

Voice for Choice
Listening to the needs of young people with mental health and severe learning disabilities

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Background

An estimated 40% of all young people with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 13 and 25 years will experience mental health problems.

As an organisation, Sunfield supports students experiencing mental health difficulties in a range of modalities. However, organisationally, it is felt that the need to enable children to make choices with regard to their care and support is crucial. As the main stakeholders in this process, the voices of children with severe and complex learning difficulties have, to date, largely remained silent.

At Sunfield, a range of therapeutic interventions are available to those students who are experiencing mental health difficulties. These range from traditional pharmacological support to counselling, play therapy, music therapy and sensory integration. In addition, each child has a Behaviour Development Plan (BDP) which is prepared by the care and education staff together with the Psychology & Therapies Team.

The aim of the project:

To explore the ways in which young people with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems can be supported and facilitated to make informed choices about their types of treatment and therapeutic interventions.

Design

A range of materials will be designed and trialled with students to enable them to participate and have choice over decisions which affect the support they receive in relation to mental health problems.

The methodology will take the form of action research, enabling problems to be identified, solutions to be found, revised and refined in order to provide the best mechanisms of support

Anticipated outcomes

- Children with special needs who are experiencing mental health problems at Sunfield, and elsewhere, are utilising a set of specially designed resources to enable them to communicate to professionals their choices in relation to their care, treatment and therapies.
- Professionals at Sunfield, and beyond, are utilising a set of 'Best Practice' guidelines and resources to facilitate this choice for children.
- Positive outcomes are achieved for the children.

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