



# **The Children's Society**

*Meeting the mental health needs of  
children and young people*

## The level of need

Around 1 in 10 children in the UK have a diagnosable mental health problem, yet The Children's Society's research shows every year around 30,000 children are turned away from specialist mental health services without further support.

The situation is at crisis point. Children with serious mental health problems are waiting several months to get help as services struggle to cope with rising demand. The most vulnerable children and young people – those facing complex and multiple problems – are being let down as current services react to crisis rather than provide early intervention support.

Vulnerable young people, such as those living in poverty or known social services, are more likely to experience mental ill health, while older teenagers are turning to self-harm or suicide in increasing numbers. But the true scale of the crisis is unknown, with many children who show signs of trauma going unnoticed. The most common mental health problems for this age group are anxiety and depression, but other problems like eating disorders and psychosis can also emerge during this stage of development.

Mental health support for these children and young people is woefully inadequate. We want to make sure teenagers who have been subjected to sexual exploitation, trafficking or who have run away from abuse have somewhere they feel they can turn, and we fight to get them the mental health support they need.

## Our work with children and young people

We run therapeutic support, befriending, counselling and advice services for young people who are desperately in need of mental health support. Our objective is to challenge and disrupt the cycle of poor mental health that adds to the vulnerability of children and young people at a critical stage in their lives.

Across the country, we deliver a range of services that are children and young people led, using a combination of face-to-face and digital delivery that is focused on the needs of the young people. We create and promote positive opportunities for children of all ages and abilities to get actively involved in our work, and ensure their involvement in meaningful decision-making at all levels.

### Connect and Support Hubs

Our **Connect and Support Hubs** offer universal access to a service without thresholds, tiers or waiting times. Young people can access immediate support – including group work and face-to-face therapeutic support – on a walk-in basis through a city centre hub. This service places prevention, early identification and recovery at its core, and serves the needs of those children and young people who are most vulnerable.

The hubs are designed to increase the availability of help and reduce demand on specialist services through early engagement and prevention.



## Stories from our Connect and Support Hub

### Khudeja

I welcomed a young Afghan boy who came in in emotional and physical pain. We sat together and he told me of his experience escaping Afghanistan at the age of 11 and his journey to the UK, including being abandoned and persecution. He had also recently lost a loved one. He had attended his GP and A&E 50 times in the last three months to get to the bottom of the physical pain he was experiencing.

We listened to him and offered advice and support – he not only calmed but we also realised much of his physical pain was being caused by anxiety and his pains began to lessen. He left Pause [Connect and Support Hub] stating how grateful that he was made so welcome and listened to. He said just by telling somebody about his experiences, that he had not shared with anyone before, he had felt better and much of the physical pain had gone.

### Sarah

A 20 year old girl came in to Pause in real distress and we initially found it difficult to understand her concerns. Once we had been able to help her calm down she presented with very low self-esteem and low sense of self-worth and had expressed serious thoughts of suicide. She had felt nobody could help her. She had attended A&E on a number of occasions but they had not been able to help her – but I contacted the Crisis (emergency mental health) team and they were able to help her.

She contacted me a few days later via letter thanking us for supporting her and stating her time with us was 'The first time I had been treated as a person not a problem'.

### Rachel

A young person dropped into the service with her mum and younger brother. She initially reported having severe anxiety and panic. The young person stated that she experienced panic attacks 4–5 times daily, resulting in her having to leave the classroom often. The young person also mentioned that a close friend of hers died suddenly in an accident. Consequently this had impacted even more on her mood.

Since coming to Pause, she was given support and information about anxiety and panic, and how to manage these. Her panic and anxiety have now reduced significantly, and she is beginning to accept her friend's death.

## **Online support and counselling**

An important component of our vision for supporting young people includes working with Xenzone to create an online support and counselling service to provide young people with a range of options to access the support they need, and bring digital applications into service development.

Our blended digital and face-to-face model seeks to transform mental health services for vulnerable young people aged up to 25. Working together we will widen access to services by removing tiers and providing a joined-up model of care.

This unique and comprehensive model will be delivered across a network of partners, working with established health and social care systems, and with clear pathways to specialist mental health services.

## **Mental health in schools**

Our mental health and emotional well-being in schools work focuses on creating emotionally healthy school environments, with citywide offers that engage all schools and colleges in improving the emotional well-being of their students.

This initiative strives to create a school ethos and classroom environment that is supportive of good emotional health, identifies and supports young people most vulnerable to poor emotional health, and strengthens the partnership between school and community to better support children and families.

