

Inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland

Connect (formerly SPTC) is pleased to submit this response to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee inquiry into mental health support for young people.

About Connect

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' group and a registered charity which provides support to parents and carers all over Scotland. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents who have concerns about any aspect of the education of their child, or the wider education system. We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community.

Our Response

In our manifesto, we describe how all young people who require additional support in their learning should receive this so they can fulfil their full potential. School and adolescence can bring a lot of stress, so it is vital our young people have access to suitable mental health support. We know this is an issue of great concern to many families, which is expressed through engagement with our social media posts on the issue, callers to our help/advice line, responses to our surveys of parents, and through the work carried out by the schools involved in our Partnership Schools Scotland programme. We have drawn on these to inform our response.

The diagram provided by the inquiry shows how complex and haphazard accessing support can be. It is also important to stress that many of these options may not be available, due to long waiting lists, costs, or may not even exist in the area where the child or young person lives. Across the country support is patchy, and can be confusing, inadequate and only available if the young person is extremely unwell such as evidenced as being suicidal.

The lack of suitable child and adolescent mental health service provision may mean some seriously ill young people are placed in adult wards.

It is vital CAMHS services are able to meet demand, but there also needs to be a focus on early interventions to address issues before they require this level of service. School-based counsellors are available in some places, but school is not always the best location for accessing support, particularly when educational pressures or bullying are the cause of distress.

We believe much more can be done to support young people and recommend the Scottish Government should consider a national strategy for supporting children and young people's

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mental health with enhanced funding, with the focus on ensuring universal access to the right kinds of mental health support relevant to the individual's needs. It is also of utmost importance that families and young people are made aware of the supports available to them. This could be done through schools, through the wider community such as community learning and development, social services, family support agencies, youth clubs, uniformed youth groups such as Scouts/Guides, through libraries and through health services.

Eileen Prior, Executive Director

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