



A MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING TOOLKIT TRILOGY TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Mental Skills Training **Toolkit trilogy** (Mental Skills, Delivery Guide and Commissioning & Evaluation) are **strengths-based** resources co-designed by researchers at the University of Birmingham with St Basils, a West Midlands housing charity, Youth Voice, and homeless charity Homeless Link.
- The toolkits aim to impact upon homeless or at risk young people's **social inclusion** by improving **resilience**, build **capacity** for frontline service staff, and contribute to public sector **savings**.
- These build upon the My Strengths Training for Life™ (**MST4Life™**) programme,^{1,2} by translating 6+ years of learning into a user-friendly and shareable format for use among young people experiencing multiple and complex barriers to independence.
- Housing and homeless services can access these **freely available** resources online. Launch of the toolkits is timely, given the projected impact of **COVID-19** and the increasing need for evidence-based resources to support the well-being and employability of marginalised young people, and aid **recovery** from the pandemic (see policy **infographic** on the following page).

Introduction

UK homelessness is a major social issue costing the Government over £2 billion/year and resulting in poor long-term mental and physical health outcomes, challenges engaging with opportunities for education, employment and training, sustained social isolation and low life expectancy.

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Young people aged 16-24 are disproportionately affected, especially during and likely beyond COVID-19. The University of Birmingham's Prof Cumming and Dr Quinton submitted a response to the Government's call for evidence around the impact of the pandemic within the homeless sector.³ The document highlights the reasons why now, more than ever, we must support these young people to build their resilience, by defining the immediate and long-term concerns: mental health challenges, victimisation, engagement in risky behaviour, lack of employment opportunities, and heightened drop-out rates within education. To meet the demand for evidence-based support, the SPRINT project team,⁴ led by Prof Cumming, collaborated with staff and young people from partner organisations to co-design impactful resources for resilience.

Resources to support resilience

Following the principles of co-design, key stakeholders of over 100 staff and young people collaborated to produce expertly informed resources. Production activities provided stakeholder feedback that directly informed development of the resources, by exploring feasibility, identifying demand and defining barriers and enablers to implementation.

✗ Top **barriers** include being **text-heavy** or using **jargon**, which can be disengaging. There is a need for guidance on **how** to deliver the content.

✓ Top **enablers** are the inclusion of **colourful**, **flexible** and **user-friendly** content. There is a need to include **grounding techniques** to offer a break from activities when needed.

¹ A strengths-based programme developed by researchers at the University of Birmingham, and staff and young people from St Basils housing charity. It has led to significant improvements in resilience, self-worth and well-being for over 600 young people since 2014.

² An independent cost benefit analysis, carried out by The Birmingham Business School (2019), revealed participation in MST4Life™ improved young people's chances of engaging with opportunities for education, employment and training by 30 percentage points.

³ <https://www.sprintproject.org/impact>

⁴ <https://www.sprintproject.org>



Toolkit trilogy

To address enablers to engagement, the **Mental Skills Training Toolkit** is practical and accessible, consisting of six tools that improve personal skills, e.g. identifying strengths, goal-setting, emotional regulation and problem solving. The accompanying **Delivery Guide** was developed in response to a barrier to implementation and offers tips and guidance on how to deliver the content in an evidence-based and psychologically informed way. The **Commissioning & Evaluation Toolkit** completes the trilogy and is aimed at supporting commissioners to plan and evaluate strengths-based interventions. These can be downloaded for free via sprintproject.org/toolkit.

The collaborative process ensures these are fit for purpose. They have been designed to be flexible and adaptable to suit specific local needs and contexts.

Impact

Feedback from stakeholder and public events has been extremely positive. In the 7 months since the launch of the first toolkit, the resources have reached over 60,000 individuals within over 100 organisations.

'A fantastic tool to share with the organisations we support in our day to day roles'

- Co-production participant

Recommendations

We wish to turn now to our potential to influence policy at the organisational level. Taking the **toolkit trilogy** into consideration, we propose that investment in **strengths-based** interventions that are underpinned by evidence is more likely to **empower** young people to become independent; by equipping them with the **skills** needed to fulfil their **potential** and build **resilience** in the face of adversity through and beyond COVID-19.

SPRINT PROJECT

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to COVID-19, we urge policy makers to action the following changes:

GOVERNMENT

Provide extra resources to homeless and housing services to ensure adequate staffing levels and the proper provision of support.



HOUSING SERVICES

Implement evidence-based approaches to address the anticipated lack of employment opportunities, increase in financial difficulties and disengagement from education and training.



NHS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Provide NHS mental health services with evidence-based resources to give targeted preventative and early intervention support to young people; and prepare for an increase in both the prevalence & severity of mental health challenges within this group.



ALL SECTORS

As marginalised members of society, consider the multiple and complex support needs of homeless or at risk young people and how these are expected to increase as a result of the pandemic.



[WWW.SPRINTPROJECT.ORG/IMPACT](https://www.sprintproject.org/impact)
#MSTtoolkit #MST4Life

Find out more

MST4Life™ and associated research
www.sprintproject.org

St Basils
www.stbasils.org.uk

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