

GREATER MANCHESTER MENTALLY HEALTHY COLLEGES

School to college transition

BOLTON SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
MAY 2021



The Sixth Form Bolton is the only specialist Sixth Form in the town and the largest provider of A Level studies in the borough. The students are all 16 to 19 years old and follow full time programmes of study in A Levels and BTEC Vocational courses.

The single site, purpose-built, campus opened in August 2010 with a fourth-floor extension completed in 2013 to address the increase in demand for places at the time. The campus is now being further extended with the new area due to be opened in September 2021.

The proportion of A Levels to BTEC Vocational courses is currently 60% (A Levels) and 40% BTEC Vocational.

School to college transition

This is part of the Greater Manchester Mentally Healthy Schools and Colleges programme. Due to the concentration of student numbers in a relatively small number of education settings and the short timeframes involved we recognised that a more bespoke approach to further Education colleges would be needed.

The aim of this project was to:

- Develop the capacity of further education and sixth form colleges in Greater Manchester to collaborate in support of the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and students
- Identify good practice that can be shared across the system.

There are 21 colleges in Greater Manchester (9 general further education colleges and 12 sixth form Colleges) and approximately 90% of 16 to 18yr olds in Greater Manchester are in colleges. During an academic year approximately 51,000 out of 56,000 16-18-year olds will study at these further education and sixth-form colleges.

The Association of Colleges (North) was awarded funding for 12 months in March 2019 to deliver a project to raise awareness and support development of the mental health agenda within individual colleges. Two main providers are supporting the project, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust and British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists.

Our students

The project worked with three targeted cohorts:

Cohort 1

- Children leaving care – one group of 6-8 students

Cohort 2

- Students identified with mental health issues by mainstream school – three groups of ten students
- Students who self-disclosed mental health issues application/interview stage – two groups of ten students

Cohort 3

- Student with disabilities – one group of ten students

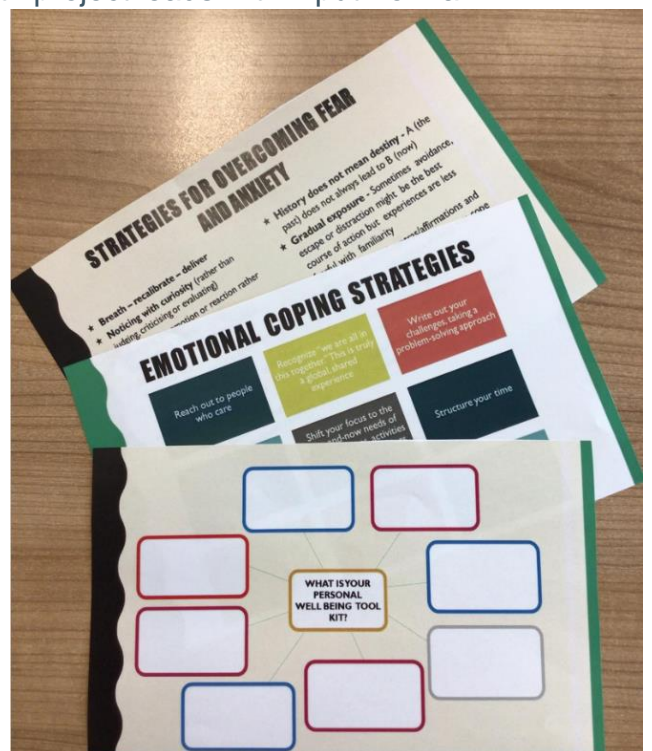
What we did

We planned to offer opportunities to engage in the following specifically targeted transition activities between Sept and December 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that these were extended and ran until February 2021.

The aim was to support students to develop and build self-reliance and coping skills and to discover stress management, relaxation and calming methods to suit them personally. We delivered three workshops to each group (21 in total)


- Managing Uncertainty and Adapting to change part 1
- Managing Uncertainty and Adapting to Change part 2
- Find your Calm workshop

Materials and resources were developed by mental health project leads with input from a consultant psychologist and materials from the NHS, Samaritans, Mind and Every Mind Matters. Workshops were delivered in extra curriculum sessions to suit the different groups and were run by staff experienced in mental health and pastoral delivery.



