IN THIS ISSUE

USEFUL RESOURCES
Where to go for support when you need it

FIVE STEPS
to mental wellbeing

You asked, we answered
Your questions answered by Matt

BEING HEARD
Helping young people have their say

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE
How research is making mental health support better
Hello!

Welcome to another issue of Thrive. We know that the mental health and wellbeing of young people has never been more under pressure – and sometimes being care experienced can add its own challenges. For some young people, this has been made worse by the pandemic and cost of living increases, with some saying that they experienced loneliness, money problems, and struggles in accessing mental health support services.

But, what’s the best way to help young people, especially when so many of the services you might get help from have moved online? We’re delighted that this Thrive explains some of the research that Cardiff University has been doing into the mental health and wellbeing of care experienced young people. We look at what they think needs to change to help improve support for care experienced young people’s mental health and wellbeing – plus there’s all our usual features, like Ask Matt and Have Your Say.

We always love to know what you think about this issue of Thrive. Email us at wales@fostering.net

Thrive xxx

PS: There’s loads of issues of Thrive online with advice on everything from pathway planning to healthy relationships. Find them at bit.ly/TFNThrive

A big up to...

The Fostering Network in Wales Young People’s Advisory Board, Daniel Sinclair, the research team at DECIPHer and CASCADE (Cardiff University) and Alun Richards. Without your contributions, we just couldn’t create this mag. Thank you!

By the way, if you’d like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network and what goes into Thrive, you could join our Wales Young People’s Advisory Board. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net to find out more.

Get in touch

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff CF11 9HB
029 2044 0940
Contact: wales@fostering.net

Being heard

Rachael Vaughan is the engagement manager for children and young people at CASCADE, the Children’s Social Care research and Development Centre at Cardiff University. Lots of the content in this edition of Thrive is from Rachael’s work with young people with care experience.

What would you say to those who fund services, about what needs to get better when it comes to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people with care experience?

They need to make the time to listen to young people themselves. Think about young people and the particular circumstances they are in, then talk to them and co-produce a better service with them as they know best what they need.

There needs to be greater investment in early intervention and wider wellbeing support, rather than being reactive or waiting until young people are in a crisis.

You’ve been looking at the move of mental health and wellbeing support online because of the pandemic. What would you say is working well, and not so well, in this area?

For people who live in rural areas, the ability to join groups online is very useful – it gives them the opportunity to connect with their care experienced peers (where they are ‘not different’). This has widened opportunities for young people, given them more ways to have their voice heard and find out more about what’s going on in Wales. It also highlighted the need for reliable internet access.

We should continue to support foster carers to develop their knowledge around IT because our use of technology is going to grow and not go away. We need to empower foster carers to feel confident to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing and how that links with online support.

What needs to change?...

How to improve mental health and wellbeing support.

Ask Matt

Answers to your questions about mental health and wellbeing.

Five steps to mental wellbeing.

Resources

Support for your wellbeing or mental health.

Part of your role is to help young people have their voices heard. Why is this so important?

Enabling young people with care experience to be involved in things that affect their care is essential. Having a young person interpret the results of research can be so important. For example, on this latest piece of research on mental health, I worked with a co-researcher who was care experienced herself. After every interview we did, she and I would discuss the findings, and she would interpret things differently to me because of her different perspective and experiences.

Young people can tell us what topics they think we should research. They can also help make sure that we are asking the right questions. For example, will young people understand the questions in the way that we think they will? How should we talk about and to young people? They can also see if our findings sound anything like their experience, and can advise on the best ways for us to share the findings of research so that young people can see them. These things can take time and need to be built into a project if it’s going to be meaningful, and that’s part of my job.

Part of your role is to help young people have their voices heard. Why is this so important?

By the way, if you’d like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network and what goes into Thrive, you could join our Wales Young People’s Advisory Board. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net to find out more.

A big up to...

The Fostering Network in Wales Young People’s Advisory Board, Daniel Sinclair, the research team at DECIPHer and CASCADE (Cardiff University) and Alun Richards. Without your contributions, we just couldn’t create this mag. Thank you!

