

MH:2K Oldham – Impacts Update

September 2018

FINAL

1. Background

Between September 2016 and June 2017, Involve and Leaders Unlocked partnered to deliver a pilot of the [MH:2K](#) model in Oldham. MH:2K offers a new model for engaging young people directly in the issues and solutions surrounding mental health in their local area.

Aims of the MH:2K Oldham pilot:

1. Stimulate interest, debate and informal learning amongst young people about biomedical science on mental health and its social and cultural impacts.
2. Create dialogue and exchange on the areas above between young people, decision-makers and researchers.
3. Fill gaps in young people's, decision-makers' and researchers' understanding of young people's mental health - including encouraging new ways of thinking.
4. Reach new and diverse audiences, who are not currently engaged with biomedical science on mental health.
5. Encourage collaborative local partnerships on young people's mental health by bringing together diverse stakeholders.

MH:2K has six main elements per area:

- **Recruitment:** A team of proactive young people aged 14-25 are recruited as 'Citizen Researchers'.
- **Design Days:** The Citizen Researchers explore key national and local research about youth mental health, and determine which issues are most significant for their area.
- **Roadshow:** The Citizen Researchers co-design and deliver workshops to engage 500 of their peers on the priority topics.
- **Results Day:** The Citizen Researchers co-analyse the Roadshow data and extract key findings. They work with local decision-makers to develop strong, practical recommendations for change.
- **Big Showcase:** The Citizen Researchers present the findings and recommendations to key local stakeholders at a media-friendly event.
- An **Expert Panel** of key local decision-makers and researchers informs the project's work throughout.

2. This report

The final MH:2K [report](#) was presented to decision makers in Oldham in June 2017. It was followed by an [evaluation report](#) reflecting on the achievement of aims, the delivery process and the potential for impact.

A year on from the end of the MH:2K pilot, this short update report highlights some of the ongoing activities, impacts, and further potential for impact that have emerged in Oldham. It

is based on email and telephone exchanges with members of the Expert Panel in June and July 2018, as well as recent observation of the MH:2K process in four further locations.

3. What impact or potential impact was identified at the end of the pilot?

At the end of the pilot process, the Citizen Researchers taking part in MH:2K Oldham reported a range of personal learning and impacts, including some significant positive life changes. For example, they cited increased confidence, new friends, feeling more prepared for work or university, improvements in their own mental health, new skills, and the desire to continue to work to improve mental health in Oldham.

The Expert Panel and the wider group of stakeholders attending the Big Showcase identified multiple areas of potential action and impact, and expressed a strong wish to take the project's recommendations further. These included personal commitments to:

- Trialling or implementing project recommendations.
- Highlighting the final report in specific forums – e.g. Health and Wellbeing Board, Emotional Wellbeing Partnership.
- Organising new forms of engagement – e.g. student focus groups, supporting peer network development among young people, offer further opportunities for youth led projects.
- Changing current engagement practices or doing more engagement.
- Pushing for more resources.
- Sharing the outputs of MH:2K with specific people or organisations, and through various publicity channels.

This strong potential for long term positive impacts was mirrored by a high level of expectation from Citizen Researchers and Expert Panel members that change would happen.

4. What's happened since the launch of the MH:2K Oldham report?

Activity at the end of the pilot project

Towards the end of the Oldham pilot project, a number of activities relating to the dissemination and carrying forward of findings and recommendations had already occurred. These included:

- Plans to increase resources dedicated to young people's mental health.
- Requests or discussion of opportunities for Citizen Researchers to support other mental health related conversations and initiatives.
- Plans to develop new or revised communication documents (e.g. relating to self-harm).
- Requests for delivery team members, Expert Panel members and Citizen Researchers to attend or talk at events.
- Requests for meetings, e.g. to discuss the implications of MH:2K outputs for research priorities.

The Expert Panel organised a fourth and final meeting, which led to the formation of a Task and Finish Group under the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership – with the Partnership itself being chaired by a member of the Expert Panel. The Task and Finish Group was designed to involve key local decision makers and experts in taking forward the project findings and recommendations.

Revisiting Oldham

In June and July 2018 – a year on from the end of the project – an update on impacts was sought from local decision makers. This involved telephone interviews with the Service Manager, Youth Services and the Acting Director of Public Health at Oldham Council, as well as a short survey for other members of the Expert Panel.

Reflecting back on the MH:2K Oldham process, all respondents remained positive about the usefulness of the findings and recommendations – particularly the way in which the process championed the voice of young people.

“The findings gave us insight to some of the issues that young people are facing, they validated existing information we already had as adult decision makers and also provided new insight to some of the issues or concerns young people had around mental health.” Oldham decision-maker

Key messages that had stuck with decision-makers since the end of the pilot project were:

- The need to look more at schools’ and colleges’ role in supporting young people’s emotional wellbeing.
- The high priority of mental health for young people in Oldham.
- The powerful, inclusive, wide-reaching and participatory nature of the MH:2K process.
- The degree of empowerment of citizen researchers, and the thoughtfulness of the collaborative, youth-led recommendations.
- The ease with which the voices of young people can be captured, and the clarity of message from young people.

