

Annabel Hodgson

No Limits is an award-winning, local, independent charity providing a unique combination of prevention, early intervention and crisis support to young people, based on a nationally evidenced model. We provide information, advice, counselling and support through a range of services available ‘under one roof’. Set up in 1993 we have grown to support thousands of young people in Southampton and across Hampshire through our Advice Centre and the specialist projects we deliver as well as drop-in sessions in schools/colleges.

We meet the needs of the most deprived, vulnerable and isolated young people who often don’t access mainstream services. By supporting across a wide range of issues including mental health, housing, debt, employment, relationships and sexual health we support young people through the transition from adolescence to adulthood, often helping them climb out of, or avoid, social exclusion. 7,758 children and young people accessed our services last year, of which 1,475 were supported with their mental health and 33% of whom self-identified as being vulnerable. We employ 120 staff and have support from a further 100 students and volunteer workers.

Our core service offers advice and support through our drop-in Advice Centre in Southampton High Street, a friendly, accessible space open for over 40 hours per week, including evenings and weekends. Young people can drop in for a chat and cup of tea without appointment. This flexibility, combined with the non-judgemental, young person-centred approach of the youth workers,

mean that many of the barriers to seeking help often faced by vulnerable young people are removed. The youth workers are trusted by the young people – often the only professionals that are seen to be ‘on their side’. From the drop-in, young people can be referred on to our specialist services.

Our specialist services include counselling; therapeutic groups (anger management, anxiety, bereavement); housing and homelessness; substance misuse; vulnerable groups (young carers, care leavers, young offenders, child sexual exploitation); young parents.

Going above and beyond

Having worked in the Youth Work sector for over 30 years, Annabel has had a pivotal role in shaping the provision of mental health support for young people in Southampton and Hampshire. Starting as a Detached Youth Worker on a council estate, Annabel then developed Southampton’s first LGBTQ youth project before starting her role as the CEO at No Limits.

Annabel has built No Limits from a tiny charity with 2 members of staff to a large local charity with 100 staff and 70 volunteers from all over Hampshire. In her first year, No Limits had 600 contacts with children and young people. Last year it had 49,517 contacts. She’s helped to bring significant amounts of funding into Southampton and Hampshire for young people’s mental health support and has campaigned tirelessly – and successfully – for the rights of young people both locally and nationally.

Annabel is passionate in her belief that young people should be given help to reach their potential, including those who are the most vulnerable. Annabel works continually to develop projects to support mental health, including:

- weekly health and wellbeing drop-in sessions in all secondary schools / colleges in Southampton
- Primary Mental Health Workers in schools providing targeted, one-to-one mental health support for children and young people in schools and colleges across Southampton
- Annabel set up and manages Hampshire Youth Access, which provides free, Hampshire-wide counselling for children and young people through 12 local charities
- Therapeutic groups including mood management, anxiety and bereavement
- peer support services, including for young carers, care leavers and teenagers suffering anxiety
- extensive services through our Advice Centre to address root causes of mental health problems and provide a comprehensive, young person-centred approach to mental health, including addressing issues with housing, substance misuse, debt, relationships, domestic violence, sexual exploitation.

“No Limits have been amazing with helping me over the last couple of months I can’t express my gratitude with the many tearful chats and help with

paperwork. I really don't know what I'd have done with their help and support”

Providing young person-centred provision has always been at the heart of Annabel's vision and she has created strong, city-wide partnerships to make this happen, with both statutory and voluntary sector partners. With Annabel's leadership, No Limits works closely with a range of agencies who can also provide support and with whom we regularly liaise / refer regarding young people, including CAMHS / AMHS, Local Authority Early Help, GP's, Substance Misuse services, Housing and Social Care teams, Rape Crisis, Domestic Violence services, LGBTQ+ services, YMCA, Schools, Colleges, Universities, CAB. Annabel has brought huge amounts of funding into the city for multi-agency partnerships including SRB money in the 1990's (taking No Limits over £1 million income) and significant lottery funds.

