



## Our Minds, Our Future NI

### A Youth-Led Charter for Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland

This is what young people expect from mental health services in Northern Ireland. Sign up to the charter and support these principles.



✓ Make sure the service is affordable for young people.



✓ Don't make young people wait any longer than necessary to receive a service.



✓ Don't discriminate against young people, no matter who they are, where they come from or what their background is.



✓ Help young people to feel safe and welcome.



✓ Give young people clear information about the service so that they know what is going to happen.



✓ Listen to young people and respect their story without judging them or where they are from.



✓ Keep information confidential and tell young people when it needs to be shared with others.



✓ Focus on young people's needs and the issues they face.



✓ Offer young people hope that they can make positive changes in your life.



✓ Include young people in decisions about how our service works and how we educate children & young people on mental health.



## The Who, The What, The Where, The Why

In 2019, National Children's Bureau (NCB) in Northern Ireland was invited to work in partnership with Youth Access, Scottish Youth Parliament, SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health), ProMo Cymru and Hafal to put the voices of young people at the centre of mental health service design and delivery all across the UK.

It was an easy offer to accept! The statistics on youth mental health in Northern Ireland are staggering and there's arguably never been a greater need for service improvement.

NCB agreed to lead the project in Northern Ireland and set up two groups to help inform the development of a Youth-Led Mental Health Charter for Services. One was a Project Stakeholder Group of other organisations who were already working hard to improve mental health services in Northern Ireland, and the other was a Young Person's Advisory Group of 13–25 year olds who had lived experiences of mental health issues.

Together, we spent the strange and sometimes surreal year of 2020 thinking, talking, planning and designing this Youth-Led Charter for Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

We reached out to other young people to ask what they needed and wanted from services and an unbelievable 1,764 responded to our survey. Another 151 took part in focus groups to share their stories, experiences and hopes with us. We owe every word of this Charter to them.

They are not the first young people to ask for their rights to be fulfilled and they won't be the last. We add their voices and this Charter to the voices of the young people who developed the Elephant in the Room report – with Belfast Youth Forum, Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Children's Law Centre – and the Still Waiting report with the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner (NICCY). We add them to other voices that are less heard, silent or silenced.

We add them to the wonderful voice of Eleanor Roosevelt, a pioneer of human rights and human rights laws. Almost 70 years after her death, her explanation of why rights matter every day, for every person, is still the best!

*"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."* (Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958)





### We have the right...to know our own rights!

Children and young people, including those over 18 years of age, have rights when it comes to mental health services. These rights are protected in international law in agreements called:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The UK (including Northern Ireland) has signed up to these agreements and agreed to fulfil these rights for all young people who live here.

The United Nations has appointed a Special Rapporteur (or independent expert) on the Right to Physical and Mental Health. It is her job to monitor and report on the right to health throughout the world and, in 2020, the Special Rapporteur welcomed the increasing recognition that "there is no health without mental health."

### We are entitled to services which are:

- **Available:** There should be enough mental health services for the young people who need them.
- **Accessible:** You should be able to access a mental health service no matter who you are, where you live, whether you have a disability or not and whether you are rich or poor.
- **Acceptable:** You should feel like the mental health service you receive respects you, your needs, views, culture and language and any information you share with them.
- **Quality:** You should know that you will get the best mental health treatment from skilled workers who work with you in a way that is appropriate for your age.
- **Participative:** You should be asked, listened to and involved in decisions about the mental health service and the care that you receive.

Rights are universal, that means they are for everyone.

Rights are inalienable, that means they should not be taken away from us.

Rights are indivisible, that means you cannot have one without the other! We should have them all fulfilled so we can enjoy our best lives and reach our greatest potential.

Rights are the baseline, the least we should expect.

We can, and should, reach even higher.





## 3. The things that matter most to us

### Nothing about us without us

We expect to have all of our rights protected, promoted and fulfilled but the young people who participated in our survey and focus groups have some clear priorities that we need decision makers and service providers in Northern Ireland to act on now.

#### Affordability

Money should have nothing to do with young people's mental health services. You might think it does not but some 'free' services are too far away, take too long to access (if we even know they're available!), are limited to a small number of sessions, or come with too many terms and conditions for us to be able to receive them.

Those barriers, and more, mean that too many young people and their families are relying on private services. This has to stop. It could be costing lives.

*"I get £40 a week. I could never afford counselling."*

#### Waiting Times

Too many of us are waiting too long for help and support. Long waiting times and broken promises about when we will be seen or heard add to the stress and anxiety of mental ill health. Stress affects our immune systems so we can become physically unwell too. Waiting for weeks or months feeds the lie that poor mental health can tell us, that we are not important.

