Highbury Roundhouse Youth and Community Centre

Young People's Access to Professional Mental Health Support in Islington

Our Organisation

Highbury Roundhouse is a youth-rooted organisation founded in 1974 when Islington youngsters had nowhere to go and nothing to do. Since its opening, Highbury Roundhouse has grown into a thriving non-profit, community-based organisation. It serves a large cross-section of the community, including children, young people, lone-parent families, older people, and people with disabilities from different backgrounds. Highbury Roundhouse provides a safe and welcoming environment that encourages people, especially those from disadvantaged and disaffected communities and backgrounds, to engage in activities that enhance their life outcomes.

The Research Programme

Highbury Roundhouse in Partnership for Young London, researched young people's access to mental health support. We reviewed the barriers to the delivery of effective mental health services and how to ensure that mental health has the profile that it deserves in our communities.
This research project is part of the work that is taking place for the New Deal for Young People, which the City Hall has commissioned through The Young Londoners Research Programme. The programme funded and trained young people and their youth organisations to investigate the question: 'How can we help young people in need of support who don't access youth activities to take up London's youth offer?'

The Researchers

Two young people from the Highbury Roundhouse youth club worked on this project; Nassiirah Kureembocus and Anisa Lleshi, both 14 years old. They were supported by Dinisha Shibnauth, 30 years old who is the Youth Services Manager at Highbury Roundhouse (dinishas@highbury-roundhouse.org.uk), and Eneida Capaldi, 45 years old, the Business Development Manager at Highbury Roundhouse (eneidac@highbury-roundhouse.org.uk). The two young people investigated the barriers that young people face in accessing professional mental health services in Islington.

The Research Question

What are the challenges and barriers that young people aged 13-18 in the London Borough of Islington face in accessing professional mental health support?

Data Collection and Analysis

This research adopted two data collection methods: a quantitative questionnaire (Appendix 1) and qualitative focus groups (Appendix 2). Participants were recruited from youth clubs and colleges in Islington. The research's advertisement poster (Appendix 3) was posted on Highbury Roundhouse's social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, which have around 1,500 members. An invitation email (Appendix 4) was sent to around 1,800 people from the Highbury Roundhouse mailing list, colleges and youth clubs in Islington.

Participants under 16 were asked to complete a consent form (Appendix 5).
After consent was given, participants were directed to the survey, with participants' information at the beginning of the questionnaire. The survey started with demographic questions of age and gender, followed by open-ended and multiple-choice questions to gather information on access to mental health. The total time required for completion was approximately 7 minutes. Young people who participated were thanked for their participation and were given the opportunity to enter a £150 prize draw for their contribution. We provided the details of the Highbury Roundhouse management team and Partnership for Young London in case participants had something that they wished to discuss at a later time.

The focus groups were conducted inside two youth clubs in London. The youth managers and young people's parents gave permission for these sessions. The focus groups allowed the young researchers to gather qualitative data via semi-structured questions, increasing the depth and quality of the information collected. It also helped the young people to be heard by giving them a voice.
The quantitative data from the questionnaire was statistically analysed. Data from open-ended questions and focus groups were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Common themes emerged from the young people's voices, and participants' quotes were used to illustrate these.

The Participants

This study involved a sample of 90 participants (60% Females, 31% Males, 2.2% Other, 2.2% Prefer not to say, and 1.1% Transgender). Participants' age range was between 13 and 18. Participants' age and gender breakdowns are displayed in Table 1.
78 participants responded to the questionnaire, and 12 participated in focus groups.

