, who both have learning and behaviour issues.

What impact does being a young carer have on your life and wellbeing?

Draining, due to worrying all the time, when I am at school, when I do not know what is happening and how everyone is. My anxiety is high now due to this feeling I have all the time as I do not know what is happening at home.

And how do you balance your caring roles with schoolwork and your friends?

It gets in the way, as my friends do not know as I like to keep this private and



"ASK FOR HELP, SPEAK TO YOUR SCHOOL, THEY CAN REFER YOU TO HELP AND SUPPORT LIKE GYGYC ... IF NOTHING ELSE, SHARE HOW YOU FEEL WITH SOMEONE."

they do not understand when I say I cannot do that or I need to get home. I do feel lonely.

Is there anything positive about being a young carer?

When you know you're a young carer you can access support through GYGYC, you can speak to Terry and go to group where people are in the same situation, and you are able to talk. And playing Uno with Terry is great too!

If you could give advice to another young carer, what would it be?

Ask for help, speak to your school, they can refer you to help and support like GYGYC. And don't refuse the support that is offered, as it will help you and your family. If nothing else, share how you feel with someone.

There'll be people reading this that might now want to support young carers. How do you think they could do that?

Support the people and groups that support us.

The work of young carers is never unappreciated by those they care for, but it often goes unseen by society at large. Because of this, the average young carer cares for at least four years before anyone offers any help. When help is finally offered, young carers are often already struggling to cope, falling behind at school, becoming more socially isolated, or not being able to look after their own mental health. Caring for a relative can be overwhelming and stressful for young carers. In addition to the demanding responsibilities, they also worry about the health and wellbeing of their loved one.

We are fortunate to be able to support the vital work of charities that look after young carers' mental health and wellbeing, such as GYGYC, where Jake goes for respite, peer support, and help with his wellbeing. Sometimes, groups like GYGYC are the only place a young carer will go outside of their home and school. It is essential that we can support the core activities of these groups, which are crucial to a young carer's wellbeing. With a community-focused approach, we can continue to support this hidden health service and can bolster the wellbeing of these young people who are under so much more pressure than their peers.

We always work to ensure our grant funding is responsive as new needs emerge. Seeing the vast increase in young carers needing support, we worked to create new funding streams to help them get what they needed. We expanded our Millennium Trust for Carers offer for young carers, awarding small grants for things to help young carers enjoy life more. These small things, like music lessons, or equipment for a hobby or a short break, can make a huge difference to a young carer who is struggling to cope. We continue to fundraise for this essential initiative so we can support as many unpaid carers as possible. ♦



An interview with Jamie Kowalyk from Norfolk Community Foundation

Few discuss the challenges of supporting a young person in crisis. What does it feel like to be a parent trying to support children struggling with their mental health? How does a family cope with trauma? What do you do when every door you try is closed? We asked one Norfolk mum who received support from one of our funded projects about what it felt like to be a parent struggling to get her children the help they desperately needed, and how her life changed when she found the support they needed on her doorstep.

We have decided to keep the interviewee, the youth group, and young people mentioned anonymous. This is a story of youth mental health at breaking point. The following interview contains details of self-harm.

I do some voluntary work in the community, and I'm a local person so I've known about the youth project for a long, long time. I have an 18 year old daughter. She's grown up locally, and she's just doing her A-levels. She was really struggling with life in general. When I look back now, I think during Covid we thought she did really well. She was very, very resourceful. She taught herself to sew, to knit, to crochet, to do all sorts of things.

In her own words...

a parent's perspective.

She made a really big decision to leave the town and do Sixth Form nearby, but this was a massive step for her. I realised that there were some issues, and I really didn't know what to do. I think I was very fortunate coming in here. The youth worker and her team here were phenomenal. And I really think we wouldn't be where we are today with her if they hadn't got her the support. And if her dad and I hadn't got the support, because we all had a little support along the way as well.

The self harm was the worst. And on the outside she seemed absolutely fine, you know? She was getting on with her day-to-day. But it escalated quite quickly and even though I didn't believe she was going to do anything horrendous - I didn't feel she was suicidal, but I just... It was, you know, the marks on her arms, on the top of her legs and really trying to understand why. Why did she need to do that? You know, we felt we were a loving family. She had everything she needed, you know? Financially, we were secure as a family. We go on holiday. You know, all those things. But I mean, it obviously wasn't any of that; it was clearly what she was going through in her own world, in her own life.

