

# **Spotlight Report: Where do students aged 16+ go first for mental health advice?**

Engagement period: September 2025

Report published: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2026

# About Healthwatch

## Healthwatch Shropshire is your local health and social care champion.

If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. Last year, the Healthwatch network helped nearly a million people like you to have your say and get the support you need.



We are not experts in health and social care. We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved, and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- the organisations who provide services
- the commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board, Shropshire Council)
- service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how local services are working in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

Interactive surveys are just one of the methods we use to put a spotlight on services and ask people to share their views with us.

**We are very grateful to all those who took the time to talk with us and take part in our interactive survey. If you have an experience to share about the topics raised in the report, please do not hesitate to get in touch.**

# Context

Last year (2024) we attended college induction events to speak to young people aged 16+ to raise awareness of Healthwatch Shropshire and the services we provide. We asked them where they go for health information and advice.

To see our report: [Where do students go first for medical advice? | Healthwatch Shropshire.](#)

This year (2025) we wanted to find out where this age group go **first** to seek out mental health advice and support if they need it.

In line with our information and signposting role, we hoped that by simply asking the question we would also be able to raise awareness of the different sources of mental health support available to this age group. From the less formal, e.g. family, teachers, to NHS providers, e.g. pharmacists and the more specialist services such as [BeeU](#). (For more information about BeeU, see p.9)

We hoped that the information we gained would be helpful to NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin to help them to understand if this age group are aware of their ['Think Which Service'](#) campaign' which is aimed at letting people know which services are available to them and how to access them, and if any more targeted information might be needed.

# What we did

During **September 2025** we attended three scheduled welcome week opportunities across two different sites of Shrewsbury College:

- SCG<sup>2</sup> London Road Campus (September 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- SCG English Bridge Campus (September 3<sup>rd</sup>)
- SCG London Road Campus (September 4<sup>th</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> SCG – Shrewsbury Colleges Group

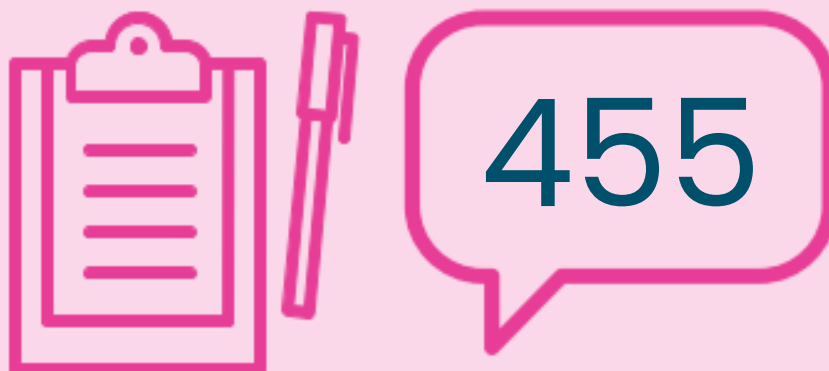
Where do students aged 16+ go  
first for mental health advice

Due to the number of students in attendance, we wanted to gather information in a way that was quick and engaging. We know from induction events in previous years that they are very busy which restricts the amount of time we have to engage with each student.



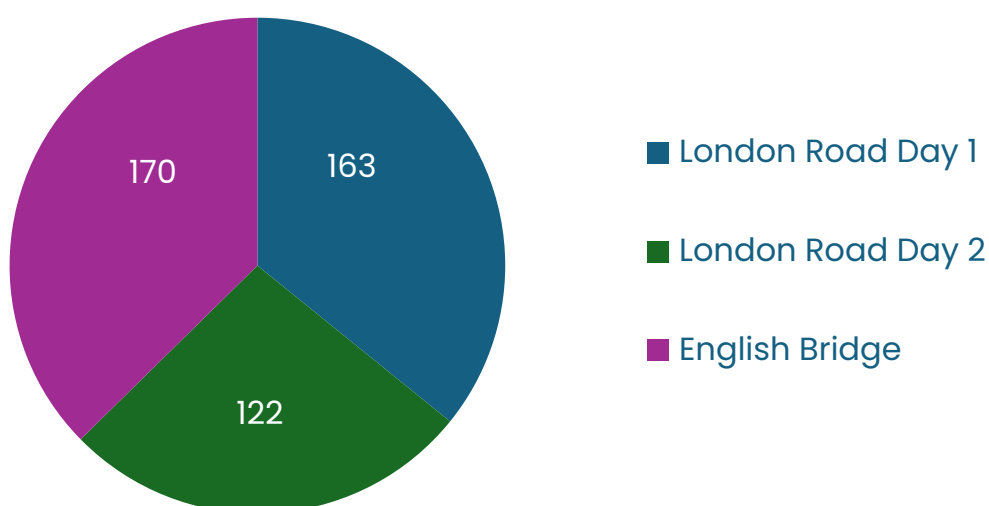
# Who we spoke to

We managed to speak to **455 students** across the three dates attended.



We spoke to the most students on a single day at the English Bridge campus, but we spoke to more overall at the London Road campus, as this was spread across two days.

