



RESEARCH EVALUATION

Turning Tides:

Wellbeing and resilience for early adulthood transition

- *What do participants of Turning Tides think about the project?*

March 2025

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Turning Tides

- Wellbeing and resilience for early adulthood transition

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Introduction

The following report offers the results of a small-scale qualitative study that elicited the views of Turning Tides participants. The participant feedback gives important insights into the value that Turning Tides offers the participants and participants' recommendations for the future provision of services.

Turning Tides – Project overview

Turning Tides was established in January 2024 as a relationship-based programme for young people between the ages of 15 and 21 years old in the areas of Scarborough Borough and Redcar & Cleveland (North Yorkshire). Turning Tides works with young people who are on the cusp of adulthood. The transition to adulthood is a crucial phase for all young people. For those with low self-esteem and mental health conditions, the successful transition to adulthood and independence can be disrupted or prevented, leading to negative outcomes not only for the young person themselves but for society as a whole. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set out a vision –

where mental health conditions are prevented and where anyone and everyone can exercise their full range of human rights and access the high quality, timely and culturally appropriate health and social care they need and deserve. And it is a world where everyone has the chance to achieve the highest possible level of health and to participate fully in society free from stigma and discrimination. (WHO 2022, 248)

To achieve that, WHO suggests “community-based networks of services” that “[p]romote person-centred, human rights-based care” (WHO 2022, 250). Turning Tides fits this model of services. Turning Tides is delivered as a collaboration of local VCSEs who work in partnership to transform the wellbeing and life chances of young people. At the heart of the project is the relationship between a young person and a wellbeing coach. The focus is placed on identifying a participant's strengths and ambitions, with a community-based asset development approach taken to match those goals with opportunities in the local area. Figure 1 (below) gives an overview of the programme design.

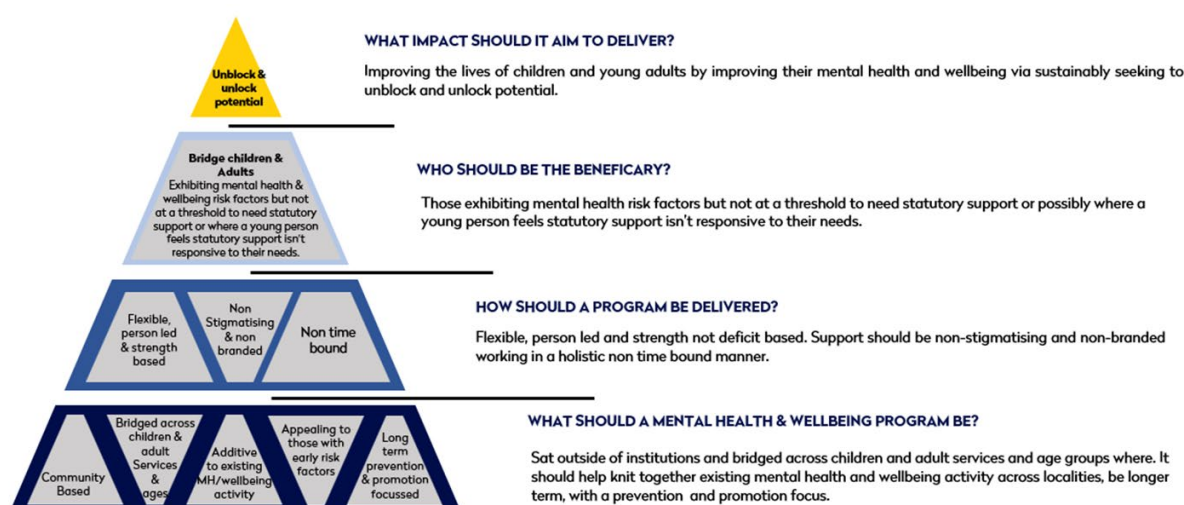


Figure 1: Turning Tides programme design

The overall aim of Turning Tides is to improve the mental wellbeing of young people. It bridges a gap in services caused by long waiting lists for (C)AMHS and other mental health services and adds to existing services by connecting the young people to their communities allowing them to build networks that go beyond the project. The wellbeing coach works with the young person to identify their goals in relation to living situation, school, work or training, friends and relationships, healthy lifestyle, self-esteem, and feelings and emotions. This approach aligns with the protective factors for mental wellbeing as set out by WHO: *“Protective factors [...] include our individual social and emotional skills and attributes as well as positive social interactions, quality education, decent work, safe neighbourhoods and community cohesion, among others.”* (WHO 2022, xiv)

Through this holistic approach the wellbeing coach can support the young person to engage in their community and participate in social activities, attend health appointments as needed, return to education or employment and prevent homelessness. The longer-term nature of the project ensures any changes are sustainable and long lasting.

At the start of the programme, the young people complete the MyMindStar, both as a baseline measurement but also as a starting point for the discussion with the wellbeing coach. The MyMindStar baseline data shows two areas in particular that have the readings at a lower end of the scale: feelings and emotions, and self-esteem. This gives a first indication of the areas the work with the young people focusses on.