My stepson had really bad mental health problems, which had gone on for years, and he resorted to alcoholism, ended up having a liver transplant. We were trying to get him the mental health support. And I suppose at the same time, we

thought we were shielding it, from her and her mental health. But actually, we probably never could have done that. We tried our hardest. I think that was some of the issue. He was 20, he'd been living in America and when he came back and we knew there were problems. Getting him mental health support was just... Well, that's why it got as bad as what it did, because we couldn't get him the support he needed until he was at crisis point. I think because we had struggled so hard to get my stepson the help that he needed, I suppose the fear was that if we couldn't get help for him, how will we ever get help for her? We did start to look at somewhere private, but it's a minefield. Where do you go? Who do you turn to? I felt I had this meltdown one morning, and then I came here.

That was the start of the turning point for my daughter - we know that. For us it was like a weight was being lifted from our shoulders. Then as time went on, I think she was coming here to see a support worker probably every week, and then it extended, but still things were still happening and I was like, 'Oh God, I just don't... I don't get it. I don't understand.' So then me and her dad, we came in. She talked to us, talked about how we can carry on that support at home and also taught us that we can't solve every problem, you know, because we're the sort of parents want to jump in and say 'What can we do to fix this? What can we do?' And I think we learned valuable lessons. We

learned it with my stepson, but we learned it again with my daughter - that you can't fix everything. Maybe it will never be fixed, but you'll get to the best point you can.

You know all the little issues, they feel little to us, but in her mind they were big issues. She wasn't quite where we felt she needed to be. And the youth group said she could access this funding for further therapy, and again it was that whole, 'Oh, great, then we've got that next level of support and maybe this will be the thing that that could really help her.' The youth worker always made it clear to us, you know, she's not a counsellor - she was really clear about what her role was and what she could do. This funding opened up another door for her, really.

I think it's a whole, holistic experience that we've all been a part of. I feel it's a strong, really safe environment. I felt safe talking to the youth workers and as a parent, I feel a very capable person, but I also felt very vulnerable and exposed because of what we've gone through with one child, it was like, 'Oh my gosh, we're going to go through this again.' I felt vulnerable, but I think the youth workers helped me to feel, as her mum that I shouldn't be too hard on myself and harsh on myself. I think, for my daughter, it's opened her eyes. I think they've really helped her to look at herself and to give her some key coping strategies as well. We're at the end of those sessions now and yeah, she's doing really well. ♦

A legacy of love

All it can take is one voice,
singing in the darkness

By Humphrey Berney



'I believe
if she had
received
the right
medical
support
here in
Norfolk
she
would
still be
alive
today.'

Humphrey Berney is one third of BRIT Award winning classical group Blake, selling over 3 million albums worldwide. With deep-rooted family ties to Norfolk, Humphrey has created a fund with Norfolk Community Foundation to support mental health and suicide prevention services in Norfolk. Along with the rest of Blake, he has hosted a series of concerts to raise money for the fund.

On November 15th, 2023, it was the eighteenth anniversary of my sister Rose taking her life. The scale of the grief, the impact on all that loved her and the feeling of such deep sadness that someone you love could get to the point where they feel that is the only solution is so terrible. Tragically, since her death I have met so many other families who have lost a loved one to suicide and the situation is only getting worse. Rose was 28 and I believe if she had received the right medical support here in Norfolk she would still be alive today.

In the shadow of her death I wanted to start something in her memory which would allow us to raise money for a fund in her name, focused on helping young people in Norfolk struggling with their mental health and ultimately prevent another young person taking their life. From this The Rose Berney Memorial Fund was created. Through my work as one of the singers in the classical singing group Blake, I organised an annual summer outdoor concert, headlined by Blake and featuring a host of great musicians, many of whom are from Norfolk. Rose was an exceptional musician and singer and so it is fitting that we can

remember her and raise money to help others through making music. The concerts we have held so far have been generously sponsored by a number of Norfolk companies and individuals which have enabled us to raise many tens of thousands of pounds.

So often, media and government focus on the crisis end of mental health and not enough on the proactive long term, patient support of the young people who are struggling. They need to be given an environment to express themselves, to recognise and examine what they are feeling and be given the tools to cope. Early intervention is key to prevent deterioration in a young person's mental wellbeing. Luckily in Norfolk there are a number of great charities and organisations working to do exactly this. Now, through the Sir Norman Lamb Coalition for Young People these charities and community support groups have been assisted in working together and this is why we have been so happy for Rose's fund to support it.

