

MSP backs new mental health service for children and young people

A pilot service is being trialled in East Lothian aiming to tackle the mental health crisis facing children and young people.

Developed by Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity (EHC), the new wellbeing and resilience programme is a response to research by the charity which found that over half (59%) of Scottish families have a child who has experienced a mental health concern.

The service will offer a therapeutic drop-in space with a range of creative interventions, including leisure, art, dance, activities, family support and youth work. Every family will have their own 'Pal' – a trained team member who can support them along their child's mental health journey.

While it is a psychologically informed service, it is not a crisis or clinical service and does not duplicate or replace anything offered by the NHS. At its best, it may negate a family's need for future access to medical support, alleviating the pressures on CAMHS.

It will be modelled on the charity's existing Hub, which delivers very similar interventions to children and families who need to visit Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Children and Young People. Once scaled, it will be delivered in community settings and available to all children and young people with any mental health concern, and their families, across

Scotland.



Daniel Johnson MSP with Pippa Johnston, ECHC's Director of Corporate Development

Daniel Johnson MSP found out more about the service when the charity visited parliament. He said: "When it comes to tackling the mental health crisis facing children and young people in Scotland, I agree there is no time to wait.

"There is a clear need for whole-family support delivered at scale and this new service from ECHC will be a positive intervention for children and families at a time when they may feel they have limited access to support, for example, whilst awaiting a CAMHS appointment.

"This is a groundbreaking service for Scottish families and I'm looking forward to supporting ECHC as it rolls out this life-changing pilot."

Roslyn Neely, CEO of ECHC, said: “We are aware that the mental health crisis impacts not just the child but the whole family, affecting their resilience, health, education, and the ability of parents to attend or perform at work. Children and their siblings supported by our hospital team are experiencing increased loneliness, isolation and anxiety and are missing out on their childhoods.

“Overwhelmingly, families we’ve spoken to feel that they have nowhere to turn, no one to support their child, no one to support them and tell them they’re doing a good job, and no access to support or advice. This is not right, and we need to change it.

“We believe we are best placed to deliver this game-changing project using our unique wellbeing and resilience model which we already use successfully in the hospital, and we are delighted to have the support of Daniel. Together we have an opportunity to save our children and young people from this mental health crisis and improve their life outcomes.”

The wellbeing and resilience programme will initially be piloted in two geographical areas of Edinburgh and the Lothians for two years to ascertain the scale of demand, running until May 2025.