

## Healthwatch Barnet attend SOS - Stamp out Stigma! 2018 Conference

In June, Healthwatch Barnet attended the **SOS – Stamp out Stigma! Conference**, organised by the Hendon School Mental Health Wellbeing Team. This student-led conference is in its third year, and with over 300 attendees and a wide range of mental health related workshops run by various organisations, it was a big success in getting young people, relevant organisations and schools to think about how mental health stigma can be tackled in schools.

Healthwatch Barnet organised an interactive session **‘Your Journey to Good Health’** where during the main activity we asked participants to:

- plot along a path the different places they would go to for help with a mental health issue (examples provided were: family, friends, school, online, places of worship)
- Explain why they chose these places and not others
- Order places in terms of where they would go first
- Define what ‘good health’ meant to them and to feed this back to their group.

We taught the participants some useful British Sign Language (BSL), as an ice-breaker and to get them thinking about how communication is an important part of good mental health. To wrap up the session, we asked the students to feedback to the group something they had learned as a result of the session and to provide us with feedback, so that we can improve future engagements.



### Findings:

Overall, 4 secondary students and 2 adults attended our workshop. As the activity was group work based, it is hard to generalise the young people’s experiences and opinions, however we did find that young people:

- **preferred to talk with friends and family in the first instance**, because they felt they would be best at listening. With friends, it was seen as an opportunity to share experiences and support one another.
- would **go online to get information** about mental health and to check that what they were experiencing was not unusual.
- would **attend places of worship** when feeling low, as they are peaceful, safe places where young people can meet people of the same faith.
- had **mixed views on seeking help at school**, including: wanting to speak with a teacher who would listen; wanting keep health and school separate; and feeling that school staff would not listen to or believe them.

Finally, we received positive feedback on the session. From the students’ comments, it was clear that sharing their views on services had been a useful exercise to learn: *“about my friends”, “different places where people go to access mental health services”* and *“different views of people’s places to go to ask for help”*.

### Conclusions from this project:

The young people had a lot to say on mental health services, what good mental health means to them and were open to sharing these with adults and other young people in the room. It is useful for Healthwatch, commissioners, healthcare providers and mental health organisations working with young people, to know where they want to go to seek help and what they expect from these places.