Rose was a wonderful, loving, kind, social person. Her fund, in association with the Norfolk Community Foundation means that we can help others, championing the many working in the field of care and mental health support in Norfolk and preventing someone getting to that terrible place my dear sister reached.

As written on her grave stone: 'Like a shooting star she came, dazzled us all and is gone. Her legacy, above all is love.' ♦

03

Mental health is a complex issue with no quick fix, but the solution could be on our doorsteps.

A community response

A place to be.

A youth centre is much more than just a sofa and an Xbox. The Foundation's Adam Baker went to Swan Youth Project in Downham Market to discover why these spaces are more vital than ever.



Adam Baker,
Communication
& Insight Manager

Youth centres are a vital resource for young people in any community. They provide a safe and supportive environment, offering opportunities for learning and development, and access to a range of beneficial services to support wellbeing. These safe spaces give children and young people the chance to express their troubles and to find solutions to their problems, enabling early interventions to prevent their mental health from deteriorating.

To find out more, I visited the Swan Youth Project. Led by Anna and her team, they offer a range of valuable services to the community. These range from open access groups and family support sessions to personalised 1-to-1 support and working in local schools. During my visit, the team were preparing for an 'Open Access' session, and the enthusiasm from the children waiting outside spoke volumes. The atmosphere was filled with excitement and a palpable sense of safety, signalling that the children were not only there to have



fun and learn but also to find a secure haven when needed. I spoke to some young people there. Their stories highlighted the critical support provided to children facing challenges at school and home, underscoring the indispensable role played by the Swan Youth Project in their lives.

One of the most important functions of a youth centre is to provide a space where young people can feel safe and comfortable. When faced with significant changes, such as starting a new school or moving to a new area, young people's confidence and wellbeing can be affected. They can usually get through this if they feel supported at home and school. For those who may not have a supportive home environment or who may be experiencing difficulties in school, however, this becomes more of a challenge.

"It's just getting things off your chest and being able to know that they're not going to judge you."

I spoke to one girl about her experience at the open access sessions, where young people simply turn up and hang out with their friends, but can also speak about their worries to a trusted adult:

"The adults are always available to talk to, like Rhi, Sonja and Louise. They're always willing to let you talk to them. It's just getting things off your chest and being able to know that they're not going to judge you. If you've got a really busy family or stuff at home isn't quite how you'd like it to be, there's a different safe space and quiet areas that you can come and relax in here. And it's kind of like a break away, and you can just have a chilled moment and feel a bit better about yourself."

At the Foundation, I have the privilege of working to understand the impact

that funding has on groups. I constantly hear how important services like Swan Youth Project are to the young people that go there. For almost a decade, however, local authorities have struggled to fund these key projects. Must-have frontline services are rightfully prioritised, but this has forced many youth services to endure continued and damaging cuts. Today, there are over 700 fewer youth centres nationally than there were 10 years ago, and figures produced by the YMCA show youth services have received real-term spending cuts of almost £1 billion in the last decade. The Eastern region has suffered a shocking 60% reduction in annual funding. The YMCA rightly point out that 'the increasing incidences of... mental health difficulties and social isolation among young people illustrate these cuts are not without their consequences.'

If left unaddressed, young people's worries can develop into more serious conditions, such as anxiety or depression. A youth centre can provide a sense of belonging and community that is essential for young people to share these worries as they navigate the challenges of adolescence. By intervening early, they help prevent more serious mental health problems from developing. The 'Open Access' drop-in sessions are just the starting point. The youth workers build trust, helping young people open up about the more difficult challenges they may be experiencing and creating a plan of action involving parents, schools, or other agencies to help young people thrive and deal with mental health issues before they become worse.

Another young person told me about the severe anxiety she experienced around going to school. I asked her how Swan Youth Project helped her:

"Before I had the Swan Project, I wasn't going to school any day. When I arrived at school, I had a huge panic attack. I

"It is difficult to overstate the importance of youth centres when it comes to providing a supportive and encouraging space. They not only offer a place for young individuals to socialise and engage in positive activities but also serve as a gateway to various opportunities for personal development."

just didn't know what to do. My school just didn't listen at all. And then Sonja listened to me, and then got involved and it just helped massively. And then I started going to school more and then more. And then I finally just went to school every day.'