A previous quantitative evaluation of the Turning Tides programme has shown significant positive changes across the MyMindStar categories. This report adds to the quantitative insights by reporting the results of qualitative interviews with young people who participate in the Turning Tides project.

Methodology

Nine young people who currently are receiving support from Turning Tides took part in the research. All participants received the questions prior to the interviews. To ensure the young people were comfortable and could contribute in a way suitable for them, different formats of engagement were available. One young person attended an individual interview online, four participants attended an online group interview, and four participants provided written responses. This approach ensured maximum accessibility and inclusivity, given that low self-esteem and anxiety is something many Turning Tides participants experience.

All interview participants gave informed consent and said they understood that participation is voluntary, they can exit the interview at any time, and do not have to answer questions they do not feel comfortable answering. The responses have been anonymised to protect the identity of the participants.

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) following the six steps of familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes which led to the findings that are being reported in the next section.

Findings

“but I think Turning Tides are a million times better” (Participant 9)

All participants felt that the Turning Tides programme has been extremely beneficial for them. Most participants have experience of other programmes prior to joining Turning Tides. The participants agree that Turning Tides is better than any other programme or service they have previously been part of. Five participants found the other services not useful:

“I felt that other services felt like a dead end and felt too artificial.” (Participant 8)

Two of the participants gave as the reason that the services finished too soon:

“I have found the short term services less helpful since they felt rushed and a level of trust wasn’t established. The longer term services have been more helpful since that trust was established early on and improvements can be seen.” (Participant 5)

The following sections describe three aspects of the programme that the participants especially value in more detail: coping with anxiety through individual support, enrichment activities and hobbies, and self-confidence.

Coping with anxiety through individual support

Four participants talked about anxiety that limited their participation in life outside the home prior to starting the Turning Tides programme. One participant described being both nervous and eager to get help prior to meeting their wellness coach. Turning Tides’ flexible approach allows participants to ease into the process and take steps at the right speed for them. For one participant, this meant to initially attend with their mother:

“We met at a time and place that suited me and made me feel comfortable, and I was allowed my mum there until I felt comfortable to be without her.” (Participant 7)

For another participant with anxiety, the weekly meets with the coach helped a lot with her anxiety. The coach also attended baby groups with her and her children to meet new people and widen the participant’s life-world. Being out in public can be difficult for people with anxiety and here the coaches offer invaluable support:

“I was given a lot of support in doing things that made me anxious or worried.” (Participant 6)

Importantly while the coaches support the participants to try new things they are guided by the participants’ ability and desire to move forward:

“The positive aspects that have helped me are: being able to go at my own pace and not being pushed into things, having my feelings validated, and being heard.” (Participant 7)

For all participants, feeling comfortable in the presence of the coach is important:

“I felt really listened to and comfortable in talking about how I was feeling or even just sitting quietly.” (Participant 6)

The participants also valued setting goals with the coaches and being held accountable by them:

“I like the goal setting and having someone to help with accountability.” (Participant 5)

Participants talked about the goals they have achieved and how new goals build on previous ones. In addition, the participants valued support in getting more independent in feeling supported through speaking to their coach. Two participants also stressed the benefits being able to message their coaches:

“Like every time you need help, you can just text them and they’ll give you a reply straight away.” (Participant 9)

Enrichment activities and hobbies

In addition to individual support, Turning Tides offers group enrichment activities and supports the participants to take up a hobby. The group activities allow participants to meet other people and form friendships:

“There’s a lot of groups, activities, a lot of socialising. And they always invite you. And if you can’t go, you can always go to the next one. [...] Like just going out to see people day-to-day. Like just makes you feel so much better and happier mentally. And that’s what like makes you want to get out of bed and just makes you stronger in the long term.” (Participant 9)

“...opportunities to get to know other people on the programme, and activities to help with life skills.” (Participant 6)

Both the participant in the individual interview and those who submitted written responses talk positively about the social activities. However, no one in the group interview participated in group activities or seem to have opportunity to do so. It would be interesting to understand this variation in the experiences.

Beyond activities that are organised by Turning Tides, coaches also encourage and fund activities in the community. This builds both self-esteem (see below) and social connection:

“I’ve made tonnes of friends. I’ve learned how to play the guitar really well and it just makes me feel good because I’ve got a hobby and something to look forward to everyday. [...] He [wellness coach] helped me a lot and he brought hobbies of mine into reality and pushed me to do them more.” (Participant 9)

Self-confidence

Seven of the participants talked about how their self-confidence has improved through the Turning Tides project. Interestingly, several participants link enhanced self-confidence to a more positive outlook on one’s future:

“I am definitely starting to feel more and more confident about myself and my personal future.” (Participant 5)

“Turning Tides has helped me build my self-confidence a lot, and also my outlook on my future. I’ve been to look round colleges and explored different paths I could take.” (Participant 7)

“I feel much more confident in myself in daily tasks and don’t feel as pessimistic about the future.” (Participant 8)