**Number of Students From Each Campus**



# What we found out

We used an interactive voting activity and gave each student one counter to vote for one of nine choices which had been decided by the Healthwatch team. When we had the opportunity to speak to people for longer, we used this activity as a conversation starter to try to get a bit more detail.

## 🗳️ 'Where do you go to first for mental health advice?'

With the options of:

- |             |                                       |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| 🗳️ Friends  | 🗳️ 111 <sup>3</sup>                   |
| 🗳️ Family   | 🗳️ NHS App <sup>4</sup> / information |
| 🗳️ Teachers | 🗳️ BeeU <sup>5</sup>                  |
| 🗳️ Internet | 🗳️ Other                              |
| 🗳️ GP       |                                       |

When asked where the students would first go for medical advice, the top three most popular responses were:

- 🗳️ **44%** said they would **ask family members first**
- 🗳️ **32%** said they would **go directly to their friends**
- 🗳️ **7%** said they would **check the internet / Chat GPT<sup>6</sup>**

For all responses see table on next page

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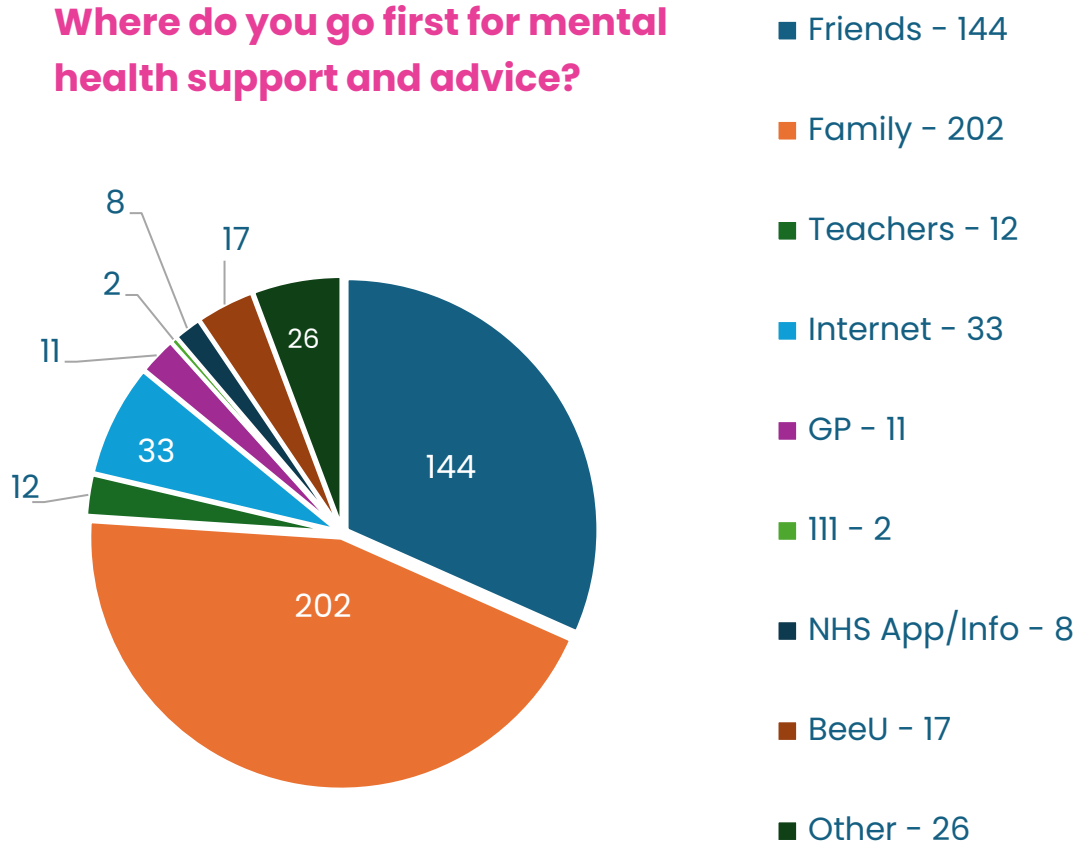
<sup>3</sup> [Get help for your symptoms – NHS 111](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NHS App and your NHS account – NHS](#)

<sup>5</sup> [BeeU :: Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust](#)

<sup>6</sup> Chat GPT is 'a chatbot that responds to almost any prompt, be it a question or command, in convincingly legible prose. GPT stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, which means it's a tool that can generate responses based on what it's already learned.' [What is ChatGPT, and is it safe to use? – Which?](#)

**Where do you go first for mental health support and advice?**



# What people told us

**"What's BeeU?  
What's a GP?"**

**"Chat GPT Because  
it's unbiased,  
confidential and  
convenient."**

**"I would just  
Google what's  
wrong with me."**

**"I wouldn't go to my parents  
because they worry too  
much, so I would go to the  
internet and find out as  
much as I could first."**

**"I would go to my  
family or to the gym."**

**"I would probably call  
Childline for example."**

**"I've got really good  
teachers."**

**"I would keep it  
to myself, I  
wouldn't talk to  
anyone."**

**"I find BeeU helpful,  
it's not as helpful as I  
hoped it would be, but  
I like having someone  
to talk to regularly."**

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<sup>7</sup> [Childline | Free counselling service for kids and young people | Childline](#)



Some students gave a brief explanation for their choice of vote, but the majority did not as it was very busy, and the stalls became crowded quickly.

