Promoting wellbeing through partnership and co-production

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Background

Between the ages of five and sixteen, one in ten children suffers from a diagnosable mental health disorder (Green et al, 2005). The stigma surrounding views of mental ill health, particularly among children and young people can have serious impacts on those dealing with such illnesses and on preventing others from seeking help (Young Minds, 2011:02).

> "52% (45% 9-16yrs and 58% 17-25yrs) have heard friends/classmates call other people names when life is hard for them and 45% (both age ranges) have been called names by friends/classmates when life has been hard for them. Examples of name calling across the age range include weirdo, retard, stupid, idiot, freak, schizo, crazy, spaz and psycho."
> (Young Minds, 2011:01)

The negative connotations surrounding this area of personal wellbeing in children's and young peoples discourses, and the casual nature in which they use abusive terms "links in with the difficulties that young people face when talking about their problems" (Young Minds, 2011:01). Children's sense of wellbeing is intrinsically linked to their feelings about their relationships with others (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Their psychological wellbeing has important implications for their current and future abilities to engage with all aspects of their lives: making and keeping friends, participating in education and other societal contexts, and building skills for later in life (Hagell, Coleman, Brooks 2013).

The constituencies of Belfast West and Belfast North are areas of multiple disadvantages and have the highest suicide rates in Northern Ireland (HM Government, December 2012). The average suicide rate in most deprived areas in Northern Ireland is almost three times the rate in non-deprived areas (DHSSPSNI, 2012). Between 2005 and 2009, 77% of the total number of suicides were male, and 36.8% of the total number of suicides involved people aged between fifteen and thirty-four years old (DHSSPSNI, 2012).

Incidents of self-harming are also increasing, especially in young women in the sixteen to forty-four year old age group: 53% of total admissions to hospital between 2005-2010 were female (DHSSPSNI, 2012). "The reported self-harm figures substantially underestimate the true size of the problem", as many incidents of self-harm are dealt with in accident and emergency departments and approximately 40% of these visits do not result in hospital admissions (DHSSPSNI, 2012). The implications of these statistics are especially concerning as Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH) is considered the most significant risk factor for future suicide (DHSSPSNI, 2012).

In response to the significant increase in suicide rates, government, educational and charity bodies and organisations have been active in initiating strategies and interventions to address the problem throughout Northern Ireland.

> "Early intervention for positive mental health and wider measures to improve our quality of life are undoubtedly part of the long-term answer…Frontline preventative action to care for people who face this situation will remain essential" (Poots, DHSSPSNI, 2012:4).

Media and public information campaigns, support services and training have sought to educate the population and address underlying issues, which can increase the risk of suicide within communities. However, it is important to note, "the specific circumstances of every person who becomes suicidal are unique" (Poots, DHSSPSNI, 2012:4).

Stigma towards mental ill-health at individual, community and society levels has impacted significantly on children and young peoples perception of mental ill health "Some young people and their families have described the experience of stigma as being equal to and sometimes worse than having a mental health problem" (Young Minds, 2012:01). Children as young as three years old have displayed prejudicial behaviours (Weiss, 1994). How these judgements have been informed and formed, and what children understand their behaviours and feelings to mean could, if understood more fully, inform interventions at appropriate stages in children's social development.

Rationale

This presentation will discuss the findings from evidence-based research into the effectiveness of a partnership between Louise O'Boyle (Ulster University) and PIPS Charity North Belfast, over a series of collaborations between 2012-2016. These collaborations included a number of arts-based projects that involved post-primary children, PIPS staff and PIPS Family Support Group. The outcomes of these projects were further utilised to promote emotional wellbeing within the local communities of North Belfast.

This presentation will focus on the development of the partnership and discuss what were the key considerations, synergies and modes of working utilised to make it effective; how these findings can

inform future partnerships within communities. As proposed in the Assembly's consultation document, 'Strategy for Culture and Arts 2016-2026' the driving vision is "To promote, develop and support the crucial role of arts and culture in creating a cohesive community and delivering social change to our society on the basis of equality for everyone" (2015:11).

Activities

Creative activities can afford opportunities for reflection, evaluation and often the articulation of what we know or see, but cannot verbalise orally or through prose. By participants controlling the creation and selection of images they can most legitimately present their meaning or response to an issue and/or concern. Discussions then evolve to further explore the significance and themes emerging from the imagery. Affording people the opportunity to develop and articulate their voice and present it to the wider community can be a route to motivate and empower those involved and build social capital within their communities. (Thomas, 2008; Esche and Bradley 2007; Matarasso, 2015).

Key Findings

Fundamental to the development of any partnership is recognition that knowledge can be created outside of the academy and other formal bodies. Who the experts are and where they are located is changing and this approach to partnership can lead to coproduced forms of knowledge. Communities can inspire and inform public bodies and in turn be supported by them.

Future Focus

Research has evidenced the negative impact on self-esteem and worth people may experience when scrolling through Facebook and other social media platforms feeds - this submission's output aims to achieve the opposite. The World Health Organisation predicts that depression will be the leading cause of global disability by 2020. The increasing use of digital engagements by young people and the embedded value of those engagements in their social constructs must be considered.

Recommendations

Public health initiatives and/or interventions should engage with the developing social practices of young people (aged 10-25) in our society. These engagements should be informed in their design, content and implementation by authentic research partnerships with young people (aged 10-25). This approach to partnership can lead to coproduced forms of knowledge. Communities can inspire and inform public bodies and in turn be supported by them.

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