health campaign

Offering shoulder to cry on

BULLIED, grieving or depressed children may often find it difficult to find someone whose job it is just to listen to them.

Family breakdowns and increased exams pressure can make modern childhood confusing and difficult - and new research states that as many as one in five teenagers in Greater Manchester self-harm.

But now Bury's under-19s have a place to go where they are guaranteed a shoulder to cry on and support to get through their problems - the first service of its kind in England.

The new Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Service (IAPT), has helped 300 youngsters since it first opened in November.

Currently based in The Rock in Bury town centre, the service will move to a new location in Bury shopping centre over the next few months.

IAPT manager Anna Dalton explains that the service tackles mental and emotional problems early so children are able to grow up without any long-term psychological problems.

She says: "We work with children who have been bereaved, and whose parents are splitting up.

"The service is also for children who have behavioural problems, or are suffering from anxiety or depression," she explains.

"The biggest number of referrals - about 33 per cent - comes for children who have behavioural problems.

"They often have no other way of expressing the distress about the situation that's going on around them.

"They may exhibit very challenging behaviour, or be in conflict with their siblings or school.

"They may be struggling to manage their anger about a situation, and may be taking it out on those around them.

"Another 17 per cent are children with bereavement issues; the remaining proportion are depressed or have anxiety.

"These children may have school phobias.

ANNA Dalton, manager of the IAPT Service and Stephen Mills, PCT chief executive

"Or their parents may be having arguments."

Anna admits that the mental health of children is getting worse.

She says: "There is some research from the Children's Society that suggests that more children are identifying as feeling sad all the time.

"We need to do more research into the degree of depression in children, but this does seem like a worrying trend."

Children with anxiety who come into the centre are offered Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - which helps them cope with negative thoughts - while those who have been bereaved or find themselves at the centre of conflict are given counselling.

Bury was given the £200,000 initial funding for the service after the Department of Health identified that the mental well being of the borough's teenagers was a particular concern.

"Whereas we are not actually that deprived in Bury, we have some quite stark health inequalities in the borough," Anna explains.

"In terms of public health and well-being, we don't do as well as a lot of other areas in the country.

"I think it's very hard for us to say how we are affecting the problem because it is early days.

"But the reaction to the new service has been very positive.

"We are asking all the children who come to us for evaluations and we do get some very positive feedback.

"One 14-year old who had been bereaved said that she didn't know what would have happened to her if it hadn't been for the service."

■ THE Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Service (IAPT) service is available weekdays from 9am until 4pm, with a number of appointments in the evenings, and is based at 114 The Rock, Bury.

Young people can refer themselves by ringing the number below - or they can talk to their teacher or Connexions adviser. Two evening drop-in self-referral sessions will be offered soon. For information, call: 0845 070 5399.

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