

# Head Start for Mental Health

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**Teachers across the country have seen mental health issues amongst young people become an increasingly challenging barrier to learning over the years - and this trend shows little sign of abating.**

However, teachers at Sittingbourne Community College have thrown their weight behind a new scheme developed in Kent that aims to turn the tide, and remove these invisible obstacles that are afflicting more and more of the nation's schoolchildren.

Therefore, in a packed school hall, an new organisation called HeadStart delivered a presentation to help them not only identify signs of poor mental health, but how to tackle it with a range of strategies designed to tailor individual solutions for young people.

HeadStart is run by Kent County Council and operates a Resilience Hub for all 10-16 year olds, parents and teachers in Kent, to help people take care of their emotional health and get the most out of life. They focus on helping young people build resilience to life's many difficulties as well as educating parents, carers and teaching professionals in providing better support for the young before poor mental wellbeing becomes a debilitating obstacle to an enjoyable life.

"What we learnt on the day," explains English teacher, Mrs Elizabeth O'Hagan,"was not only interesting, but gave me a fresh perspective on spotting problems and new ways to tackle them in a purposeful way. It really is a programme worthy of more support. We often see mental health issues being reported in the media, but there seems to be an unfair and dangerous view that the symptoms of poor mental health are 'just part of growing up,' as if depression, stress and anxiety are normal for teenagers. They are not, and are just as serious as they are to adults."

Claire Vidler, Assistant Headteacher and lead contact for HeadStart, said,"It's not only valuable for staff to be involved in the HeadStart project, but also valuable for our students. The aim is for resilience strategies to be sewn into the fabric of lessons and extra-curricular activities, for not only students facing challenging experiences, but every student. Resilience builds strong minds that achieve."