

Press release: Young people to benefit from new mental health awareness course

Thousands of teenagers will receive additional support to improve their mental health as part of a new youth initiative, the Prime Minister announced on 17 August.

On A Level results day, Prime Minister Theresa May unveiled a new course is to be developed by National Citizen Service (NCS), to raise awareness of mental health among young people and improve their knowledge of how to get help.

Mental health issues disproportionately affect young people, with over half of mental health problems starting by the age of 14 and 75 per cent by the age of 18.

The course will be developed with mental health experts and NCS graduates and be delivered as part of the organisation's programme to prepare young people for the challenges of adult life and work.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Mental health issues can have a devastating effect on young lives and that's why making sure young people are fully supported both inside and outside of the classroom is a key priority for me.

It is not only the pressures of school and exams, though that is in the front of our minds today, but also self-esteem issues, struggles with home life or friendships, and getting into university or finding a job that can all affect mental wellbeing.

We know that early intervention, along with giving young people the confidence to access support, is key – that's where NCS plays such a vital role. NCS helps young people forge friendships across social divides and enhance their confidence and self-esteem.

This excellent enhancement to the NCS programme will build on the work we are already doing in schools and ensure young people get the knowledge and help they need.

The package of measures delivered by NCS will include:

- a dedicated mental health awareness course for teenagers taking part in NCS
- new mental health training for more than 10,000 frontline NCS staff to improve support to young people
- a new network of young NCS graduates to champion mental health awareness

Michael Lynas, chief executive of NCS, said:

NCS brings young people from all backgrounds together for a shared experience that changes their lives for good.

By experiencing the great outdoors, building new friendships and serving their community these young people not only build important skills for life and work, they also improve their health and wellbeing.

As our country's flagship programme for sixteen year olds, we know just how important the issue of mental health is to this age group and we hope this initiative will help the next generation to live healthier and happier lives.

On 17th August, the Prime Minister met young people who are benefitting from the NCS programme as well as graduates of the scheme and staff.

The new mental health initiative being delivered by NCS, which is fully funded by the government, builds further on the Prime Minister's existing commitment to improve mental health training within schools.

The first training sessions for secondary school teachers and staff on how to identify and respond to the early signs of mental health problems began in June. All secondary schools will be offered this training by 2020, and all primary schools by 2022.

In 2017 more than 100,000 young people will take part in an NCS programme. Independent evaluations of NCS have shown it has positive impacts on young people's confidence as well as their mental wellbeing.