It is difficult to overstate the importance of youth centres when it comes to providing a supportive and encouraging space. They not only offer an offline place for young individuals to socialise and engage in positive activities but they also serve as a gateway to various opportunities for personal development. By fostering a sense of community and belonging, youth centres play a crucial role in helping young people build confidence, develop essential life skills, and form meaningful connections with their peers and mentors. It is within these nurturing environments that young individuals can explore their passions, discover their strengths, and realise their full potential. As advocates for the wellbeing of our young people, it is our responsibility to rally behind youth centres and ensure they have the resources and support needed to continue their valuable work. ♦

Loneliness and young people:

is volunteering the solution?

Loneliness does not discriminate by age, location, or occupation. It can affect any of us at any time, and the effect on our health and wellbeing can be profound.

When we imagine loneliness, we often think of older people. In 2022, half of all adults in the UK reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often, or always. 3.83 million of these experience chronic loneliness, meaning they often or always feel lonely.

This perception, however, must be challenged. The proportion of under-25s saying they have just one or no close friends has trebled in ten years, from 7% to 22%, while the proportion with four or more friends has fallen from 64% to 40%. A report by the think tank Onward has linked loneliness among young people to a 'collapse in community [and] crisis in belonging'. They found that young people are less likely to think other people are trustworthy than they were 60

years ago. This lack of trust and feelings of disconnect pose a significant barrier to young people participating in activities that could reduce loneliness or improve their mental wellbeing. Whilst more recently the Covid-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated loneliness among young people, their levels of loneliness were already rising prior to 2020.

This decline has been linked to a number of issues, from social media to a rise in mental health conditions. Loneliness is also linked to having special educational needs, being disabled, being LGBT, being from a global majority background, or dropping out of school or the workforce early. But what can we do about this?

One answer to the loneliness crisis facing young people is volunteering.

It gives young people the chance to meet and interact with others, which can help them build meaningful connections, boost their confidence, and enhance their social skills. Additionally, volunteering in the community can provide young people with a

sense of purpose and fulfilment, helping them overcome feelings of isolation and disconnection. Moreover, by working alongside other volunteers and community members, young people can develop trust and respect for others, which can translate into a greater sense of trust in the broader community.

Onward backs the suggestion that volunteering is one way to help reduce loneliness among young people. More recently the UK Government has acknowledged the role of voluntary community organisations in combatting loneliness. They chose to target Great Yarmouth for a project called 'Know Your Neighbourhood', which aims to tackle loneliness through widening participation in volunteering. They chose to work with UK Community Foundations to identify local projects, and we distributed grant funding in Great Yarmouth.

Because volunteering can also help young people develop skills that are vital to future employment, it is an ideal pathway for those who are 'NEET' (not in education, employment,



or training). Research has shown that dropping out of school or the workforce early on increases the risk of becoming socially isolated. Equally, as education can provide routes into volunteering, young people who are NEET face this additional barrier to engaging.

One project we funded is trying to change that. VIY (or Volunteer It Yourself) is working in Great Yarmouth to assemble teams of volunteers to renovate community spaces like community centres, mosques, and educational facilities. What makes the project unique is that they work almost exclusively with young people who are NEET,

taking referrals from local organisations like colleges or charities supporting young people. Through VIY, young people volunteer to complete the project as a team on a local building. While there, they are mentored and supported to work alongside professional tradespeople, learning DIY skills as well as developing key life skills together. They also have the chance to gain professional qualifications in carpentry, health and safety, or bricklaying – among others. Gaining skills also boosts young people's confidence and could help young people feel more positive when looking for work and help with anxieties around entering

employment.

Working with funding from the DCMS Know Your Neighbourhood Fund, we have supported VIY to engage an estimated 120 volunteers over the next 18 months to renovate six community spaces in Great Yarmouth, all with the aim of increasing volunteering and tackling isolation in the community. This helps to strengthen the voluntary sector as a whole in Great Yarmouth, as many local groups will receive vital maintenance and upgrades as part of the project. Improving community spaces while building skills locally is a project worth shouting about! ♦

BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES

Former MP Sir Norman Lamb opens up about youth mental health in Norfolk and what he's doing to help



An interview with Jamie Kowalyk from Norfolk Community Foundation

Sir Norman Lamb and his wife Mary established The Sir Norman Lamb Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund with Norfolk Community Foundation in 2019. The Fund supports community organisations in Norfolk working in the fields of mental health, learning disability, or autism and focuses on children, teenagers, and young adults. We spoke to the former North Norfolk MP about his family's personal struggles with mental illness, his motivations for setting up the fund, and his hopes for the future.