Table 1

Breakdown of Participants by Age and Gender

Levels	n	%
Age		
13	3	3.4
14	4	4.4
15	3	3.4
16	37	41.1

Levels	n	%
17	26	28.9
18	17	18.8
Gender		
Female	54	60
Male	31	34.5
Other	2	2.2
Prefer not to say	2	2.2
Transgender	1	1.1

Participants had a diverse ethnicity from varied backgrounds. Participants' ethnicity breakdowns are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Breakdown of Participants by Ethnicity

Levels	n	%
Ethnicity		
Black African	19	21.1
Other White Background	14	15.6
Other Mixed Background	11	12.2
Prefer not to say	6	6.7
Black Caribbean	6	6.7
White and Black African	6	6.7
Other Asian Background	6	6.7
White British	6	6.7
White English	4	4.4
Arab	2	2.2
Pakistani	2	2.2
White and Black Caribbean	2	2.2
Bangladeshi	1	1.1

Levels	n	%
White and Asian	1	1.1
Chinese	1	1.1
Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller	1	1.1
Indian	1	1.1
Other Ethnic Group	1	1.1

Participants Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) were assessed via their postcode. English Indices of Deprivation (ID) provide a means of identifying the most and least deprived areas (LSOAs) in England and comparing them. Participants' IMD breakdowns are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Breakdown of Participants by Index of Multiple Deprivation

Levels	n	%
IMD Decile		
Most deprived		
80 - 100	1	1.1
60 - 80	2	2.2
40 - 60	11	12.2
20 - 40	46	51.1
0 - 20	15	16.6
Not known	15	16.6
Less deprived		

Participation in this study was voluntary, and participant's information were kept private and anonymous. They could opt out at any given time up to two weeks prior data analyses.

Research Results

Questionnaire:

- **83% of the participants said that their mental health is important or extremely important to them**

83% responded that their mental health is 'extremely important' (48%) or 'important' (35%).
11% reported their mental health was 'neither important nor not important', and 4% responded that their mental health was 'not important at all'.

- **50% of the participants reported that they felt they needed professional mental health support**

Professional mental health support was defined in the question as a service delivered by qualified mental health professionals, such as Psychologists, Counsellors, Clinicians, Therapists, Clinical Social Workers, Psychiatrists, and Mental Health Nurses.

- **Of the 50% that felt they needed mental health support, 67% reported they had reached out for help**

We asked them who they had asked for help. The top three answers were Doctor/GP, Mental Health Support Organisations and Parents. The full breakdown of responses is displayed on Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage breakdown of who young people reach out help

Reach out to	%
Doctor/GP	45.8
Mental Health Support Organisations	33.3
Parents	25
Friends	25
Online Chat	25
Telephone Line Support	12.5
Looked for Information on the Internet	12.5
Other	12.5
Youth clubs or services	8.3
Sibling	4.2
Other family member	4.2

We asked participants to provide more detail on 'Other' if this was selected, and they reported: boyfriend/girlfriend/partner, social workers and sexual health clinic.

- **Of the 50% that felt they needed mental health support, 33% reported they hadn't reached out for help**

We asked them why they had not reached out and the following themes emerged:

1. **Felt uncomfortable, anxious, scared and fearful about opening up**

'Because I feel more comfortable to keep it to myself' (Female, 18).

'I didn't want to use up governmental resources or to be a burden on my family financially. Also, it's my responsibility and I hoped I could deal with it in my own and I fear being seen as less or people being awkward around me' (Male, 16).

2. **Didn't think it was serious**

'Because it happened to me a couple times, bit at the time, didn't think it was serious' (Male, 15)

3. **Didn't know how to get help**

'Didn't know where to look and fear opening up to strangers' (Female, 17).

4. **Didn't want parents to know**

'Didn't want my parents to know I need help with my mental health' (Female, 17).

5. **People's lack of understanding on mental health**

'Many people in my life don't really understand the concept of mental health because you can't see it' (Female, 16).

6. **Long waiting times to get help**

'I learnt to deal with it by myself' (Female, 18).

- **The main factors which stop young people from seeking professional mental health support are: they don't want to involve their parents; they lack the confidence to reach out; they don't want to involve their schools; they are worried about what people will think of them.**

37.3% responded that they feel comfortable to seek for help.
The complete responses breakdown are displayed on Table 6.

