



TALK2NISH PEER MENTORS

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

APRIL 2024 TO APRIL 2025

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1206747

REGISTERED ADDRESS: 19
BLUEMANS, NORTH WEALD,
ESSEX CM16 6EU

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Introduction

Talk2Nish Peer Mentors is a peer to peer wellbeing mentoring programme for schools in England and complies with the law of England & Wales. It involves training school staff and students to deal with students' wellbeing issues, to talk to them in the first instance and signpost them to help and advice. Initially focused on secondary schools, it functions similar to a mental health first aid programme in the workplace which trains employees to recognise the crucial warning signs of mental ill health and feel confident to guide someone to appropriate support.

Such schemes have been growing over the past couple of years and many employers from WH Smith to Capgemini and Sky now operate a mental health first aid scheme or have mental health champions or ambassadors. It makes a great deal of sense to extend this to secondary schools where mental health problems are so rife and where the resources to tackle them are few. In this context we believe a mentoring programme will work best. This has been operated in other regions, such as Kent, and it means students can build a relationship of trust so that they can more easily ask for the help they need.

The idea is that young people may be more likely to talk about some of their problems to peers rather than authority figures such as teachers in the first instance. The programme will also encourage greater awareness in the school of mental health issues generally and of the issues that contribute to mental health problems, help reduce associated stigma, lead to increased self esteem and boost problem-solving skills and could reduce absence levels and improve academic performance.

Covid foregrounded mental health, but mental health problems have been increasing for many years, particularly among young people, with the World Health Organization saying that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

Schools have often not had the resources to provide adequate support before mental health problems escalate. While there is more funding for mental health in schools now, it is highly likely that it will fall short of addressing the full extent of the problem, which is contributing to soaring absence rates.

Structure and management

Talk2Nish is a young and developing charity, which is currently run by the board. The board meets every 6-8 weeks.

The Trustees are:

Christine Barry, Chair and Secretary

Rebecca Lewis

Jasmine Norton

Stuart Shepherd, Treasurer

Mandy Garner, Coordinator

Arline Okin

Salma Shah

Mandy Garner is the founder and coordinator and does all the day-to-day administrative tasks, including updating policies, reporting to the Charity Commission, coordinating training sessions, speaking to schools, updating the website and social media and promoting the charity.

The charity works with a freelance trainer, Yvette Dooley, from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Network.

All the trustees have responsibility for a particular area of development as outlined above and they report to every board meeting. Each trustee has been chosen for their expertise in a particular area. Christine Barry was a headteacher and education consultant. Rebecca Lewis is a teacher. Stuart Shepherd runs his own IT business. Arline Okin has years of experience working in marketing. Jasmine Norton works for a mental health charity. Mandy Garner has decades of experience as an education journalist and Salma Shah is a respected coach, focusing on diversity and inclusion with a special interest in education. She works with employers, many of whom have a strong vested interest in the wellbeing of their future workforce.

New trustees are being recruited in areas where expertise is lacking and the board is sent cvs and relevant information for discussion before approval.

The objectives of Talk2Nish Peer Mentors are:

To preserve and protect the good mental health of primary and secondary school-age children in England in particular by assisting, training and overseeing schools through the provision of peer mentoring and support programmes and other activities that raise awareness of mental health amongst the student population.

Activities and achievements 2024/25

The charity is in its early phase and spent much of the first part of 2024 on practical issues such as setting up a bank account, a Just Giving page and signing up to the Fundraising Regulator. In September it conducted its annual safeguarding review.

Talk2Nish Peer Mentors has so far trained three cohorts of peer mentors at its pilot school, the Anglo European School in Essex. The third cohort is just about to start work, having done a handover at the training session in March. Feedback forms will be going to the previous cohort and their coordinator and anonymous feedback is being sought from mentees.

An interview with the school was conducted in late 2024 to ascertain how the programme is working on the ground and any challenges they had encountered [see appendix]. Testimonials from the first cohort were obtained through feedback forms and a selection has been posted on the website, with agreement from the school. In the autumn, the charity added an online continuing professional development course to its offering, meaning that, after two sessions of training by the charity, schools can take the programme in-house, making it more sustainable for the long term.