We trained a group of 2nd Year 'Be Kind' peer mentors and facilitated drop-in sessions from October half term to Christmas break to support any concerns from students within the targeted cohorts

TAKE CALMING BREATHS



- When your body is experiencing a stress response, you're often not thinking as clearly as you could be
- A quick way to calm down is to practice breathing exercises
- These can be done virtually anywhere to relieve stress in minutes
- Especially effective for reducing anxiety before or during exams and at other times

ACTIVITY – TRY BREATHING HANDS

Stress & Anxiety Companion
Guided breathing exercises, relaxing music and games made to help calm the mind, and handle stress and anxiety on the go.

(Apple/ Android)

Includes:

- Breathing exercises
- Relaxation Guides
- Thought reframing
- Written guides on managing common anxieties

Our students also used [Unyte IOM2 relaxation devices](#) to support the students to self-manage their breathing and heart rate and through fun activities encourage self-help and mediation techniques that improve coherence, breathing control and aid learning

What we found

- The students felt supported and valued the opportunity to share their concerns in a safe environment. Their feelings were normalised and they were given multiple coping strategies.
- The project extended the support the College offers and has led to further developments such as a student wellbeing hub.
- Stress levels/Anxiety. Students felt that whilst their stress levels were high, they realised others were in same situation and felt less alone
- Peer relationships – being directed to a safe space support room for those who were particularly anxious meant that they met others in a similar situation and some new supportive friendships/peer emerged
- Attendance. The impact on attendance is difficult to measure due to COVID-19 but we did note continued engagement in both live and remote activities
- Increase in access to and engagement with support services. Students reported they were more aware of services on offer and would access. We also noticed an uptake in the use of our safe space support room.
- Retention. We noted increased retention of this vulnerable cohort
- Students reported that that they had benefited from the workshops and felt they had new strategies, knew how to access support and were aware they could utilise technology such as Apps and IOMs.
- The activities helped new students to adjust to college life and the many changes COVID-19 brought about eg helping them to settle in after not being in a formal education setting.

Next steps

- Rolling out activities to a wider cohort now we have developed resources in place
- Develop a wellbeing hub, a Little Book of Well-being and additional resources
- Roll out training to a number of other staff to deliver workshops to a wider cohort

Case study Student 1 November 2020

- Under CAMHS for Anger Management/PTSD
- Runaway
- In foster care

What we did

- Student 1 attended a two-part workshop Going with the Flow (Part 1 - Managing Uncertainty and Part 2 - Adapting to Change with a final activity of developing a personal toolkit)

Outcomes/ Next steps

- Student 1 has been retained when otherwise may have left
- Student 1 felt that they could talk openly in a safe environment and became aware that other students felt the same way, which made Student 1 feel reassured and not on their own
- Feedback was that it was a positive and helpful experience overall
- Student 1 was also offered other single part workshop – Find Your Calm and option to try the IOMS Relaxation Technology but declined at the time

“ I felt relaxed and comfortable sharing my concerns in a safe environment

“ I think we should share our experiences with next year’s students, which I think would be helpful to them

Case study Student 2 November 2020

- Anxiety

What we did

- Student 2 attended a two-part workshop Going with the Flow (Part 1 - Managing Uncertainty and Part 2 - Adapting to Change with a final activity of developing a personal toolkit)

Outcomes/Next steps

- Student 2 has been retained when otherwise may have left
- We noted a higher level of engagement with mentoring support and in studies
- Student 2 benefited from hearing the perspectives of others and liked the strategies suggested, feeling that most students would find several strategies to use from the range suggested
- Feedback was that sessions were very positive and in a safe environment

- Student 2 felt that it was good to have the opportunity to talk about concerns with other students, which they had limited options for due to COVID-19

“ A very positive experience

“ I know more students were invited but I felt the small group numbers made it easier to share

Case study Student 3 November 2020

- Depression and anxiety

What we did

Student 3 attended a Find Your Calm workshop themed around relaxation

Outcomes/ Next steps

- Student 3 was retained when may have left otherwise
- Student 3 felt that there were good ideas to try what would help with sleep issues and liked three of the apps - Stress/Anxiety Companion, Feeling Good and Evernote
- We offered IOMS Relaxation Technology as follow up
- Feedback was that it was a useful workshop in a safe environment with a small group

“ I liked 3 of the apps and it was really good to have something practical to use independently after the session

GET IN TOUCH

gmhscp.gmmhprogramme@nhs.net

0161 625 7463

<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health>

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