

An early intervention and recovery support for high school aged young people (12-16 years)

What have high school aged young people (12-16 years) asked for?

An informal drop-in space, near their school or public transport, offering structured group activities (i.e. music, drama, sport and art therapy), and non-pathologising group education to help with social/emotional literacy.

Qualified, caring adults are available to talk and listen one-on-one anytime. There is a buddy system, and also active outreach within the school and community.

ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS

My parents might not be there to help me access support for my mental health – I need to be able to get there independently (and maybe go there straight from school)

I want to feel that taking care of my mental health and getting support is normalised in my school

- Convenient location that is near the school or locally based in an accessible location
- Access is facilitated through the school, or there is active outreach into the school and the community through talks or other ways to connect with everyone
- This support is promoted as being relevant for everyone (not just for 'at-risk' kids)

RECOVERY SUPPORTS

I need to experience safety within a community of support. I need a space outside of home and school – 'a space just to be'

Adults in my life sometimes fall short. An authentic continuous connection with an adult I can trust and feel safe talking to is important to me

I need help to understand myself and my experiences, and gain skills and knowledge to navigate things that seem overwhelming

I need to feel accepted and normal (and understand that nothing is wrong with me)

I need to connect with other children around shared interests

- A 'third space' outside of school and home to spend time with friends and trusted adults. Sibling and parent involvement should be limited and only with consent of the young person
- Qualified staff who care who can establish a continuous one-on-one relationship with the young person. Someone who has time to talk and listen to the young person (and not tell them what to do)
- Opportunities to develop life skills, group education opportunities about difficult topics (such as sexual assault or family conflict) and ideas for taking care of self (using non-pathologising language)
- Peer support or mentoring/buddy system
- A choice in activities to engage in with others, such as nature walks, music, drama, art therapy, relaxed sports games and video games
- Low level brokerage funds to support practical help with transport, phone credit and homework tutoring will help me engage
- Phone calls, texting and online chat could be additional supports

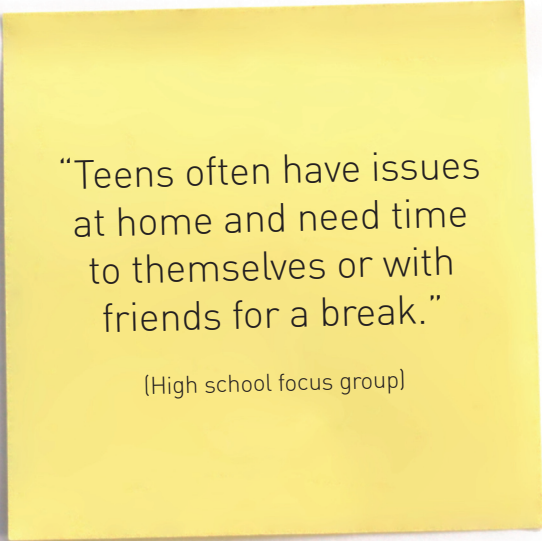
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MODEL DEVELOPMENT – BRINGING IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

With young people experiencing high rates of mental health challenges, mental distress, and worry about their mental health, increasing young people's access to supports as soon as the need arises is critically important.

This model was co-designed with a focus group of young people aged 12-16 years, building on (and sometimes throwing out) elements of the findings from the survey and co-design workshops.

The focus group described many barriers to mental health support, including lack of family support or understanding, and poor mental health literacy. They talked about the impact of stigma on help seeking, and described one of the barriers to accessing support as the perception that services are for 'at risk kids' and not for them.

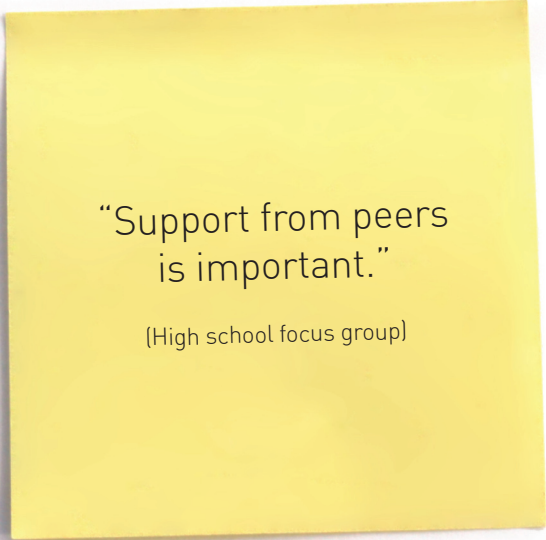


“Teens often have issues at home and need time to themselves or with friends for a break.”

(High school focus group)

The setting is important – a ‘third space’ near school, with a convenient location to access independently and that facilitates social and community connection.

Accessible and appealing supports will include group activities and developing mental health literacy. This is seen as a requirement to allow young people to feel comfortable before more mental health focused interventions can be received. Thus a model will emphasise group activities, but also have capacity to provide regular one-on-one sessions and more intensive recovery support by qualified adults, as needed.



“Support from peers is important.”

(High school focus group)

The model will also need to be responsive to supporting young people with basic, urgent issues that they might be finding overwhelming, so small scale brokerage funds are important.

Participants shared how they want ‘to feel heard and understood’ by someone outside of the school and their family. One of the strongest themes to emerge from talking with young people during the co-design of this model was their need for a safe adult in their lives, described as someone who is not stressed or demanding, has plenty of time, and can listen non-judgementally.

“I want to feel not-alone.” High school focus group

Some young people explained things that work already e.g. breakfast clubs that support health and nutrition and a relaxed opportunity to check in with adults and peers. This illustrates how a community mental health support may not need to be complicated. Many of the suggestions focused on simple ways to be together, such as going hiking, while ensuring there was enough funding (i.e. “not watered-down milos”).

“Nature is beneficial for everyone, for getting away from chaos. It’s calming, freeing.”

High school focus group