

The Impact of Covid - 19 on Young People

July - August 2020

Introduction

Local Healthwatch have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs.
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf. The service is managed by Pioneering Care Partnership, a leading third-sector charitable organisation aiming to improve health, wellbeing and learning for all.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to.
- Providers and Commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Background and Methodology

During these unprecedented and changeable times, as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees have continued to engage with local people in order to find out peoples' experiences and views of the pandemic and how this has impacted on their lives and their health and wellbeing.

Following on from a recent generic survey responded to be members of the public we wanted to focus upon the views of younger people, up to the age of 20.

Due to the social distancing and lockdown measures we released a COVID-19 survey which specifically targeted younger people, aiming to gather their experiences of living through the pandemic and any concerns they may have about the future.

The survey was made available via a link on the Stockton-on-Tees Healthwatch website. It was also posted on Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees social media platforms, and Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees volunteers were engaged to support and promote the survey to local people.

We also contacted a wide range of support services within the Stockton-on-Tees area via email and telephone, with an aim to create awareness of the survey and to engage their support to promote the survey with any young people they were in contact with.

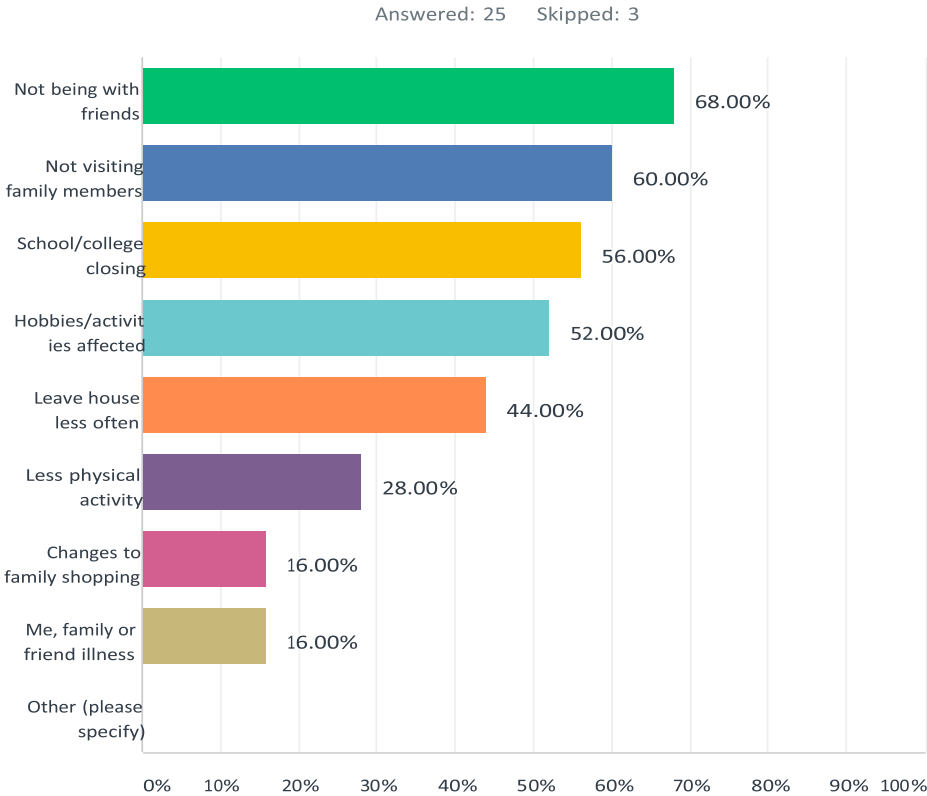
A total of 28 surveys were completed, which may reflect the difficulties in engaging with younger people. However, we also received two very helpful case studies providing us with further insight into what it has been like to be a young person at this time.

Survey Response

The survey consisted of 13 questions, although not all respondents gave an answer to every question. The findings were as follow:

Question 1.

