



Working with and for young people across Europe to ensure happy and healthy futures

# Speak Your Mind!

## European Youth Event, Strasbourg

### 1-2 June 2018



## Summary, Conclusions & Recommendations

By Nicholas Morgan & Charlotte Payne

*"We act in order to create a Europe that enables young people to access support and talk openly about their mental health and well-being. By encouraging collaboration across services, sharing of best-practice and ensuring that young people are empowered to have a voice in all matters that affect them around the promotion of mental health and preventing the impact of mental illness."*

## Introduction

The European Youth Event is organised by The European Parliament and happens every 2 years. It aims to give a platform to young active citizens so that they can debate their ideas with young people, professionals and Europe's decision makers. Attending this year were 8970 young people from across Europe and wider, as well as hundreds more 'not young people'. The dynamic two-day event consists of a mixture of talks and group workshops, alongside plenty of opportunities for networking and connection-building. Young people were able to select from a range of parallel workshops, of which our session was one.

We applied to the European Youth Event to deliver a session covering the following part of our mission statement: to "empower young people to have a voice in all matters that affect them around the promotion of mental health".

We developed a session called 'Speak Your Mind' to open up informative conversations about mental health amongst participants. Worldwide 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders. Half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid – 20's. However, mental health still does not get the same precedent in society as that of physical health, this is why we aimed to deliver something that helped participants feel relaxed in the environment before beginning

some discussions about mental health education, awareness and promotion.

We anticipated that the session would open up some important next steps for our collaboration and recommendations for European policy and decision makers.

## Aims of Speak Your Mind

- To highlight the challenges people experience around talking about their mental health
- To map recommendations and future implications for young people and their mental health across Europe.
- To create a common definition of mental health and wellbeing amongst participants
- To understand the context of young people's mental health in Europe

The session was split into 3 parts and delivered in English with a group of mixed language speakers.

### 1. Play activity

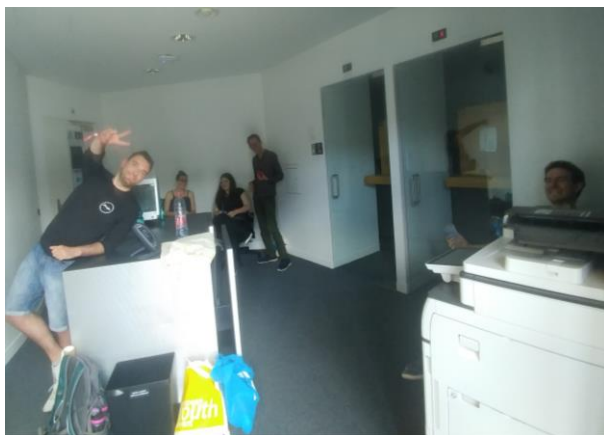
The first exercise of the session was a fun activity, aimed at provoking a small bit of anxiety and discomfort amongst participants. The group of 54 was split into three, and given a small part of what their activity would be. Each group were given a different 10 minute activity and were always offered the ability to 'opt out' should they feel too uncomfortable.

ACTIVITY 1 – Kiss the Rabbit

A well-known icebreaker/energiser game, usually conducted with a group who have known each other for longer than 2 minutes, but in this instance we conducted it at the very beginning, with most people being complete strangers to each other. This was to incite a bit of unknown amongst participants especially when it came to the second part of the exercise. Run by our facilitator, Nives, the group was asked to kiss an imaginary rabbit in a different place as the rabbit was passed around a circle. The group were then asked to kiss the person next to them on the same place they kissed the bunny.

#### ACTIVITY 2 – Juggling

A very simple activity run by facilitator, Demjan, who can juggle. Demjan helped participants to learn how to juggle. After they'd all had about 10 minutes of practise time, they performed one at a time in front of the group.



*The team waiting eagerly to go deliver and take part in Speak Your Mind – Jonny, Laura, Nives, Tomek & Demjan*

#### ACTIVITY 3 – Pop Idol

In a circle the group were asked, one at a time, to share their favourite song of the moment or ever. They were then given a label with that song title and artist on it.

