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Big Brother Big Sister
Programme



This research explores the experiences of young people referred to Foróige's Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) mentoring programme from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The research explored the value of mentoring, from the perspective of young people, parents, mentors, and staff involved in the CAMHS-BBBS partnership.

Who Participated in the Research?

40 participants (13 male, 25 female, 2 transgender) who were actively involved in the BBBS-CAMHS partnership in December 2021, took part in the research.

Mentors

10 (6 female, 4 males) volunteer mentors who were matched with a young person referred to BBBS from CAMHS.

Youth

10 (4 male, 4 female, 2 transgender) young people.

Parents

10 (8 female; 2 male) parents/ guardians.

BBBS Staff

5 (4 female, 1 male) BBBS programme staff who were involved in matching young people referred from CAMHS.

CAMHS Staff

5 (4 female, 1 male) CAMHS staff who had a history of referring young people from their service to the BBBS programme.

Why is this Research Important?

Evidence shows that the mental health and wellbeing of young people has deteriorated significantly in recent years (Centre for Disease Control, 2020). Health professionals and policy makers have identified the need to respond to this decline in youth mental health as a public health priority (Collishaw & Sellers, 2020).

While clinical interventions are important, research suggests that young people with mental health needs may also benefit from community-based intervention (Hart et al., 2021). Community services provide young people with access to support and opportunities which may otherwise be unavailable to them, and can help aid recovery (De Wit et al., 2016). These services may also help relieve pressure on primary and secondary care services (Chatterjee et al., 2017).

Youth mentoring is a community-based intervention where youth are paired with an adult who is a friend or 'mentor' to the young person. Mentoring has been identified as a potentially powerful tool for the prevention and intervention of youth mental ill-health (Cavell et al., 2021). In 2018, as part of the National Service Plan, the HSE formed a partnership with Foróige's Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programme. It was envisaged that providing youth, who are waiting for, attending or exiting CAMHS, with access to quality mentoring relationships would help them to develop protective factors, such as emotional resilience, and build capacity to address risks, such as bullying. It is important to evaluate this partnership and explore the value of mentoring from the perspective of multiple stakeholders.

Youth mentoring as a supportive resource for young people involved with CAMHS: *An exploratory study*

Research summary

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Main Findings

Participants felt that young people typically formed high-quality relationships with their mentors and showed signs of positive development, across an array of outcome areas.

1. Improved Relationships and Social Skills

I think I have changed in my trust and friendships... I can definitely trust more people

– Youth

2. Greater Functioning and Independence

They do exceptional work in moving young people on in getting back into being able to function in their life the way most young people do

– CAMHS Staff

3. More Confidence

[BBBS] boosted him, boosted his confidence and made him feel like that he was a nice person and a good person and worth getting to know

– Parent

4. Enhanced Mood and Positive Affect

They're invaluable in service really, in helping young people from a mental health perspective

– CAMHS Staff

5. Improved Coping and Wellbeing

It has given her a little bit more resilience

– Parent

6. Stronger Self-Identity

That relationship as I say is incredibly positive...it has really built her up as a person...

– Parent

7. Increased Engagement

I think that the skills that they build on through the mentoring programme are transferable so they transfer to school, into their friendships, making new friendships

– CAMHS Staff

Type of Mentoring Relationships Formed

Young people who were referred from CAMHS to BBBS typically formed strong, positive friendships with their mentors and described the mentoring relationships in terms of:

Friendship

[Mentor's] just like a big sister to her. Looks out for her, offers her advice as much as she could, and helps her out with things

– Parent

Trust

I have very bad anxiety and slightly bad mental health so it is quite nice to kind of have that company and companion who I can tell my worries to

– Youth

Empathy

When they meet with the young person they are fully present you know... they really try and get into their space, stand in their shoes and understand what's going on with them

– BBBS Staff

Participants identified several factors which they believed influence the type of relationship that develops between youth and mentors. For example, several participants felt that stronger relationships are built when mentors consistently engage with the young person, and treat them as equals.

References

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BBBS-CAMHS Partnership

Participants believed that BBBS was a valuable resource for young people who attend CAMHS.

It's helped me out a lot... Like I've learned a lot through it and I've gotten a lot of help through it that I wouldn't if I hadn't have done it

– Youth

The voluntary, non-clinical nature of BBBS was considered a highlight of the programme.

Why BBBS? ... It's specifically for the young person; it's got a very different focus... it's that informal piece that's so important; a friendship type piece as opposed to you know another number or a care plan

– CAMHS Staff

Participants believed that youth benefitted from receiving support from a non-familial adult.

It's nice to have someone there to talk to; it's nice to have someone who is maybe not at school... You just have somebody else there entirely. It's nice really

– Youth

The quality of mentor training and care taken in the matching process were seen as key features of BBBS

I think they pair them very well. There's a lot of thought that goes into matching the two together

– Parent

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