Can you tell us a little bit more about why youth mental health is such an important issue to you personally?

Even before the pandemic arrived, there was clear evidence of a rising tide of need in this country for all sorts of reasons. I think life is more complicated growing up these days than it used to be. But the fact is that there is an increase in prevalence. CAMHS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, is the fastest-growing specialty of any in the NHS. Then on top of that, we have a system that is simply failing to cope and I think is broken. My own family has experienced this. When our oldest son was a teenager, he was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. And at a moment when we were desperate, we were told that we'd have to wait up to six months before he could start treatment. We simply couldn't wait that long, so what did we do? We paid for treatment. But, of course, most families can't afford to pay for treatment and that is the injustice... And that's what makes me driven to fight for change and to ensure that there is something there for young people in their moment of need.

Was it that motivation then that led you to work with Norfolk Community Foundation?

When I stood down as Member of Parliament for North Norfolk after 18 years, my wife, Mary, and I decided we wanted to continue to try and make a difference locally. I felt I wanted to do something that

"I know Norfolk has had its particular challenges, but it's the case across the country. Young people are waiting far too long for access to support. So these community-based organisations intervening earlier, supporting young people to improve their wellbeing and happiness, are so critical."

might have a lasting impact. We approached Claire Cullens from Norfolk Community Foundation. The Foundation is a reputable, secure and reliable organisation, and we were able to explore a collaboration which led to the creation of a fund to support young people's mental health and those who are autistic or with a learning disability. What really impressed me was that I was working to quite a tight time scale and, very quickly, Claire responded and facilitated a fund being established so that people could make their contributions without any delay. It was just that speed of response and the sense that she was enthusiastic about the opportunity to establish a dedicated mental health fund and to work with me. And I thought this all fits really well. Mary, my wife, was also very positive about it. We were doing this together. And so it was very easy to make that decision.

How has that collaboration evolved since then?

Mary and I set about raising funds immediately and we were overwhelmed

with the response. Hundreds of local people donated alongside local businesses and organisations, enabling us to financially support grassroots organisations working to intervene early to support young people with their mental health needs.

What are the biggest challenges that you've had to overcome?

Just 6 months after opening the fund, the global Covid-19 pandemic hit. I held a virtual summit with the Community Foundation to better understand the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on vulnerable children and young people. The summit was incredibly helpful in improving our understanding of the impact of the Covid lockdown on children, teenagers, and young adults. I was left with the sense that our Norfolk Mental Health Fund was needed more than ever and knew that we had some amazing community-based organisations in Norfolk doing vital work. They told us about the increase in demand for their services since the start of the pandemic, and shared their innovative solutions for supporting young people during this challenging time.

How has the funding you have raised helped young people in Norfolk?

Working with the Foundation to understand the impact the fund was having was important to me. We had the grants independently reviewed, and they found that 90% of all young people who engaged with a funded project showed an improvement in their mental health and wellbeing, and even more pleasingly 85% felt more able to make changes or deal with any problems in their lives. Having the opportunity to meet with groups at the Coalition meetings has also helped me gain a greater understanding of the breadth and depth of the work going on in Norfolk to support young people. I'm confident that the funds we've raised are being put to the best use and are actively making a difference to young people in the county I call home. ♦

'Not About the Bike' provides a fully equipped bicycle workshop to the whole community. Through the delivery of courses, drop-in sessions, and after-school clubs, they promote self-reliance and the passing on of new skills - it really is 'Not About The Bike'.

04

Young people can thrive when their communities support them. So let's come together and make a difference.

Gearing up for the next chapter.

United we stand

Working with Sir Norman Lamb to
create better futures for young people

We have been working with Sir Norman Lamb for over 4 years to create better futures for our young people. But what does this look like?