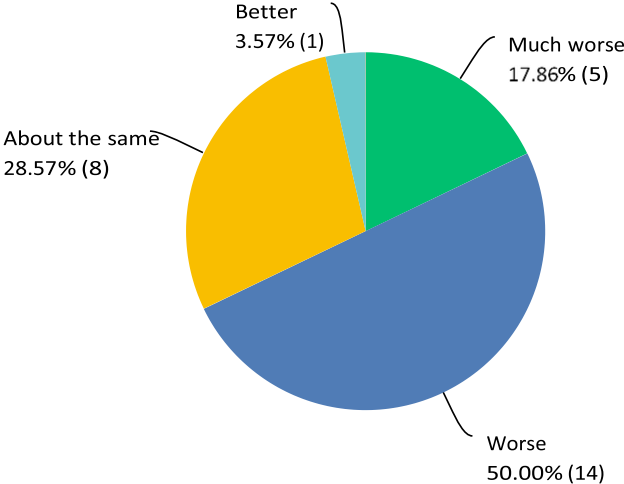
What changes have made the most impact on how you have felt during the Covid-19 pandemic? (choose the top 3)



Although being affected in many ways, the most significant impact felt by young people was being separated from friends and family - especially during the early part of lockdown. Many also cited the fact that the closing of schools also had a significant impact upon them. Four people told us that illness, either to themselves or a family member, had also influenced how they had felt.

Question 2.

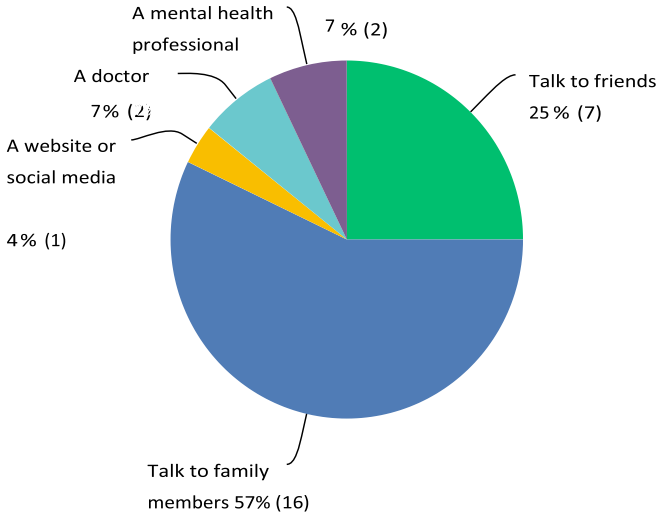
How has your emotional and/or mental health been during the pandemic?



Of the 28 people who responded to this question, five told us that their mental health had been ‘much worse’ as a result of the pandemic while a further 14 people told us that it had been ‘worse’.

Question 3.

If you needed some help with your emotional and/or mental health where would you go to receive it?

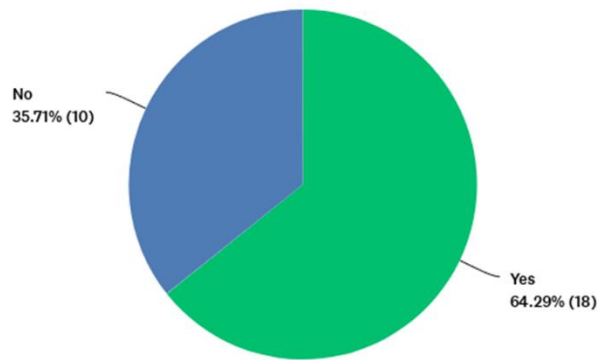


16 of the young people who responded told us that they would seek help from a family member whilst a further seven told us that they would talk to their friends about it. Only two people would seek help from a GP or specialist mental health worker.

Question 4.

