

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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Looking Forward to Thursdays – effective learning provision for young adults with mental health difficulties

Abstract

Statistics indicate that the incidence of mental health difficulties among young adults has been increasing. These young adults are often subject to stigma and disadvantage that contribute to their exclusion from society and from the opportunities afforded to most young adults. This research, undertaken by the NIACE/NYA Young Adults Learning Partnership and funded by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, uncovered some excellent practice in the provision of learning for young adults who experience mental health difficulties. However the research also found a widespread lack of awareness and knowledge of the needs of these young adults. The publications and website culminating from this research provide a range of information to assist learning providers to meet the needs of these young adults.

Research methodology:

Desk-based research that involved a literature review to identify and examine: existing data about emotional and mental health difficulties among young adults; the connection between learning and good mental health; integration of young adults with mental health difficulties into learning.

Postal questionnaire, telephone interviews and project visits to identify and examine current practice in the provision of learning for young adults with mental health difficulties.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ Mental health difficulties are increasingly common among young adults: a study by the Mental Health Foundation found that 6 per cent of young men and 16 per cent of young women experience mental health difficulties; in the UK, suicide is the most common cause of death for young men under 25. Since 1982, the incidence of young male suicide has increased by 75 per cent, reaching 1,300 per year in 2002.
- ❖ Mental health difficulties are particularly prevalent among particular groups of young adults, including: those in care/care leavers; homeless young adults; young offenders, and refugees.

- ❖ Learning providers should consider a range of factors when establishing provision for young adults who experience mental health difficulties, these include: the methods of recruitment they use; the style of provision they offer; the skills and experiences of the staff they employ; the networks and partnerships that they contribute to.
- ❖ Four key principles of good practice were identified:
 - Young people centred approach – the individual needs of each young person should be identified and the learning should be tailored to meet these needs. This process should be carried out with, rather than for, the young adult, as he or she is the expert about how they are feeling and what type of learning will work for them.
 - Flexibility – for many people with mental health difficulties it can be difficult to predict how they might be feeling from one day to the next. This may affect their ability to attend a learning programme on a regular basis. Providers should respond to this in a positive manner by being as flexible as possible.
 - Relaxed and varied approach – the environment, the atmosphere created and the style of provision should be as relaxed and comfortable as possible. The provision should be varied, with plenty of opportunity for breaks. All of these factors will help to ensure that young adults look forward to attending, rather than perceiving it as a chore, or like going to school.
 - Working with others – working in partnership with other organisations from the learning, health and social care sectors will help them to more effectively meet the holistic needs of young adults with mental health difficulties.

Recommendations

Further research and development activity to raise awareness of the needs of young adults who experience mental health difficulties and the benefits that learning can bring to their lives.

Output

- ❖ Aylward, N. (2003) *Looking Forward to Thursdays: effective learning for young adults with mental health difficulties*. The National Youth Agency.
- ❖ Smith, L. and Aylward, N. (2003) *Looking Forward to Thursdays – Project Report and Evaluation*. The National Youth Agency.
- ❖ Website – www.lookingforward.org.uk

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Requests for 'Key Findings' in other formats, such as large print, are welcome. We would be pleased to consider your request.

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