

Young people need help to battle issues

There is a mental health crisis among our children and young people. How can the Church help those who need it?

If you see Chloe Bacon leading worship or acting on stage, you might assume she is always confident in herself. The 18-year-old college student has real skills in acting, singing and in talking about her faith.

But there are days when she doesn't feel able to get out of bed. And there have been times when she has self-harmed. Chloe has been diagnosed with moderate to severe depressive episodes, and is being treated with medication and regular counselling.

Her mental health issues have been a big part of her life for more than four years now. Although she is learning how to deal with them, when the bad days come, it still feels very real.

Chloe, who goes to St Jude's Church, Southsea, is among thousands of young people living with a mental health disorder. The NHS estimate that one in five of those aged between eight and 25 years old has mental health issues, and the numbers have risen since 2017. It's an issue we can see in our churches and church schools.

"When I have episodes, I lack motivation," she said. "I feel sad and I just want to lay in bed. That can sometimes trigger self-harm, which takes the form of cutting myself. I can find it difficult to go to college



Above: Chloe Bacon (centre) leading worship at a High Tide youth service in Emsworth; right: Chloe on the Surf Camp in Devon run by St Jude's, Southsea

on those days, but I've told my teachers and I can just email them and say I'm having a bad day.

"Because it's been going on for a while, I have also become good at masking it. With performing drama and leading worship, it's not actually about me, which is better. If I'm having a bad day, I can push myself to try the worship, and it can cheer me up to praise God.

"And once I'm actually performing the drama, I can manage to focus on being someone else for a couple of hours. You can step out of being yourself for a bit.

"I've had cognitive behaviour therapy and counselling, and I'm on medication. Since the medication, I've self-harmed less often. When that was all hidden from view, that was a real mess. But when you can speak about it without judgement with people who have been there before you, it's easier to prevent it happening.

"Self-harm feels like it has been stigmatised within the Church, or that people have skirted around it. But more recently things have become more proactive, and church is a really good place of love and acceptance to talk about



these things with people who aren't family.

"When a group of St Jude's teenagers went to Surf Camp in summer 2024, I became aware that I would be swimming and wearing short-sleeved clothes, and therefore my scars would be visible.

"It meant that I talked to people about it, and it was actually encouraging to be in an environment that was safe. It was my first experience feeling self-conscious about how my struggles had physically affected me, but I felt supported.

"In fact, Christian holidays of all sorts have been helpful – the regular High Tide summer holidays with young people from across the area, New Wine, and Bears Camp with St Jude's families. Being surrounded by friends means that whatever you are feeling, it's OK.

"How it's affected my faith has been different at different times. Over the past couple of years, people have prayed for healing and nothing seems to have happened, which has frustrated me – I've asked God why nothing seems to be changing.

"But as I've grown into faith, I've come to an acceptance that God has a plan. He meets you in your tears. He will use it for good, and there is a reason why I haven't been healed immediately. Obviously, I can also see God in the medication and therapy. I think I also understand that instant healing wouldn't necessarily be a permanent fix. God is teaching me that I can build resilience to fight it off when it comes again.

"These days it is easier for me to

Podcast helps us to examine wellbeing

ONE of the best ways of helping young people with mental health issues is to talk about it.

That's the premise behind an ongoing podcast that aims to help children and young people with their emotional health and wellbeing. Called 'The Wellbeing Club', it's a joint project between our diocese's CSR and #BeeWell.

It dives into real-life stories and includes open, informal chats with young people about wellbeing. They explore their experiences and offer insight and education for all listeners, whether they are a young person navigating similar challenges or an adult seeking to support.

The focus is creating a safe, environment for young people to open up about their emotional

wellbeing. It started with four online workshops in December 2024 and January 2025, where 10 young people helped to co-create the podcast.

The Wellbeing Club explores topics such as bullying, social media, loneliness, anxiety, puberty, and mental health diagnoses, while also providing practical support and resources.

Each episode explores data from the #BeeWell survey, prompting discussion on the topic and providing an evidence base from local young people. The

group also bring in an expert to talk about their professional and personal experience of the topic for a Q&A in each episode.

There is an introductory podcast and then seven more episodes, all focussing on a different element of wellbeing. Future episodes will be created in partnership with Express FM.

You can listen to them via www.youtube.com/@CSRStaff-o1p or see www.csrnet.org.uk/the-wellbeing-club-podcast



Some of the young people involved with the podcast

SUPPORT AND ADVICE

If you are struggling with mental health issues, here are some places to find advice and support:

- **Youthscape:** www.youthscape.co.uk/mentalhealthhub/self-harm
- **Young Minds:** www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person
- **Mind:** www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people

know what to do when the bad days come, and to recognise that that feeling isn't permanent. There are days when I'm sad, but more often these days I can pause and know that it will pass.

"It does seem there are so many young people who are suffering now, which maybe says something about our world. Many people can't understand it, so it's good to have others who have been through it to talk to, as they know what you are feeling. And when I see others suffering, perhaps those who are younger, I hope I can give them some advice too."

The mental health of children and young people was one of the