

Our Time Family Focus Group 28.04.2021 - abridged transcript - submitted as written evidence (PSC0058)

Participants: **6 families, including 5 parents and 8 children and young people aged between 8-17 years.** The families taking part were existing KidsTime Workshop members, and represented KidsTime Workshops in London and South West England; some were long-standing members (several years) and some had only recently joined their KidsTime Workshop.

PART I: Introduction and warm-up activity

(Warm-up activity: Find an object that reminds you of the KidsTime Workshops: Children and young people showed some of the pictures and artwork they had previously created in the KidsTime Workshops)

Parent 1: I haven't got an object that reminds me of KidsTime, but I've got something that's meaningful to me - **me just being present and being here. I'm grateful I was able to find KidsTime which helped me to be present.**

Parent and child 2: *(Holding up a pizza)* So our favourite bit is pizza. Every time, she says, "What flavour pizza are we having?", - that's her favourite bit.

Parent and child 3: She doesn't want me to show it because she's embarrassed. I've not been at KidsTime for very long, but we like to get into our onesies after KidsTime and watch a film, or just chill or do drawing, because I work really long hours, and they're always tired after school, so it's nice to just be like [*sighs*], and relax, because Wednesday is also one of the only nights when we don't have to go out and do clubs either, we can just stay at home; this is one of her drawings that she's done *(holds drawing up to camera)*.

Parent and young person 4: Hi, I'm [-]'s Mum. We haven't been with KidsTime that long, I think about three or four months, so our experience has just been over Zoom, but **I have appreciated it, because it was so isolating in the lockdown and it was just good to be able to see some new faces and talk to some different people, and it's helped in that way,** I would say.

Young person 1: The object I have is my phone because that's how we've been communicating.

Young person 2: I brought a camera because we used to film films at KidsTime when we were still face to face.

Young person 3: Hi, it's kind of similar to [-] - I got my phone, because I couldn't find a camera, but I can write down notes about what I'm going to plan for the next film, and then, the camera is used to film the stories.

PART II: What are the magic ingredients that make a KidsTime Workshop?

Facilitator 1: Ok so, we thought we'd get some questions going. In terms of this research, because what we'd like the research to do is to mean that KidsTime can carry on, for a start, because it costs money, of course, and because we need to get money in to run them; also for there to be more of them, to raise awareness around mental health and mental illness; so all of it is going to be useful.

Facilitator 2: So, we've got some questions, and we're going to do a bit of an activity in a minute. So, if we're thinking about KidsTime as a whole, what are the key ingredients that make it what it is?

Facilitator 1: If you write down three things and then we'll share them. Put down three magic ingredients that you think make KidsTime worthwhile.

....

So, how are we doing? So we've got **'yoga'; 'understanding smiles'; 'friendly faces'**; lovely. Would anybody like to voice it, tell us, rather than putting it in the chat?

Young person 1: I said talking, like **asking and answering questions, because in KidsTime we..., it's very like happy and it's good that the children can talk about how they feel**, like, yesterday, we were talking about how lockdown affected us; it was good to hear different stories, I guess.

Facilitator 1: Yes, why do think that is? What do you think it is about listening to each other's stories?

Young person 1: **We're connecting over our experiences, we have shared experiences really.**

Facilitator 1: And how does that make you feel when you have that shared experience?

Young person 1: It's good, I don't know, **it makes you feel like you're not alone sometimes.**

Facilitator 1: Thank you.

Facilitator 2: That's very similar to what people have put in the chat. One parent said that as well - **'having someone that gets it', 'knowing you're not alone', 'friendly faces'**. That's definitely it, isn't it, the power of walking into a space and saying you feel something or you've experienced something, and someone's else goes, "*Oh yeah, me too!*". Thank you both.

Facilitator 1: Who else?

Young person 2: I said **'having fun', 'respecting the people who are around us' and it's also educational.**

Facilitator 1: In what ways educational? Say more...

Young person 2: **Because when I first went there, I didn't know anything about mental health at all, but after all these years, like, I know a lot about it now, and it's easier to understand and see also how other people might think, even when you're feeling a type of way about them.**

Facilitator 1: Does anyone else have that experience of it being educational, that they've learnt things? I can see a few nods.