Get in touch

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff CF11 9HB
029 2044 0940
Contact: wales@fostering.net

Being heard

Rachael Vaughan is the engagement manager for children and young people at CASCADE, the Children’s Social Care research and Development Centre at Cardiff University. Lots of the content in this edition of Thrive is from Rachael’s work with young people with care experience.

What would you say to those who fund services, about what needs to get better when it comes to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people with care experience?

They need to make the time to listen to young people themselves. Think about young people and the particular circumstances they are in, then talk to them and co-produce a better service with them as they know best what they need.

There needs to be greater investment in early intervention and wider wellbeing support, rather than being reactive or waiting until young people are in a crisis.

You’ve been looking at the move of mental health and wellbeing support online because of the pandemic. What would you say is working well, and not so well, in this area?

For people who live in rural areas, the ability to join groups online is very useful – it gives them the opportunity to connect with their care experienced peers (where they are ‘not different’). This has widened opportunities for young people, given them more ways to have their voice heard and find out more about what’s going on in Wales. It also highlighted the need for reliable internet access.

We should continue to support foster carers to develop their knowledge around IT because our use of technology is going to grow and not go away. We need to empower foster carers to feel confident to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing and how that links with online support.

What needs to change?...

How to improve mental health and wellbeing support.

Ask Matt

Answers to your questions about mental health and wellbeing.

Five steps to mental wellbeing.

Resources

Support for your wellbeing or mental health.

Part of your role is to help young people have their voices heard. Why is this so important?

Enabling young people with care experience to be involved in things that affect their care is essential. Having a young person interpret the results of research can be so important. For example, on this latest piece of research on mental health, I worked with a co-researcher who was care experienced herself. After every interview we did, she and I would discuss the findings, and she would interpret things differently to me because of her different perspective and experiences.

Young people can tell us what topics they think we should research. They can also help make sure that we are asking the right questions. For example, will young people understand the questions in the way that we think they will? How should we talk about and to young people? They can also see if our findings sound anything like their experience, and can advise on the best ways for us to share the findings of research so that young people can see them. These things can take time and need to be built into a project if it’s going to be meaningful, and that’s part of my job.

Part of your role is to help young people have their voices heard. Why is this so important?

By the way, if you’d like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network and what goes into Thrive, you could join our Wales Young People’s Advisory Board. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net to find out more.

A big up to...

The Fostering Network in Wales Young People’s Advisory Board, Daniel Sinclair, the research team at DECIPHer and CASCADE (Cardiff University) and Alun Richards. Without your contributions, we just couldn’t create this mag. Thank you!

Get in touch

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff CF11 9HB
029 2044 0940
Contact: wales@fostering.net

Being heard

Rachael Vaughan is the engagement manager for children and young people at CASCADE, the Children’s Social Care research and Development Centre at Cardiff University. Lots of the content in this edition of Thrive is from Rachael’s work with young people with care experience.

What would you say to those who fund services, about what needs to get better when it comes to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people with care experience?

They need to make the time to listen to young people themselves. Think about young people and the particular circumstances they are in, then talk to them and co-produce a better service with them as they know best what they need.

There needs to be greater investment in early intervention and wider wellbeing support, rather than being reactive or waiting until young people are in a crisis.

You’ve been looking at the move of mental health and wellbeing support online because of the pandemic. What would you say is working well, and not so well, in this area?

For people who live in rural areas, the ability to join groups online is very useful – it gives them the opportunity to connect with their care experienced peers (where they are ‘not different’). This has widened opportunities for young people, given them more ways to have their voice heard and find out more about what’s going on in Wales. It also highlighted the need for reliable internet access.

We should continue to support foster carers to develop their knowledge around IT because our use of technology is going to grow and not go away. We need to empower foster carers to feel confident to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing and how that links with online support.
Lots of young people say they don’t know what mental health and wellbeing services are available or what they actually are. For example, when they are referred to counselling, they often are not sure what will happen.

There should be improved information and access about resources for mental health and wellbeing. Young people recommended that there be one place (a ‘hub’) that can host this information. This hub should be designed with care experienced young people and be available to young people and their foster carers. It should have ongoing funding so that it can be continually updated and supported.

