



# MH:2K Oldham

## A youth-led approach to exploring mental health

### Summary Report, July 2017

# Introduction

MH:2K is a powerful new model for engaging young people in conversations about mental health in their local area. Designed to be replicable across local areas, it empowers 14-25 year olds to:

- Identify the mental health issues that they see as most important;
- Engage their peers in discussing and exploring these topics;
- Work with key local decision-makers and researchers to make recommendations for change.

MH:2K was developed by national charity **Involve** and social enterprise **Leaders Unlocked**. From September 2016 to July 2017, they piloted MH:2K in Oldham, supported by a Wellcome Trust People Award, Oldham Council and Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group. This document summarises MH:2K Oldham's design, findings and recommendations, and initial impacts.

## What we did

The MH:2K model has six elements. In Oldham they were worked as follows:

- **Recruitment:** Reaching out through local statutory and community organisations, we recruited twenty diverse young people to be MH:2K Oldham's Citizen Researchers.
- **Design Days:** The Citizens Researchers discussed their views and explored key information on youth mental health. They identified the top five mental health challenges facing young people in Oldham as families and relationships, the environment and culture of schools, stigma, professional practice and self-harm. The Citizen Researchers co-designed a workshop template for each topic and received training in areas such as public speaking and facilitation.
- **Roadshow:** Over four months, the Citizen Researchers used the workshop templates to co-lead 42 events for their peers, engaging 598 diverse young people in Oldham.
- **Results Day:** The Citizen Researchers used the information collected during the Roadshow to determine MH:2K Oldham's findings on the pressures facing young people on their mental health. They worked with key decision-makers and researchers to co-create MH:2K's recommendations for solutions.
- **Big Showcase:** The Citizen Researchers presented the findings and recommendations to eight-five decision-makers and researchers, from twenty-seven different organisations in Oldham and Greater Manchester, and further afield.
- **Expert Panel:** From its very beginning, MH:2K Oldham was supported by an Expert Panel of key local decision-makers and researchers including representatives from Oldham Council, Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group, Healthy Young Minds Oldham, Oldham Youth Council, Oldham Sixth Form College, Tameside Oldham and Glossop Mind, NIHR Clinical Research Network Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester Academic Health Science Network and Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

# Findings and recommendations

In total, the MH:2K Oldham Citizen Researchers recorded 29 findings and 30 recommendations (see Part Two of this report for a full description).

Their findings on **families and relationships** cover expectations around religion and culture, domestic violence and neglect, lack of awareness and understanding about mental health, pressures around education and careers, and romantic relationships. Their recommendations on families and relationships are:

1. Train '**Community Ambassadors**' to have conversations about mental health in various religious and other communities.
2. **Health professionals to visit religious buildings** and give talks. This should be designed with the community.
3. An Oldham focused campaign, over 5 years, to raise awareness of **safe spaces and improve signposting** to information.
4. Target information at the **primary school age group**, including information for children to take home to their parents.
5. Provide a **free mediation service for extended families** to enable young people to be heard at home.

The Citizen Researchers' findings on the **environment and culture of schools** cover pressures around exams and grades, how punishments are given, teacher training around mental health, bullying and discrimination, and social media. Their recommendations on this topic are:

1. More **designated areas** in schools for **relaxation / stress relief**.
2. Schools should do more **work with parents to build their understanding** about grades and career pathways.
3. Teachers should be **trained and supported** to create a positive culture towards progression rather than panic and pressure.
4. Use a **peer education approach** to address bullying in an interactive way and have open dialogue with staff and students.
5. Hold **drop-in sessions** with a mental health specialist coming into school, supporting any referrals that are needed.
6. Establish **peer mentor programmes**, where mentors are trained and accredited to lead group discussions on mental health and wellbeing.
7. Schools should be better informed about digital technologies.

MH:2K Oldham's findings on **stigma** cover perceptions of the levels of support available, masculinity and mental health, language and labelling, the social hierarchy that exists amongst young people, levels of understanding about mental health, and parental involvement. MH:2K Oldham's recommendations on stigma are:

1. Work with young people to ensure information on available services is **as accessible as possible**.
2. **Train teachers** in PSHE and mental health. Ensure lessons address unhelpful expectations, e.g. expectations of masculinity.
3. **Hold a 'Mental Health Awareness Day'** (non-uniform) charging pupils a small fee to give to local mental health charities.
4. Undertake **more work like MH:2K using peer-to-peer engagement** to increase awareness of mental health, decrease stigma, and gather evidence.
5. Mental health support and information should **target different cultures and religions**.

On **professional practice**, the Citizen Researchers' findings cover changes in practitioners, transition between Healthy Young Minds and adult services, how professionals talk to young people, and choices of treatment. Their recommendations on this topic are:

1. Link-up young people in transition with **young people who have already transitioned** (buddying). Use regular meetings and fun activities.
2. **Pass more information** between professionals to help avoid patients having to re-live experiences.
3. Send young people **regular updates about the progress of their referrals**. Create an app which young people waiting for referrals can use to access support.
4. Professionals **should listen to young people**, not be rude or patronising, and not use language that is too formal.
5. Teach young people about **coping methods** and how to recognise symptoms. Offer talking therapies before medication.
6. Provide more **community activities**, such as arts and sports groups.
7. Ask young people **what sex of professional** they would like to see. Offer home visits where young people's mental health conditions mean they miss appointments.

MH:2K Oldham's findings on **self-harm** cover family issues, bullying, abuse, other mental health conditions and social media. Its recommendations on self-harm are:

1. Offer **activities to help young people cope**, such as stress packages (e.g. mindfulness toys and information), and non-sporty extra-curricular activities.
2. **Run campaigns such as 'self-harm awareness day'**. Young people need more information about areas such as coping mechanisms, real life stories, and what help is available.

3. Provide **more support**, such as specialist services, drop-in sessions and family workshops. Promote them and make sure interpreters are available.
4. Focus on **self-harm around educational transitions**, for example in PHSE.
5. **Provide a 'drop box'** in schools and elsewhere to ensure the problem is identified early.
6. **Improve the NHS Booklet on self-harm**, for example by adding colour, bullet points, positive quotes, and survivors' stories.

## Conclusion: Impacts and next steps

Although MH:2K Oldham is only just reaching its end, its independent evaluation has already found evidence of significant impacts. These include:

- Decision-makers and researchers have identified **"multiple potential impacts on research, decision-making and engagement practice"** in Oldham and Greater Manchester, with "potential for significant improvements in health outcomes". These include the setting-up of a task and finish group, ultimately reporting to Oldham's *Health and Wellbeing Board*, to drive forward implementation of the project's recommendations. Several organisations are considering undertaking more youth-led, or peer-to-peer engagement work as a result of the project.
- There have been significant impacts on the young people involved. Among other changes, Citizen Researchers and Roadshow participants alike reported increased knowledge about mental health. Citizen Researchers reported learning or improving hard and soft skills, and some noted further impacts, for example, changes to their career plans. Oldham Youth Council, Healthy Young Minds, and Tameside Oldham and Glossop Mind, among others, have all offered the Citizen Researchers continued opportunities for participation and development beyond the lifetime of the project.

## For more information

MH:2K Oldham's full project report, its evaluation, and other resources, are available at [www.involve.org.uk/mh2k-resources](http://www.involve.org.uk/mh2k-resources)

For any other questions about MH:2K, its pilot in Oldham or future plans, please contact Sarah Allan at [sarah@involve.org.uk](mailto:sarah@involve.org.uk) or Rose Dowling at [rose@leaders-unlocked.org](mailto:rose@leaders-unlocked.org)

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