THE STONE PROJECT:
REPORT
2020

Friends of Josh & The HOPE Project

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Introduction

The HOPE Project

The 'Helping Our Pupil's Emotions' (HOPE) project was commissioned in 2015. The project is aimed at training school staff to intervene with pupil's experiencing poor mental health. The project is based on the rationale of the Staffordshire Local Transformation Plan (LTP). The Staffordshire LTP seeks to increase mental health awareness in schools, and increase the ability of school staff to manage emotional wellbeing.

The specific aims of the HOPE Project are two fold;

(1) Offer training and guidance to school staff aimed at increasing their understanding of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing difficulties.
(2) Support and manage emotional wellbeing within school settings through individual or small group interventions. These interventions are focused on building resilience and improving social and emotional wellbeing.

Friends of Josh

Friends of Josh is a local charity in Stone. Friends of Josh was created to remember the life of Joshua Smith, a local resident who passed away following a period of depression. Friends of Josh supports local community causes, particularly those that are addressing mental health within the community.

Friends of Josh and the HOPE Project connected online over shared aims regarding mental health and raising awareness in schools and with young people. The aims of the collaboration included bringing the HOPE training and project enrolment to Stone and to widen participation in the project to include parents and the wider community.

Mental Health in Schools

In previous years, UK teachers have appeared widely ill-prepared for identifying warning signs of poor mental health (Bockstock, Kitt & Kitt, 2011). This is especially problematic in secondary schools, as they lack the parent-teacher communication that is often present in primary schools (Vernon & Sinclair, 1998; Vulliamy & Webb, 2003), e.g. at 'drop-off' and 'pick-up' times. The HOPE project trains one staff member, to better prepare them for these identifications. The exact training for these HOPE mentors will be outlined below.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are strained. A recent survey of head teachers found that 65% were unable to get referrals for their pupils, whilst 80% wanted CAMHS services to be expanded (Frith, 2016). By training staff members within schools, the pupils can receive interventions and emotion management without needing a referral to CAMHS. In more severe cases, CAMHS may still be necessary, but the HOPE project can still go some way to ease the case load of referrals.

By training at least one member of staff to become a HOPE mentor, they will take on a role that almost mirrors that of a support worker. In educational settings, support workers develop trusting relationships, provide sympathetic and constructive advice on problems, and facilitate parent-teacher interactions in the discussion of pupil problems (Vulliamy & Webb, 2003). These same responsibilities and characteristics are then taken on by each HOPE mentor.

HOPE Training

Training runs across four consecutive days, covering a range of different topics and interventions. Training only occurs once a year, meaning that all trainees have to be in attendance. The topics and themes involved in training follow the following structure;

Day One:

- ❖ Understanding mental health in children and young people
- ❖ Anxiety and Depression
- ❖ Anxiety reduction techniques, e.g. labelling areas of the body that are experiencing anxiety.
- ❖ Measurements of anxiety, e.g. pros and cons of using The Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS)
- ❖ The RCADS is a 47-item, youth self-report questionnaire with subscales including: separation anxiety disorder, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and low mood (major depressive disorder).
- ❖ Outcome measures such as the Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)
- ❖ The importance of a goal-based SMART approach to mental health.

Day Two:

- ❖ Dispelling myths around openly talking about self-harm
- ❖ Sign-posting to self-harm prevention apps and websites
- ❖ Self-help/ self-soothe kit boxes
- ❖ The topic of suicide
- ❖ Listening and questioning skills such as the use of open-ended questions
- ❖ Taking a PACE approach (Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathic)

Day Three:

- ❖ Using evidence-based approaches and feedback tools for effective practice and documentation.
- ❖ The importance of getting feedback form pupils in the form of 'session rating scales'
- ❖ The use of the CORC website as a resource for tools and practice.
- ❖ Using goal-based outcomes and a strength-based approach.

