

## Case Study 5

## **Working with schools and communities: A postgraduate module where students undertake a mental health or well-being intervention in a school or community setting**

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The MSc in Child and Adolescent Mental Health (MSc CAMHS) is a multi-disciplinary programme aiming to promote an advanced level of knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent mental health.

The programme is taught by practitioners and academics from varied disciplines including psychology, social work, law and therapeutic settings, and therefore engages with a diverse range of perspectives. Students develop their understanding of child development and mental health difficulties in children and adolescents and consider the implications of theory and research in their work with children and young people.

One of the core modules on the programme, called 'Working with schools and communities', involves students designing and planning mental health or well-being interventions in school or community settings. During the taught component of the module, students learn about a range of intervention approaches that can be used to address a variety of issues in child and adolescent mental health. Examples include counselling in schools, tackling stigma, building resilience, nurture groups, creative techniques and cognitive strategies to improve learning. For their module assessment, students have to design, conduct and evaluate their own small-scale school or community intervention which is designed to improve wellbeing and/or mental health for the groups they are working with. This involves students going out into the field, assessing need and identifying an issue or problem that needs to be addressed, and then working with members of the school or community setting to try and 'make positive change' for them. The module assessment is broken into 3 components, each focussing on the three main stages of the intervention process:

- 1) Producing an intervention proposal. This involves students critically designing and planning an intervention in a school or community setting based on an assessment of need, justification for the approach taken, and consideration of relevant ethical issues involved.
- 2) Obtaining ethical review approval and conducting an intervention, built upon the proposal in 1), which involves students implementing their proposed intervention in the school or community setting, and providing a record of this process including application of professional skills and appropriate ethical conduct.
- 3) Critical reflection of the intervention. This assessment requires students to show that they have evaluated the intervention they conducted in order to reflect on how effective it was, what impact it has had, analyse their own role in that process, and make recommendations for ongoing improvements that may be needed.

### **Examples of interventions that have been undertaken**

The students have conducted a varied range of interventions in school or community settings over the two years that the module has been running.

Examples have included:

- A school-based intervention to promote awareness and tackle the stigma of mental health issues in adolescence, which took the form of two one-hour classes with Year 10 students in a secondary school.
- A therapeutic intervention to improve emotional regulation in adolescents with emotional and behavioural difficulties, involving interactive tasks and games with adolescents with a diagnosis of autism or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who have been excluded from mainstream school.
- A community intervention to introduce practitioners to the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which involved a practice-based workshop for staff who work with children and young people displaying aggressive behaviour.
- A school-based intervention to support primary school children in preparing for transition into secondary school, comprising circle time, storytelling and narrative role play with Year 6 students in a primary school.
- A community intervention to promote internet safety for young people, which involved an interactive information stand set up in a youth club.
- An intervention in north-eastern Nigerian schools (in an area where girls from one school were recently kidnapped and other atrocities have occurred to young people) to brief teachers on the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and to educate them on the process of obtaining professional screening for students who appear likely to be experiencing PTSD.

Rehana Raheem, a current student on the MSc in Child and Adolescent Mental Health, conducted her intervention on the use of Social Stories to aid the transition of pre-schoolers in Dubai from their home to classroom environment. Specific to a preschool setting, social stories are created by teachers for students on topics that are relevant to the specific child, and this can offer help for those pre-schoolers who need extra support with the transition process. A classroom teacher can create short personalized social stories about various subjects like routines in the classroom, appropriate behaviour, and social interactions; therefore addressing the needs of the particular child while ensuring appropriateness. She says:

'My intervention was carried out with 4 pre-school teachers who are employed at a British nursery in Dubai. I conducted a short presentation explaining the concept, history, and application of Social Stories, along with examples. Afterwards, I was able to have a brief discussion with the teachers on how they felt the information presented could be used in their classrooms, and if they found it useful enough or not. They also started brainstorming on which children they could use Social Stories with. The second part of the intervention (which is not completed yet) will be a follow up with the teachers to find out if and how they have implemented social stories in their practice, and what impact it had. Speaking from prior experience as a pre-school teacher, I feel the use of Social Stories in teachers' day to day classroom activities will have considerable benefits. Dubai is a multi-cultural city, and because of this I used to have a lot of children being brought to pre-school who spoke various languages, most of them did not know English. Particularly for these children, separating from their parents and getting used to their classroom environment can be tough as they don't understand what teachers are trying to communicate, and vice versa. In cases like these I have myself used pictures to communicate with these children, so when I learned about Social Stories I imagined this should work well with transitioning children. During my intervention, the teachers looked positive and discussed how this could be useful in their classrooms. I feel they understood the concept well as they started to bring out excellent examples in the discussion. In terms of what I got out of it, it was definitely a great opportunity to share my enthusiasm for Social Stories. It was also beneficial for me to understand what some of the main challenges of the teachers were in dealing with children who have difficulty transitioning. It was also a good chance to practice my presentation skills.'

### **Evidence of impact and 'making change'**

The students who have participated in the module have reported that they really enjoy the experience and gain valuable skills from doing it. They leave the module with concrete examples of having designed and facilitated a small scale intervention, which is very beneficial for their own professional development and employability. In addition, the experience itself can improve students' confidence and open doors into opportunities they may not have previously considered. Importantly, the outcomes of this module are not limited to the students themselves. The evaluation phase of their assessment also involves them taking lengths to show impact/benefit for the school or community setting where they carried out their intervention. This means critical reflection on the work they did, feedback from participants and key stakeholders (where appropriate) about its usefulness and change in practice/behaviour as a result, a consideration of lessons learned from the intervention, and how things might be improved/done differently. Therefore, we believe that the work students do on this module involves Changemaking for them in terms of their own skills and experience, but also Changemaking for the schools and community settings where they are based.

