

Web: [www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk)  
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/hwbrent>  
Email: [enquires@healthwatchbrent.co.uk](mailto:enquires@healthwatchbrent.co.uk)  
Tel: 0800 9961 839



## **Young people in Brent and their mental health services**

**Briefing and call to action for Brent MPs in advance of parliamentary debate on 02/03/15**

**To: Barry Gardiner MP; Glenda Jackson MP; Sarah Teather MP; Brent CAMHS**

**CC:** Members and Friends of Healthwatch Brent; The young people and groups who gave their views to Healthwatch Brent; Brent Youth Parliament; Brent Council Members; The wider community of Brent; Healthwatch England

Healthwatch Brent asked young Brent residents about their views and experiences of mental health. Their views are recorded and reflected throughout this briefing.

### **Healthwatch Brent asks its local MPs to -**

1. Consider the issues they raise in this briefing;
2. Attend the parliamentary debate on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015;
3. Provide Healthwatch Brent with an update from the debate;
4. Inform Healthwatch Brent as to what information they have regarding the mental health of young Brent residents;
5. Update Healthwatch Brent on any work done regarding young people and mental health issues in Parliament and in Brent.

### **Background to this briefing**

The main providers of Children and Adult Mental Health Services in Brent are – CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)

CNWL (Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust) – other services – access

A planned review and redesign of CAMHS across NWL is underway.

CAMHS is the subject of a report by the House of Commons Health Committee, and the subject of the debate on 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

Adequate access to CAMHS is a major concern in this report, as in Brent.

Other local Healthwatch organisations across NW London may do a piece of work on surveying young people in advance of a CCG review of CAMHS across of NWL.

Healthwatch England is considering making this the subject of their special enquiry for 2015, depending on the outcomes of discussions with Government Ministers.

**“CAMHS is a comfortable and friendly service. They are a reliable team. However, access needs to be easier.”** Parent of CAMHS user in Brent.

Healthwatch Brent asked a random group of 80 young Brent people about their mental well-being.

Most of the young people expressed a largely positive view of life, which is very encouraging for our community in general.

76% agreed/strongly agreed with the statement 'I am satisfied with my life nowadays' as opposed to 6% who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

### **What makes you feel good about your life?**

Key themes were - loving family and friends, socialising, a good education, good future prospects, direction, achievement, helping others, travelling and other good life experiences, faith, health, and money.

**"Amazing friends and supportive people, and my own mental state to be honest."**

There are clearly pressures on most young people –

**What makes you feel anxious or low?** (In order of most commonly expressed)

Unknown future / career prospects / jobless / no money; Exam pressures; Poor health; Arguments; Personal relationships; Family relationships; Peer pressure; Negativity / unfairly judged; Society's changes and expectations; Discrimination / hate; Thinking about my looks and personality.

7 people said that nothing makes them feel anxious or low.

Within the whole group exists a number who struggle due to mental health problems. Their experience of life is very different.

Feeling alone / no one to talk to; Bad childhood events; Phobia; Loud noises, aeroplanes and helicopters, cars, people staring; The paranoia of developing symptoms that may get worse; Low confidence, not being able to perform well in my job; and meeting new people.

By far the most common behavioural responses to stress and anxiety reported by these young people are - not talking to anyone, and not sleeping. This shows a clear need for helpful contact at such times – professional input is clearly invaluable.

**"Most people are not very understanding and they don't care."**

**"It is good to have someone to talk to. However, to be better it would be good to have more things like BUG (Brent Mental Health User Group)."**

10 of the young people (12.5%) had used some form of mental health services in the past 12 months.

Young people were largely positive about their treatment from practitioners when they received them. Of a range of mental health practitioners, 52% said they were given enough time, versus 9% of negative comments. Similarly regarding being listened to, 65% were positive against 5% negative. Those people able to access CAHMS in Brent said –

**“You're helpful.”**

**“The staff are nice and you aren't attacked with questions.”**

**“It's a place where you feel like you're not judged - you feel safe.”**

**“We get to share our opinions.”**

However, 20 of the 80 (25%) said it would have been helpful if mental health services had been available to them. Note that MIND report that 1 on 4 of the adult population will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life.

For adults in Brent, CNWL are Improving Access to Psychological Services. Children and adolescents, and their families, who have to wait for support, and those assessed to be ineligible, find that access to CAMHS simply does not meet their needs - needs that clearly exists.

With regard to the Health Committee report, the debate, and the redesign of CAMHS in NW London, HWB wonders how significant improvements to access can be achieved on existing funding - this is in common with other genuine endeavours to improve services. It has been regularly reported by MIND that mental health services are significantly underfunded compared to other NHS services.

**“There are ways mental health services can improve if the government gives more funding just like to the rest of the NHS health department wards get.”** Young Brent resident

**“Not organised well enough and I feel there is too much managerial focus and not enough practicality. It is absurd that one can handle about 30 plus cases. What are you doing NHS Mental Health Services? I have been dissatisfied in the amount of waiting. I also have an issue with the transition from CAMHS to adult services - the referrals and waiting time are ridiculous. GET IT TOGETHER MATE”** User of CAMHS in Brent

These views are reflected by CAMHS users on page 30 of the House of Commons Health Committee on Children's and adolescents' mental health and CAMHS, Third Report of Session 2014–15.

**The big service issues at the moment** are that CAMHS has reduced resources resulting in stricter referral criteria to access the service. This has resulted in less early intervention work, resulting in less prevention and CAMHS having to work with more complex cases. If someone needs an inpatient admission there has been a real shortage of beds and they are blocking beds in paediatric A&E departments. Beds that are found are often out of London or far from family homes.

The issues raised regarding the key themes above in relation to Mental Health are interesting and highlight that the focus on young people's mental health shouldn't just focus on Mental Health services - or mental health services should be widening their scope. There is surely also a role of Public Health. Young people's hopes for the future in the current economic climate, school pressures with a system heavily focused on exams, their ability to engage with community and socialise are highlighted as important in contributing to mental health problems. Obviously government policies impact on all these things and all departments need to consider evidence relating to mental health. For example there is some research on negative impact exams can have on motivation and increasing anxiety. Cuts to council services will impact on youth services community engagements and leisure facilities. There is also a real issue of how social media and the media in general focus on appearance and warped body images which glamour magazines contribute to.

These are all impacting on young people's perception of themselves. There is also a huge issue of how social media can be used to bully and encourage certain types of behaviour. CAMHS are getting lots of young people self harming and accessing websites where other young people talk specifically about self harming. It seems to encourage this type of self harming behaviour as well as in some cases suicide. Issues relating to identity and culture also need to be explored, especially in Brent / London. How young people balance the peer group expectations influenced by western society with 1st generation immigrants who are still heavily influenced by culture practice and norms at home. Young people can be placed in a very difficult position of trying to fit in at school and please the families at the same time. CAMHS can be very white middle class and often services are not as tuned into these issues as well as they could be. Healthwatch Brent has received feedback that Brent CAMHS is dominated by white middle class women which is surprising considering the diverse borough they serve.

Healthwatch Brent and the young people of Brent look forward to the responses from our MPs.

Ian Niven, Coordinator, Healthwatch Brent, 24/02/15

Also available - Background reports and consultation on CAMHS, Brent CCG

**Web:** [www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk)  
**Email:** [enquires@healthwatchbrent.co.uk](mailto:enquires@healthwatchbrent.co.uk)

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/hwbrent>  
**Tel:** 0800 9961 839