

## ONLINE SUPPORT April 2021

### THE CHALLENGE

16 to 18 yr. olds often report significant levels of stress and anxiety, often resulting from educational pressures which in the last year has been even more pronounced.

Making support as accessible as possible has always been a focus of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and, even before the impact of COVID-19 was felt, creating an online service was seen as a potentially invaluable resource to offer. It provides a “front door” that can be accessed with a good deal of anonymity, at any time, from any place and importantly for this project, was not constrained to individual boroughs or clinical commissioning group funding streams (a key characteristic of colleges being the wide catchment area for students, often meaning any given student body crosses multiple post codes, meaning colleges benefit from services that covers the whole of Greater Manchester to promote to a diverse student body).

### OUR APPROACH

This project is part of the Greater Manchester mental health in colleges programme. In the very early stages of this project 42<sup>nd</sup> Street conducted a survey of 827 college aged young people to understand help seeking behaviour online and used the results of this to create a bespoke online platform able to offer confidential one to one support, group work and drop-in advice to this demographic.

Whilst the national lockdown limited face to face engagement, it led to a sizeable increase in engagement with the platform for all ages but in particular those aged 16-18. The additional funding from the Greater Manchester mental health in colleges programme allowed 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to focus on expanding -one to one capacity to meet the significant increase in demand from 16 to 18 year olds, creating additional weekly open-access group sessions and an expanded drop-in service at times accessible to college students.

- 42<sup>nd</sup> Street’s online support platform was redeveloped with Aeguana
- Online drop-in was set up offering on average 6 sessions per month since March, with 30 students accessing when needed (accounting for 42% of all young people accessing the drop-in).
- Online social group was established to offer young people a way of connecting during lockdown. These began in May, with 29 sessions offered so far and 47% of young people attending are further education students.
- Recruited a group of young people to create open access resources for the new platform launching in March 2021

## OUTCOMES

Since the beginning of the project (Q3 2019) 173 16 to 18 year olds joined the platform, 108 of which were enrolled in college and these referrals have increased month on month (significantly higher than first anticipated).

“ I can't imagine where I would be now without all of the support, I was so close to ending my life all together and now I couldn't even imagine that. Online young person

### Who's accessed the platform?

72% identify as female  
32% as LGBTQ+  
28% as BAME  
10% as having a disability

Anxiety accounted for 54% of all presenting difficulties, followed by depression (39%), suicidal thoughts (16%) and panic attacks (12%) (bearing in mind the majority of young people don't present with just a single issue.

For all those ending support (including those leaving the service prematurely) 91% of young people show improvement and 55% clinically significant change or better.

**173** 16-18yr olds have registered

**41%** of [registrations] show severe psychological distress

**91%** of young people show improvement

For those completing all sessions 100% have improved, 60% clinically reliable change or better.

“ [Being online] actually worked out better in the end for me definitely and I feel like I got a lot more out of the sessions than I would have face to face. Online young person

The ability to access support via a text-based system has proved increasingly popular since lockdown began. Whilst some young people initially expressed disappointment it was not a video-based environment as they had expected, a considerable amount grew to prefer the text-based nature, citing both an ongoing difficulty to find a confidential space and “Zoom exhaustion” as lockdown continued.

## NEXT STEPS

- Its clear online working is particularly relevant for this age range and ensuring colleges are continuously aware of the service could be of great ongoing benefit.
- Explore options to increase one to one capacity, key to reducing the waiting lists that have grown since lockdown

[Read the full report here](#)