

A Behaviour Change Intervention for Looked After Young People

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Background

Children and young people in the care system face many health inequalities and have poorer health than their peers^{1,2}. As a group, Looked after young people have complex backgrounds and experiences sometimes including abuse and neglect and problems surrounding family relationships, which can lead to a reluctance to engage with health services³. Behaviour change often requires complex interventions⁴, however this is even more imperative with vulnerable groups, who, due to their backgrounds, experiences and social context, may find behaviour change a greater challenge⁵.

Aim

To develop a high-intensity intervention for LAYP to improve their health around sexual health and relationships, smoking, activity, healthy eating, alcohol and drug use

What we did

- Qualitative interviews to assess their behaviour change needs and desire for interventions.
- Intervention development informed by the interviews, theory and evidence.
- Delivery of an intervention spanning: one-to-one behaviour change interventions with young people in care and care leavers aged 11+; consultancy and training for carers and workers.
- The intervention was funded to run between March 2009 and March 2015.
- The intervention was flexible: meeting young people in a convenient place; the option of using text messages for contact; appointment number and length were flexible; incorporated drop-ins.
- Pre-post evaluation undertaken on behaviours and wellbeing to evaluate the service.

Impact

- Successful in engaging a hard-to-reach group in considering lifestyle issues.
- Significant changes in sexual health (use of pregnancy contraception, condom use intention and condom use), smoking, activity, fruit and vegetable consumption and wellbeing.

Conclusions and recommendations

The development of an intervention that is both engaging and draws on the theory and evidence was successful in improving the health and wellbeing on a vulnerable group-looked after young people. Future interventions with vulnerable groups may benefit from drawing on the tools to engage and the range of behaviour change techniques utilised in this intervention.

Further Information

tinyurl.com/JPHlayp

tinyurl.com/LAYPhej

References

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