Day Four

- ❖ Understanding reflective practice
- ❖ The importance of supervision and taking care of yourself
- ❖ Meeting the clinical supervisors

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the current report is to outline some of the work that has been done in Stone as a result of the collaboration between the HOPE Project and Friends of Josh. The main focus will be outlining the work done in schools, parent out-reach techniques and events to involve the wider community. There will also be a discussion of plans for the future and expanding the project in Stone in the future.

The Pilot Project: Alleynes Academy

Alleynes Academy

The HOPE Project was first implemented in Stone in Alleynes Academy, and this was treated as a pilot project to bring HOPE to Stone. Alleynes Academy is a secondary school and sixth form that educates approximately 1000 pupils. Training first took place in Alleynes from 11th – 25th September 2018, with further training taking place in October 2018.

Success of the Pilot

The pilot in Alleynes was considered a success. Following the training and implementation of the project in late 2018, Alleynes created their own emotional and mental well-being policy to implement in the school. The aim of the Alleynes well-being policy is as follows:

At Alleyne's we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and student body. We pursue this aim using both universal, whole school approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable students.

In addition to promoting positive mental health, we aim to recognise and respond to mental ill health. In an average classroom, three children will be suffering from a diagnosable mental health issue. By developing and implementing practical, relevant and effective mental health policies and procedures we can promote a safe and stable environment for students affected both directly, and indirectly by mental ill health.

The success of the pilot can also be evidenced by some of the techniques and strategies that the school implemented following involvement of the HOPE Project. An example of this would be the use of 'Individual Care Plans'. These individual care plans include:

❖ Details of a pupil's condition
❖ Special requirements and precautions
❖ Medication and any side effects
❖ What to do, and who to contact in an emergency
❖ The role the school can play

The success of the pilot can also be evidenced by the awareness that Alleynes show of some warning signs and alarming behaviours related to pupil mental health. The policy outlines some key behaviours that could be indicative of a decline in pupil's mental health, for example:

❖ Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
❖ Changes in eating / sleeping habits
❖ Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
❖ Changes in activity and mood
❖ Lowering of academic achievement
❖ Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
❖ Abusing drugs or alcohol
❖ Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
❖ Changes in clothing – e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
❖ Secretive behaviour
❖ Skipping PE or getting changed secretively

The School Model

Following the success of the pilot in Alleynes, a school model was developed to outline how the project was going to going to fit in the Stone community. The school model demonstrates how the HOPE Project was going to target mental health in schools at the core, and then move out into the wider community through parents and engagement events.
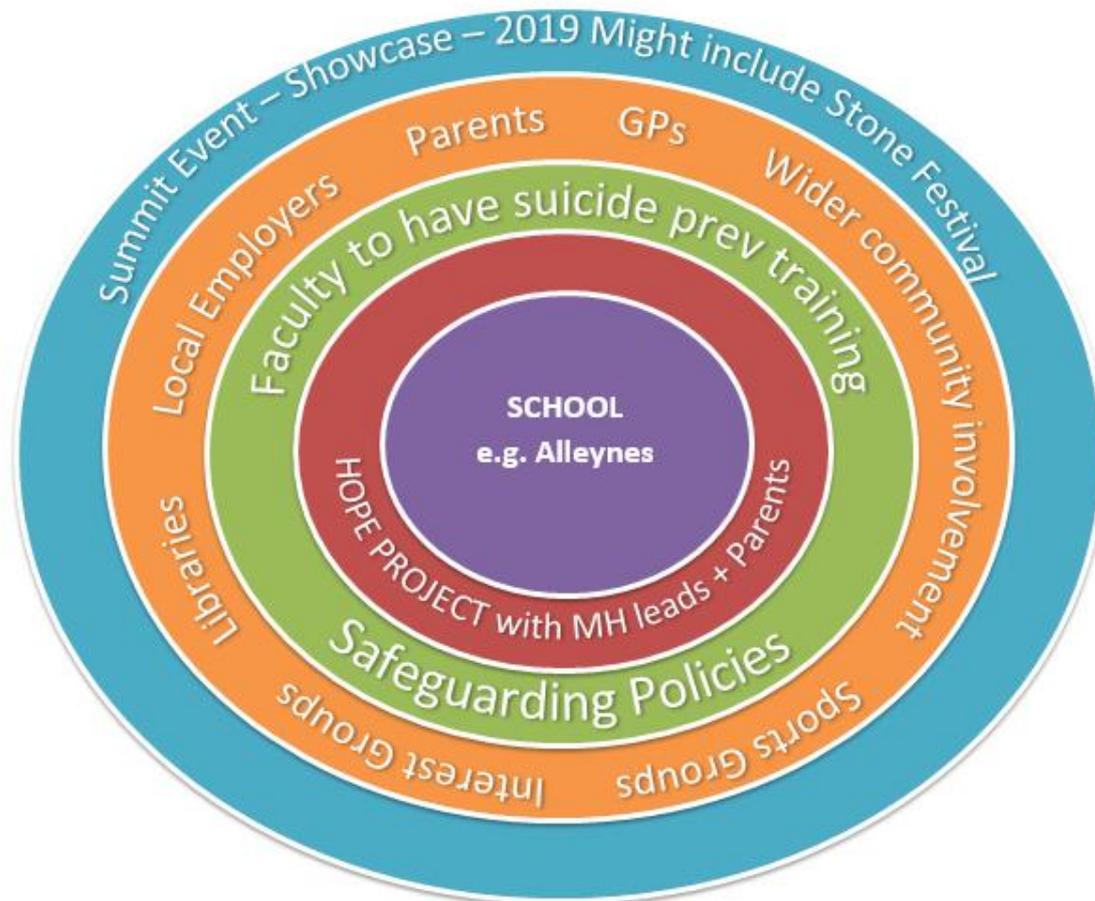
At the centre of this model is the pupils of schools in Stone. They benefit directly from the training of the HOPE mentors; they receive the extra support and the useful interventions. The education regarding warning signs will help identify those pupils who were previously suffering in silence.