Carrying forward the MH:2K findings and recommendations

Conversations with decision makers confirmed that the Task and Finish Group – or Reference Group – was formed and carried out a mapping process, which involved:

- Comparing recommendations against existing or planned activities.
- Identifying gaps and level of resource need.
- Going back to Citizen Researchers (via email list or sometimes in person) when needed to clarify accurate interpretation of their recommendations – including whether existing plans adequately covered specific recommendations.

The Children and Young People’s Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership now has the MH:2K recommendations embedded in its action plan. There is also an expectation that one of the Citizen Researchers will sit on the Partnership to ensure the voice of young people is brought directly into conversations.

Broadening and embedding the conversation

The Service Manager, Youth Services, at Oldham Council has received several invitations to attend events and organisations to talk about MH:2K, and ensured that Citizen Researchers carried out as much of the presentation of findings to different audiences as possible.

The organisations and forums where MH:2K findings and recommendations, or the MH:2K process, have been shared to date include:

- Adult Mental Health Services at Oldham Council.

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team (Healthy Young Minds), including directorate, operational managers team, clinical business unit, and partnership meetings.
- Children's Social Care managers.
- Commissioning managers at Oldham Council and Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Conferences on participatory engagement.
- Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership – multi agency representation.
- Health and Wellbeing Board – a range of senior officers including representatives from Oldham Council, healthcare and police.
- Mayor of Greater Manchester (short meeting with one of the Citizen Researchers).
- Suicide Prevention Panel.
- Teachers at secondary and primary schools.
- University of Manchester staff / researchers.
- Various social media and blog posts.
- Wider services and partners such as libraries, Early Help, and Oldham College.
- Youth Focus North West – regional youth work organisation.
- Youth organisations such as Mahdlo and Positive Steps Oldham.

When asked whether MH:2K had contributed to youth mental health receiving increasing recognition, decision makers agreed that the issue is now well-cemented a key priority locally – one that is shared by various organisations beyond the council or youth services. The degree to which this shift is solely due to MH:2K is difficult to determine, but decision makers highlighted the power of the process in enabling young people to gather views from their peers and articulate these in their own words.

“It is impossible to say whether it’s down to MH:2K or as a result of the wider movement towards increased focus on mental health, but MH:2K has definitely given us the momentum and leverage we need to move on this.” Oldham decision-maker

Decision-makers in Oldham point towards ongoing awareness of and interest in MH:2K locally, with various organisations commonly wanting to know what the young people involved in MH:2K had to say about specific issues.

“Mental health has always been a priority in our youth services, but I think MH:2K has such value that other services are seeing the importance of it in informing their work. I have a lot of people emailing me to ask what the young people said about “x”, so I’ve been sending out the report a lot.” Oldham decision-maker

One decision-maker suggested that the MH:2K process had cemented the partnership working between the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Oldham Council, reinforcing the impetus for joint delivery on services.

Actions and impacts to date

The mapping exercise identified several opportunities to build MH:2K recommendations into existing or planned local activities. Where this was the case, ongoing consultation with MH:2K Citizen Researchers ensured that these activities met their expectations. Specific activities included:

- **Targeting information at primary schools** – including information to take home to parents. Local primary schools have introduced Health Champions (year 6 students), with “Happy Me” as one of their themes – highlighting simple messages through activities and communications, and supporting existing school teaching on health and wellbeing.
- **Training for schools.** The School and College Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework built in training for schools around creating a positive environment. This training was delivered by Oldham Council’s Educational Psychology team.
- **Peer education.** Schools already using a peer education model have been asked to share their approach and learning within their school clusters.
- **Accessible information about mental health and stigma.** Some of the Citizen Researchers worked with CAMHS and Tameside, Oldham and Glossop (TOG) MIND to increase the accessibility of their communications materials. More broadly, Oldham Council has committed that any information produced for young people should be led by young people.
- **Mental health awareness day at schools.** Oldham Council committed to promoting this as an idea to all schools during mental health awareness week.
- **Professional listening.** CAMHS was already in the process of developing new guidance for professionals, so used the MH:2K recommendations to directly inform this.

The Oldham Library Service used the MH:2K findings and recommendations to support a bid for funding with the Wellcome Trust. The bid was successful and led to the delivery of an arts-based project with a focus on mental health and wellbeing: young people attended workshops and a theatre performance about social anxiety; their input informed the production of a graphic novel designed to enable young people to connect with mental health issues.