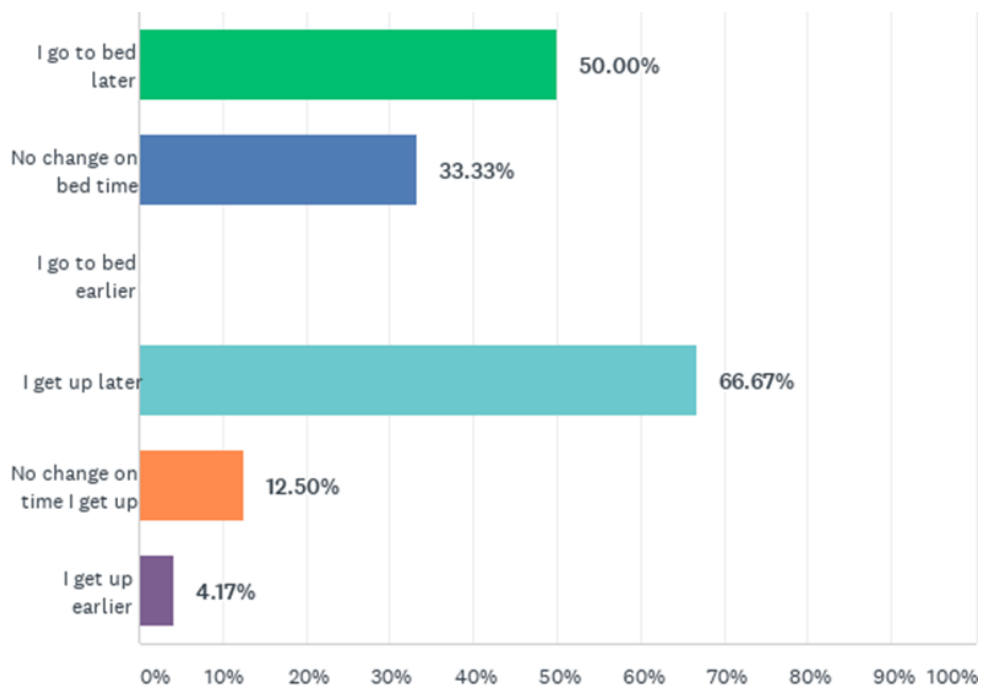
Have you personally had increased levels of stress/anxiety during the pandemic?

18 out of the 28 people who responded told us that they had experienced increased levels of stress/anxiety.



Question 5.

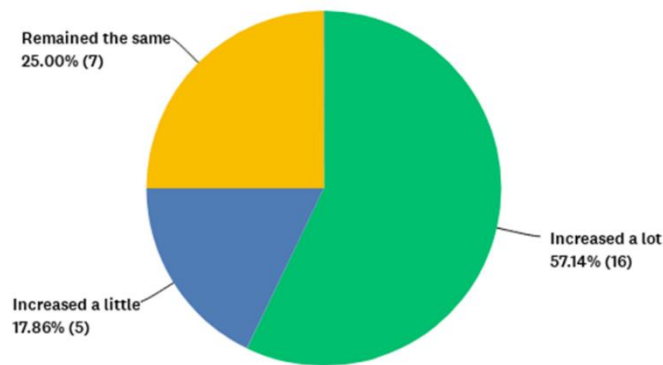
Has your sleep pattern changed during the pandemic?



Feedback showed that a majority of the 24 people who responded are going to bed later (12) and getting up later (16) than they had been before the pandemic. Only three people told us that there was no difference to the time they got up on a morning with one person saying they got up earlier.

Question 6.

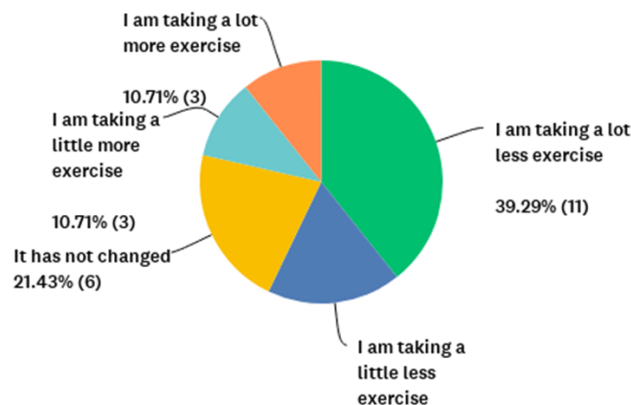
Has your use of electronic devices (mobile phones, online gaming, etc.) changed during the pandemic?



Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that people told us they were most affected by the lack of social contact with friends and family, the use of electronic devices was reported to have increased by 21 of the 28 people who responded. This may also account for the fact that a majority of respondents told us they were going to bed later.

Question 7.

