EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Mental Skills Training Toolkit trilogy (Mental Skills, Delivery Guide and Commissioning & Evaluation) are strengths-based resources co-designed by researchers at the University of Birmingham with St Basils, a West Midlands housing charity, Youth Voice, and homeless charity Homeless Link.
- The toolkits aim to impact upon homeless or at risk young people’s social inclusion by improving resilience, build capacity for frontline service staff, and contribute to public sector savings.
- These build upon the My Strengths Training for Life™ (MST4Life™) programme, by translating 6+ years of learning into a user-friendly and shareable format for use among young people experiencing multiple and complex barriers to independence.
- Housing and homeless services can access these freely available resources online. Launch of the toolkits is timely, given the projected impact of COVID-19 and the increasing need for evidence-based resources to support the well-being and employability of marginalised young people, and aid recovery from the pandemic.

Resources to support resilience

Following the principles of co-design, key stakeholders of over 100 staff and young people collaborated to produce expertly informed resources. Production activities provided stakeholder feedback that directly informed development of the resources, by exploring feasibility, identifying demand and defining barriers and enablers to implementation.

Introduction

UK homelessness is a major social issue costing the Government over £2 billion/year and resulting in poor long-term mental and physical health outcomes, challenges engaging with opportunities for education, employment and training, sustained social isolation and low life expectancy.

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1 A strengths-based programme developed by researchers at the University of Birmingham, and staff and young people from St Basils housing charity. It has led to significant improvements in resilience, self-worth and well-being for over 600 young people since 2014.
2 An independent cost benefit analysis, carried out by The Birmingham Business School (2019), revealed participation in MST4Life™ improved young people’s chances of engaging with opportunities for education, employment and training by 30 percentage points.
3 https://www.sprintproject.org/impact
4 https://www.sprintproject.org
Toolkit trilogy

To address enablers to engagement, the Mental Skills Training Toolkit is practical and accessible, consisting of six tools that improve personal skills, e.g. identifying strengths, goal-setting, emotional regulation and problem solving. The accompanying Delivery Guide was developed in response to a barrier to implementation and offers tips and guidance on how to deliver the content in an evidence-based and psychologically informed way. The Commissioning & Evaluation Toolkit completes the trilogy and is aimed at supporting commissioners to plan and evaluate strengths-based interventions. These can be downloaded for free via sprintproject.org/toolkit. The collaborative process ensures these are fit for purpose. They have been designed to be flexible and adaptable to suit specific local needs and contexts.

Impact

Feedback from stakeholder and public events has been extremely positive. In the 7 months since the launch of the first toolkit, the resources have reached over 60,000 individuals within over 100 organisations.

‘A fantastic tool to share with the organisations we support in our day to day roles’
- Co-production participant

Recommendations

We wish to turn now to our potential to influence policy at the organisational level. Taking the toolkit trilogy into consideration, we propose that investment in strengths-based interventions that are underpinned by evidence is more likely to empower young people to become independent; by equipping them with the skills needed to fulfil their potential and build resilience in the face of adversity through and beyond COVID-19.