Choice and flexibility

Young people often feel that they cannot choose the mental health and wellbeing services that best match what they need.

It is important that young people are able to decide how they use services (online or in person) and when they use them. Services also need to be flexible, and young people should be able to change their mind about how and when they receive this support as their circumstances change.

In the future, services need to be designed with young people to make sure that different needs are being taken account of, and that all care experienced young people are seen as the same.

The Children’s Commissioner in Wales is encouraging all Welsh regions to have a ‘no wrong door’ approach to children and young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. This means that services should support you and be provided as easily as possible, and that you should not keep being told that you have come to the wrong place when trying to get help.

If you are being told to try another door, then the Children’s commissioner will want to hear from you to support this change.

You can read more about this work here: www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/no-wrong-door-bringing-services-together-to-meet-childrens-needs

Choice and flexibility

Young people often feel that they cannot choose the mental health and wellbeing services that best match what they need.

It is important that young people are able to decide how they use services (online or in person) and when they use them. Services also need to be flexible, and young people should be able to change their mind about how and when they receive this support as their circumstances change.

In the future, services need to be designed with young people to make sure that different needs are being taken account of, and that all care experienced young people are seen as the same.

The Children’s Commissioner in Wales is encouraging all Welsh regions to have a ‘no wrong door’ approach to children and young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health needs. This means that services should support you and be provided as easily as possible, and that you should not keep being told that you have come to the wrong place when trying to get help.

If you are being told to try another door, then the Children’s commissioner will want to hear from you to support this change.

You can read more about this work here: www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/no-wrong-door-bringing-services-together-to-meet-childrens-needs

If you think the choices you are being offered are not right for you, or are not taking your opinion into account, you should say so to your foster carers. If need be, you might also need to speak to your social worker, ask for an advocate or raise it at your next child looked after review.
**Getting help for mental and emotional wellbeing**

**Feeling lonely and low**

**YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED**

**Matt’s back to help with your problems**

**A Welsh language service**

**Q** I have recently come into foster care. I’m 15 and before coming into care I was living with my aunt. She’s very poorly so can’t look after me any more. My foster carers seem nice, but I’m feeling really lonely and pretty depressed. Will things ever seem any better?

**Matt says:** Moving from someone important in your life, like your aunt, is never easy - especially if the move is to foster carers that you may not have any feelings for.

It’s important that you talk to your foster carers about how you are feeling and ask them to help you to support you in your mental health and wellbeing. There are lots of ideas on page 10 of this magazine, including Facebook groups and YouTube videos about mindfulness, which could help you find ways to feel better.

If you are worried about your aunt’s health, you could consider asking your social worker to help you get a different appointment so you can ask your doctor about being referred to a counsellor to help you with your mental health.

**Q** My foster carers won’t let me use the internet in my bedroom because they’re worried about what I’m looking at. But I want to find out more information about getting mental health support. How can I persuade them to let me get online in private?

**Matt says:** Feeling lonely and low can be tricky for both of you, but there is a balance between your foster carers wanting to keep you safe online and your ability and need to access information and services independently.

Do you feel able to sit down with your foster carers to talk about this? Starting these conversations can be tricky for both of you, but there is a fantastic resource called the Digital Passport (www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport) which could help to get you started. The passport helps your foster carers get to know what you like doing online and in other parts of your digital life, and who can help give you the support you need if something happens to you online which makes you worried or feels wrong. This should mean that your foster carers will feel more confident in giving you more online responsibility. The passport also includes an agreement about your digital life which you could fill in with your foster carers.

**Q** Recently I started to see a great counsellor at school. The only problem is that they keep coming to get me in the middle of my Food Tech lesson and I’m worried that everyone will know that I’m seeing the counsellor. I’m also a bit worried about how much of my course I’m missing as it’s my GCSEs next year. What should I do?

**Matt says:** It’s very important that you have the opportunity to complete your GCSEs course, and to see the counsellor to support your mental health.

Have you tried speaking to your counsellor to see if they have another appointment available? If that hasn’t worked, you may need to speak to whoever organised your work experience to see if they have another appointment available.

