'Speak Your Mind'

Raising awareness of young people's mental health and wellbeing by mapping struggles and creating intercultural dialogue

*Nicholas Morgan - 23.08.2018*

Introduction

Earlier this year we were successful in receiving funding to attend the European Youth Event in Strasbourg, hosted by European Parliament, to deliver a workshop covering the following part of our mission statement: to "empower young people to have a voice in all matters that affect them around the promotion of mental health'

Our session, called 'Speak Your Mind', aimed to urgently open up informative conversations about mental health amongst 60+ young participants from across Europe, for a variety of reasons, we believe this is need for many reasons, below are two of which can be seen below:

Worldwide 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders.

Half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid – 20's.

Mental health awareness and support is vital to **sustainable development** of our wellbeing, This poster shows us why, with broad outcomes from our session.
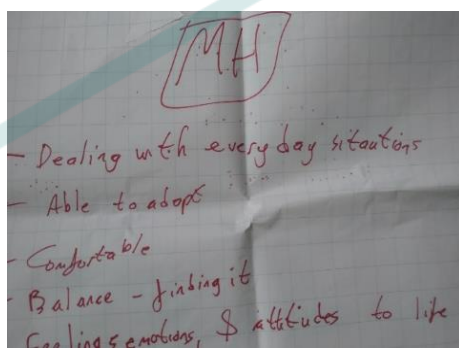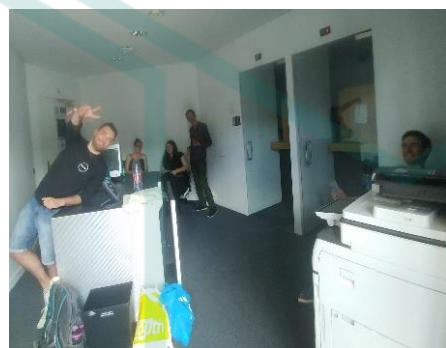
Aims of Speak Your Mind

- To highlight the challenges people experience talking about their mental health.
- To map recommendations and future implications for young people and their mental health across Europe.
- To create a common definition of mental health and wellbeing amongst participants.
- To understand the context of young people's mental health in Europe.

What do you think mental health is?

The facilitators presented this question to the group, highlighting that there are various definitions of the term mental health and for this reason, it is often hard for anyone to comprehend the defining factors. We wanted to hear participants ideas, as an international group of young people, on what mental health means for them.

Five key themes emerged from discussion on this question:
Coping - Social inclusion - Biological health - Self-identity - Emotional awareness.

Volunteer Jonny talking to group about relationships

Top three areas of life that negatively impact my mental health and what can we do to prevent it having this impact?

1. Relationships
What is a healthy relationship?", "How to communicate", "Understanding empathy", "Learning about yourself"

2. Equality in society
"Integration to be equal – integrated society – everyone should be involved", "making activities accessible for people with disabilities", "Equal identity"

3. Expectations from self & others
"How to receive feedback", "Room to fail", "Educate everyone on healthy perceptions"

Conclusion & Recommendations

This activity provided a good introduction to a much wider needed conversation across the continent, in order to produce more thorough recommendations of young people's views. We were pleasantly surprised by the young people's understanding of mental health, but recognise the participants chose our workshop as a topic of interest to them and so we would relish the possibility to talk to a broader group of young people, who maybe don't talk about mental health often, in places such as schools or youth clubs as a public health education piece to ensure people are able to **sustain their wellbeing mentally.**

We observed that the themes that came out from the session, were all closely linked to the psycho-social context of day-to-day life in Europe, which would be great to explore more.

We felt that the areas that negatively impact young people's mental health established during activity was an interesting and unexpected learning for us, again covering much broader psycho-social concepts of life.

It was exciting to work with a large group of international young people and to think of mental health problems on a larger scale. We feel these conversations need to happen more across Europe with young people for **sustainable health,** and this simply proved so.