1. How are children and adolescents potentially at risk of developing mental health problems identified and how can those problems be prevented?

Within West Dunbartonshire Council in a multi-agency approach, there are a range of procedures and support mechanisms which contribute to the early identification of children and young people at risk of developing mental health problems. This approach uses a Staged Intervention process operating from Early Years through secondary schooling. The Staged Intervention process allows children’s needs to be identified and those needs matched to appropriate interventions on a staged basis, at the lowest level through input from nursery/school staff and progressively if needs increase and are more complex to a multi-agency response can include Social Work, Health, Voluntary Sector providers. Within Early Years and schools typically class teachers and learning assistants have a key role within the primary sector and pastoral care staff have an important role within the secondary sector. Within the secondary sector and their associated cluster primary schools we have a multi-agency forum which can allow for early identification and intervention. In some school settings there are drop-in clinics where health service staff can provide confidential support.

Within West Dunbartonshire there has been fairly extensive individual and multi-agency staff training over a considerable period of time in relation to identifying concerning behaviour among children and young people and responding to prevent further difficulties or intervene to address presenting difficulties. Typically the range of behaviours which may give cause for concern would include acting out or withdrawn behaviour, self harm, non-attendance/truancy, failing to achieve, social isolation and difficulty with relationships.

Mechanisms also exist to identify children at risk and transfer information at key points during the child’s educational journey for example, pre-scat, transition to primary, primary/secondary transition and transition to post-school placements. Children at risk may be targeted for specific interventions through the use of nurture groups, group work, alternative curriculum packages and multiagency support packages.

In terms of preventative approaches, our schools support the development of good mental health through a range of curricular materials at a universal and targeted level. These might include, Circle Time, PAThs, pastoral care/key worker support, multi-agency interventions around risk and resilience, group work within the Seasons for Growth programme, nurture groups and the FRIENDS model. We have developed multi agency approaches to support to parents through programmes like Mellow Parenting and Handling Teenage Behaviour which may also operate at a preventative level in terms of young people developing mental health difficulties.
2. What obstacles are there in identifying children and adolescents with mental health problems and how might they be overcome?

The main obstacles to identification and support would be around staff awareness and confidence in relation to mental health difficulties and the quality of inter-agency working and support. Children and young people can manifest a range of behaviours as a result of mental health difficulties, but these behaviours may also be presented by young people who do not have any particular mental health difficulty.

In some cases staff who are tackling very challenging behaviour from a young person may have difficulty identifying this as an early indication or symptom of a mental health issue.

Engagement with services may be more of a barrier than the identification of difficulties. In some cases both children and parents require considerable encouragement to acknowledge difficulties and engage with appropriate services. There remains a stigma around the idea of mental health difficulties and an underlying tendency to wish to attribute blame to individual young people who present challenging or worrying behaviour. Where contact and positive working relationships between education staff and Health agencies are poor, education staff may lack the support and confidence to identify and support young people at the appropriate stage.

Many of these difficulties can be overcome where agencies work together within a clear multi-agency framework and using the staged intervention approach. Universal services like education and health have a key role in early identification and support but this is only effective where training and resources are put in to build the capacity of universal services. In order for a staged intervention process to be effective there requires to be appropriate resources available at each stage with clear allocation and access protocols.

3. What action is being taken to facilitate early intervention and what else can be done?

Single agency and multi-agency training within the GIRFEC framework is key to early identification and support. For education it is important that there are clear guidelines and protocols for staff to recognise patterns of behaviour which may be indicative of mental health concerns, example, poor or problematic attendance, and that interventions are timely and appropriate. The Psychological Service within local authorities are in a position to provide useful training and ongoing support to education staff in discussing concerns and advising on appropriate interventions.

There is an ongoing need to recognise that young children within the Early Years and primary sectors may already be exhibiting signs of distress and resources require to be made available to allow intervention at this early stage.
West Dunbartonshire’s Choose Life Action Plan has supported a range of training and innovative initiatives. Actions to target awareness of particular issues and support to young people include: a programme of multi-agency staff training including Applied Suicide Prevention Intervention Skills Training (ASIST); Scottish Mental Health First Aid (SMFA), Seasons for Growth; Loss and Bereavement, Suicide Talks; Self Harm awareness training; commissioned PACE Theatre to deliver a performance and workshop to promote awareness of mental health to all Secondary 3 pupils.

4. **How can access to services and ongoing support be improved.**

Close links between Social Work, Education and Health Services are vital to providing an effective staged intervention approach to mental health difficulties. Health visitors for example may have a key role to play in supporting parents at the Early Years stage while nursery staff can provide key interventions to build resilience in young children. At times Education staff may feel that they could provide the key support to children and young people but this would be dependent on good advice and support from Health colleagues. Access to some specialist services for children of all ages can be difficult and lead to the appropriate help not being available when required.

Fast Track access systems into specialist CAMHS services are in operations in some areas of service in Scotland for appropriate situations. The merit of extending this model more widely could be explored.

There may be a perception among partner services that access to specialist CAHMS is difficult and there is a need for greater clarity as to the young people which these services can benefit. The clinic-based approach of specialist services can be a barrier to many families taking up the offer of support and continuing to engage with the services. This raises issues of equality of access and social inclusion. There are groups of young people who are particularly vulnerable, LAAC, young carers, for whom specialist services can be difficult to access.

One the main areas of difficulty is agreement and consistency around the appropriate age for the transition from children's to adult services. On this issue, clearer formal guidance from the Scottish Government would be very helpful. For example, this varies even within CAMHS services.

In recognition of some these issues, particularly around LAAC children and young people in West Dunbartonshire, Social Work and education services, in partnership with Health, (including the local CAMHS team), have developed a multi agency initiative - the Young People in Mind Team. The objectives of the initiative include promoting awareness and training for staff and carers involved with LAAC children and young people, to build skills and confidence in supporting these young people and to demystify mental health issues and services for both staff and young people. The team also undertake direct work with individual young people.
What problems are there around transition from CAHMS to adult mental health services and how can a smoother transition be achieved?

There are difficulties around transition from CAMHS to adult Mental Health services. There is a perception that the protocols around transition from adolescent to adult mental health services remain uncertain and vary from area to area. It is not always clear that the boundary between children’s and adult services is at an appropriate stage which is meaningful to children and families. There are also concerns at times regarding transfer of information.

On this issue, clear formal guidance from the Scottish Government would be very helpful.

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