It was not a huge surprise that **'Family'** was the most popular choice for this age group. As most of the students were around 16–17 years of age, many of them would still be living with parents, carers and guardians, although none of the students mentioned that they would seek advice here first just because of this convenience.

**'Internet'** was the third most popular response, with ChatGPT being the most popular platform for requesting information, although search engines and chat rooms were also mentioned. Most students liked the confidential, no fuss element of consulting the internet. We did not have the opportunity to go into detail with the students to ask how they know internet sites are confidential and the information they give is accurate and trustworthy.

There were a few students who voted **'Other'** and when we asked what they meant, they said that they would not seek advice from anywhere or anyone, instead writing in diaries, going to the pub and praying were all mentioned in response to the question.

## Awareness of official mental health support

We found out that there are several options for young people to choose if they are worried about their mental health, but that they are not widely known about by the student community:

### **'BeeU'**

'BeeU' provides emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people (ages 0 to 25) in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

The service provides:

- Emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people (0–25)

- Neurodevelopmental assessments for children – autism for 5–18-year-olds, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) for 6–18-year-olds
- Community Eating Disorder Services for 0–18-year-olds’.

[BeeU: Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust](#)

In regard to mental health, ‘BeeU will provide services for young people struggling with:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences and/or Developmental Trauma
- Anxiety
- Attachment Difficulties
- Behaviours of Concern (from a child or young person with a Learning Disability)
- Eating Disorders
- Low Mood and Depression
- Self-Harm
- Suicidal thoughts, intentions, plans, or attempts / In Crisis’

[BeeU :: Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust](#)

[Getting more help: Mental Health Pathway](#)

We found that only those students who had experience of using BeeU knew about it. Several students asked us what it was when looking at the voting choices. Those that had used the service gave a mixed, but generally negative response:

- ❗ “I would say my BeeU case worker. It took them a year to call me back, but things moved very quick when I was in crisis.”
- ❗ “I am with BeeU, but they aren’t very good, they aren’t good at communicating and it took a few good years to get me into the service.”
- ❗ “I wouldn’t use BeeU, they didn’t really help me much before. They told me things that shocked me, they told me I could self-harm as long as I use something clean.”
- ❗ “I wouldn’t go to BeeU, I have been in the past and every time I went I saw a different person and would have to start over again. There was no consistency, it was a waste of time.”

## **‘Kooth’**

‘Kooth’ is ‘A judgement-free [online] forum to get advice, help others and share your story’. [Kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com)

The Shropshire Council website says:

‘Kooth is a web based confidential support service, providing a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people.

Kooth offers young people the opportunity to have a text-based conversation with a qualified counsellor. Counsellors are available from 12noon to 10pm on weekdays and 6pm to 10 pm at weekends, every day of the year on a drop-in basis. Young people can access regular booked online counselling sessions as needed. Outside counselling hours young people can message the team and get support by the next day.

When a young person registers with Kooth they will have support available to them now and in the future. Support can be gained not only through counselling but articles, forums and discussion boards. All content is age appropriate, clinically approved and fully moderated’. [Kooth.com - online support for young people](https://www.kooth.com) | [Shropshire Council](https://www.shropshirecouncil.gov.uk)

‘Kooth’ is provided by the NHS and one of the services Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust signpost young people to. Several students we spoke to knew about it and had found it helpful in the past.

## **Health Assured Student Assistance Programme**

Shrewsbury Colleges Group has signed up to Health Assured which is an external student assistance programme providing a 24/7 helpline giving confidential expert advice on a wide range of issues including mental health, drugs, alcohol and debt.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [Calling the SAP helpline - non counselling v1](https://www.shropshirecouncil.gov.uk)

Students are also signposted to the 'Wisdom App' provided by Health Assured: 'In addition to practical help, students can enrol in a 4-week programme to help manage stress or follow the guides for sleep and meditation'. [Important information for Year 2 A Level students about their exams](#)

As it was most of the students first week at college they did not currently know about this service.

## Thank you

We want to thank Shrewsbury College's Group for continuing to invite us to student engagement events and all of the students who spoke to us during their induction.

Without your feedback we would not be able to let people providing health and social care services in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin know where you are going for health information and advice so they can make sure you know what is available to you and how you can access it.

## Next Steps

The findings of this spotlight report will be shared with the Shropshire Colleges Group (SCG), Shropshire Council Public Health and NHS Shropshire Telford and Wrekin to support their work to ensure young people know where they can go for help, support and reliable information in their own communities and online.





# healthwatch

## Shropshire

Healthwatch Shropshire  
4 The Creative Quarter,  
Shrewsbury Business Park,  
Shrewsbury,  
SY2 6LG.

01743 237884  
[www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk)  
[enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk)

