



Response from Moving Up Moving On to the draft Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031

1. Background

1.1 Moving Up Moving On (MUMO) is a project based at Forthspring Inter Community Group. MUMO provides holistic family support to families from two local primary schools – St. Clare’s Primary School and Springfield Primary School. Both are situated in areas experiencing multiple disadvantage as identified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. MUMO employs two children’s support workers (CSW), one based in each school and two family engagement workers (FEW), one attached to each school as well as a project manager.

1.2 MUMO staff see first-hand and on a daily basis the extent of mental health issues within the community it delivers services in. MUMO staff are all trained in early trauma and how that impacts on brain development and mental health and emotional wellbeing throughout life. They have learned to facilitate a conversation focusing on ‘what happened to you?’ rather than ‘what’s wrong with you?’, with the follow up question: ‘how can we fix this?’.

1.3 Practically every activity which MUMO delivers aims to promote emotional and/or physical wellbeing and to build resilience. This includes:

In-school activity

- Exercise programmes such as a walking activity as children have been unable to move during the school day:
<https://www.facebook.com/mumoproject/posts/1300267560356918>
- A school-based counsellor based in each school one day a week
- Group work with children with a positive mental health focus. Children commented on work with the CSW:
 - We can talk about our feelings
 - She (CSW) can make us feel better
 - She (CSW) encourages us to be more positive in ourselves
- Mindfulness sessions

Activities for parents

MUMO offers an extremely varied programme, aiming to support parents’ emotional wellbeing and mental health. Below are a few examples:

- One to one support through FEWs
- Exercise classes
- Self-care sessions such as massage
- Self-care support sessions facilitated by a trained counsellor offering support for parent’s mental health
- Availability of counselling support
- Walking activities
- Art activities: <https://www.forthspring.org/candles-in-a-tea-cup/>
- Five Steps to Wellbeing programmes
- Healthy eating programmes
- MUMO manages several WhatsApp groups facilitating parents to stay in touch with each other, offer each other support and share information especially useful when they are isolated at home

A participant quoted: "Great wee class something to look forward to been locked up lol helps with my mental health encourage me to eat and drink healthy and my kids can join into which is great thank very much"

Whole family activities

- Family therapy
- Monthly Families Matter sessions where families come to Forthspring, do an activity and eat together and mix with other families
- Programmes such as Families Connected (Save the Children Fund) supporting parents to be proactive in supporting their children's wellbeing and education

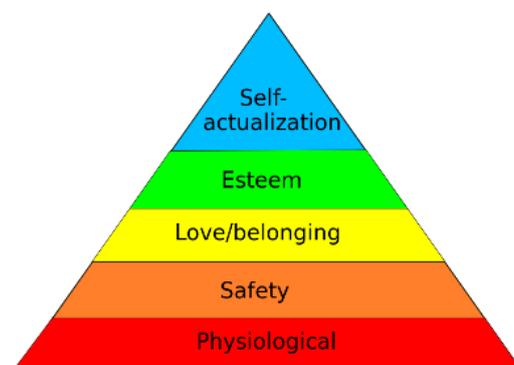
MUMO, in everything it does, aims to promote emotional wellbeing and positive mental health. As the draft strategy points out:

- 1 in 20 of our children and young people experience post traumatic stress disorder
 - 1 in 10 of our children and young people experience emotional problems
 - 1 in 6 of our children and young people experience patterns of eating disorder
- 1 in 10 of our children and young people experience self-injurious behaviour

2. International context

2.1 The UN General Assembly report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (28.03.2017) states: 'nowhere in the world does mental health enjoy parity with physical health in national policies and budgets or in medical education and practice. Globally, it is estimated that less than 7 per cent of health budgets is allocated to address mental health.' In Northern Ireland, spend on mental health is 27% less than England and 20% less than the Republic of Ireland despite having a much higher incidence of mental health problems, with a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England. For any mental health strategy, this is a priority which needs addressed.

2.2 International basic needs: MUMO works with a lot of families whose basic needs are not met. Without these needs being met, they will constantly be at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of need and unable to develop strategies to promote emotional wellbeing and positive mental health as outlined in the draft mental health strategy 2021-2031. (Maslow, A, 1943, a Theory of Human Motivation, Psychological Review, American Psychological Association, Washington, USA)



3. The draft Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031

3.1 MUMO welcomes the development of a long-term mental health strategy with (29) clear actions to promote positive mental health in Northern Ireland. Along with a mental health champion, supported by all government departments, this is helping to have a proactive societal approach to positive mental health.