Table 6

Percentage breakdown of what would stop them for seeking for mental health support

What would stop them for seeking help	%
I don't want to involve my parents	32.8
I don't have the confidence to reach out for help	26.9
I don't want to involve my school/college	20.9
I am worried about what people will think of me	19.4
I don't know what mental health services are available to me	10.4
I don't know where to go for help	10.4

What would stop them for seeking help	%
I don't know where to go for self-referral	4.5
Other	4.5

We asked the participants to provide more detail if they answered 'Other' and they said:

'I don't want to go' (Female, 18)

'In my experience, mental health professionals haven't always listened to me and taken me seriously' (Transgender, 17)

'Money' (Prefer not to say, 17)

- **The main barriers to young people accessing professional mental health services are: the involvement of parents or schools (39.3% classified this as a 'moderate' or 'extreme barrier'), the lack of culturally appropriate mental health services (36.1% classified this as a 'moderate' or 'extreme barrier'); and waiting time (36.1% classified this a ' moderate' or 'extreme barrier')**

46% the participants said that language was not a barrier for them.
The complete responses' breakdown is displayed on Table 7.

Table 7

Percentage breakdown of the potential barriers to access professional mental health support

Potential barriers	%
Traveling distance to access mental health services	
Not a barrier	22.2
Somewhat a barrier	26.4
I don't know	25
Moderate barrier	19.4
Extreme barrier	6.9
Language	
Not a barrier	45.8
Somewhat a barrier	11.1
I don't know	13.9
Moderate barrier	18.1
Extreme barrier	11.1

Potential barriers	%
Involvement pf parents or school/college	
Not a barrier	14.1
Somewhat a barrier	18.3
I don't know	18.3
Moderate barrier	18.1
Extreme barrier	16.9
Traveling distance to access mental health services	
Not a barrier	22.2
Somewhat a barrier	26.4
I don't know	25
Moderate barrier	19.4
Extreme barrier	6.9
Lack of culturally appropriate mental health services	
Not a barrier	15.3
Somewhat a barrier	15.3
I don't know	33.3
Moderate barrier	20.8
Extreme barrier	15.3
Appointment made during school/college times	
Not a barrier	16,9
Somewhat a barrier	25,4
I don't know	28,2
Moderate barrier	16.9
Extreme barrier	12.7
Waiting times	
Not a barrier	12.5
Somewhat a barrier	19.4
I don't know	31.9

Potential barriers	%
Moderate barrier	15.3
Extreme barrier	20.8

- **Young people would like to receive professional mental health services at schools (39.1%), Internet (34.8%) and youth centres (33.3%)**

Please see Table 8 for the complete response's breakdown.

Table 8

Percentage breakdown of where young people want professional mental health services

delivered

Places	%
School	39.1
Internet	34.8
Youth centres	33.3
Phone	27.5
GP	23.2
Home	15.9
Video call	14.5
Other	4.3

We asked the young people to provide detail to the 'Other' channels and one participant reported therapists.

- **Young people told us that the top three ways to let them know about how to get help with their mental health are over the Internet, via school or college curriculum and on TikTok**

Complete responses breakdown is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Percentage Breakdown of the best ways to let young people know about how to get help

Channel	%
Internet	51.4
School/college curriculum	35.7
TikTok	30
Information sessions/Talks	21.4
Instagram	18.6
Advertisements at youth centres	18.6
Workshops	18.6
Posters or leaflets at school	18.6
YouTube	17.1
By phone	15.7
Posters or leaflets in the community	14.3
By Email	10
Twitter	7.1
Other	7.1

We asked the young people who the 'Other' were. In common with another question one participant detailed therapists.

- **77.8% of the participants said they have never used professional mental health support**

- **50% of the young people reported that the access to mental health support is 'very difficult' (12.5%) or 'difficult' (37.5%)**

Young people described getting access to mental health as 'very difficult' (12.5%) or 'difficult' (37.5%), 31.3% found it 'easy' and 18.8% reported it as 'neither difficult nor easy'. The young people said that the professional mental health support that they used were CAMHS, school counsellors, therapy and learning support.