Facilitator, Nick, then told the group that they were going to each sing at least two lines from the song, giving his example, as a comfortable singer.

#### Outcomes

The first thing the facilitators noticed when we introduced each activity was the “whites of people’s eyes” generally indicating fear or anxiety. After each facilitator stated this observation to their group, participants were offered the option to opt out of the ‘awkward’ stage of the activity, such as singing in front of everyone, but we highlighted that our aim was to reflect parallels to the challenges people experience around talking and listening about mental health. The facilitators also highlighted potential reasons for this, such as due to how we, as a society, perceive of mental health and do not know enough about what it is. This led on to the next exercise.

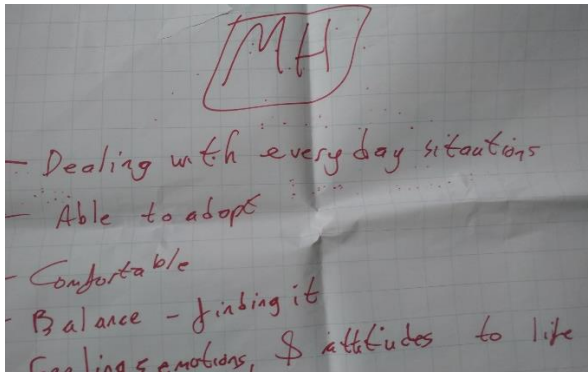
That being said, to the credit of all the facilitators, it was noticed that everyone in this group gave the activities a go, including some great renditions of songs in a variety of languages.

## 2. What do you think mental health is??

#### The activity

The facilitators presented this question to the group, highlighting that there are various definitions of the term mental health and for this reason, it is often hard for anyone to comprehend the defining factors. We wanted to hear the group’s ideas, as an

international group of young people, on what mental health means for them.



Afterwards we presented participants with three different definitions of mental health:

*"Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community"* (World Health Organization 2014).

*"The condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterized by the absence of mental illness and by adequate*

*adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life; also : the general condition of one's mental and emotional state"* (Merriam - Webster, 2018).

*Mental health is the process of psychological and behavioural adjustment in face of unknown situations. Is mental - National Institute of health"* (National Institutes of Health (US), 2007).

The group was split into 3 different sub groups, which were asked to answer 'what do you think of when you hear the words 'mental health'? The groups then worked together to come up with phrases or words that came to mind in relation to this and then present back to the group.



*Volunteer Jonny talking to group about relationships*

## Outcomes

Five key themes emerged from discussions:

1. Coping
2. Social inclusion
3. Biological health
4. Self-identity, and
5. Emotional awareness.

'Coping' & 'self-identity' in particular stood out more than the other themes.

'Coping', is a term that comes up in many definitions of mental health across the world, including the ones we presented. Some of the comments from participants that linked to this theme were:

*"Being able to cope"*

*"Able to adapt"*

*"Stress management"*

'Self-identity', is not necessarily something that we have found to come up often in conversations about mental health. It has only vague connections to the definitions we presented, with maybe the Merriam-Webster one linking most closely:

*"Feeling comfortable about oneself".*

Some comments from young people linked to this were:

*"Believing in yourself and choices"*

*"What's good for you, may not be good for me"*

*"Feeling okay with yourself"*

Of course, it could be argued that many of the young people's comments cover many

of the themes, but we agreed on strict categorisations, as this is a small piece of work with a short timeline to share.

Some other comments from the other themes included:

*"Not fitting the average behaviour"*

*"Feelings, attitudes & emotions to life"*

*"Biological health"*

## 3. Top three areas of life that negatively impact my mental health and what can we do to prevent it having a negative impact?

### The activity

For this activity, the group were asked initially to put forward a large list of topics that negatively impact on their mental health, and then asked to vote for their top three. They were then split up into working groups to answer the second part of the question on prevention strategies.