Sir Norman Lamb got in touch when he wanted to take action on the youth mental health crisis after hearing the stories of local people during his time as North Norfolk's MP. The first thing we did together was try to understand the underlying challenges facing the local charitable sector and work collaboratively to begin to address these issues. This led to the creation of the Sir Norman Lamb Coalition for Young People – simply called 'the Coalition' by its members.

At its simplest, the Coalition is the

thread that ties together a patchwork of grassroots charities in Norfolk that support young people's wellbeing every day, each with their own unique skills and areas of expertise. It provides a forum where those charities and community groups critical to supporting the wellbeing of young people, from local youth clubs in market towns to countywide 1-to-1 counselling services, can come together to have their voices heard. Quarterly meetings hosted by Sir Norman Lamb allow ideas to be shared and action to be taken. But the Coalition has become so much more than just that.

Coordinated by the Foundation and chaired by Sir Norman, the Coalition

has been working to address the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by young people across Norfolk. By bringing together over 60 groups, both large and small, the Coalition has quickly become a powerful vehicle for improving young people's wellbeing. It is a beacon of best practice within the sector, facilitating resource sharing and learning among organisations, raising awareness of preventative youth work and promoting existing networks that support young people.

Young people often don't get the right support at the right time. Groups in Norfolk were so busy supporting local young people that they didn't have knowledge of what other groups could

offer, nor the time or resource to find out. The Coalition has changed this, playing a crucial role in bridging the gap between specialist organisations supporting youth mental health and local youth groups. By providing awareness and referral routes between specialist and local groups, the Coalition has enabled a more cohesive support network for young people facing mental health challenges. This collaboration has not only facilitated greater access to resources and services for young people in need but also fostered a sense of community and understanding among different support groups. Equally, because of the elevated profile of groups in the Coalition, bodies like social services are now more aware of the essential work charitable organisations do to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, and consequently have started to signpost young people there more regularly.

The networking enabled by the Coalition has also created an environment where collaboration has flourished. 'I think it's what the Coalition is able to provide to these organisations by bringing them together,' said Sir Norman Lamb, 'they also start to collaborate with each other. One of the organisations within the Coalition, Cup-O-T, offers counselling services and they now work with some other groups within the Coalition, providing support to their young people as well.' This has led to joint funding bids, reframing competition between groups as an opportunity for collaboration and sharing resources.

Sharing is also key to the Coalition in a broader sense. 'Recently, I brought in a nationally recognised specialist in trauma-informed care to talk to organisations in Norfolk,' Sir Norman explained, 'we know that young people experiencing trauma, abuse or neglect are particularly susceptible to poor mental health when it comes to teenage years and beyond, which also

"we know that young people experiencing trauma, abuse or neglect are particularly susceptible to poor mental health when it comes to teenage years and beyond, which also not just affects their health but affects their education and their life chances."

not just affects their health but affects their education and their life chances. We've also put on training around other topics such as eating disorders, youth mental health first aid and keeping children safe online.' Training can be expensive, especially for small groups with limited resources. Sharing training in this way brings up standards across the board, rather than just for the organisations who can afford it. This means that wherever they are in Norfolk and whatever organisation they go to, young people will be getting the best possible support with their mental health and wellbeing.

Operating as a group gives a clear entry point for our local statutory partners wanting to fund community action. Sir Norman also explained that, 'because statutory organisations, the NHS, the local authority, the Police and Crime Commissioner, trust the Coalition and the Norfolk Community Foundation, they're willing to disperse some of their money through the Coalition to organisations in Norfolk.' The Coalition's dedication to best practice and the quality of its collective work has rewarded it with a de facto mark of excellence. By creating a platform where the profile of these youth organisations has been heightened, the Coalition has created a platform to unlock wider funding and opportunities for youth sector organisations. In 2023 alone, over

£500,000 of vital funding was awarded to member organisations – half of the £1 million worth of support and opportunities awarded to its members since the Coalition was established in 2020. Part of this staggering amount came from the Sir Norman Lamb Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, which has helped achieve better outcomes for young people.

The network has also enabled wider giving, with Sir Norman also adding that, 'alongside these funding and training opportunities, the Coalition has acted as the go-to place for other organisations or individuals wanting to offer support. Norfolk County Council worked with the Coalition to distribute free laptops for young people outside education, and Norwich City Football Club have generously offered free tickets to young people and their families to watch matches at Carrow Road.' These little extras can make a huge difference to young people's wellbeing. It helped them engage with essential schoolwork and connect with their peers during lockdown, but also allowed them to experience something like a football match that boosts self-esteem and feelings of togetherness.