Outside of schools, HOPE mentors can deliver suicide prevention training to parents and other staff members. This can help improve awareness in the community and is a key initiative for Friends of Josh.

Finally, there is an opportunity to move out and reach the wider community through a range of different events (some of these will be discussed in greater detail later in the report). The model also demonstrates how input from the wider community can feed back directly into work in schools. Parents and other members of the community could offer their opinions and evaluate the content of the report. This could help inform training in the following year and result in better outcomes for the pupils. This model provided the outline for expanding the project following the pilot.

Expanding the Project

Reaching Schools and Parents

Following the success of the pilot in Alleynes, the project has expanded out into the whole of Stone. At present, the project has been completely saturated throughout Stone; every school in Stone has been made aware of the HOPE Project, and has made the decision to either enrol or pass on the project.

Following the expansion and contact with schools, the project was able to reach parents whose children were involved in the project. For example, from 20th – 25th June 2019, there were three informal workshops run for parents as a means of transitioning from the pilot into a wider Stone project. Parents were given an opportunity talk about the type of support they would want provided to their children, the topics they would want involved and to discuss any questions they might have.

Evaluations from Other Schools

Following the expansion of the project throughout Stone, several other schools enrolled on the project have evaluated the success of the project in the first or second year. The following examples have been taken from an evaluation conducted by Christ Church Academy. Christ Church was chosen as the example as it is a feeder school to Alleynes, and therefore can exemplify how the project can support pupils from early education, and through transitional periods including moving to secondary education.

Christchurch Academy cited the following techniques and parent/ pupil experiences as evidence for the positive impact of the HOPE project training;

- ❖ Parents and pupils have been very complimentary about the support they have received.
- ❖ The school started running weekly drop-in sessions for pupils enrolled on the project. Some of these sessions are targeted at specific needs, for example running sensory garden projects.
- ❖ There was an introduction of mindfulness exercises for year 6 pupils to help minimise anxiety and exam stress.
- ❖ The school incorporated mental health and emotional well-being into the curriculum for both key stages 2 and 3.