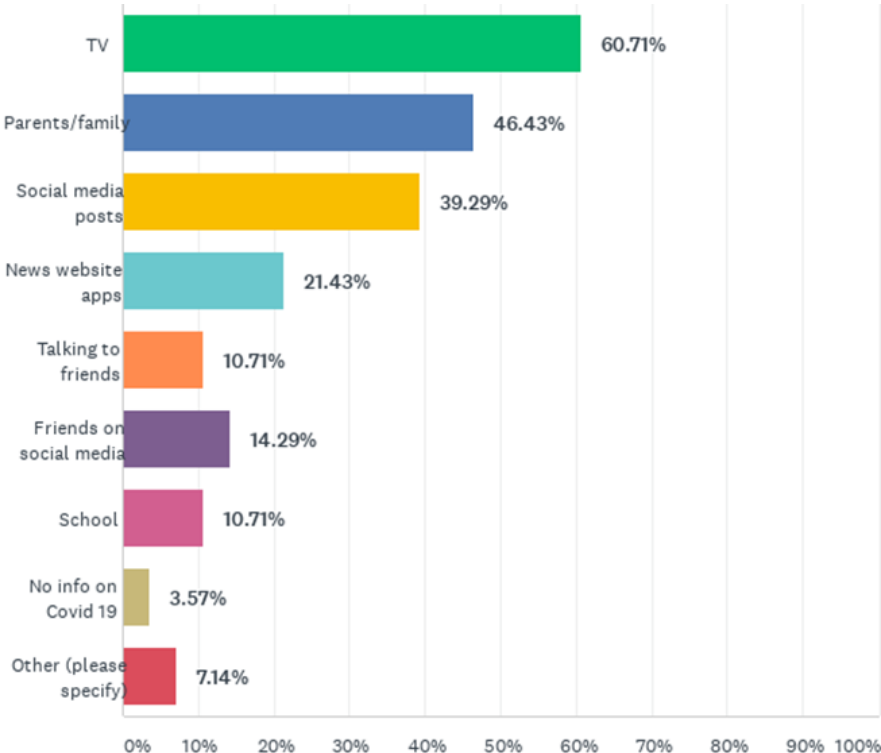
Has the amount of exercise you take changed during the pandemic?



Whilst the majority of people who responded told us that they were taking less exercise, with 11 saying this had reduced a lot, a smaller number of people (six) told us they were managing to take more exercise.

Question 8.

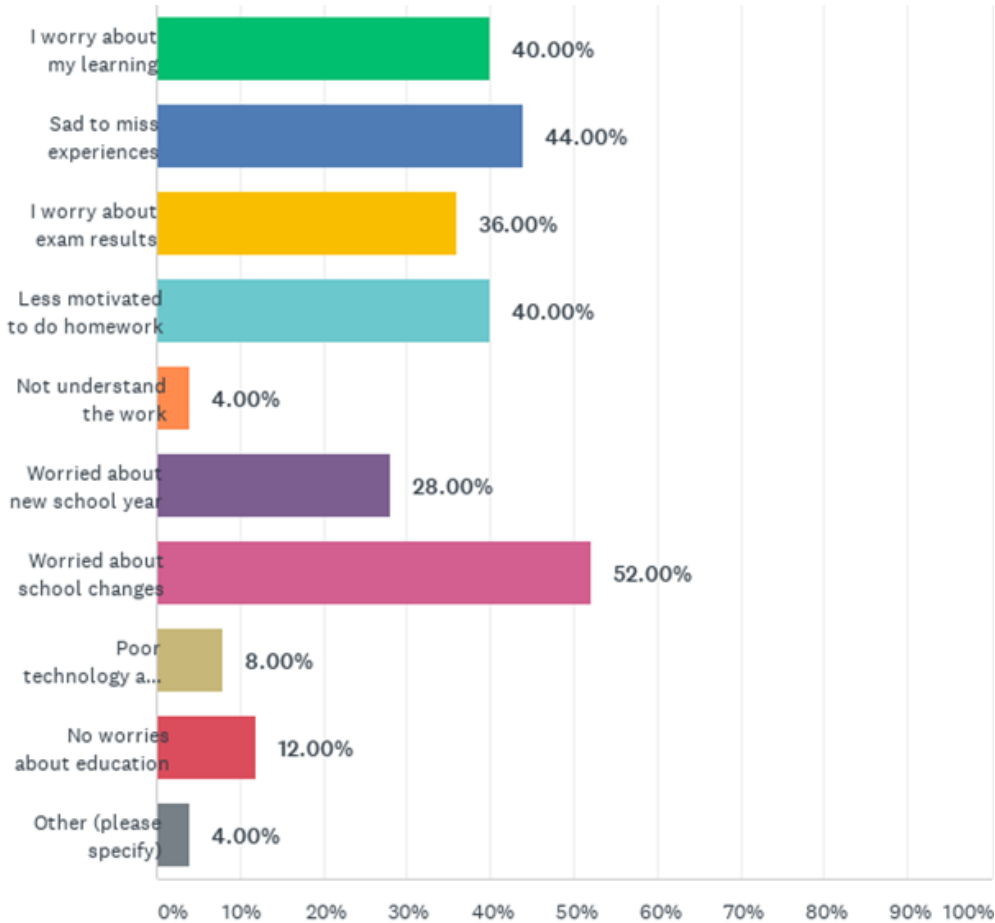
Where do you get most of your information about Covid-19?