Working with the Turning Tides coaches has enabled the young people to do things they did not think were possible:

“And so like a few years ago I like didn’t have friends. I wasn’t confident I didn’t leave the house. Now I’ve got lots of friends. I’m always out. But it’s mainly from Turning Tides who have pushed me and helped me [...] I’ve done more stuff than I thought I ever would in the past year and a half. [...] So my self-confidence is definitely rising a lot.” (Participant 9)

“I don’t think I would be here full stop if it wasn’t for Turning Tides” (Participant 3)

In summary, Turning Tides has a lasting positive effect on the young people’s lives and participants described it as extremely beneficial. The biggest impact was described by Participant 3, who credits Turning Tides to still being alive:

“If it wasn’t for Turning Tides along with a few other things in my life I wouldn’t be here anymore. [...] I don’t think I would be here full stop if it wasn’t for Turning Tides.”

The flexibility of the coaches and the personalised guidance that they offer were praised by the young people and one participant considers the programme life-changing:

“It’s been very good for me. It’s changed my life.” (Participant 9)

The quote below by Participant 5 shows the evolution from a reclused, anxious state to expanding their life-world with the support from Turning Tides:

“I have found it really positive being able to be out in the community rather than being stuck in four walls talking to someone, I’ve also found it really positive that the support workers are genuinely interested in helping and improving younger lives. I’ve also found it really positive that it’s a longer term support program it doesn’t feel so rushed.” (Participant 5)

The young people also made some recommendations for the service going forward that will be discussed in the next section.

Recommendations

Several participants commented on the need for Turning Tides to be available to more people locally as well as expanding the programme to other areas. This recommendation is rooted in the experience of the young people that they found Turning Tides more beneficial than other services they have previously used (see above):

“The quality of support needs to be available for more people.” (Participant 3)

“It could be more widely available to young adults, and ensuring that support remains accessible to those who may need it for a variety of reasons.” (Participant 6)

“I think they can do more, but they just need the funding and the right things in place like support surrounded areas and I think it should. I think it should be all over England because they do a lot for children and young adults and like I’ve got a few friends who’ve Turning Tides and they’ve all had good experience. No one’s had a bad experience and the support you get is just beyond amazing.” (Participant 9)

Two participants also suggested more frequent (weekly or fortnightly) group activities and widening the times at which activities are being offered.

“I also think there could be some better social events for people of similar ages that are accessible at different time as many are in the evening and quite a walk on a winter’s night.” (Participant 5)

Discussion and Conclusion

The impact of mental health conditions not only on the individual but also on societies has been widely acknowledged. Previous research has shown a significant connection between low self-esteem and anxiety and depression (Sowislo and Orth 2013). It is therefore meaningful that the young people who participated in this research stated that their self-confidence has grown. The personalised, strengths-based and holistic approach of Turning Tides helps young people to reduce or overcome their low self-esteem and anxiety, thereby making a successful transition to adulthood and independence more likely.

An interesting finding is that the participants stated that their higher self-confidence led to a more positive future perception. There is some existing research on the connection between time perception and self-esteem. Mello et al. (2022) found adolescents with a present-future orientation had the highest self-esteem, whereas a past orientation was connected to low self-esteem. Equally research has shown that a positive perception of time lowers anxiety (Moon et al. 2023). A positive future orientation is also linked to better educational and employment outcomes, less anti-social and criminal behaviour and fewer depressive symptoms (Walker et al. 2023).

There are several potential explanations of how the participants’ self-esteem grew and future perception improved through the Turning Tides project. Connection to peers, neighbourhoods and the wider community has been shown to reduce depression and enhance life-satisfaction (Hari 2019). The work that the wellbeing coaches do to connect participants with community groups might lead to participants feeling better about themselves leading to enhanced self-esteem. The other part of the project that is likely to lead to higher self-confidence is the feedback loop of setting goals, trying new things, realising what one is capable of and then repeating this process, widening the comfort zone and willingness to leave it. Here the one-to-one work with the wellbeing coach is crucial to ensure goals and activities stretch the young person but are not too ambitious to avoid the young person failing or withdrawing again (Csikszentmihalyi 1998). Both the experience of new activities and of being part of a group gives young people something to look forward to that might contribute to the positive future perception.

Overall, this research has shown that the Turning Tides project is highly valued by and beneficial to young people in their transition to adulthood. The young people especially valued the long-

term nature of the programme that allowed them to make sustainable changes. The young people feel strongly that Turning Tides should be available to more young people locally and be extended to other geographic areas. Securing long-term finance for Turning Tides in the existing areas and providing further finance to expand the project can ease the pressure on waiting lists for existing mental health services, prevent a deterioration of young people's mental health and most likely reduce the need for services during adulthood. Here, a long-term evaluation of the service, ideally with a control group, could offer more in-depth data.

In the meantime, this research and the quantitative data collected previously clearly show the benefit of Turning Tides to the young people and also confirm that WHO's vision of personalised services grounded in community networks can indeed ensure that young people can fully participate in society.

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