### Outcomes

The group's top three areas in young people's lives, that negatively impact their mental health were:

1. Relationships
2. Equality in Society
3. Expectations from self and from others

Below we briefly cover young people's ideas on these topics and how we may prevent these areas impacting their mental health in a negative way. It is worth noting that the groups naturally started talking about the

topic more broadly initially before they could get to thinking about prevention.

### 1. Relationships

Based on our experience, we expected education to come up as a broad setting for prevention. It was a clear area that the young participants felt could prevent relationships having negative impact on their mental health. Learning about relationship topics such as *"What is a healthy relationship?"*, *"How to communicate"*, *"Understanding empathy"*, *"Learning about yourself"* were put forward as suggestions, amongst many others (see Appendix 2 for full list).

Along with this, there was a discussion about young people's relationship with social media. Young participants stressed there is a growing need to look into how we look at and understand social media and how not to use it as a tool for comparison or self-reflection on their lives.

### 2. Equality in society

This theme surprised us being in the top three priority areas, especially as topics such as employment and housing didn't make it. Reviewing participant's conversations, we interpreted this theme as linked to the idea inclusion, participants being self-conscious on always ensuring everyone is included in society.

Some people in the room who had experienced segregation for various reasons, such as race, disability, nationality and more, discussed the need for equal treatment and access to services. These related to both services in general (housing, financial

support) and access to mental health services.

The other discussion around equality and inclusion was around the need to receive education on how to ensure that those who may be segregated are in fact included in their society. So how to be inclusive, and not being able to do so, in fact impacted their wellbeing, people are anxious of being exclusive to those with different needs to them.

It was noted that this idea steamed from conversations about ensuring young people with mental health problems are included in everyday activities, but naturally moved on to exploring other areas, such as more broader topics mentioned above as race, culture, nationality and more.

### 3. Expectations from self & from others.

Unlike some of the other issues raised, this one was not a surprise to the facilitators. We noted it seemed people voted for it, rather than things like school, work, money, as it covers a lot as a broad topic, such as the above as well as relationships, self-image and more. From our experience, we can surmise that young people often feel they have lots of expectations put upon them, these can come from family, newspapers, social media and they can be about about 'getting results', 'the right job', 'having a girlfriend' 'being fit and healthy' etc. The young participants seemed to agree that this is not something that can necessarily be removed from their lives, but there could be ways of supporting young people in handling them.



The participants raised several ideas that could help to prevent the negative impact of this theme, such as learning everywhere *"how to receive feedback"* and having *"room to fail"* in their adolescent lives. We thought these were fantastic ideas and are keen to explore them further, especially the topic of how we perceive others' expectations, and what we expect of ourselves.

## Conclusions

Participants fed back that this was a *"playful and engaging session exploring young people's ideas of mental health and mapping out recommendations and the future implications that need to be considered to ensure happy and health lives for young people."* A young person at 'Speak Your Mind' event, 2018.

We feel we addressed all of our aims and that the activity provided a good starting point to explore these topics broader. Although we realise far more input is needed to produce more thorough recommendations and overview of young people's views. We were pleasantly surprised by the young people's understanding of mental health, as based on our experiences in our own countries doing work such as this, which led us to have some assumptions that clinical terms like 'depression' and 'schizophrenia' would be discussed, but they weren't so much. On the other hand, as this group chose our workshop about mental health, we are aware that they would be likely to have an interest

in the topic. To remove this bias, it would be interesting to repeat the activities in schools or youth clubs to capture the views of a wider range of young people.

We observed that the themes that came out from the session, were all closely linked to the psycho-social context of day-to-day life in Europe, which would be great to explore more.

We felt that the three key areas that negatively impact young people's mental health established during activity three were the most were interesting observation and piece of learning for us, but were not necessarily surprising, as they addressed broader psycho-social concepts of life.

It was exciting to work with a large group of international young people and to think of mental health problems on a larger scale. We felt these conversations need to happen more across Europe with young people and this simply proved so.