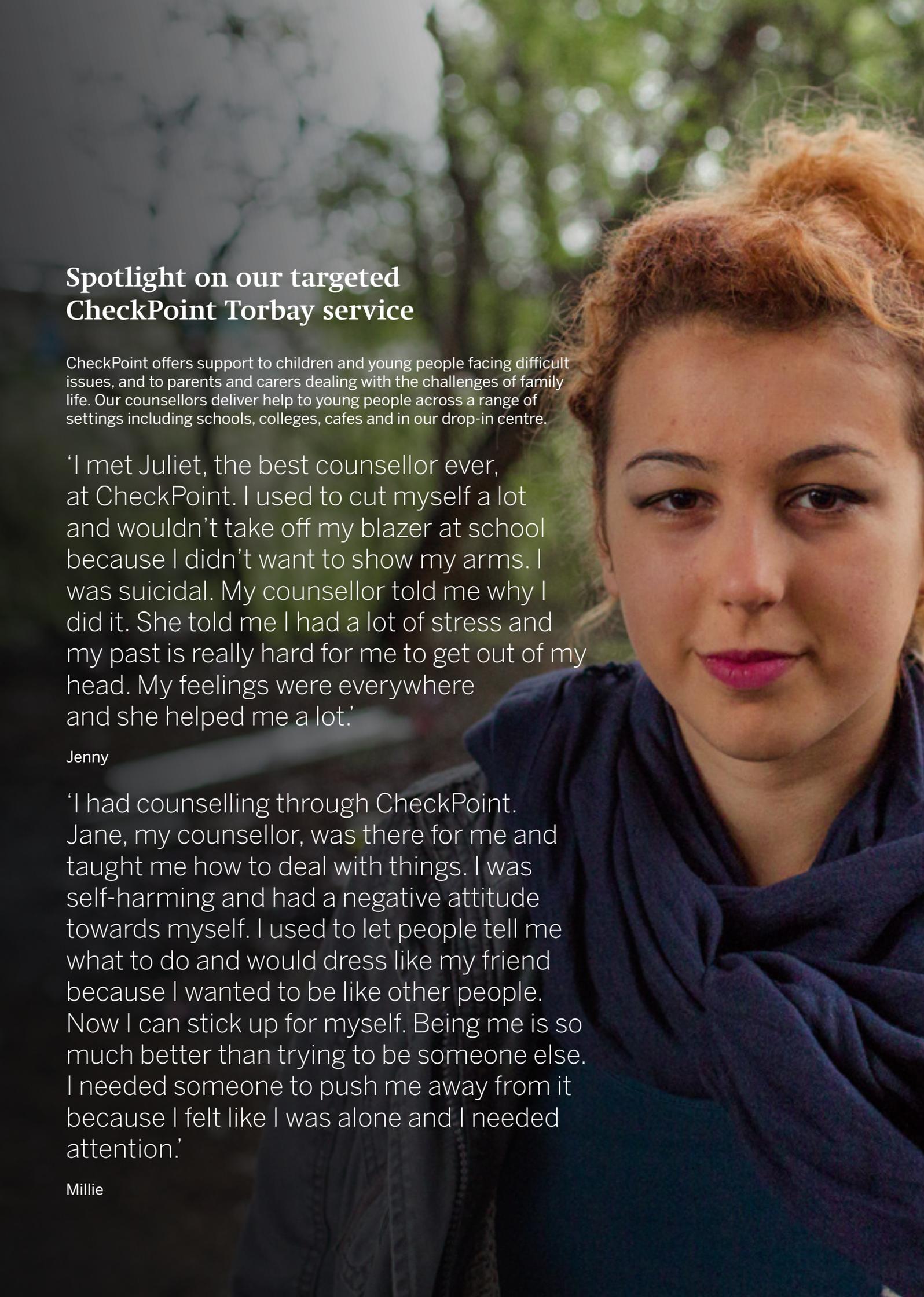
## **Targeted and specialist support for vulnerable teenagers**

Some children whose needs are not met by a universal approach alone may require additional provision and support. We offer targeted and specialist support delivered by qualified professionals with extensive experience in supporting vulnerable young people.

Service models such as Targeted Individual Support, Targeted Group Support, and Befriending are developed in a trauma-informed manner. Further staff training and skill development in mental and emotional health improves the impact of our services and thus outcomes for young people.

Services working with young people affected by trauma – for example domestic violence, abuse or assault, exploitation, or seeking asylum – can utilise our Therapeutic Interventions service model, which recognises that recovery from acute distress often requires this type of intervention.





## Spotlight on our targeted CheckPoint Torbay service

CheckPoint offers support to children and young people facing difficult issues, and to parents and carers dealing with the challenges of family life. Our counsellors deliver help to young people across a range of settings including schools, colleges, cafes and in our drop-in centre.

'I met Juliet, the best counsellor ever, at CheckPoint. I used to cut myself a lot and wouldn't take off my blazer at school because I didn't want to show my arms. I was suicidal. My counsellor told me why I did it. She told me I had a lot of stress and my past is really hard for me to get out of my head. My feelings were everywhere and she helped me a lot.'