The Coalition is, unfortunately, a one-of-a-kind model; nothing else in the UK mental health space operates such a close network of local organisations for the benefit of young people. Both Sir Norman and the Foundation are keen to see it replicated elsewhere. 'I think this is something quite special,' said Sir Norman, 'But young people's mental health isn't something that we can change overnight. I believe that with continued support, we can make Norfolk an exemplar, demonstrating to the rest of the country how we can be innovative in providing better community support for young people, working together to share best practice and strengthen the existing provision. Together, we can build a brighter future for all our young people, and something for our county for which we can all be proud.' ♦



The story of a business taking action because they care

Why Handelsbanken came to Norfolk Community Foundation to do more for mental health.



Adam Baker,
Communication & Insight
Manager

Handelsbanken Norwich approached Norfolk Community Foundation in 2019 because they wanted to make a bigger difference in their community. Since then, the local bank branch has raised and helped to distribute in excess of £150,000 to local charities in partnership with the Foundation.

As a reputable local grant funder led by local action, they knew we could help them make more informed decisions about where their donations could have the most impact and reach a wider range of causes that align with Handelsbanken's values. Working together, we identified a funding gap

in mental health and wellbeing in our community and set about addressing this pressing issue through distributing funds.

The bank hosts a biennial charity ball to raise funds to support programmes across Norfolk that support mental health and wellbeing. Peter Daines, Corporate Manager of Handelsbanken Norwich, said:

'Teaming up with NCF has been a game changer for Handelsbanken Norwich in taking our Corporate Social Responsibility to new heights. The Foundation helped us to form our own fund and at our 2022 Charity Ball, we raised around £40k for our fund. The Foundation invited applications from local charities very much in need of help, and we then

formed a Funding Panel with 5 members of our team to agree on where the money would be best placed. The whole process was a very humbling experience and at the end of the meeting we were delighted to have selected 10 different local charities to support with grant funding. The next step was to pair up and go and visit all of the successful charities, spending time with them to truly understand the difference they are making and how our money will be spent. Following each visit, team members reported back and share their experience with the wider team. From start to finish the journey we go on is both inspiring and very emotive with the whole team feeling as though they are making a real difference.'

Last year, Peter and his team helped

us to make over £40,000 in grants to local groups supporting community mental health, including two youth projects.

Handelsbanken have been supporting mental health projects for the past few years because, as Peter explained, 'It really is quite frightening to see the impact mental health can have on all our lives, especially our young people who have so much to contend with. From our involvement with NCF and the local community we can see that all too often, the support they so desperately need is often just not there. That is why we have been so impassioned by the likes of The Swan Project and other similar charities we have supported, helping to enable these amazing charities to carry on making a real difference.'

We helped Handelsbanken to see their impact first-hand by facilitating visits to the charities they supported, including Swan Youth Project and Sunbeams Play. Peter's colleagues, Ale, Becks and Dom, visited Sunbeams Play in Great Yarmouth. 'They are the only self-referral centre in the local area to provide a safe, understanding and secure setting for children affected by autism and related conditions,' he said, 'Other centres require a diagnosis, which we learnt can take years, so it can be very challenging for those going through the diagnostic process to find the support they require.' Long waits put further strain on the mental wellbeing of young people and their families while they await support, so this early intervention is vital. Peter's team learnt about the day trips that Sunbeams organise:

'they explained how essential these group trips are, as a lot of families can find it extremely difficult to go to these places by themselves at fear of judgement and the anxiety that brings.' Like so many groups, Sunbeams provide a holistic experience to support mental health and wellbeing.

Thanks to funders like Handelsbanken, who take the time to understand the crucial work that is being done by charities in Norfolk to support youth and adult mental health, these vital frontline services can continue to thrive. Handelsbanken recognises the value of getting behind programmes that are already doing amazing things, helping them ensure this support is available to those who need it in the future. ♦





Thank you for joining us in this important discussion. We hope we've helped to tell the stories behind the numbers, given space to discuss the issues, and highlighted some of the local solutions making a difference.

Please share this Spark with those who you think would also find it of interest and continue to work with us to achieve even more.

Together, Norfolk shines brighter.



Together, Norfolk shines brighter

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