The charity is now looking to expand the pilot to other schools in the Essex area. The coordinator spoke to a meeting of local schools in late October and information, including a leaflet on how the programme operates and any costs to schools plus an FAQ, were circulated via Essex County Council.

The charity is now seeking funding in order to train three schools in the coming year to expand the pilot and ensure that the programme is backed by clear evidence of impact before we expand further. The coordinator took part in an online fundraising course in early 2025 and is currently compiling a video for use in grant submissions. The charity is also talking to Anglo European School about a wider survey of parents to ascertain their needs.

In September 2024, the charity organised a sponsored walk from London to Brighton and publicised this on local news and radio. The walk was successful and around £3.3K was raised. A second sponsored walk is planned for September 2025, involving a wider range of participants. It has also signed up to Easyfundraising. The charity is planning an official launch in June 2025, with an event which will aim to involve the local community as well as peer mentors. It will include a mental health quiz. This will also aim to raise more funds.

Financial report

In the past 12 months Talk2Nish Peer Mentors has returned a profit of £2,580.

Through the first 12 months of opening our bank account and formally tracking finances we have raised approximately £4,450. This consists mainly of one-off donations (£1,000) and regular monthly donations (totalling just over £150) plus the largest money-generating event in 2024, the sponsored walk, which raised around £3,300.

There were only four key outgoings in the past month - three were to pay for training and course costs (£1,364, £99 & £447) and there was a one-off Charity Regulator Cost of £50.

It is estimated that training course costs will now slightly increase from what was originally budgeted due to increases in the cost of living, travel etc and that will be factored into forward strategy planning.

No budget has been planned for the next 12 months as of yet. There are scheduled events in which we will look to raise similar amounts as in 2024, but at present no estimations have been made. Similarly, as we do not have any existing pipeline business with schools we have not made any initial budget assumptions against training costs.

There is an expectation that we will need to spend money for sundries and expenses for events, which will offset any profits. Additionally, we will require Charity Insurance which has been budgeted for.

Appendix

Ruth Wootton, Deputy Head Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead at Anglo European School, Essex, says: "We are so fortunate to have the Talk2Nish programme in our school. Our student mentors have received high quality training which they can use to support younger students in school, and carry forward as skills for life. The mentors all talk positively about the skills they learned during the training and preparation days and we know that parents and students appreciate knowing that there is a group of young people who have been trained to listen and offer support and guidance. Our Talk2Nish mentors are a valuable part of the school's early help mental support framework."

Case study

Anglo European School in Ingatestone, Essex, is a large academy school with 1,500 students aged 11 to 19. Anisha Vidal-Garner, who Talk2Nish is named after, attended the school so it was fitting that it should be our pilot school. The school has received two rounds of mentor training so far and has embedded Talk2Nish in their pastoral support programme. Around 12 mentors have been trained in each cohort and the programme is promoted through assemblies and posters around the school.

Mentors wear lanyards and badges so they are easily identifiable.

Most referrals have gone through heads of year and form tutors to the coordinator who is based in the pastoral team or her manager. However, as the programme has become more well known some students have directly asked for mentors. Most of the issues mentors have dealt with have been related to friendship problems, bereavement, settling into school, self esteem/confidence issues or exams. Some mentees ask for specific mentors, for instance, based on ethnicity.

The Talk2Nish group has a page on the school's online platform where requests for support are posted by the coordinator, after checking that there are no safeguarding issues. The page is overseen by the head of pastoral support. Mentors then pick up the requests, usually within an hour. Mentors arrange to meet with mentees on a one-off or regular basis, usually in morning registration when they can find quiet spots around the school to talk.

Mentors support each other and if they have any problems they contact the coordinator. Most of the mentees are in the lower school, particularly years 7 and 8 who have never known the school not to have a peer mentor programme. The school anticipates demand will rise as these students progress through the school.

The feedback from mentors and mentees has been very positive and the school says the scheme is now a regular part of its student support offer.