3.2 There is much to be welcomed in the draft strategy including:

- it is building on earlier work such as the Bamford Review (2002) and the creation in 2020 of a high-level Executive Working Group on Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Resilience
- the focus on early intervention is welcome and essential
- it recognises the importance of breaking down barriers to access support
- the vision to deliver compassionate mental health services is welcome
- the recognition of the core role of the voluntary and community sector in supporting people who have mental health issues is welcome
- a more integrated approach to mental health between the statutory and voluntary and community sectors is welcome
- the approach to mental health care moving ever more into the community with the expansion of talking therapy hubs with the involvement of the voluntary and community sector is welcome
- the increasing emphasis on non-medical models to support people's emotional wellbeing and mental health is welcome

4. Serious gaps in current provision

4.1 Primary care providers such as GP's often do not have counselling support for patients. This is a glaring gap in positive mental health for the population as a whole. The excellent Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) campaign to ensure all GP practices offer timely access to mental health counselling would significantly improve the mental health of people in Northern Ireland. More than 30% of GP practices in Northern Ireland do not offer in-house counselling to people, with huge regional variations on what is on offer.

5. MUMO recommendations to the draft mental health strategy 2021-2031

5.1 Forthspring Inter Community Group has endorsed the #123GP campaign which recommends:

- Ensure that mental health counselling is available to all, regardless of where they live
- All counselling provision will be quality assured, adequately resourced and of sufficient duration to meet individual needs
- If counselling is the agreed best form of support for a person, they should have to wait no longer than 28 days for a first appointment and no more than two days for an urgent appointment
- The role of local community-based providers (such as MUMO) in providing timely and accessible counselling will be fully recognised and resourced
- Delivery options will include face-to-face, telephone and online provision through an adequately resourced, in-house GP counselling service and/or recognised community-based provision

5.2 MUMO recommends that every school has a fulltime counsellor employed by the Department of Education as part of every school's staff team. These counsellors will be able to work in a holistic way across the school – with pupils, teachers and parents. For the first theme to be realised – 'promoting wellbeing and resilience through prevention and early intervention' - it will need a serious, proactive investment such as this in our children and

young people. The MUMO model is worth examination and has already been replicated by schools in south Belfast.

5.3 MUMO recommends that the social determinants of mental health are central to any strategy. Policies that are known to cause significant levels of distress and harm, like Universal Credit, have not been referenced in the draft strategy as having a negative impact on mental health. The draft strategy acknowledges the social determinants of health but lacks any kind of detail on how it intends to tackle them. Families MUMO works with who are dealing with multiple disadvantage are so busy firefighting that they cannot focus on mental wellbeing. Current policies on social security, housing and homelessness, employment, education, immigration and criminal justice are all causing and exacerbating poor mental health. MUMO recommends an action point around each of these inequalities.

5.4 MUMO recommends that the draft mental health strategy 2021-2031 embeds the United Nations recommendation that governments shift the paradigm in relation to mental health. This model involves addressing a range of structural barriers and inequalities which impact negatively on mental health - a shift to a human rights model which promotes and protects the mental health of populations rather than 'fixing' problems. These problems are often so complex by the time a person reaches adulthood that resources are simply not available to support that person to enjoy positive mental health. In line with the cross departmental approach to mental health, spearheaded by the Executive Working Group on Mental Health, Resilience and Suicide Prevention, MUMO recommends that the Mental Health strategy must include a commitment to incorporate a Human Rights Checklist.

5.5 MUMO recommends a bold, ambitious, ground breaking approach to any mental health strategy for Northern Ireland with embedded principles such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index. This would locate Northern Ireland at the cutting edge of proactive, positive mental health strategies. The includes '...both traditional areas of socio-economic concern such as living standards, health and education and less traditional aspects of culture and psychological wellbeing. It is a holistic reflection of the general wellbeing of the Bhutanese population rather than a subjective psychological ranking of 'happiness' alone' (<https://ophi.org.uk/policy/gross-national-happiness-index/>).h This model involves addressing a range of structural barriers and inequalities which impact negatively on mental.

5.6 MUMO recommends that the strategy includes plans for within mental health services **and** beyond mental health services with a focus on preventative programmes and strategies.

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