## Next Steps for Euro Youth Mental Health

- Share to the European Parliament members, specifically the interest group on mental health (Gamian).
- Share publicly through various partners and social media platforms and hopefully spark further dialogue across Europe on these topics that impact young people's mental health the most.
- Seek funding to conduct our 'Speak Your Mind' workshop in more settings across Europe. Through this we will:

- *Build up a comprehensive overview of findings about what European young people feel effects their mental health the most.*
- *Create a European youth answer to 'what does mental health mean to you?'*
- *Look for opportunities across Europe to host other events and awareness raising work to promote awareness and understanding of mental health and mental health issues.*

## Recommendations

- More education on the topic of mental health for those who work with young people, such as social workers, youth workers and nurses.
- Education settings should consider adding the topics raised by young people into their curriculum.
- Engage in further conversations with young people across Europe on mental health in order to create more thorough set of results.

If interested in hearing more about our work, what we can offer, engage us in youth mental health activities or specifically want us to come and run some 'Speak your mind' workshops in your settings, please get in touch or follow us on our various social medias:

Email: [Emocije1st@gmail.com](mailto:Emocije1st@gmail.com)

Facebook: [EuroYouthMH](https://www.facebook.com/EuroYouthMH)

Twitter: [@EuroYouthMH](https://twitter.com/EuroYouthMH)

YouTube: [Euro Youth Mental Health TV](https://www.youtube.com/EuroYouthMH)



*EuroYouthMH team of volunteers at EYE 2018: Jonny, Demjan, Adele, Nick (Co – Director), Laura, Nives & Tomek*

# Stay healthy, mentally.

## References

Merriam - Webster (2018) *mental health*. Available at: [https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mental health](https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mental%20health) (Accessed: 23 May 2018).

National Institutes of Health (US) (2007) *NIH Curriculum Supplement Series*. Available at: <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK20369/> (Accessed: 27 May 2018).

World Health Organization (2014) *Mental Health: a state of well-being*. Available at: [http://who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/) (Accessed: 25 May 2018).

## Appendices

Appendix 1 - What do you think mental health is? (Comments on each flipchart)

Group 1	Theme
Dealing with everyday situations	Coping
Able to adapt	Coping
Comfortable	Coping
Balance and finding it	Self-identity
Being happy with life you live and who you are	Self-identity
Feelings, emotions, and attitudes to life	Emotional awareness
Invisible	Social inclusion
Individual - different perspectives	Self-identity
Acknowledging death	Biological health
Sensing world around you	Social inclusion
What is good for you, may not be good for someone else	Self-identity

Group 2	Theme
Being able to cope	Coping
Not fitting the average behaviour	Self-identity
Feeling safe being yourself	Self-identity
Believing in yourself and your choices	Self-identity
Being conscious/aware of feelings	Emotional awareness
Trust others/yourself and share experiences	Self-identity
Part of your overall health	Biological health
Acceptance	Coping

Group 3	Theme
Happiness	Emotional awareness
Balance	Coping
Taking good care of myself	Biological health
Confidence	Self-identity
Feeling okay with yourself	Self-identity
Predictability of feelings	Emotional awareness
Self-knowledge	Self-identity
Stress management	Coping
Inner peace	Coping
Seeing the future positively	Coping
Biological health	Biological health

Appendix 2 - Top 3 areas of life that negatively impact my mental health and what can we do to prevent it having a negative impact? (Comments on each flipchart)

Relationships
Direct dialogue
What is a healthy relationship? Talk about it?
Knowledge and understanding
Acceptance
Get rid of shame and stigma
How to communicate (non-violent)
Understanding of empathy
Trust with others
Learning patience (and parents) - education
Better communication - activities altogether
Time for self - care - learning about yourself
Comparison - get rid of bad influences

Equality in society
Cooperation and mixing - through projects and education
Government supported
Integration to be equal -> integrated society -> everyone should be involved
Accepting different opinions
Free mental health service
Making activities accessible for people with disabilities
Intention and commitment
Equal identity
Consider voters
Own privileges awareness
Education to break prejudice

Expectations from self and from others
Choose who to listen to
How to receive feedback
Background check -> safety net
Know yours and others expectations (write them down - diary/journal)
Show case - help groups
Educate everyone (healthy perceptions)
Room to fail