

Report to Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 13th March 2018

**Subject: MiLife – Children & Young Peoples`
Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Project.**

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Committee Secretary: A. Hendry (01992 564246)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Communities Select Committee notes the success of the MiLife initiative, which is an innovative programme focusing on positive mental health and emotional wellbeing for children and young people in the district.

MiLife has been announced as a finalist at this year's National Crime-Beat Awards on 18 April 2018, having been nominated by Essex High Sheriff, Mr Simon Hall MBE.

Report:

Background

As part of the Epping Forest Youth Council's Youth Conference event in October 2015, a consultation exercise was undertaken with 100 local teenagers regarding their priority concerns. Overwhelmingly, mental health was highlighted as the biggest issue for local Epping Forest young people. Young people reported high levels of stress and anxiety as a result of a range of issues including; exam pressure, bullying, family relationship breakdown, negative body image and low self-esteem. The Youth Council found that many of their peers were engaged in self-harm or turning to substance misuse as a result of poor mental health and feelings of helplessness.

Working with staff from the Council's Community, Health & Wellbeing Team, Youth Councillors formulated and co-designed a project, which they named MiLife, to address the issue of mental health via a programme to be delivered in schools. As the design of the project gathered pace, wider partners were brought on board to provide professional advice and facilitate delivery. These partners included; adolescent mental health staff from the NHS North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT), school representatives and the Red Balloon Family Foundation organisation.

Ultimately, the objectives of the MiLife Project are to support children and young people to understand mental health, dispel stigma, equip them with tools to develop personal resilience and to provide signposting information to wider support services

1. Adolescent MiLife Programme

Pupils from every state secondary school in the district participate in an interactive workshop facilitated by professional youth workers from the Red Balloon Family Foundation, which is a local third sector organisation based in the district. Workshops are also supported by the Council's Community, Health & Wellbeing staff and representatives from the NHS.

The workshops include:

- An interactive forum-theatre production focusing on real-life scenarios.
- Facilitated discussions about positive mental health and personal resilience.
- Real life testimonials highlighting the issues experienced by young people and their positive coping strategies.
- A presentation explaining practical resilience tools including the MiBox concept, on-line apps and the dedicated MiLife website resource.

The workshops are followed up by a more informal lunchtime roadshow to allow pupils to access further information around mental health via information stalls or to directly self-refer for support.

A key element of the MiLife Project is its interactive website (www.milife.org.uk) which is hosted by the Red Balloon Family Foundation. Research undertaken by the Youth Council identified a plethora of information available on line but raised concerns around the validity of much of this. Consequently, a dedicated local website was developed as part of the MiLife Project which supports young people, parents and teachers.

Additionally, teachers are provided with Ofsted appropriate teaching resources in order to deliver sessions within lessons over the academic year.

2. Outcomes and Evaluation of Adolescent MiLife

Since its roll-out in 2016, over 6,000 Epping Forest young people have taken part in the Adolescent MiLife Programme to date. All seven state secondary schools fully participate in the project indicating the value and importance placed on mental health interventions by senior leadership teams within schools.

The programme is continuously evaluated using a range of methods including pupil, teacher and professional agency feedback. Information gathered is regularly reviewed and the project is constantly modified and improved in line with these findings.

Examples of feedback received include:

Matthew Tinker (Youth Councillor involved in the MiLife Project from its inception) says -
 “The MiLife Project is a really great youth led project that has allowed the young people of Epping Forest to understand their own personal mental health in greater detail. The project aims to give young people a greater understanding of what to do if they feel mentally ill but also how to help themselves keep a healthy and happy mind. I strongly believe greater mental awareness will lead to a reduction in youth crime rates as young people can understand now when they need to seek professional support. I am so proud of our project and the great impact it is having on my peers and my friends.”

Deborah Lake (Deputy Head Teacher, Davenant Foundation School) says –
 “The ‘MiLife’ initiative is such a success. All years appreciate the presentation, they respond to both the content and techniques adopted by the team. We were surprised and delighted at their response. The involvement of local students through the Epping Forest Youth Council brought a reality to the presentations and content which got through to the students. To see one of our own students actively involved in the day and instrumental in its planning gave our students confidence in the team. Thank you to all the organisations and individuals involved.”

Having fully endorsed the MiLife initiative and associated resource materials, NHS NELFT is now looking to roll the project out regionally. Additionally, in partnership with the Red Balloon Family Foundation, research is being undertaken into the further digitisation of the programme and the potential development of a BBC “CBeebies” resource.

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3. Primary MiLife Programme

Following the overwhelming success of the Adolescent MiLife Programme, requests for an age appropriate version of the workshop for delivery in the district's primary schools began to be received from local teachers, parents and wider agencies.

The Epping Forest Early Help & Start Well Group, a sub-group of the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board, had highlighted children and young peoples' mental health as a key priority back in 2016. Consequently, in April 2017 this group looked favourably on a Public Health Community Fund bid submitted by the Red Balloon Family to pilot a "Primary MiLife Project" in six schools.

The format for the Primary MiLife programme was carefully developed through consultation with schools and is specifically tailored to three age brackets. Assembly sessions are delivered to each year group, followed up with hour-long classroom based activities to ensure key messages have been understood.

- Reception class and Year 1 class pupils engage with the topic of mental health through "Embers the Dragon" a visiting 7 foot high character who needs help identifying how he is feeling and how to share these feelings with others once he understands and can name them. The focus is on emotional literacy skills for 4 to 6 year olds.
- Year 3 and 4 pupils meet "the World's Worst Detective" character and explore how talking to others can help identify feelings, share them and take control of their emotional wellbeing.
- Year 5 and 6 pupils experience three interactive stories exploring supporting friends, family members and themselves with emotional wellbeing. Pupils are encouraged to draw from real situations they are likely to recognise from their own friendship groups.

4. Outcomes and Evaluation of Primary MiLife

Evaluation of the Primary MiLife Project has shown it to be a resounding success. To date 6,500 pupils have participated in the programme. Overall, over four in five children have said they have learned something new about emotions through taking part in the day and over half reported that they were more likely to talk to a trusted adult about their emotional state having experienced the presentations and taken part in the workshops.

Parents are invited to be proactively involved in the Primary MiLife initiative. Information about the programme is shared through letters, Parent Mail and face to face parents sessions before and after school.

5. Early Years MiLife Programme

Further development of the MiLife initiative has been agreed by the Early Help & Start Well Group and will take place over the coming months through the design and implementation of an Early Years version. Reception class teachers and Early Years providers have requested that pilot programmes be delivered in sample settings within the district.

Reason for decision:

This report serves as an information item for the Community Services Select Committee.

Options considered and rejected:

N/A

Consultation undertaken:

Consultation was undertaken by the Epping Forest Youth Council with their peers. Professional practitioners from the NHS, teachers and wider youth service providers have been consulted throughout every stage of the development and implementation of the project.

Evaluation is undertaken using data collected from pupils, teachers, professionals and visitors.

Service review:

Each MiLife session is reviewed post event and a multi-agency debriefing held.

Mental health is a key priority within the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018-28 and the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-23.

Resource implications:

Personnel:

Staff from the Council's Community, Health and Wellbeing Team organise, manage and facilitate the MiLife events in partnership with The Red Balloon Family Foundation and colleagues from NELFT NHS.

£8,000	- Epping Forest District Council DDF
£5,200	- ECC Youth Strategy Fund
£13,500	- Public Health Community Grant Fund

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference:

Corporate Plan Objective: 1.1.2 – Promote mental health and emotional wellbeing

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: N/A

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A

Key Decision reference: (if required)

N/A