

"We could write you a book"

Co-producing a Staff Handbook from the lived experience of Young People in inpatient care

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Context

Within UK CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), Tier 4 provides specialised inpatient care for young people (YP) aged 12–18 with mental health needs.

These YP often face poor outcomes and are consistently identified by professionals as needing better support. While staff training foregrounds clinical and safeguarding competencies, YP's needs also call for relational and communication-based practice.



Key insights

YP emphasised the importance of staff knowing them beyond their diagnosis, and of relationship-based care grounded in honesty and personalisation.

Restrictions and protocols felt punitive unless explained and shared; meal times were particularly sensitive; and therapeutic spaces needed to preserve autonomy and dignity.

YP also called for genuine, non-tokenistic involvement in staff recruitment.

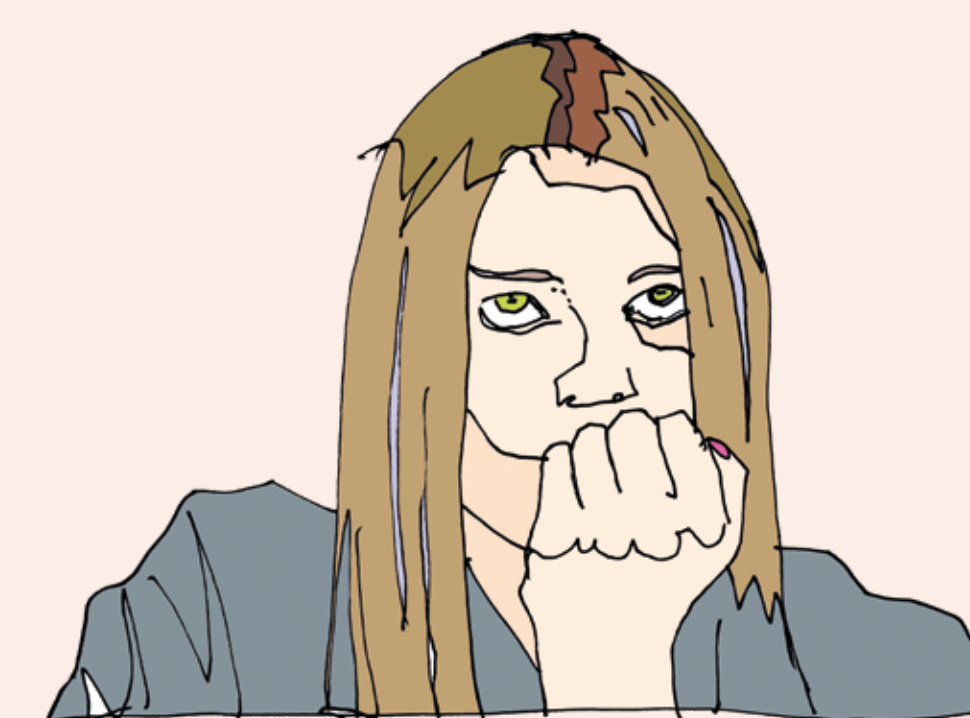
Method/ Approach

A youth-led, co-production approach was adopted. Following a presentation delivered by four YP (aged 17–20) with lived experience of Tier 4 care at a workshop with commissioners and health professionals, they spontaneously offered to write a handbook on what good care looks like from their perspective.

Their accounts were then co-produced, with the support of the HF team, a designer, and an illustrator, into a staff-facing handbook structured around key relational themes, illustrated through examples and practical tips.

Aim

This project, lead by Home+Future (HF), is part of a pilot of the South East Regional Care Cooperative, set out to capture and translate YP's lived experience of Tier 4 care into practical guidance for staff, placing their expertise at the centre of workforce development.



Implications for practice and policy

HF is rolling out the handbook across mental health, residential, and foster care providers in the South East, through a public-facing webinar presented by the YP themselves.

Beyond Tier 4, these insights can inform staff training and recruitment processes involving YP across residential settings more broadly.



View the
handbook
online here