Parent 1: Yes, I definitely did. **I found it easier talking to the children about mental health and feelings. Prior to attending KidsTime, I never knew how to talk about feelings with the kids,** so the activities we do there did make it slightly easier.

Facilitator 1: Thank you. Anyone else want to add anything? This is really helpful. Before we move on, I just wondered about your experience of support generally speaking at the moment, how that's been? Has it been good, middle, different, not good? Any sort of thoughts on that?

Parent 3: Our support, well my support, in the [X] group has been really good. So, at the beginning of lockdown last March they would just do weekly calls, **so we all had different people call us and it would just be an hour call to make sure everything's ok**; that was at the beginning of lockdown when everything was a little bit more messy. And then, as the lockdown proceeded, we started doing the Zoom group, and for my child, she's never been to a (face-to-face) group yet, we haven't met (other people in the group), we've only met over Zoom, and we've got a few other families that haven't been to a (face-to-face) KidsTime group yet, but **all of our workers they've just been absolutely fantastic**. We've started a WhatsApp group that's monitored between 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, **so if people are finding it hard, we put some stuff on there or achievements that the kids have done or upcoming mental health appointments that people might be a bit anxious about, so we've rallied between us, it's pretty good**.

Facilitator 1: Fantastic, thank you for sharing that. Any other comments?

Parent 1: Definitely **the first lockdown, it was very overwhelming for me, all services came to halt; the only thing that I had was the KidsTime Workshop, and it was good having some human interaction**, although it was virtual, it was nice to have that, and the phone calls and the check-ups, **I felt cared-for, it kept me going; and doing the activities online, keeping the kids engaged and entertained, it was very helpful**, and the bonus was the yoga cards that we could still do something with them. Yeah, it was really helpful. But I do want to add, before the lockdown, in person, I found attending the sessions a bit difficult, because my youngest was playing up and I didn't know how to deal with him in the sessions, and I didn't feel fully supported then, but other than that, everything's been great.

PART III: Exploring lived experience through character

Facilitator 1: Thank you for sharing that with us. Ok, let's move to our next section. Ok so, we want to get an idea about what it's like, in order for the researchers to help people understand what it's like living with a mental illness, we want to create a picture for them; so to do it KidsTime style, to anonymise it, we thought we'd create a character and we can be thinking about what types of things they might feel, what support they might need, what their experience might be like, because for a lot of people, they have no idea what your experiences may be like, and it's that balance between trying to campaign like Our Time does to think about getting education out there.

When I was preparing for the session, I looked at my old materials, and we'd asked what needs to happen, what do people need to know, about families living with mental illness, and someone had written, **'they should teach about it in**

schools...in schools, nonone ever talks about it, you wouldn't tell a teacher, I haven't told my friends', - we did a whole session on what it would look like if teachers talked about it, if there was education, and then we talked about that it has to be in the right way, because otherwise that would be really difficult for families. What do we want other people to start thinking about and doing that would be supportive for you? So let's create our character. What ideas do you have for who would be in this family?

(Discussion follows where one of the families share that they have done a similar activity in their KidsTime Workshop, creating a character called Katy who is a young person whose father has a mental illness)

Facilitator 1: Shall we go with Katy? And her dad's got a mental illness. What's her dad's mental illness? Do we know?

Parent 3: Bipolar?

Facilitator 1: Yep, let's have bipolar. How old is Katy, and what year is she in, in school?

Parent 3: 11 is quite a tricky age isn't it? When they're in Year 6.

Facilitator 1: Right, so just before going up to big school? Yeah that's good. Who else is in the family?

Young person 2: Maybe a little brother or something.

Facilitator 1: How old should he be? What's the brother called?

(Reading from the chat): or 'an older one that's moved away', an older one and a younger one.

Lovely, that makes it a nice interesting family.

Facilitator 2: Let's make one 8 and one 19.

Facilitator 1: So, what's life like for Katy day to day? What does the average day for Katy look like?

Parent 1: **She has to take care of her younger brother.**

Facilitator 1: Ok, what kinds of things do they have to do?

Parent 1: **Getting him ready for school.**

Facilitator 1: Get breakfast, that type of stuff?