If you are worried about how much of your course you are missing, you could ask your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker to help you get a different appointment.

So, think about what you want from your counselling sessions, how your school could help you access the sessions without missing lessons (or how you can make up what you miss) or being obvious where you are going. Once you are happy with what you want to say, practise your delivery with your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker.

You might not get everything you were hoping for, but it really is important that you can complete your course successfully and meet up with your councilor.

**Q** By the way, medowl.org is a Welsh language mental health charity with a Welsh language service. Matt’s back to help with your problems.

**Matt says:** Yes, it is! Thank you for letting me know. Welsh-speaking mental health support is really important and it’s great that there are organisations like Voices from Care and Become.

**Q** Recently I started to see a great counsellor at school. The only problem is that they keep coming to get me in the middle of my Food Tech lesson and I’m worried that everyone will know that I’m seeing the counsellor. I’m also a bit worried about how much of my course I’m missing as it’s my GCSEs next year. What should I do?

**Matt says:** It’s very important that you have the opportunity to complete your GCSEs course, and to see the counsellor to support your mental health.

Have you tried speaking to your counsellor to see if they have another appointment available? If that hasn’t worked, you may need to speak to whoever organised your work experience to see if they have another appointment available.

If you are worried about how much of your course you are missing, you could ask your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker to help you get a different appointment.

So, think about what you want from your counselling sessions, how your school could help you access the sessions without missing lessons (or how you can make up what you miss) or being obvious where you are going. Once you are happy with what you want to say, practise your delivery with your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker.

You might not get everything you were hoping for, but it really is important that you can complete your course successfully and meet up with your councilor.

**Q** My foster carers won’t let me use the internet in my bedroom because they’re worried about what I’m looking at. But I want to find out more information about getting mental health support. How can I persuade them to let me get online in private?

**Matt says:** Feeling lonely and low can be tricky for both of you, but there is a balance between your foster carers wanting to keep you safe online and your ability and need to access information and services independently.

Do you feel able to sit down with your foster carers to talk about this? Starting these conversations can be tricky for both of you, but there is a fantastic resource called the Digital Passport (www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport) which could help to get you started. The passport helps your foster carers get to know what you like doing online and in other parts of your digital life, and who can help give you the support you need if something happens to you online which makes you worried or feels wrong. This should mean that your foster carers will feel more confident in giving you more online responsibility. The passport also includes an agreement about your digital life which you could fill in with your foster carers.

**Q** Recently I started to see a great counsellor at school. The only problem is that they keep coming to get me in the middle of my Food Tech lesson and I’m worried that everyone will know that I’m seeing the counsellor. I’m also a bit worried about how much of my course I’m missing as it’s my GCSEs next year. What should I do?

**Matt says:** It’s very important that you have the opportunity to complete your GCSEs course, and to see the counsellor to support your mental health.

Have you tried speaking to your counsellor to see if they have another appointment available? If that hasn’t worked, you may need to speak to whoever organised your work experience to see if they have another appointment available.

If you are worried about how much of your course you are missing, you could ask your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker to help you get a different appointment.

So, think about what you want from your counselling sessions, how your school could help you access the sessions without missing lessons (or how you can make up what you miss) or being obvious where you are going. Once you are happy with what you want to say, practise your delivery with your foster carers before you speak to your school or social worker.

You might not get everything you were hoping for, but it really is important that you can complete your course successfully and meet up with your councilor.
There needs to be more age-appropriate services, and they need to figure out what would work for a certain person, not just label us all as one type... it needs to be tailored to the individual.

If I was actually going to commit to some sort of therapy, I would probably want it to be in person, yeah, to build that relationship more with the person, with the person doing it.

If I think not having your own computer, that causes a barrier with online resources... or the whole family share one computer. It’s maybe not somewhere that you want to go and deal with your deepest thoughts.

Evidence suggests there are five steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life.

1. Connect with other people – try and build stronger and closer relationships.
2. Be physically active – it can help your physical and mental wellbeing.
3. Learn new skills – a new skill can boost confidence, give you a sense of purpose and help you make new friends.
4. Give to others – acts of kindness can create positive feelings and a sense of reward.
5. Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness) – this includes your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you.