The largest number of people (17) told us that their main source of information was the television, closely followed by information from family/friends (13) and posts on social media (11). Only one person told us that they were not getting any information about Covid-19.

Question 9.

Which of the following statements apply to you? (Select up to three)



This question focused upon gathering views about the impact the Covid-19 pandemic was having regarding education and any concerns young people may have about returning to school once it was safe to do so.

25 young people responded to this question with several (10) being worried about falling behind with their schoolwork and nine being concerned about the effect it could have on their exam results. 11 people also told us they were sad about missing out on experiences they were looking forward to, such as an end of year Prom.

Some young people (10) said they felt less motivated to do work at home, whilst one told us they did not always understand the work they were being sent. A further two people told us that they did not have the necessary technology to undertake work at home.

Regarding returning to school, 13 people told us that they were worried about a return to school as a result of all the changes that may have to be introduced. Only three people told us that they did not have any worries about their education.

Question 10.

What three words best describe how you feel about exams being cancelled?



The impact of the pandemic clearly impacted upon those young people who had exams cancelled during the pandemic. It was very clear that for most this was a cause of great concern, with 8 people telling us that they were ‘worried’ about the effect this cancellation would have for their education. Some said they felt ‘let down’ and even ‘angry’ about this. Others told us they were ‘anxious’ and ‘confused’ about what this would mean for them.

The final three questions related to Kooth - an online counselling, support and advice service for young people which has been commissioned by the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust. This has been rolled out to schools across the Borough over the last 12 months.

We asked three questions:

1. Kooth (www.kooth.co.uk) is a free, online, counselling and support service for young people (11-24) who may be seeking some emotional and/or mental health support. Have you heard of Kooth?

Of the 28 young people who responded, 10 told us that they had heard of Kooth whilst 18 said they had not.

2. If you answered 'yes' have you used Kooth?

Whilst 25 people told us they had not used the services of Kooth, three people told us that they had contacted them for support.

3. If you have used Kooth, how would you rate the support you received?

Although only three people told us they had accessed Kooth services, 8 people responded to this question. Ratings ranged between 2/10 and 5/10 giving an overall rating of 3.5/10.

As part of this piece of work, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees were delighted to receive case studies from two young people, highlighting their own experiences of living through the pandemic and the concerns they have for the future.

Case Study 1

"From a young person's perspective this is how I have been coping during the pandemic of the coronavirus.

"The coronavirus has had a great impact upon me personally, physically and mentally. Firstly, since March I haven't been able to go to school or many clubs due to Covid restrictions. This consequently has made me feel confined to one space (my house). Also not being able to see my friends has left me feeling quite lonely and feeling isolated, almost imprisoned.

"However, thanks to technology, I can still stay in touch with my friends regularly and see them using Facetime and Zoom. Also, some clubs that I am part of, including dancing, have been still doing lessons while Covid has been happening which has allowed me to still do a form of exercise which I enjoy. Thankfully, my piano teacher has continued to have lessons virtually, so this has kept me entertained during the crisis.