- **When we asked how to encourage young people to use professional mental health services key themes were:**

- **Advertise/ Promote**
  'Add more things to attract young people'.
  'Advertisement in a fun way'.
  'Persuade them and teach them about mental health'.
  'In schools, social media'.
  'By spreading information in the community in places where young people like to go'.
  'By advertising it on social media and having workshops in schools'.
  'Promote it in schools, colleges, youth clubs'.

'Promote the need for mental health services'.
'Promote on Social Media'.
'Speak about it more'.
'Talk more about it in schools'.
'Via youth centres'.
'By advertising it on social media and having workshops in schools'.

- **Workshops**

  'More workshops/ talks about mental health'

  'Do more frequent workshops about mental health for them to be comfortable to speak'

  'Giving young people talks about their mental health awareness, to make them feel more comfortable about opening up to a professional'

  'Hosting different sessions out of people's comfort zone and letting young people be able to express themselves through talks between both male and females through workshops'

- **Safe spaces and feeling comfort**

  'Having people feel comfortable and safe in the environment'.

  'Make them feel comfortable with who are around'.

  'You to need make sure the parents support it so that they are comfortable'.

  'Persuasive language and making them feel comfortable and safe'.

- **Services to be available and accessible**

  'By letting them know what help is available to them'.

  'By always reminding them that help is accessible always (not just once) and letting the young person tell you themselves and not pressure them'

  'I would tell them to not be shy and just ask you trust to help'

  'Let people know about mental health services and if people need it, they will seek help'

- **Educate – create awareness**

  'Educate people about mental health and spread awareness on what to do when people have mental health issues'

  'Educate people about mental health illness + neurodiversity + make sure everyone has access to resources'

  'Educate people on how to receive mental health and specific health issues.

  'Let young people know that, not everything can be done on their own'.

- **Empathise/Relate to young people**

  'By being able to relate with their mental struggles and telling them what is normal/not normal to feel. Also, by helping them calm their anxiety/stress'.

  'Make them feel genuinely listened to and don't assume everyone wants to hear the fact they need help in the same way. Emphasise how it can be good them because some people don't understand it and think it's just talking'.

  'Give young people the opportunity to have a safe space to open up have people who have had personal experience'.

- **Normalise mental health**

  'Ensure them that it is safe, and it isn't abnormal'.

  'Help remove stigma around mental health + be mindful of difficulties with parents'.

  'Let young people know that, it is normal to struggle and give information on the signs'.

'Normalise it and make it more available but I don't know if availability can be realistically improved'.

'To teach people that mental health help isn't a bad thing'.

- **Anonymous/Independent mental health services**

    'Make sure people know of it and where to go as well as making it easier and more anonymous/ independent from parents/carers'.

    'Advertise it on social platforms and encourage schools to set up easy, anonymous systems to help young people get into the healthcare - difficulty of access is the hardest part of getting help'.

    'Possibly make it more engaging and well-advertised and you don't need to involve your parents and have access to resource'.

Focus Groups – Themes and Discussion

Our young researchers conducted two focus groups at two youth clubs in Islington. The following key themes emerged from these sessions:

- **Non-medical interventions**

    'Well, I think you don't want to go as far as getting medication. You just want to talk'.

    There was a discussion on how mental health is perceived and the stigma that it carries. Young people were afraid of heavy hand interventions that use medication. There was a call for a lighter touch approach.

- **Easy online access**

    'A website that people can access it'.

    Young people expressed the need to have online access to professional mental health services available more easily.

- **Difficulty to open up**

    'Most time it's very hard for people to open up'.

    One to the key reasons why young people don't reach out for help is because they find it difficult to open up to people that they don't know. The barrier is that there isn't a relationship established between the young person and the mental health professional.

- **Lack of trust and confidentially**

    'They say it's confidential. I know people who, like, have said stuff and then like the school, like social services involved or stuff like that'.

