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## College Counselling at Greenhead College

A general assumption is that a college counselling service mainly deals with exam pressures or study-related issues. For some, this is true, however, for many young people life can be complex due to the general stresses of growing up, working out who they are, the transition from school and the demands of college life. A confidential counselling service for students is invaluable. Without it, they may never have an opportunity to talk about such issues, which are having significant effects in their lives. The safety of the familiar college environment can help reduce stigma about counselling and therefore make it easier to just drop in, which for young people in particular is one less barrier to getting help.

Greenhead College in Huddersfield has had a counselling service for over ten years. The aim is to provide confidential support for students on a short or long-term basis and to be able to respond to their needs. Being easily accessible means that they can drop in anytime and therefore don't miss classes (this is an especially important consideration for students who claim EMA who would lose payments or compromise their right to confidentiality).

Other counselling options for students would be via their G.P. or private arrangements. These may involve travel, waiting time, finding a counsellor who specialises in young people, time-limited sessions, or incur a financial commitment (currently £30 - £50 per hour).

Learning to understand yourself and make your own decisions are life skills that

empower students.

### Transition and retention

The impact of the having a counselling service within the college is vast. Many students find the transition from school to college or from college to university difficult. In our experience it helps with student retention; often they feel there's no choice but to leave college, until they come to speak to us and we look at options. Referrals from tutors and staff are vital to the service. Identifying students' needs ensures they get the correct support and reduces pressure on staff. As counsellors, we are also able to offer our support to staff if they need to offload or have concerns about a student. Providing INSET for tutors and enrichment training programmes for students on basic listening skills we have become a part of the whole college structure.

The value of talking to someone in confidence and being 'heard' can be underestimated - for the student it can be liberating and a way of managing a challenging situation. When a student gives such feedback as: 'they take time to listen', 'it enabled me to put things in perspective', 'I feel so much happier and confident', 'I was believed' and 'I have learned to trust in myself', it highlights how important and successful counselling has been for them.

When a client tells you the counselling that they received, 'literally saved my life', the importance of being able to access it easily with as few barriers as possible cannot be ignored.