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Date: Tuesday 29th May 2018

Dear Kirsty,

Mind over matter report

Following the release of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report on their inquiry into the Emotional and Mental Health of Children and Young People, we would like to take this opportunity to welcome the recommendations. We believe that urgent action is required to tackle the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales; action which focuses on population approaches and innovative change.

As we have discussed previously, children and young people are experiencing record levels of distress, with an increase in self-harm admissions to A&E and increased demand on CAMHS. We have welcomed the new curriculum and the increased focus on wellbeing since its announcement and have been pushing for change in the provision of emotional health throughout school settings in Wales. As you know, we have called for mandatory emotional provision in order to embed a public health approach to mental health and suicide prevention by placing a primary focus on prevention rather than cure alone. Investment in prevention and early intervention can reduce human, social and economic costs. Emotional health programmes in schools should be viewed as a form of promotion, prevention and early intervention which could reduce pressure on CAMHS, reduce specific mental health problems and increase academic achievement.

To successfully implement and fulfil the potential of the new curriculum, and to improve the emotional and mental health of young people in Wales, we believe the recommendations presented in Mind over Matter are of crucial importance. We would like to highlight some specific recommendations to raise some key points.

Recommendation 3: *That the Welsh Government undertake a review of the numerous emotional and mental well-being initiatives underway in Wales's schools, with a view to recommending a national approach for schools to adopt, based on best practice. The Welsh Government should work with exemplar schools such as Ysgol Pen y Bryn in Colwyn Bay to develop elements of this national approach, including but not limited to mindfulness.*

With increasing pressure on schools to deliver such a robust PSE framework, emotional and mental health lessons are often not included in the school curriculum. Our engagement with schools in Wales has shown us that teachers are desperately in need of a national approach. There are many valuable emotional and wellbeing initiatives and lesson plans for schools but it is important these are reviewed and presented to schools, in order to promote the preventative elements of emotional health provision and maximise their potential to be embedded in the curriculum.

Recommendation 4. *That the Welsh Government, while undertaking the review we call for in recommendation 3, work in the meantime with the Samaritans to develop its Delivering Emotional Awareness and Listening (DEAL) Programme for wider use in schools in Wales. Subject to the results of the DEAL evaluation that is underway, the Welsh Government should fund the extension of the programme to the primary school sector.*

We are very prepared to engage effectively with Welsh Government on the development and extension of the DEAL programme and would welcome this opportunity. The initial findings of our DEAL evaluation, in which five schools in Cardiff taught DEAL for one academic year, are highly promising. Initial findings suggest that DEAL had success in raising awareness of emotional health –

- 74% of post-DEAL pupils agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, *“I know how to develop positive coping strategies”*.
- Post-DEAL pupils were also asked *“Would you recommend DEAL to others?”* to which 79% said *“Yes”*
- There was also a positive trend in responses to the question *“How would you describe your current understanding of emotional health?”*, with a greater proportion of post-DEAL pupils than pre-DEAL answering *“Very good”* or *“Good”*.
- The most significant of these include the question *“How often would you say you talk with someone about your own emotional health?”*, post-DEAL students indicated that they would speak more frequently with someone than pre-DEAL pupils.

Pupils were asked to indicate whether they considered their emotional health to be as important as four comparators. There were statistically significant differences in three with post-DEAL pupils indicating that they were more likely to think that their emotional health was as important as their *“physical health”*; *“doing well in school”* and *“having lots of money”*.

Recommendation 16. *That the Welsh Government, in relation to suicide specifically, work with expert organisations to: provide, within three months of this report’s publication, guidance to schools on talking about suicide and self-harm, to dispel the myth that any discussion will lead to “contagion”;*

It is important that schools receive guidance on talking about suicide and self-harm. We would point to evidence which we provided in our session, which shows that specific suicide prevention approaches in schools, reduces both suicidal ideation and attempts ([School-based suicide prevention programmes: the SEYLE cluster-randomised, controlled trial, National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health \(NASP\) 2015](#)) It is crucial we work together to promote talking about suicide, in order to demonstrate that talking openly reduces the risk, not increases it.

- *work with expert organisations to prioritise the issuing of guidance to schools where there has been a suicide or suspected suicide;*

The Samaritans education team has seen an increase in call-outs to schools where there has been a suspected suicide. Step by Step is a Samaritans service that provides practical support and guidance to help school and college communities prepare for, and recover from a suspected or attempted suicide.

Our service is here to support organisations working with young people so that they can respond effectively following the suspected or attempted suicide of someone from within their community; taking practical steps to reduce the risk of further deaths in the area. The service is run by a team of trained volunteers, called Postvention Advisors, who can offer practical support, guidance and information on addressing the impact of a suspected or attempted suicide on the school community. The team is experienced in working proactively with schools and local authorities to prevent further suicides.

The specialist knowledge and skills of the volunteers is based on research and best practice developed through Samaritans’ experience, learning from the communities we have supported.

The dissemination of information on this postvention programme to schools, could provide much needed support and crucially, reduce the likelihood of copycat behaviours in pupils.

- *ensure that basic mental health training, including how to talk about suicide, becomes part of initial teacher training and continuous professional development, so that all teachers are equipped to talk about it.*

The training gap in emotional and mental health for teachers in Wales is concerning. This is another growing concern which could be addressed during the phased rollout of the new curriculum. We believe existing teaching staff across all schools in Wales should be provided with basic emotional and mental health awareness to increase confidence in teaching the subject. We should also be equipping new teaching staff with the confidence and skills they need by embedding emotional and mental health awareness in Initial Teacher Training (ITT). We are pleased to see the 'upskilling of teachers to recognise and deal with low level problems' included in the announcement of the £1.4m mental health project in schools. However, we must ensure consistency across all educational settings in Wales and make sure teaching staff are equipped to deal with emotional and mental health. During our training session for the Cardiff DEAL Pilot, the most frequent concern raised was the lack of confidence the teaching staff had in dealing with difficult questions. Of the five schools involved, all of them raised the issue of not knowing how to respond to instances of self-harm or questions about suicidal feelings. This lack of confidence is apparent in passionate PSE staff so we must be realistic about the many other teachers in Wales who don't have the confidence or knowledge to deal with these issues. During our time engaging with teaching staff, we have heard of many instances where pupils are referred to services because the first point of contact, the teachers themselves, do not know how to deal with them.

Overall, we have welcomed the recommendations arising from this report and believe they have the potential to change the outlook for the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales. Increasingly, children and young people are born and raised in a complex environment, one which we struggle to understand. Living digital lives and being subject to the online environment round the clock, has been linked to increased levels of anxiety and loneliness. Increased resilience can improve the emotional health of young people and equip them to face life's challenges. We need to start approaching the emotional and mental health of children and young people in new and innovate ways and we believe this report could be a significant driver for change, one which could save lives. We would of course be glad to provide any more information or to discuss further. We look forward to the Welsh Government response to the report and the opportunity it offers.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Stone,
Executive Director for Wales
Samaritans

Cc: Vaughan Gething AM, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services
Cc: Huw Irranca-Davies AM, Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care
Cc: Lynne Neagle AM, Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee

Noddw: Ei Uchelder Brenhinol Tywysog Cymru. Sefydlwyd yn 1953 gan y diweddar Brebendwr Dr. Chad Varah CH CBE.
Elusen wedi'i chofrestru yng Nghymru a Lloegr rhif 219432, yn yr Alban rhif SC040604.
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A charity registered in England and Wales no. 219432, in Scotland no. SC0 40604.
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