"As for coping mentally, this has left me in a very stressful and anxious situation. I am in Year 11 and my exams were cancelled, consequently I have felt very unproductive over the last couple of months as the Government guidelines regarding GCSE exams were vague and unclear. As a result, I am extremely worried about the future, particularly regarding my education, as being away from school for such a significant time might lead to falling behind in my A levels.

"I, just like many others, will be in a position where we will be worrying about our exam results. I think the pandemic has given me new ways of looking at things and has also made me realise just how fragile our lives are."

Case Study 2

"I struggled a lot through this pandemic for a few different reasons. To begin with the cancellation of GCSE's was very hard after the effort that was put in for them. To add on the uncertainty and worry lead by the not knowing how we would be graded both at the beginning and recent news.

"Our year 11 prom was cancelled, and many may say it's not a big deal, but it was really upsetting knowing we would all miss out on something we'd all looked forward too so much. Being in year 11 we were no longer set work from the first day GCSEs should start, this led to long draining days of not being able to do anything really.

"For me personally and many I know this has caused massive impacts on mental health. Not being able to see friends or family was also a major factor toward this not being able to talk to anyone other than people in your household really took a toll.

"As restrictions ease I think getting normality back in to my life has made me feel more positive and happier, I look forward to starting college but worry about restrictions and what it will be like there but I can't wait to have some structure to my day and to be able to do work again."

Conclusion

Towards the end of March 2020, the country was in the grip of a serious worldwide pandemic. To try and control the spread of the Coronavirus, the country experienced a period of unprecedented 'lockdown'. Schools and many places of work were closed, and people were told to stay at home and avoid any face to face contact with extended family members and friends.

Over the following six months things have slowly improved but there are still many restrictions in place and life is far from 'normal' for many people.

It is clear from the information gathered in this survey that the Covid -19 pandemic has had a significant impact upon the lives of most young people. Having to remain at home without face-to-face contact with family and friends was seen as a major impact upon young people.

Alongside this was the impact of the closure of schools again highlighted by many as a matter of concern to them. For a smaller number, illness was a significant issue, either their own health or that of a family member.

These have been quite unprecedented times and it is therefore little surprise that a large majority of respondents told us that it had a negative effect upon their emotional and/or mental health. Almost 66% of those who responded (18/28 people) told us that they had personally experienced an increase in stress and anxiety.

Although many had managed to keep in contact with friends/family via electronic technology such as mobile phones and use of apps like Zoom and Facetime this did not replace face to face contact. In addition, the increased use of such technology may, at least in part, have resulted in significant changes to the sleep patterns of young people. A large majority reported going to bed later and getting up later during the period. People also told us that they have been taking less exercise.

The question around the concerns young people had for the future was quite revealing. It was very evident from the responses made that for many, the impact of missing out on schooling and the effect all of this might have on exam results was a significant concern for them.

Not being clear about what was expected of them whilst working from home also caused concerns, and a couple of people told us they did not have access to the necessary equipment to work from home. 40% of those who responded told us that they had concerns about falling behind with their education.

Although looking forward to a return to school to see their friends and to continue their education over 50% of people told us they were very apprehensive about this, and what school would actually be like once they returned there. Only three people out of the 25 who answered the question had no concerns about their future education.

The comments made about exams being cancelled this year show the degree of frustration, and indeed anger, felt by many young people. Comments such as "worried", "anxious" and "confused" were typical, with one person telling us they felt "let down" and another saying they were "devastated".

We are aware that most schools across the Borough have access to the services of Kooth, an online free and confidential service providing counselling and other support for young people experiencing any emotional or mental health issues. We saw that 10 out of the 28 people who responded had heard of Kooth and, indeed, three had used the service themselves.

However, 18 people told us they had not heard of the service. This is perhaps a little disappointing given the fact that 65% of people told us they had personally experienced a worsening in their emotional and/or mental health, and who may have benefitted from contacting the service for support.

Recommendation

1. Out of 28 people who responded to the survey, 18 told us that they were not aware of the Kooth service and what support was available to them. It is recommended that Kooth be promoted more widely in schools and by organisations providing services for young people. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are happy to support this through our networks and our work with the Local Authority.