Shortly after the end of the MH:2K pilot, Oldham was identified by the Government as one of 12 [opportunity areas](#) in England – part of a national plan for improving social mobility through education. Opportunity areas have three priorities: early years, attainment, and being ready for life. Since mental health is of direct relevance to the third of these priorities, the opportunity area funding has provided resources to deliver on some of the schools-focused recommendations identified through MH:2K. Indeed, MH:2K is referenced in Oldham’s opportunity area [delivery plan](#) as a key source of evidence for forthcoming activities, which will include:

- Mini-MH:2K style activities at schools, enabling further peer led consultation to drill down into the recommendations relating to the environment and culture of schools.
- Needs assessments and baseline data collection.
- Development of school mental health plans.
- Support for schools to provide additional mental health resources for students.
- Training for at least one staff member in every school to deliver classroom-based mental health and resilience programmes.
- Evaluating existing practices in schools with a view to scaling up promising initiatives.
- Consultation with primary and secondary schools throughout the process.

Decision-makers commented that, following MH:2K, CAMHS and TOG MIND had increased involvement of young people in their work. Additionally, several decision-makers highlighted the positive impact MH:2K had on their own or others’ views about youth participation, including:

- Strengthening the rationale and practical approach for engaging with young people, especially from diverse backgrounds.
- Reinforcing the existing belief that it is imperative to embed the voices and views of young people when making decisions about services.
- Raising awareness across services of the benefits to involving young people in peer led consultation.
- Demonstrating and evidencing the value of a youth-led and inclusive approach.
- Providing useful learning for enhancing engagement.
- Highlighting the importance of continuing to involve children and young people in the shaping of existing services, to ensure services meet real needs.
- Raising the possibility that this approach might be applied to other topics.

Extending the reach of MH:2K

Since the Oldham pilot, MH:2K has been rolled out to four other locations in England. The location-specific reports from these areas are due to be published later in 2018, alongside a national report summarising findings from across all MH:2K projects to date and flagging high level messages at a wider policy and research level. The evaluation of these four projects so far indicates a similar level of positive response and appetite for change as was seen at this stage in Oldham. Evaluation reports will be published later in 2018, followed again by a post-project impacts update in 2019.

5. Looking ahead

Decision-makers in Oldham have expressed clear intentions to maintain links with the Citizen Researchers, highlight MH:2K outputs with relevant forums, and continue delivering the recommendations through the Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership, where resources are available.

Following a period of communicating and responding to requests for detail about MH:2K, implementation of the recommendations began in earnest in early 2018, making health outcome impacts difficult to gauge at this stage. Looking ahead, impact data are likely to come from several sources, including:

- Population-level data on health outcomes.
- Service-level data collected by the CCG.
- School-level data collection through the opportunity area delivery plan activities.
- Data on the engagement of young people, collected by Oldham Council.

Outcome-based impacts are expected to start emerging over the next year or two, although linking any changes directly to MH:2K may prove challenging in the context of a complex and evolving issue such as mental health, which is influenced by many factors within and outside of the local area.

“Everybody who is implementing changes should be collecting data on impacts – it’s then how you collate that from different sources and how you attribute it to MH:2K.”

Oldham decision-maker

There is currently little evidence of any tangible impacts of MH:2K on the mental health research agenda, either within or outside the Oldham area. This is perhaps not surprising given it is still early days in terms of implementation, but highlights the risk that outputs

become focused within service delivery rather than also extending the wider mental health knowledge base. It may be that the national level report being produced following implementation of MH:2K in the four new areas adds to the potential for research impacts – this will be examined in the national evaluation report.

Challenges to maintaining the momentum built by MH:2K in Oldham in terms of youth engagement over the longer term remain. Although MH:2K continues to be referenced and highlighted across multiple organisations, there is a risk that the report becomes a go-to place for guidance at the expense of the continued engagement of young people, or that ownership for the youth mental health engagement agenda does not become fully distributed among all relevant organisations.

“We can’t become so reliant on MH:2K to the point that it’s the only thing we lean on and that we think young people don’t need to be involved any more. We need to keep up the momentum and carry on involving young people in these discussions. Engaging young people should be everyone’s job and not the remit of one person – it should be built into practice.” Oldham decision-maker

There is determination from specific decision makers that the responsibility for carrying forward the MH:2K approach and recommendations should be shared; this provides a good foundation for wider awareness and ownership to be cemented locally.

The number of recommendations identified by MH:2K remains a challenge, especially as the mapping work identified several that would be reliant on additional funding in order to deliver. There is recognition among decision-makers that this is not a quick fix, and that to respond to all the recommendations will take time and resources.

The opportunity area funding provides a timely and relevant route to resourcing the schools-focused recommendations. Delivering on other recommendations will rely on the work of the Children and Young People’s Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership to prioritise, coordinate action and – where needed – identify additional resources. The experience of the Library Service in using MH:2K outputs as a basis for securing new funding is encouraging, as is the firm belief among local decision-makers that a focus on young people’s mental health in Oldham is here to stay.