Annabel has been/is involved in local, regional and national boards and steering groups including: HeadStart, Future In Mind, GSK Impact Leaders, Solent NHS, Advice Southampton.

Innovation

No Limits, under the direction of Annabel, has always been innovative in the delivery of its services, trying new things and evaluating them thoroughly.

Three recent examples of innovation are:

1. We have recently won funding to introduce Primary Mental Health Workers into our Advice Centre, for 18-25 year olds, building on an evidence base built up by our Primary Mental Health work in schools. Mental health support from the PMHWs is the starting point for an ongoing integrated mental health support pathway at our Advice Centre. This mental health support for those in crisis sits alongside our hardship crisis programme, providing a holistic approach for young adults suffering homelessness, family breakdown, debt.

Evidence from Mental Health Matters has shown that young adults often suffer from a lack of early intervention with their mental health, leading to young adults not presenting until they reach a crisis point. Adult mental health commissioners and services in Southampton have identified that there is a population of young adults in Southampton who have 'emotional dysregulation' and difficulty tolerating distress but don't meet the criteria for AMHs or Steps to Wellbeing, the local IAPT offer. In discussion with commissioners, it was clear that many of these young adults access No Limits drop-in services and therefore No Limits could provide an easier access route for young adults to achieve mental health support.

This work will be evaluated by Youth Access, of which Annabel has been a trustee, and the Dept of Applied Health Research at University College London, looking at the role of YIACs in meeting the mental health needs of young adults.

2. In the last few weeks, funding has been secured to pilot a project that will deliver mental health and well-being support to children and young people in the A&E Department at Southampton General Hospital during the Winter months. This is a completely new area for No Limits and another example of innovation. This project will push the boundaries of access to early intervention support for mental health and well-being and reduce the number of young people being discharged from hospital only to return again and again.
3. We have been awarded funding to take on some outreach work in Southampton, to target the most vulnerable young people who are most likely to commit serious crime. Through our outreach work and the Advice Centre we will provide them with holistic support including support with their mental health through counselling and therapeutic groups.

Annabel puts young people at the heart of No Limits' development. We continually monitor, evaluate and develop our services with the help of the young people who use them. We gather case studies and data about our interactions with children and young people to monitor the areas of disadvantage that they are facing.

We invite children and young people to fill out feedback forms on our services, give their feedback via our website, and provide testimonials. We conduct a service-wide 'Have Your Say' consultation twice a year, asking service users about their experience of our services and the outcomes they have experienced

as a result. Feedback has indicated that the drop-in environment is welcoming and approachable for young people.

Sustained impact

Annabel has grown support for the charity within Southampton and Hampshire and embedded No Limits in all aspects of children and young people's health and welfare in Southampton. She has gained quality standards and contributes to local/national strategy around young people's social exclusions. She has always placed children and young people at the heart of her work, developing significant partnerships to ensure sustainable positive outcomes for young people. Over the last 25 years Annabel has built and sustained relationships with both voluntary and statutory services and has strong multi-agency links including with Early Help, Housing, Rape Crisis, Schools, Colleges, Universities, Social Services, CAB, CAMHS, Probation service and the Youth Offending Service.

Working at a strategic level, Annabel has shaped the way the city supports young people, working within the Southampton plan, alongside statutory partners. She has been a trusted professional and, as such, has often been given a seat at decision-making tables, advising statutory bodies on many occasions. Through this trust and experience she has given the voluntary sector a voice in these important forums.

Annabel has also aimed to put children and young people's participation at the heart of No Limits and empower them by giving them a voice in Southampton,

Hampshire and nationwide. She has built lasting partnerships with decision makers, statutory bodies and other voluntary sector organisations to ensure CYP are placed at the heart of decision-making.

Her collaborative rather than competitive approach to service development has benefitted many smaller organisations who receive funding from partnership bids. She set up the Hampshire Youth Access (HYA) partnership, bringing in essential funds for ten smaller partners, some of whom would have been at risk as charities without this partnership funding. The HYA project successfully provides counselling for CYP through smaller partners across Hampshire.