Engaging with Student Mental Health Agreements

The following information was collected during Think Positive's Session at NUS Scotland's Lead and Change in July 2020. The aims of this session were to encourage attendees to start to think about how they can support their student body's mental health, and how they might introduce/expand a "whole institution" and "one community" approach at their colleges.

It is our aim that this resource will support you to continue asking these questions and seeking more answers to how we can all offer a "one community" or "whole institution" approach to student mental health support in our colleges. To learn more about participating in the Student Mental Health Agreements Project, and how Think Positive can support you, please get in touch via thinkpositive@nus-scotland.org.uk

What are we doing already, and how could we improve?
These are questions we suggest SMHA participants ask their student bodies prior to writing their Student Mental Health Agreements. The following answers were offered by delegates on the day. How would you answer these questions?

What do we do as an institution that is helpful?

- We offer spaces for students to relax in
- We run mental health campaigns to raise awareness of our services
- We offer a counselling service and have employed extra counsellors through the new SFC funding
- We have Guidance Lecturers who offer weekly meetings
- We host mental health awareness events
- We provide information on the support services we offer
- We have a Student Mental Health Agreement
- We support external charities coming onto our campuses and create support links to them
- We promote mental health and wellbeing on our social media channels
- We offer Scottish Mental Health First Aid training
- We offer events which promote inclusivity
- We offer Mental Wellbeing groups
- We run workshops to raise awareness
- We offer drop-in events where students can chat about mental health
- We offer a range of services; on-site counselling, online counselling, Green Button, Big White Wall, and a local student support team
- We offer Pop-Up Positivity campaigns
- We promote self-help resources and leaflets
- We organise therapy sessions around stressful periods of the year; e.g. Therapets
- We offer a self-referral service for counselling
- We run an "It's okay not to be okay" campaign
- We offer a mental health toolkit
- We offer learning support plans
- We have offered phone sessions during COVID-19

- We push our men's mental health support
- We share YouTube videos
- We promote "Support Days" where mental health groups come in to speak with students
- We target specific groups of students, ie. those learning construction, to break down specific stigmas

What do we do as an institution that isn't helpful?

- We could improve our training for mental health officers
- We could offer our support office in a shared space; sometimes students don't feel comfortable to speak to staff where it is now
- We could do more awareness raising campaigns
- We could offer clearer guidance on where students can go to get support
- We could have an on-site counsellor
- We could improve our training for staff
- We could focus more on mental health campaigns and support specifically for men
- We could engage more with our class reps
- We could engage more with and upskill lecturers to support student mental health
- We could offer more resources which could assist students
- We could offer a wellbeing space/break out room on our campus
- We could embed our awareness raising more, so that is spread out across the year
- We could empower our Action Groups to take more action
- We could look at how much of our support is out-sourced, and what could we do more of in-house?
- We could extend our support offers over the summer
- We could offer more flexible timings for our support services; "rather than, 'come in at 10am', we could say 'come in whenever you need help'"

What should we be working on and how should we do this?

- We should offer Mental Health newsletters
- We should offer Mental Health workshops
- We should create more posters
- We should use social media more to tackle stigma and promote inclusivity
- We should offer more "proper" training to our staff and students
- We should raise more awareness of our services
- We should implement a set structure which highlights the different organisations/teams who can be contacted to help (and promote this through a word document or a poster that can be shared)
- We should reach out to more external organisations and charities
- We should make our Mental Health Agreements easier to understand
- We should work more closely with our Class Reps to ensure they inform their peers about the campaigns on mental health which are organised by the SA
- We should offer emotional intelligence training
- We should offer healthy diet training
- We should offer information on drugs and alcohol consumption
- We should generate funding resources for this work
- We should offer mental health check-ins
- We should advertise preventative measures students can take to support their mental health

- We should engage in more community outreach work
- We should increase our mental health resources
- We should be working to break down stigma in a positive way
- We should focus on the support we can offer students during COVID-19
- We should ensure we are fulfilling the SFC's funding for extra counsellors' requirements
- We should be working to make sure our support is more flexible so that it is available when it is needed

What would have made it easier to answer those questions?
There are often so many services and campaigns that are run on our campuses to support student mental health, it can be really difficult to think of/be aware of them all. Reflecting on the experience of answering the previous questions, our delegates suggested the following:

What would've made it easier to answer these questions? For example, did you know what support services are currently on offer or would it have been easier if you could access a directory of all support services?

- We would have benefitted from speaking with an SA member who was in their second term. As first year sabbatical officers, we did not have much experience with the services our SAs/colleges offer.
- We would have benefitted from a clear structure of staff who are able to offer support
- We would have benefitted from better signposting for services within our institutions, particularly through social media
- We would have benefited from surveying our students to assess their particular needs
- We benefited from our own background knowledge of the support our college offers
- We would have benefited from knowing what mental health related topics and facilities we have on campus
- We would have benefited from having Class Reps/Mental Health officers who could share this information with their students
- We would have benefited from an activities trackers, to follow the various mental health related activities across the college
- We would have benefited from a refocus of our Student Mental Health Agreement
- We would have benefited from a Mental Health Calendar
- We would have benefited from a campaign pool for ready-built campaigns
- We would have benefited from an easily-accessible Student Mental Health Agreement
- We would have benefited from more personal knowledge/experience
- We would have benefited from quick links on our websites/social media channels
- We would have benefited from more contacts to connect with, e.g. staff members, service providers and counsellors
- We would have benefited from knowing the right contacts to get in touch with to ask the answers to these questions
- We would have benefited from more resources for both staff and students
- We would have benefited from an evaluation document at the end of the previous year, which would say how much of the plan had actually been achieved
- We would have benefited from having a section devoted to the SMHA on our Sabb handovers

Who could've helped you to answer these questions?
(E.g. support services staff etc- and who could support you to carryout the various initiatives across campus.)

- Our student body
- NUS
- Other student associations
- External organisations
- The Think Positive Team
- Our Wellbeing/Equalities Officer(s)
- A previous Sabbatical Officer/someone who worked on our SMHA last year
- A student survey
- College staff
- Class Reps (to find out what they are aware of)
- Counselling Team/Welfare Staff
- Mental Health Group members/Local support groups
- Student Services
- Scottish Government/Scottish Funding Council (to learn more about funding requirements)
- Lecturers
- Learning and Engagement Officer(s)
- Mental Health First Aiders

How do you know this work is needed?

- We know because of previous experiences dealing with depression and anxiety
- We know that everybody has struggles
- We know that social media is not the best way to connect emotionally and create deep relationships; it can be isolating
- We know that more education around drugs and alcohol is needed, and that this can impact on someone's mental health

We know that answering these questions can feel a bit overwhelming, particularly when there are such a range of fantastic initiatives being run! Think Positive is here to help you organise all of your fantastic work into an easily-digestible one-stop plan, so that should your student body be in need of support, they know exactly what to expect and where to seek it!

You can find out more at www.thinkpositive.scot