You can find out more about these five steps at www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing

Some helpful wellbeing resources

Five helpful tips for overcoming anxiety – NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) have some great advice on how to manage anxiety when it seems like it might be you’re spiralling out of control.

www.nyas.net/news-and-campaigns/news/5-helpful-tips-to-overcome-anxiety

Five ways to wellbeing – some excellent ideas on how to improve your wellbeing from Mind, the mental health charity.


Wellbeing calendars – some people find that a wellbeing calendar can give them a focus for improving their wellbeing.

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/mindfulness-exercises-tips

www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/blog/how-i-practise-mindfulness-to-improve-my-mental-health

Practising mindfulness – this can be a really helpful way of looking after your mental health. Becoming more aware of your thoughts and feelings may stop them from suddenly overwhelming you. Here are two useful web pages about practising mindfulness.

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/mindfulness-exercises-tips

www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/blog/how-i-practise-mindfulness-to-improve-my-mental-health

Have your say

Many mental health and wellbeing services have moved online over the last couple of years because of the pandemic. But what do care experienced young people think about that move? Here are some of their thoughts...

For me, being online, I can be myself, nobody can be like, “Oh look at her!”; because if you don’t like it, I can just close the screen and you can just go.

I can really think through what I want to talk about in the emails. Whereas, maybe, in a counselling session, you’re only there for an hour, so, it’s kind of rushing through everything... through email you get that more flexible timescale as well.
Useful resources

Staying safe online

- **Childline** – has lots of information about how to stay safe and what to do if something goes wrong – [www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/staying-safe-online](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/staying-safe-online)
- **Digital Passport** is a great resource to help your foster carer get to know what you like doing online and in other parts of your digital life – [www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport](http://www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport)
- **Thinkuknow** is a great website to learn about keeping safe online – [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11-18](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11-18)
- **Thrive: Keeping yourself safe online** – There is a whole Thrive magazine dedicated to offering advice and information about online safety. [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/thrive](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/thrive)
- **UK Safer Internet Centre** aims to make the internet a great and safe place for children and young people – [www.saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/young-people/resources-for-11-19s](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/young-people/resources-for-11-19s)

Mental health and wellbeing support

**Become** – works to improve the everyday lives and future life chances of care experienced children and young people.
Tel: 0800 023 2033
Web: [www.becomecharity.org.uk](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk)

**Childline** – a service provided by NSPCC to help anyone under the age of 19 in the UK with any issue they’re going through, for help and support.
Tel: 0800 1111
Chat: [www.childline.org.uk/info-advice](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice)

**Meddwl** – Welsh language service (see page 7)

**Meic Cymru** – the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. They won’t judge you and will help by giving you information, useful advice and the support you need to make a change.
Tel: 080880 23456
Web: [www.meiccymru.org](http://www.meiccymru.org)

**Mental Health Helpline for Wales** – a confidential listening and support service for those that may be struggling with their wellbeing. Support is available 24/7.
Tel: 0800 132737 Text ‘help’ to 8106
Web: [www.callhelpline.org.uk](http://www.callhelpline.org.uk)

**Mind** offers advice, support and information to people experiencing a mental health difficulty, and their family and friends.
Tel: 0300 123 3393, Open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm (except bank holidays).
Email: info@mind.org.uk
Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**NYAS Newid Project** – offers support to care experienced young people aged 16-25, to help to manage their mental health and wellbeing. More information
Tel: 0808 808 1001
Web: [www.nyas.net/services/our-services-in-wales/support-services](http://www.nyas.net/services/our-services-in-wales/support-services)

**Papyrus** – a service for young people who are thinking about suicide, or for anyone worried that a young person may be contemplating suicide.
Tel: 0800 068 4141
Web: [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

**Samaritans** – available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.
Tel: 116 123 (free to call from within the UK and Ireland), 24 hours a day.
Web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
Email: jo@samaritans.org

**Voices From Care Cymru** – brings young people together throughout Wales, who are, or have been, looked after. They aim to provide opportunities, to improve the conditions of being in care, to promote the view of young people and to protect the interests of young people in care.
Email: info@vfcc.org.uk