Evaluation of the Reading Well Books on Prescription Shelf Help scheme for young people


**ABSTRACT**

Executive Summary

It is estimated that 2,773,460 people under 17 are in need of child and adolescent mental health services provided by the GP or schools. It is also known that half of all anxiety disorders - the most common mental health condition - are experienced before the age of 12 years old.

Young people face many risk factors for poor mental health but not all young people with mental health conditions seek support or receive the support or services they need. The current environment of austerity means that there is decreasing resourcing of the third sector and increasing pressure on CAMHS.

‘Shelf Help’ is the name that has been used to market the Reading Well for young people scheme. It is a reading list for those who experience mental health problems between 13-18yrs old, or are friends with, live with, or care for people who do and is.

Shelf Help is delivered in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians as part of the Chief Librarian's Universal Health Offer.

Reading Well for young people is endorsed by health professionals and supported by public libraries and provides advice of specific topics such as anxiety, depression, stress, OCD, self-harm, bullying, eating disorders, autism and aspergers as well as general topics to do with adolescence.

This research report documents the impact of introducing ‘Shelf Help’ – the Reading Well for young people scheme - into a secondary school environment in partnership with a local charity, which supports the mental wellbeing of young people.

Adult stakeholders were interviewed during a scoping phase (n=12) to determine how to discretely monitor the usage and impact of the Reading Well for young people at The Priory School and Phase, in Hitchin.

Multiple copies of the reading list were given to the School and Phase, and young people were left to interact with the books for 3 months (Dec 2016 - February 2017. The engagement with the books was monitored at each site. Young people and key adult stakeholders were consented to take part in focus groups and interviews (during March 2017). Qualitative analysis of interviews focus groups used to determine the impact of engaging with the Reading Well for young people books.

33 participants provided qualitative data for the project, 18 young people and 15 adults.

26 participants (8 adults and 18 young people) took part in focus groups and interviews to determine engagement with and impact with the scheme.
Innovative and successful approaches to getting young people to engage with Shelf Help books were devised e.g. Creating a wellbeing corner in the library, selecting a 'book of the week', promoting the scheme to the whole school to create inclusivity and talking points, making Shelf Help the focus of wellbeing events, a staff reading challenge, opportunity to write short reviews for other library users. Books were recommended to service users of Phase which included young people and parents.

128 Reading Well for young people books were borrowed from the library by 67 people during the 3 months, a further 35 titles were borrowed by 18 users at Phase. Borrowers ranged from year 7 to year 11 as well as adults. Several titles were renewed and many were continually on loan for the duration of the project. Interestingly, many people used the wellbeing corner to browse and read books during break-times, without taking out loans.

Many positive impacts of reading the Shelf Help books were identified. Four key themes emerged in the qualitative research analysis:

- Improved awareness, knowledge and understanding of mental health conditions.
- Improved emotional and mental wellbeing, specifically relating to confidence, self-esteem, hope, isolation and emotional intelligence.
- Changes in behaviour and improved relationships.
- Normalising and destigmatising mental health discussions.

Through piloting Shelf Help in a secondary school and charity setting there were several areas of learning going forwards. The books can be accessed by people with low, moderate or severe mental health conditions, thus suggestions to develop a supportive environment include:

- Ensuring appropriate training in mental first aid to key staff involved in the shelf help scheme - this may include staff who would not normally have this training.
- Provide time and access for staff to read through the list of books and familiarise themselves with the content prior to rolling out to the whole organisation.
- Providing activities, or book groups that would allow young people to discuss the books they have been reading within a facilitated environment, especially where some books may make young people feel sad or upset.
- Ensure the use of the Shelf Help leaflet as much as possible, specifically as it has contact number for support organisations that can be contacted, often 24/7.

In conclusion, all participants found the Reading Well for young people scheme highly acceptable and the inclusive approach has supported an increase in discussion about mental health in each organisation that piloted ‘Shelf Help’. Further research should now be conducted to further understand the impact of the Reading Well for young people scheme on wellbeing and resilience.

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The self-help scheme looks like a possibly useful way of broadening patient choice. GPs have been criticised for over-prescribing anti-depressants, some of which carry side-effects. Samantha, a 24-year-old Londoner, suffered a difficult relationship breakdown two years ago. She started to experience mood swings and felt down a lot of the time. When she went to see her GP she was immediately put on anti-depressants. ‘They really helped at the time,’ she said. Marjorie Wallace, director of the charity Sane, which campaigns on mental health issues, has written the foreword for a self-help book, Beat Depression and Reclaim Your Life. She said: ‘Obviously we are very glad the doctors are thinking of this and there is some value in people reading self-help books. Libraries deliver the national Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme which is part of the national health offer for libraries. The scheme consists of a list of books that is curated and endorsed by health professionals and provides support for those suffering from common mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders) and dementia. Using the lists, GPs and health professionals can recommend reading materials to patients, which encourages self management, and can help reduce the need for costly interventions. In Spring 2016, Reading Well for young people was launched with with support and advice on common mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety and stress, as well as difficult experiences like bullying and exams. Self-help books can be the key that opens your whole world up to new possibilities. It’s a good book for men to read as well, especially those who work for, with and under women so…everyone basically. While you may not agree with everything the author says (I certainly don’t), there is a lot to learn here. Keeping someone’s confidence helps to deepen your relationship. Also, “one of the most important elements of confidentiality is that it helps to build and develop trust. It potentially allows for the free flow of information between the client and worker and acknowledges that a client’s personal life and all the issues and problems that they have belong to them.”[4]. Young people. Adults. News. How does the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme work? As part of your treatment, you may have been recommended a self-help book by your GP, psychological wellbeing practitioner or another health professional. Go to your local library where you can borrow the book for free. If the book is not available, you can reserve it. Find your local library. You’ll find more information from the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme leaflet. There are 30 self-help titles on the Reading Well Books on Prescription list. Find out more about the self-help books. You can also read and listen to extracts from some of the books. You may also like to read advice on how to make the most of your self-help book. What if the book doesn’t help?