

Children of all age groups are receiving mental health support after churches came together to provide counselling services in schools.



Following rising concerns about mental illness in young people, a church in Kent is taking action, providing support for children and families.

The current Bishop of St Germans, the Rt Rev Hugh Nelson, conceived the project when he was vicar of Goudhurst and Kilndown in the Canterbury Diocese.

By connecting the community, the Weald Family Hub has funded the provision of subsidised mental health counselling in 13 schools by covering 50 per cent of the costs matched by each school.

The average NHS waiting time in Kent is 42 days after two contacts but the Hub can provide 18 weeks of one-on-one counselling at an affordable rate in a safe environment at the time of need.

The project, which relies on donations from parishes and benefactors in the Weald Deanery, sees headteachers referring children in need from all age groups to the Hub.

Yet it is not just children who are receiving support. The wraparound care includes the Parents Supporting Parents scheme which helps adults with tips and an understanding ear.

Louise Vickerman, the Weald Family Hub Coordinator, explained: "The support is stripped-back and looks at the fundamentals of parenting.

"It considers reasons for certain behaviours and talks about spending valuable play time with children and all delivered by trained, empathetic people, most of whom are parents themselves."



Churches act both as a key stakeholder in the Hub, maximising visibility for the project and financially supporting it, and as a source of volunteers. Parishioners who volunteer are then trained as mental health mentors through a six-week course.

Currently, Louise is aware that Covid-19 will change the project’s demands. ‘The need will be greater it has ever been before,’ she said.

Children may have thrived, and some may have struggled. Being ready for that when pupils return to schools in September is now the Hub’s task.

The project could be replicated across the region. Louise calls it ‘cross pollinating’ with churches in Eastbourne, Sevenoaks, and West Sussex all expressing interest.

The Church of England has seen an increased focus on supporting youth mental health.

Manchester Diocese have employed a **Mental Wellbeing Youth Worker since 2018** and has found the provision to be warmly received.

The Church of England has published **mental health resources** including details of services and organisations which offer help and support.









**Notes:**

- More than 70 children have been given private counselling since the Hub's inception.
  - The Parents Supporting Parents group has helped 15 families.
  - The under-18 counselling and parents' training is run in partnership with charity Fegans.
  - More information is available on the Hub's [website](#) and through contacting Louise Vickerman at [wealdfamilyhub@gmail.com](mailto:wealdfamilyhub@gmail.com).
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