    Young people are screaming for confidentiality. They want help but don't want to be exposed to parents or to their school, they fear what people will think of them or to get in trouble in the sense that they have a problem.

- **Feeling of not being taken seriously**

  '**If you have like anxiety, people might be like, Oh, just suck it up. You know, it's not going to fix that**'.

  '**I went to of my parents… but they didn't do anything to counteract, prevent anything**'.

  When young people speak up, they feel they aren't taken seriously.

- **Include young people views on the support provided**

  '**They should take on your suggestions of what you want to do to help in the sessions instead of just forceful. I felt like I had to do what they want to do**'.

  Professional services on mental health need to include young people views when designing support. It should be tailored to the individual rather than one size fits all.

- **Preference for in-person services**

  '**Over the phone like sessions, which wasn't that helpful because you as it were like face to face and that was so far over the phone. I think that's a big thing for me because I didn't really like open it up. But face to face you actually see someone**'.

  There is a suggestion that in-person services are likely to aid relationship building between the young person and the service provider. The face-to-face interaction might make it easier to for the young person to open up.

- **Social male stereotype**

  '**I feel like people made me feel like a women. It sounds like more mental health issues because I see men having to be strong and not really like someone like me. More like suffering silently**'.

  Males feel a lot more difficult to open up about their mental health. There is a stereotype that mental health difficulties are something that linked to females. Males are encouraged by society to be strong and opening up make then feel weak. There is a real need to change this amongst young people so young males can have mental health support I to prevent being admitted in A&E hospital when they have a crisis.

- **People will suffer from mental health at some point in their life**

  '**I feel like I go through periods of my life, where mental health is like a bigger issue… I think we're all going through, like, the stages of mental health**'.

  Young people recognise that mental health challenges is something that happens to everyone, still they find hard to open up. We need to remove the barriers so people can get help when they need.

- **Importance of self-care**

  '**Taking care of yourself, for example, like I think is really important. Like when it comes to mental health**'.

Key findings

- 83% of the participants said that their mental health is 'important' or 'extremely important' to them.

- 50% of the participants reported that they felt they needed professional mental health support. Of these, 67% reported they had reached out for help and 33% had not reached out. Only 37.3% of the young people feel comfortable to seek for help.

- Young people don't reach out because:

  a) They don't know where to get help
  b) They lack confidence to reach out
  c) They don't want their parents to know
  d) They find it difficult to open up to strangers

- 50% of the young people reported that the access to mental health support is 'very difficult' or 'difficult' because:

  a) They don't want the involvement of parents or schools
  b) They worry about what people will think of them
  c) The available services are not culturally appropriate
  d) Long waiting times

- Young people would like to have professional mental health services available to them at schools (39.1%), over the Internet (34.8%) and at youth centres (33.3%).

Recommendations

- Talk about mental health in a fun way, use persuasive language. Advertise on social media, promote mental health it in schools, colleges and youth clubs.

- Increase mental health awareness via workshops and talks. Speaking more about mental health will make young people to feel more comfortable to open up.

- Address male stereotypes when talking about mental health.

- Create safe spaces and make young people to feel comfortable around mental health professionals. This can be done via empathising/relating to how young people feel.

- Make services more available and accessible, such as online services and easy access to non-medical interventions.

- Create anonymous/Independent mental health services to increase trust and encourage relationship building.

- Normalise mental health, teach that most people experience mental health challenges at some point in their lives and teach them that having mental health difficulties is ok, while at the same time taking it seriously.

- Include young people's views in designing the interventions and support provided to them.

- Better understanding the cultural differences that make mental health issues harder for some groups to deal with.

Our next steps

The research findings will be used to shape a Highbury Roundhouse Youth and Community Centre offer on mental health and we hope to influence the future offer on access to mental health for our young people London. The findings will be shared with policymakers working on the New Deal for Young People, Islington colleges and youth clubs, and mental health organisations in the borough.