



JIGSAW Young people's
health in mind

Learning from Twenty Years of Jigsaw
(Summary Edition)

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Evidence from two decades
of youth mental health research,
service delivery and implementation

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Summary Edition.

Jigsaw was established in 2006 around a different approach to youth mental health: intervene earlier, make support accessible and youth-focused, involve young people, work with families and communities, and use evidence to improve care.

Twenty years later, Jigsaw is a nationally coordinated service for young people aged 12 to 25, alongside national mental health promotion programmes.

This report reviews evidence from 51 peer-reviewed studies, routine service data, evaluation and implementation experience, drawing on data from more than 70,000 young people. It asks what twenty years of evidence have demonstrated, what we have learned through implementation, and what this means for the next phase of youth mental health care.

What have we learned?

Accessible, youth-focused care can be delivered at national scale. Jigsaw has grown from a small number of demonstration sites into a national network. Since its establishment, nearly 95,000 young people have sought help from Jigsaw. Importantly, youth and parent satisfaction and short-term outcomes have remained broadly consistent across services, suggesting that accessible, youth-focused care can be delivered reliably at scale.

Many young people improve during relatively brief care. Across routine practice, many young people experience meaningful improvement in psychological distress and personal goals over a relatively small number of sessions. Reliable deterioration is uncommon.

Young people's mental health is shaped by the world around them. Jigsaw research has consistently demonstrated the importance of relationships, trusted adults, social support, peers and school experience to young people's mental health. This shows that supporting youth mental health requires attention not only to the individual, but also to the relationships, environments and policies that shape young people's lives.

Twenty-years of evidence driven care have also changed how some of the original ideas should be understood.

Early intervention is about when support is provided, not how mild the problem is.

Many young people who seek help early are already experiencing substantial distress. Early intervention means responding promptly when motivation is high rather than assuming that early support is only for mild difficulties.

Brief care should be flexible, not a fixed dose.

Relatively brief support can help many young people, but there is no single number of sessions that is right for everyone. Care needs to be personalised - to respond to the young person, their needs and their progress.

Access is about the whole pathway, not just getting through the front door.

Young people need to recognise that support is relevant, know where to go, receive a timely response, engage with care and move easily to other supports when their needs change. Parents, schools and other trusted adults often play an important role in helping young people reach care.

Timeliness is not an administration matter – is part of the clinical process. Research with nearly 5,000 youth found that those who waited longer for support were less likely to show improvement in their mental health.

What still needs to change?

The evidence points to a wider challenge - improving individual services is not the same as building a stronger youth mental health system.

1. Build clearer pathways between services

A strong individual service does not automatically create a strong system. Young people need clear, continuous pathways between services, particularly when their needs change or they require more intensive support.

2. Understand equity in mental health care

We know far more about young people who reach services than those who do not. A better system needs to understand who gets access, who waits, who disengages, and who benefits.

3. Address the wider conditions shaping youth mental health

Services are only part of the solution. Families, schools, communities, and wider social, economic and digital environments all shape young people's mental health. Improving youth mental health therefore requires action both within services and on the conditions in which young people grow up.

What does this mean for the next twenty years?

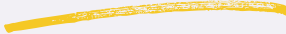
The next phase should not simply be about providing more services.

It should be about building a system in which young people receive timely support, which acknowledges care can change as their needs change, where transitions between services are clear, inequities are visible, and routine data are used to continuously improve care.

At the same time, prevention needs to reach beyond the individual. Education, housing, social protection, communities and the wider environments in which young people grow up all have a role in supporting youth mental health.

The central message

Twenty years ago, the challenge was to create timely, accessible and youth-focused mental health support. The next challenge is to build a connected, equitable and continuously learning system around young people, while acting more effectively on the conditions that shape their mental health.



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Our charity (revenue) number is CHY 17439. Our Registered Charity number is 20064846.

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