

The Transition Buddies programme developed in partnership with the Mental Health Support Team in Hounslow.

Location: Rivers Academy & Reach Academy - local secondary schools based in Feltham.

Dates: Academic year 2022/2023.

The Transition Buddies programme was developed by the Feltham Convening Partnership's Mental Health & Wellbeing Working Group in collaboration with the Mental Health Support Team for Hounslow. Supporting the transition from primary to secondary was identified as a priority by the Working Group in April 2022.

The programme is intended to support young people through:

- Building emotional resilience and capacity to deal with mental health issues
- Developing vocabulary and understanding of mental health issues and strategies
- Reducing the stigma associated with discussing about and engaging with mental health issues and strategies
- Providing extra-curricular opportunities to pupils to support CVs, personal statements and other applications, with accreditation for taking part

Engagement: 60+ Year 7 pupils, 15 Year 9 Buddies, 2 local secondary schools (Rivers Academy & Reach Academy)

Data collection:

Focus groups were facilitated by a member of the FCP Planning Team with buddies and Y7 pupils from Rivers Academy & Reach Academy in April 2023.

Key qualitative findings from the focus group conversations with the buddies:

Buddies mentioned that being part of this programme was a good experience working with young people for their CVs and personal statements. The experience made them think about jobs that they would like to do in the future.

Buddies reported that the training from CAMHs professionals was useful and helped them to understand mental health and to understand why the Y7s might be feeling the way that they do. Students have a deeper understanding and are more aware of the challenges that younger years groups face now as a result of taking part in the programme. However, some Y7s at Reach Academy reported that the buddies did not know what to say sometimes during the sessions.

Buddies recalled that the training supported their own wellbeing

“I had a better understanding of how to control my own emotions”.

This was part of the training, not only were the buddies trained on how to support younger years groups with their wellbeing but they were taught strategies on how to support their own mental health & wellbeing.

The training that was delivered by CAMHs at the start of the programme was useful. The training helped the buddies learn different techniques. If someone was feeling down, we came up with different solutions.

“We were thinking of having our own school worry monster, where you can write down the challenges that you are facing anonymously and then tear it up and place it in the worry monster.”

This can be comforting for pupils as they write it down and then it's gone. Waiting to buy a worry monster.

Students reported that being part of this programme helped them to develop skills such as communication, social, problem solving, leadership, public speaking and teamwork. Buddies reported that being a buddy has made them think about how being part of this programme has made them more flexible and adaptable.

“You need to really think about the situation and adapt how you are going to react.”

Buddies felt that they learned how to be more thoughtful and considerate of others emotions as a result of taking part in this programme. Students mentioned that being a buddy helped build their confidence.

“You get more confident approaching and talking to younger year groups.”

Students said they feel proud of the work that they are doing as a buddy as they get to help people.

Buddies reported that they have developed attributes through being part of this programme; patience and initiative were the two that came up most frequently.

“I remember walking by a Y7 student that I recognised from being part of the transition buddies. He was in the art room panicking about something, I wasn’t too sure what but I decided to go in and see. He recognised me straight away and when I asked what was wrong he said that he couldn’t find the paper he needed for his homework project. I was patient and helped him to find the paper and then he calmed down.”

Buddies mentioned that being part of the programme helped them to build relationships with their peers who were also part of the programme.

“We made friends with some of the other buddies as well as some of the Y7s”.

The group work they do together to put together presentations and think of strategies and solutions has strengthened the relationship between buddies.

“Me and X used to be friends in Y7 but then we drifted apart, this programme has helped us to rekindle our friendship and now we are good friends again.”

Some of the words that buddies use to describe their experience in one word:

- Eye Opening
- Heartwarming
- Cool
- Confidence-boost
- Selflessness
- Pride

Key qualitative findings from the focus group conversations with the Y7 students experiencing the transition:

Y7s reported that they built a relationship with their buddies and it was comforting to have them as support.

“My buddy has helped me a lot because it feels like someone actually understands how I’m feeling.”

Y7s mentioned that they have built trust with their buddies which makes them feel comfortable opening up and sharing how they are feeling/the challenges that they are facing.

“I actually feel like someone is there to listen to me, my buddy has helped me a lot.”

Some Y7s at Reach Academy said they developed a relationship with their buddy but they still did not feel comfortable opening up and sharing challenges with them and reported that being part of the programme did not help them build new friendships with their fellow Y7s but it did help them strengthen their existing relationships.

Y7s reported that being part of this programme has positively influenced their transition from primary to secondary.

“It was helpful to know that I had someone who would look out for me and be there if I needed them.”

Specific stories illustrating how the buddies supported younger year groups with the transition:

“Sometimes, I would see a specific Y7 pupil sitting outside in the hall. She looked a little down so I went over. She said she was struggling to make friends and she was talking about how she was struggling to fit into her new school. She was pleased to have someone to just listen to, sometimes that’s all you need!”

“I went to the library once and there was a girl there wearing a skirt that was covered in mud. She recognised us straight away and we went over to her. She said she fell and was too embarrassed to walk to class. I listened to her and made her laugh. Once, she was feeling better, we walked her to her class and now she is my friend.”

Key takeaways to bring forward from Rivers Academy (open to all Y7s who need the support)

- More sessions to touch base and connect with the other buddies to discuss the support that was offered to younger year groups.
- Buddies should spend more time meeting with the younger year groups where they hang out, i.e. the food hall

Key takeaways to bring forward from Reach Academy (targeted at specific Y7s)

- A specific buddy would have helped with the development of the relationship between the buddies and Y7s.
- It needs to be made clear to Y7s as to why they were chosen to be part of the programme - a clear criteria for choosing the Y7s will help with this.
- Where possible activities should be during school time.
- The sessions should be more often and consistent to build the relationship between the buddies and younger year groups.
- The sessions should be more activity led - sporting activities, outdoor activities were mentioned frequently. One buddy suggested that this could help the Y7s to open up more as there is less pressure because the focus is on the activity. They also mention that it can sometimes be easier to build relationships and trust through activity led sessions. Some suggested activities were online gaming, music, more crafts
- Y6 pupils may benefit more from this programme, preparing them for the transition especially because Reach Academy is an although school.
- Facilitators need continuous guidance and support throughout the programme. I.e. regular check-ins with the support team.
 - Clear timeline/instructions on how to deliver this programme throughout the year
 - Support network between schools that are delivering the programme across Feltham