The good news is that reverse is also true! Short waiting times make us feel like we matter, make us more likely to attend and less likely to suffer serious outcomes as a result of the problems we are having.

*"Excessive waiting times means that by the time you're able to access the support your mental health may have deteriorated or the problems you're facing are completely different than when you applied."*

#### No Discrimination, No Judgement

Our mental health issues are often related to other things happening in our lives. Some of us experience poverty, live with addiction or violence, are isolated, bullied, neglected or abused. Some of us have lives that might look perfect to you!

It should not matter who we are or where we come from. We need you to recognise any bias or prejudice you might have and find ways to make sure you do not treat us differently as a result. We also need you to know that mental health problems can affect how we are with you or others. Please don't judge us until you know us.





## 3. The things that matter most to us

*"People do things in their life that are bad or they are not proud of – if you feel judged it's harder to open up."*

*"If you are engaging in behaviours like self-harm & feel judged you will be less likely to bring that up."*

### Safe & Welcoming Spaces

The places where we receive services matter to us. Drab and run-down buildings can make us feel depressed. Clinical and cold rooms can make us clam up. Unfriendly words and faces make us wish we had not come.

We need to be made feel as comfortable as possible. We want to know we are welcome. If you are not sure what might help us to feel that way, please ask us.

It is not just about physical spaces either. Relationships matter. Help us to trust you. Tell us how you will keep us and our stories safe. Try and connect with us.

*"I liked it when there was calming music in the background and the waiting area was filled with loads of resources."*

*"Receptionists really need to be nice to make you feel at ease and not bring on a panic attack."*

### Education to improve our own mental health

Please make it easier for us to improve our own mental health when we can. We do not always need a service. Sometimes we just need skills and strategies to help ourselves.

Talk to us. Share your knowledge and skills. Explain how our brains work and start early. By the time we are young adults, too many of us are already suffering from poor mental health.

*"Mental health needs to be more widely talked about and explained in schools, both primary and secondary so that it is widely known and normalised."*





### **Invite decision-makers to sign up to the Charter**

Fulfilling our rights will take the commitment of every single person who plays a role in the design and delivery of mental health services for young people in Northern Ireland.

Our Charter is based on existing rights and professional standards so believe it can support decision makers to design and deliver the best mental health services possible.

We will be writing to government ministers, officials, committees and services to ask them to sign up to the Our Future Our Minds Charter for Young People's Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland.

### **Get more people talking about mental health**

Silence and stigma makes us sick, literally.

We need to make it easier to talk about young people's mental health and our experiences of getting, or not getting, the help that we need.

We plan to create safe and solution-focused conversations called 'Hackathons' and to invite young people, parents, teachers, support workers and everyone involved in designing and delivering mental health services in Northern Ireland.

### **Work with services to develop a youth-led evaluation model**

Every service is improved by seeking, listening to and acting upon the lived experiences of the people who use or need it.

Thousands of young people have been consulted, asked, surveyed, interviewed and quoted about our mental health needs for many years.

It is time all of our voices were listened to and acted upon.

We believe the Our Minds Our Future NI Charter can be used to allow young people to evaluate the services they receive and we want to work with others to find ways for that feedback to be acted upon.





## Join us

We welcome support and sign up from everyone with an interest in or responsibility for young people's mental health services in Northern Ireland.

There are lots of ways to get involved but the first thing to do is get in touch.

## Get in Touch and Make Connections

We would be more than delighted to provide you with information on the project and the activities that contributed to the development of the Charter. You can contact us by:

- You can contact us by emailing: [ni@ourmindsourfuture.uk](mailto:ni@ourmindsourfuture.uk)
- You can follow us on Twitter at: [https://twitter.com/ncb\\_ni\\_tweets](https://twitter.com/ncb_ni_tweets) and share the Charter by using the following weblink: [www.ourmindsourfuture.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.ourmindsourfuture.uk/northern-ireland)
- In addition, you can tag us using our Twitter handle @ncb\_ni\_tweets.

## Practice self-care

If you feel that you need professional support with your own mental health, please use any of the numbers below to start or continue your journey to recovery and good health:

- ChildLine on **0800 1111** – offers help to young people in trouble or danger
- Samaritans on **116 123**
- Lifeline on **0808 808 8000**
- Young Minds on **0800 018 2138**  
(a parents' information service providing confidential advice for any adult concerned about the mental health or emotional well-being of a child or young person)
- Family Lives Parentline on **0808 800 2222**  
(provides help and information for anyone caring for children)