Parent 1: **Yeah, help with homework etc.**

Facilitator 1: How does he get to school?

Parent 1: **They walk on their own.**

Facilitator 1: They're in the same school, aren't they?

Parent 1: Yeah.

Facilitator 1: What's going to happen next year when Katy goes up? So is Katy maybe thinking about what's going to happen, or is anybody in the family wondering about what's going to happen next year, because Katy won't be going to the same school?

(Reading from the chat): **so she feels guilty for leaving, that she is going to be leaving school, and she is worrying about what's going to happen then.** So what would Katy like? Does the school know about Katy's situation?

Parent 3: Well, I guess some of the parents would have raised concerns about them being so young and walking to school on their own, with the school teachers, because I know at my kid's school, there was a couple of kids that were walking to school from quite a young age; - I mean my daughter's 12 and I don't let her walk to school on her own -, and I think one of them is in Year 2 and I think another

child was in Year 4, or something like that, and they were walking to school on their own, and I think a couple of parents raised concerns, and **it turned out the mum was really struggling at home with postnatal depression**, so I think there was some support offered. In this case, concerns have been raised with the school about them walking along a busy road maybe, or just being without adult supervision.

Facilitator 1: What's happened for this Katy? Has support been offered? Has it helped? What do you think? What would you want the school to do? How would you want them to respond?

Parent 2: At my children's school, they have a school bus, and if there's children in the community where one of the parents is a carer or whatever, they collect these children in the morning and bring them to school for breakfast, so I guess something like that would be good, because at least they're definitely getting fed in the morning, or actually being looked after, rather than fending for themselves.

Facilitator 1: In what other ways could the school be supportive?

Parent 2: **Maybe they could contact the dad and ask whether he's up for support.** Talking from experience, **men find it quite hard to open up and say there is a problem**, because they've got that male pride thing going on, so maybe if someone reaches out to him first, he would be a lot more receptive to help. I know a lot of schools in [-] have family support workers, so yeah, you can go in once a week and air concerns and that might help.

Facilitator 1: Thank you. What about the parents? The other parents? Is there anything you'd want them to know in terms of knowledge and understanding?

Parent 2: **I think education around mental health lacks a little bit. A lot of people see mental health as what they see on Eastenders or Coronation Street, and it's very dramatised, and I think people are too scared to know the real truth around mental health, so I think people are not getting educated the right way.**

Facilitator 3: How do you think people do view mental health - do you mean that there's misconceptions about it?

Parent 2: **I think they view mental health to the absolute extreme**, so if there's someone walking around town talking to themselves, they'll go on the

opposite side of the street, or, you know, someone having a panic attack in the shop, they'll moan that they're taking too long; **no one ever seems to want to step forward and say, "Are you ok?"**, or, *"Take as long as you want"*, or, *"How can I help you?"* **People are quite scared to say, "How can I help?"**, they'd rather stand there and mutter under their breath.

Parent 3: **And also using derogatory terms such as, "You're mental"**, and stuff like that; that doesn't help people's conceptions about mental illness.

Facilitator 1: So there's a piece around language, people using language without recognising the impact it can have, and how damaging it is, and there needs to be some education around that.

Parent 3: I think it's quite easy for people to say, **"Oh you're not depressed, you're having a bad day"**, or if you've got anxiety, *"Have a cup of tea"* - if tea could solve the world's problems, it would have done it by now.

Parent: *"Be happy! Why can't you be happy?!"*

Facilitator 1: So this is something about understanding, and the not-getting-it.

Facilitator 3: Do kids feel the same about that - that people don't understand it, or have a negative view of it? We've talked about school and what the school can do, but I'd be interested in hearing people's ideas about what families experiences might be of other professionals or other support, whether it would be good or bad. What are people's ideas around that? Would Katy be getting support from anywhere else? If not, why? And if she is getting support, what does that look like? Would it be helpful?

Parent 1: I personally think, I'm speaking with the experience of my children, **my eldest daughter didn't like other people knowing about my mental health, and she found it embarrassing to accept support and help, so she'd rather not talk about it;** and another thing that comes to my mind with Katy is **how come the family hasn't received any support when she's already 11 and they have an older sibling and the father has bipolar, because I just feel that support should have been given earlier, or the school should have been aware earlier. I think to be in Year 6 is rather late without support.**

Facilitator 3: What type of support would you think would be helpful?