Christchurch also identified some of the challenges and barriers they encountered when implementing the HOPE project. The main issue was a lack of time and other pressures restricting the amount of time that can be spent 1:1 with pupils. The lead member of staff involved with HOPE was only able to dedicate one day per week to HOPE, which would not be enough time to see all pupils in a given week.

Identifying these barriers and challenges is one of the most proactive ways to improve the project. Christchurch worked to overcome this challenge by introducing a new role (Behaviour Support Officer) into the school, this will enable the HOPE mentor to have more time and opportunity to focus more on those students with social and emotional and health needs in the next academic year.

Community Projects

Involving the Community

As previously mentioned, the Stone Project is slightly unique from the wider HOPE Project in that there is more focus on the involvement of parents and other members of the wider community. This likely stems from the involvement of 'Friends of Josh', and their desire to take a family-based approach to mental health. Strategies have been implemented to try and engage people at every level in the community. As pupils are at the centre of the project, they were engaged using logo design competitions related to HOPE and mental health. The competition was open to all pupils in schools within Stone, not just those enrolled on the HOPE Project. As part of the family-based approach, the parents of the pupils were then engaged with regular parent groups being run both in person and online. Finally, the wider community was engaged with community events such as the Stone Chalk Walk.

The Logo Design Competition

The Logo design competition was open to all pupils in schools in Stone. The competition was run to compliment Mental Health Awareness Week (18th – 24th May). The competition involved designing a logo based on the aims of the HOPE Project. Pupils were asked to incorporate elements of kindness, wellness and what makes them feel good as an individual. The pupils were also encouraged to consider their own emotional well-being and mental health during the process.

The following photos are of some of the runner up entries to the Logo Design Competition:

The following photograph is the winning entry of the logo design competition:

Parent Out-Reach Groups

The involvement of Friends of Josh in the Stone Project has meant that parent out-reach and engagement was very important in the project. The initial attempts to involve parents was actually through training. Two parents were invited onto the HOPE mentor training so they could benefit from the education and techniques to address pupil mental health. Whilst both parents reported positive experiences following the training, there were some limitations; mainly that much of the training was aimed at teachers and so would lose the parental engagement. It was the evaluation of having parents involved in training that created the idea of having parent outreach groups that were focused solely on how parents can support themselves and their children in their mental health.

The initial parent outreach sessions were aimed at transitioning parents from a school-focused group into a parent-focused group. They were located within a school, which gave parents the opportunity to talk with the teachers and the professionals who were working with their children. These initial sessions helped bridge communication between teachers and parents, particularly with parents who had been previously unavailable due to work commitments or their own struggles with mental health.

Once the sessions were established, they were moved into a community building in order to involve parents from as many schools as possible. Each session has a focus point or theme, for example exam-based anxiety, or the use of aroma-therapy and relaxation techniques. However, there was always time allocated for open conversations and questions from parents. Often, the topics covered in these open conversations would guide the theme covered in the next session.

Following the closure of schools and introduction of lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the parent outreach sessions were run online using Zoom. This was actually positive for the community involvement, as it meant that parents from the wider community who had not attended the in-person sessions have been able to join and ask their questions.

The Stone Chalk Walk

The Stone Chalk Walk was a free family event. The walk was all around the area of Stone. It provided an opportunity for members of the community to come together and have communication and spend time together. There were designated stops on the walk for people to stop and write messages of hope in chalk all around different areas of Stone. The messages where designed to show that people in the community do care, that they will listen, and that it is okay not to be okay. The walk was also in aid of Papyrus Prevention of Young Suicide.

Conclusion

Whilst the Stone Project is operating on a smaller scale to the wider HOPE Project in Staffordshire, its focus on parent outreach and suicide prevention makes it a unique and worthwhile venture. The positive feedback from schools enrolled in the project is very much reflective of the feedback coming from schools in the wider project. This demonstrates that the same time, effort and care is being put into the Stone Project.

The plan for the next year is to continue to grow and improve the project based on the feedback of those involved. There will be exciting new additions, including online sessions in order to adapt to life following COVID-19, as well as the addition to a psychology placement student to the team.

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