

HUMAN LEARNING SYSTEMS



Summary

Young People Cornwall supports youth across the county, prioritising youth autonomy and engagement.

Recently, they adopted the Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach, integrating it into a multi-agency project in five colleges to provide personalised mental health support.

They foster continuous learning through feedback and adaptive strategies. Despite initial challenges, the HLS approach has enhanced responsiveness, collaboration, and resourcefulness within their team, with plans to extend it organisation-wide.

Young People Cornwall

| Overview and history

Young People Cornwall offers a range of programmes, projects and services which all have one thing in common, putting the young person in control and engaging with them on their terms – to support their needs and aspirations.

The Human Learning Systems approach has been introduced to us by our commissioner for the college hubs project and is also being used in another project we are being funded for in a multi-agency partnership piece of work for 16+. This project specifically is working collaboratively within 5 different colleges to offer 1:1 and group support for young people with mild to moderate mental health issues. We are embedded within the college and work closely with staff and other partners. We are using the theory that staff are already motivated to help support the young people we are working with, so we are giving autonomy to do so in whichever way works best. This includes resources, appointments, session focus, types of engagement and promotion etc..



Do you use the language of 'Human Learning Systems' to describe your approach?

I do not believe we are using strictly HLS language. The essence of HLS seems very person centred, and aligns well with Youth Work Principles, so although we talk about the HLS approach, we are most likely using youth work terminology. More recently, we are describing various meetings as Action Learning Sets, and talking about Learning Cycles. As an organisation we have generated 'Significant Change Stories' for over 10 years and this has been embedded across all parts of the organisation – whilst not necessarily the 'language' of HLS we have probably adopted the HLS methodologies for a number of years.

| HLS Approach

| Human

What is Human about your work ?

We use Mind Stars as a tool to look at & track the progress of young people in 6 different areas of their lives. All of which are deemed to be important in growing confidence and improving resilience of children and young people.

The participatory nature of the tool gives us a framework which helps open discussions with young people around areas of their lives where they feel are working well, not so well. This enables us to identify the most appropriate and beneficial type of support, for example some young people may benefit from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy whilst others are keen to get more active, and some have needed direct support with housing.

The worker is able to respond to individual need whilst having a standardised goal-based outcome measure that collates an individual's progress & thus informing us whether our interventions / work is successful.

We also follow an 'I Thrive' model of care which enables us to provide the appropriate care at the time of need. We have also purchased consumables as well-being resources with a much wider view of what contributes to well-being. This has included things from gym memberships, to skates, to shopping vouchers.

| Learning

How have you enacted Learning as a management strategy?

We are consistently involving all parties for feedback of what is and isn't working. We have adopted an active plan, do, review, method to our delivery. This looks like facilitated workshops, as opposed to meetings, and updates, consultation and adaptive working where some offers have had a higher uptake than others.

Going into our second year, we have developed monthly Learning Sets and each quarter we meet up as a whole system. We are also offering reflective space for staff specific to delivery.



We are gathering narrative data such as presenting issues, barriers etc, and using these findings at our meetings to prepare for the upcoming months. This has allowed us to add resources and capacity to issues around low income and poverty, social isolation and living with parents that misuse substances and alcohol.

This has enabled us been able to challenge the parameters of personal health budgets around gym memberships and similar activity.

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| Systems

What is the ‘system’ that you have worked with/brought together?

It has been integral to the success of the project so far that we have worked closely and collaboratively with our partners (Intercom Trust, We Are With You, Hunrosa) and the college staff (tutors, student services and directly with different departments).

We have ensured each meeting/workshop is a place to reflect and to share ideas moving forward. We are all driven by the shared goal of providing the best possible support and opportunities to the students, which is enough to keep everyone on the same page.

There is a very cohesive feel to the group, which may be down to the style of the meetings and the feedback loops, but it is also important to be mindful of the more successful delivery and outcomes taking place in those areas where the staff, partners and pastoral team are working with the same understanding and values around HLS.

We have also formed a collaborative with these partners, plus a few other Integrated Care Board funded partners, and will be using a HLS approach as best we can to inform our delivery and respond to need.

| Governance/Accountability

How is this work being governed? How have your governance or accountability processes changed to work in a Human Learning Systems way?

We were previously measured from our input into the [MHDS Dataset](#) and measured against [KLOE's](#), which was data driven but did allow us to deliver in a goal-based way. However, it has been a challenge to then formalise



something which truly reflects and represents the adaptive, responsive and personalised support and delivery that has been provided.

We also needed to be mindful that a more formalised reporting method, other than data driven, is a way that partners and stakeholders will feel held and structured. We didn't get this right in year 1 as we mobilised fairly quickly, however, we feel we have some good things in place for year2 and we are happy to be involved with this learning process to develop this area. Moving forward, the Integrated Care Board and commissioning has changed, and as part of the new commissioning and collaboration we are developing a new reporting system. Internal governance / accountability has not really changed but there is a collective buy-in from senior managers / trustees as to the benefits of adopting an approach which focuses on the needs of young people but we are aware that many of our other funders require a far more quantitative approach to measuring success.

| Story of Change

How did you go about adopting an HLS approach? What was the spark for change? Where did you start? Who was involved?

Initially, there was a requirement for this approach by the commissioner. However, through learning about this approach and how well it aligns with the principles of youth work, we are keen to embed this across our whole organisation. The reason being that we are seeing quicker and more impactful responses from young people, and we are also seeing a much more passionate workforce.

The interventions being asked for now are actually cheaper than the standard approved 'art therapy' and 'equine therapy' that are suitable for some (but not all). We are still very much at the beginning of this approach as I feel it's maybe just been a concept we have ran with. We are very keen to continue and grow this.

| Barriers and Tensions

What difficulties did you encounter? How did you respond to them?

The buy-in from the colleges and other partners was a bit of a challenge about three quarters of the way through year one, at the end of 2023.

Initially, everyone was on board with the flexibility and adaptability, however, when we met there was a feeling of confusion and lack of structure compared to how most were used to working.

The need for some figures, outcomes, KPI's etc was evident. We have responded by planning the year's learning sets, progress reports, and I have met individually with key stakeholders to give them an opportunity to share any concerns separately to a wider audience.

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Another barrier to the project has been around the integration of our staff in one of the colleges. This is something we learned worked well, and so want to replicate, but the desire has not been from the college the same way it has in others. We are working on it by encouraging horizontal learning but there is still a bit of a journey to go on with the learning as an outcome from this college.

| Enablers

What were the factors/conditions which enabled you to adopt an HLS approach?

The current cost of living crisis has really sparked something across our organisation, particularly when it comes to how we spend resource money. This approach has allowed us to look at a massive variety of factors that are impacting mental health and well-being, and allow us to respond to it.

We have a very compassionate and driven team, and that includes all the top decision makers, all of whom are committed to learning from the front line staff as to what the need is. In that respect, we're very blessed that we are able to have the buy-in from commissioners, CEO's etc, and deliver impactful and individual support.

| What have you achieved?

What has adopting an HLS approach enabled you to do?

It's allowed me to cultivate an incredibly resourceful and creative team. It keeps the passion in the job, when you're able to do what you know is the right thing to do.

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| What next?

What is the next challenge for this work?

To embed the HLS approach across all of our projects and organisation.