Parent 1: For instance, **I became aware of so many services very late in general. Even in antenatal appointments, the question should be, 'does anyone in the family have mental health issues?'**, and if so, information should be provided about what support is available.

There's not much information out there, **I never knew about many things until very late in life**; making it more accessible, a person needs to know about it for starters; secondly, I think, - *you know how there are comment boxes? - , in schools, they should have feelings boxes - 'Is there anything you want to tell us?'* - they (children) don't need to speak, they just have to write it and post it.

Facilitator 2: Thanks. How did you find out about services or other organisations?

Parent 2: Sadly, I've suffered, mental health has run in family and **I suffered for a very long time, I only became aware of things after being sectioned and social services intervening**; But that was four years ago, that's only when I became aware of family support and KidsTime, **but social services were already aware that I had a mental illness, and I had children, so I could have been introduced to KidsTime when my child was born.**

Parent 2: I actually found out about KidsTime the same way that Parent 1 did. **I got sectioned in 2017 after having been diagnosed with a mental illness in 2011, and things got quite bad; I got sectioned for six months and then social services introduced me to KidsTime which has been the best thing ever. My daughter was in Year 1 when we started, and now she's going into Year 6 in September, so it's pretty much been the whole of her primary school life.**

But even now, because my daughter is diagnosed with autism and ADHD, even now, we go to meetings at the school, they don't know anything about KidsTime, and they'll ask about me and my mental health, and I'll say **KidsTime are doing wonderful things**, and they don't know about it, **they don't know about this fantastic thing that's happening that could save loads of parents from being in situations like me, and they don't care** and that's the thing that we've found quite hard down here. We're a bit backwards down here in [-], it gets to us eventually, but it takes a bit of time, **so there's still a lot of services that are available in other parts of the country that aren't available here yet**; one day, they'll come, but even if school SENCOS or SEND teachers knew a bit more about KidsTime and the services they provide, I think it could benefit a lot more families here.

Facilitator 1: Thank you. (*Reading from the chat*) X (Young person 2), you've said that: "***schools are really unaware and sometimes the help isn't actually helpful, because sometimes they'll just call social services which can be stressful***". So here's another really important thing, thank you.

PART IV: Priority setting

Facilitator 1: If we had to give school three pieces of advice, what would be the guidelines?

You are now Minister for Schools, what would you do?

Young person 2: **I'd actually research mental health, because I feel that teachers don't know enough, so they just do what they think is the easiest option, and that's to call social services.**

Facilitator 1: What would you say if you had the chance to pass a law on this?

Young person 2: **I'd say that they have to ask families what type of help they want, and what type of help they think would be best for them.**

Facilitator 1: Anyone else? So I'm going to upgrade you, you're prime minister now, you can change the laws, you can make policies, what would you do around families with mental illness?

Parent 1: **What I found really helpful is that my son received some emotional support at school, but I had to fight for it, so I feel it should be there, the schools should be able to support the children who have parents with mental health issue, and they should be offered that support without the parent having to fight for it, and then, obviously, after assessment, if they feel it's not needed, then fine, but an assessment should be given - that would be amazing - every child who has known history of mental health in the family should have an assessment for that support.**

Parent 2: My daughter has an idea, - she does a thing at school called 'Miss Kendra's List' on children's mental health week -, and then **she said she would make a policy to teach adults how to fill the positivity cups - she says that adults are not very good at feeling positive, but they teach children to.**

Talking from experience, I work in a primary school, I actually work in the kids' primary school, and I've had lots of discussions, because I run a drop-in coffee morning when it's not Covid for adults with mental health or parents with SEN children, and I've had several conversations with the Headteachers and classteachers, and I've said, *'why is mental health not more in the curriculum?'* - **if you start education and recognising it young, then most people won't then be referred to adult services, then it's not like the spiral effect. So most people are scared of mental health, we get half a days training when we get teacher training and then they're (teachers) left to it, and when a child or parent presents with mental health problems, they haven't got time in their day to do the things they should be doing, and then add in education about mental health, she said we would rather not learn spanish and put in education about mental health and mental illness and how to recognise it, or put it in the PSHE curriculum, but she said that's not seen as a priority in primary schools.**

I would rather my children not learn how to speak spanish until Year 7, but they can tell me how they're absolutely feeling and have an understanding that parents feel things too - you're not immune from feeling sad, because you left school and had children.