Jenny

'I had counselling through CheckPoint. Jane, my counsellor, was there for me and taught me how to deal with things. I was self-harming and had a negative attitude towards myself. I used to let people tell me what to do and would dress like my friend because I wanted to be like other people. Now I can stick up for myself. Being me is so much better than trying to be someone else. I needed someone to push me away from it because I felt like I was alone and I needed attention.'

Millie



## Improving outcomes for children and young people

We assessed a sample of young people we worked with in our mental health services against our outcomes for that area of work, and we found that:

**75%** experienced improvements to their mental and emotional health

**61%** experienced improvements in having their say

**46%** experienced improvements in relationships with family and carers

**50%** felt more positive about the future.

**577** children and young people received one-to-one support through our therapeutic mental health services.

**92%** of the children and young people surveyed who used our mental health and emotional well-being services were happy or very happy with their experience.

**86%** of the young people assessed who used our mental health and well-being services experienced a positive improvement in at least one area.

# Influencing change for better mental health outcomes for young people

Alongside providing direct services for children and young people, we work to change national legislation and local policies and practice to improve the lives of children and young people.

Our activities include campaigning, lobbying, research and local well-being consultations with children and young people across the country.

## **We will work towards this ambition in the following ways:**

### 1. Children and young people's well-being

Our world leading well-being research programme launched in 2005 and puts the voice of the child at the heart of studies about their well-being. It has filled the gap in research regarding young people's views of their own well-being, and developed a measure of subjective well-being now used by the Office of National Statistics.

Our research aims to develop a better understanding of the concept of well-being as it relates to young people, taking full account of the views of young people themselves. Recently we have been exploring how different aspects of well-being and different types of mental health problems relate to each other.

We also conduct local well-being assessments in partnership with local authorities to understand children's subjective well-being in different locations. In 2016/17, we consulted with children and young people to identify the aspects of life where they are doing well, and the aspects where they are not doing so well, in order to identify potential priorities for improving well-being in their local area.

### 2. Mental health in educational settings

School and colleges are amongst the best places to start identifying and meeting the mental health and emotional needs of pupils, and signposting those who need further support. School-based interventions are seen as accessible, non-stigmatising and effective by pupils, their families and by staff in educational settings. Crucially, school-based support can also form part of a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being.

Learnings from our subjective well-being programme demonstrate that good mental health is about dealing with mental health problems when they occur, and also promoting positive mental health through driving high levels of subjective well-being at an earlier stage.

We have called on Government to introduce a legally-binding entitlement for children and young people to be able to access mental health and well-being support in educational settings across England and Wales. This entitlement must be matched with sufficient funding for services.

### 3. Mental health and poverty

Children and young people living in poverty are over three times more likely to experience mental health disorders than their peers. Evidence suggests child poverty has risen over the course of the last Parliament, and that it will continue to rise.

Our analysis has found strong associations between child poverty and mental health problems, so an increase in child poverty could lead to an increased demand for children's mental health services.

Children in families struggling with debt are five times more likely to be unhappy than children in families who do not have difficulty with debt, putting them at risk of developing mental health problems. When families fall into debt, parents often face impossible choices between caring for their children or paying off their debts – leading to their debts spiralling out of control.

We are calling on the Government to create a 'breathing space' scheme that gives parents and young people time and space to repay their debts, with no rising fees or visits from intimidating bailiffs.

### 4. Improving access to mental health support for vulnerable groups

Through our direct work, we see too many vulnerable young people who are turned away from vital support services. Help is often fragmented between different services, preventing young people from developing trusting relationships with consistent professionals who can help them. Vulnerable groups of young people are not being adequately supported in their journey through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) system. Many face delays in accessing mental health services due to rigid criteria, poor referral pathways and long waiting times for assessment and treatment.

We work with providers of children's mental health services to recognise the links between vulnerability and mental ill health and to take action to support these young people by ensuring their needs are identified during the commissioning process and they receive timely and appropriate care.

# The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local services, helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable, and have nowhere left to turn.

We also campaign for changes to laws affecting children and young people, to stop the mistakes of the past being repeated in the future. Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

We work directly with young people and place the voices of children at the centre of our work. We offer a range of counselling, befriending and emotional support services across the country. Some of these services are delivered alongside specialist support to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence, neglect and sexual abuse.



## For further information:

Our 130 years of experience working with the most vulnerable groups in society has enabled us to develop a range of child-centred, creative and innovative solutions to assist local agencies in meeting their objectives. Our service delivery is evidence-based and focused on delivering the best outcomes for children, families and communities.

If you would like to know more about how we can support you in delivering mental health and well-being services, please contact: Rob Willoughby, Area Director, on [rob.willoughby@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:rob.willoughby@childrenssociety.org.uk)

If you would like to know more about our policy and research work, please contact Kadra Abdinasir, Policy Officer, on [kadra.abdinasir@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:kadra.abdinasir@childrenssociety.org.uk)

[childrenssociety.org.uk](http://childrenssociety.org.uk)

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