



The Reaching Out Service: The Educational Pathway in Short Stay Primary and Secondary Schools

Fiona Wilson, Lead Occupational Therapist at Mindworks Surrey, describes how her work within The Educational Pathway of the Reaching Out service demonstrates the application of the THRIVE Framework for system change (Wolpert et al., 2019) in an educational context. The service aligns with the THRIVE Framework's needs based groupings and a number of key principles including shared decision making, partnership working, and outcomes informed practice.



Background

The Reaching Out service at Mindworks Surrey, supports vulnerable and isolated children and young people in the community through a multi-agency network. The Education Pathway provides Occupational Therapy group interventions into Surrey's Short Stay Schools (previously known as Pupil Referral Units) for children at risk of exclusion, and those permanently excluded from mainstream education. The aim of the service is to enable children and young people to build self-esteem and resilience through activity, and develop strategies to cope with their everyday stresses and challenges they may be facing, and makes a direct link between the activities they regularly engage in (occupations), and their impact on well-being. In the Short Stay Secondary Schools, key components of the group programme are: doing together, giving choices about the activities, making use of local community assets, validating feelings, and giving positive feedback.

Shared Decision Making



In our first session, we explain the programme and get to know the child or young person's strengths, challenges, preferences and aspirations from which we develop an occupational formulation. Through shared decision making, we refine the formulation with the student in a 1:1 follow-up meeting which provides an important opportunity to validate the young person's perspective and agree their focus for the intervention. Shared decision making with students continues throughout their intervention and secondary school students are involved in deciding on the content of sessions, such as the choice of activity or outings.

Help and Support aligned with the Needs Based Groupings

In secondary schools, groupwork is complimented by 1:1 sessions with attendees. On completing the programme, young people receive a letter summarising their engagement and progress, which outlines appropriate services or resources that might be beneficial, including mental health services, sports clubs and hobby groups. Through partnership working, we also support young people to seamlessly transition to our Alliance partners as appropriate, as where there are concerns about engagement or vulnerability, young people may need to be referred and supported to engage with more specialist services to meet their needs. A key outcome is that the student will have developed a trusted relationship with their Occupational Therapist, and therefore be more willing to engage with services they are signposted to support them in the longer-term to manage their ongoing needs.

Partnership Working – Building Capacity through Consultation and Information Sharing

Mutual respect and shared responsibility

Working in partnership across different schools, social care, charitable sectors and Surrey Mindworks has been paramount to providing a safe and effective service. Working with educational colleagues has been vital to understand the students' context, what the student is currently facing and also the dynamics between students which can be complex and influence sessions. We work with school colleagues to offer new insights on sensory and mental health needs. It's very much about working together in partnership to



best support young people and learn from each other, building greater capacity across the education system. For example, teaching staff support sessions, encouraging engagement and helping students make links to their broader school life. In primary schools we share our co-produced regulating strategies with the school so they can begin to support the child to use the strategies before returning to their mainstream school. We adopt a trauma informed approach and view challenging behaviours through the lens of the young person which can promote meaningful engagement and transformation.

Supporting Children and Young People's emotional mental health needs to be understood and met.

We work closely with our Mindworks partners and members of the young person's network to meet their needs. Where a young person has an undiagnosed neurodevelopmental condition, is attending a Short Stay School and there is growing risk or deteriorating mental health, we have escalated this with colleagues across Surrey Mindworks, as appropriate. In the primary schools the Occupational Therapist and child co-create an individualised "my safety plan" which is shared with the child's Short Stay and mainstream school SENCOs. It incorporates information about triggers for distress, what it looks and feels like to the child and what the child and others can do to pre-empt or respond to distress. It includes many simple sensory activities that the child can trial in groups.

"The fact that this has been jointly created with the child and yourself as someone with a specialism in this area, combined with the opportunity to practice these strategies is incredible. We will very much be using this resource" (Feedback from SENCO).

Outcomes Informed

Feedback from schools, children and young people

Children and young people have reported improved motivation, engagement and positive first contact with emotional wellbeing and mental health services. We have observed major improvements in young people's ability to regulate emotions and manage distress.

Feedback has demonstrated that the secondary school programme has been well-received by young people:

- 83% of secondary school attendees agreed they felt listened to in the group
- 78% of the students agreed that they liked most of the activities in the group
- 83% of the students agreed they felt included in the group
- 100% of the students agreed that Occupational Therapy staff were friendly to them.

"The activities were helpful because I can feel when things are not right, because all these things and drawing stuff makes me feel better and calms me down." Primary student

"We love the Reaching Out project, the pupils look forward to the sessions and are happy and willing to participate. The different strands to the project certainly meet the needs of our pupils and help in the process of successfully reintegrating pupils back in to mainstream education." Assistant head teacher (secondary)

Next Steps:

- **Outcomes informed** – we will continually refine our offer by utilizing pre and post assessment outcomes and feedback. We also intend to evaluate the impact of the service on resilience, confidence and engagement in occupations that support student's mental health through the use of Goal Based Outcomes.
- **Accessibility** - Some students have assessments for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) whilst being seen within the service, and we have begun sharing our pre-group assessments with the aim of supporting the child or young person to access the right support in the most appropriate setting. We would like to be in a position to offer sensory assessments across all the Short Stay Schools to address children and young people's unmet sensory needs and increase school engagement.

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