Young person 1: Well, I've recently left secondary school, I feel like the support mainly started there, **I feel like bringing attention to mental health should be done at a younger age, like primary school age, definitely; and for secondary school, there needs to actually be active members, like mental health professionals inside of schools, because that was a struggle of mine because I couldn't find anyone at the time and it was very difficult;** there were lists and stuff, but it would take time, like now, it's great, **in sixth form, there's mental health professionals that come in the school, but it needs to be done for younger kids, because they're not seen as much of a priority, and also maybe more attention, because PSHE lessons for me were only half an hour and mental health was barely touched upon in those sessions, so they need to be more frequent and longer.**

Facilitator 1: What kinds of mental health professionals do you want in there?

Young person 1: Psychologists I guess, maybe some art therapists as well, because in primary school, I did have one but, it's not available to that many children.

Young person 2: **I would put more mental health lessons in curriculums for schools in general for both primary and secondary schools, to teach the young kids about how mental health actually is, and also stop saying the word 'crazy' just because of the way they act, I think it's not a very nice world to use. I would, I think, have help more accessible for people who**

need it, and for schools to easily be able to give that support to the families who need it.

Young person 3: I wouldn't allow people to have any type of negative behaviour towards religions, race or anything to do with that, because I don't think it's a good thing to have, like even though it's something we should have left in the past, it's something that keeps recurring in history, and **it's like a cycle, it's never ending**, and I would stop, **I would try my best to make sure every child has an education, and is fed, and has a house and a roof to live under, and to help out with families that need it most and not be biased towards some racial group, because I feel like the prime minister we have now isn't really doing much, it does need to change**, I feel like our generation and the next one will help that as well.

Parent 3: **I would introduce wellbeing days in schools to boost children's morale**, because a lot of the time it's so focused on the academic, and if you've got a child that isn't particularly academic and really struggles with confidence and self esteem, I think wellbeing days are really good, because it's all about their wellbeing, and how they feel, for example, going up onto the moors, or paddle boarding - doing things that are good for your mental health and spiritual being, doing things that are good for you.

I agree with the young person saying how there should be more professionals in schools for young people, because **I've had mental health problems since I was a child, and in secondary school, when I tried to come forward and talk about my mental health issues, I was told I was attention-seeking, so I didn't get diagnosed until I was 30, and that was a battle in itself, so yeah, I definitely feel like there's need for more support in schools.**

Facilitator 1: And awareness generally seems to be a theme, and I know we've mainly talked about schools, but I wonder if that also applies to all of the systems outside of that, in life and everything.

PART V: Wrap up

Facilitator 3: What's the one thing you wish people knew about your situation that you didn't have to tell them?

Parent 2: For me, I live quite a nice lifestyle, but a lot of people say I can't be rich and have mental health problems, so **I'd like to for people to know that it doesn't matter where you come from in life, mental health does not**

discriminate, and I need an equal amount support as someone else from another walk of life.

Parent 3: For me, it's sometimes I know what I want to say in my head, and I can't always get it out my mouth, and some people get a bit frustrated - **I just wish people would be more patient.**

Parent 1: **I hate explaining lateness for the children;** it's not very frequent any more, but at times, **when I have been really unwell and they have been late for school, and the receptionist chooses to ask me in front of everyone, it's really hard, and even for the kids to hear,** so yeah, **there should be a better way of letting the school know why my child is late and not feel so judged about it;** and another thing I find really difficult is when I get bombarded with information like leaflets and papers, and I can't comprehend all the information; **it's easier if someone talks it through with me slowly, so that I understand rather than hand out so much information.**

Young person 1: I'm not really sure, maybe just not being pressured to answer serious questions, maybe like not feeling pressured to, but also maybe say things easier to comprehend.

Facilitator 1: (*Reading from the chat*): **'When others believe I don't have a voice or ability to make decisions'.**

28 April 2021