

Early intervention in eating disorders: South East and Dorset collaborative approach



What we do

A national programme helping eating disorder services to accelerate diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders in young people, using an innovative model designed to enable rapid access to specialised support for 16-25 year olds who have had an eating disorder for three years or less.



Why are we doing it?

Eating disorders affect 600,000-725,000 people in the UK every year. They carry one of the highest levels of mortality amongst mental health disorders, with peak onset during adolescence and early adulthood when the brain is still developing.



It is suggested that eating disorders have an associated cost of up to **£4.6 billion** in NHS treatment costs



up to **£8 billion** in lost income and up to **£3.1 billion** in carer-related costs each year

FREED - First episode Rapid Early intervention in Eating Disorders

The national programme aimed to:

- Support earlier intervention and treatment of eating disorders in young people
- Reduce the duration of untreated eating disorders in young people
- Reduce waiting times and day/inpatient admissions
- Reduce the need for inpatient or day-patient admissions
- Improve clinical outcomes.



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The AHSN Network achieved these outcomes by supporting eating disorder services to implement an evidence-based model known as FREED (First episode Rapid Early intervention for Eating Disorders), developed by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and King's College London. FREED is an innovative, evidence-based, specialist care package for 16 to 25 year olds with a first episode eating disorder of less than three years' duration.

The FREED model:

- Overcomes barriers to early treatment and recovery, and has a target waiting time from referral to treatment of four weeks.
- Provides highly coordinated early care, with a central focus on reducing the duration of an untreated eating disorder, overseen and led by a FREED champion.
- Consists of a service model and a care package of evidenced based treatments. This includes a greater emphasis on early engagement and change, family involvement, attention to social media use as a potential illness maintaining factor, and attention to transitions (such as transitions out of child/adolescent services and those to university, employment and other adult roles).

Whilst working with our local stakeholders across our AHSN footprint, the three AHSNs in the South East area (Wessex, Oxford and Kent Surrey Sussex) and Dorset agreed to collaborate to benefit from economies of scale, bringing together those with an interest in spread and adoption of the FREED model and sharing knowledge across the region.



8

mental health trusts across Wessex, Oxford and Kent Surrey Sussex (KSS) AHSN footprints have successfully implemented the FREED model



277*

patients in the South East and Dorset have started treatment as part of the FREED pathway

*Wessex - 100
Kent Surrey Sussex - 90
Oxford - 87



100%

of eligible eating disorder services in the South East and Dorset have implemented the FREED pathway



KSS AHSN developed a video with young people who received FREED interventions. The video has been downloaded over **3,600 times**



90

delegates attended our 'Innovation in eating disorders' event to explore innovative solutions to improve the eating disorder pathway

As a result of the event:

2

digital CBTe* self-help pilots for early intervention were launched

*CBTe: enhanced cognitive behaviour therapy



68

delegates attended our 'Peer Support in eating disorders' event to hear lived experience and understand peer support benefits

As a result of the event:

40%

of attendees reported an increase in their knowledge around peer support

100%

would advocate peer support in their own eating disorder teams



104

responses to our peer support audit. Results demonstrated an interest in learning more about peer support roles, and the value they bring to patients and services



Developed a practical FREED inequalities toolkit to help eating disorder services to better understand demographics and protected characteristics of young people with eating disorders

You can download the toolkit [here](#).



97

eating disorder colleagues received SLaM FREED training to support the implementation of the model across the South East and Dorset



Facilitated

11

community of practice meetings across the South East and Dorset, attended by 205 healthcare professionals



What we delivered in 2020-23:

Implementation:

Wessex, Oxford and KSS AHSNs have successfully supported eight NHS trusts to implement the early intervention model, with 100% of all eligible eating disorder services implementing the FREED pathway. This has provided an evidence based, sustainable model for early intervention in eating disorders for 16 to 25 year olds who have had an eating disorder for three years or less.

Engagement:

The South East AHSNs established a Community of Practice to support colleagues interested in and engaged with the adoption of the FREED model across the South East region.

Well attended meetings were conducted every two months (11 in total) with input from FREED Network colleagues (SLaM) and the Health Innovation Network (HIN), as well as guest speakers from across the country to share innovations and best practice. This has encouraged connections and support between eating disorder teams within AHSN geographies and beyond.

The South East Innovation in Eating Disorder event held in November 2022 showcased five innovations (informally selected by the SE Eating Disorders Early Intervention Collaborative as interesting and potentially beneficial) to ninety clinicians and commissioners across the South East and Dorset. As a result of this event, two eating disorder services across the South East and Dorset are piloting a digital CBTe self-help tool.

Peer support:

The South East AHSNs conducted an audit to explore the potential role of peer support in eating disorder services. Surveys aimed at the NHS workforce, service users and carers gathered the views and experiences. You can download the full survey analysis from the Wessex AHSN Peer Support in Eating Disorders [webpage](#).

With over 100 respondents, the audit findings were used to co-create a South East AHSN peer support webinar in March 2023, providing a forum to share best practice and to learn how to safely implement these roles. Attendees heard from peers currently working in eating disorder services and gained insights from their feedback. We saw a 40% increase in attendees' knowledge post event and 100% said they would advocate that peer support workers should be included within their own eating disorder teams. You can watch the webinar [here](#).



Addressing health inequalities:

The FREED inequalities toolkit was developed by KSS AHSN and Unity Insights to help better understand the needs and demographics of young people presenting with an eating disorder (ED) across Kent, Surrey and Sussex. It helps teams to understand who is using the FREED programme and if this offer is equitable across the local population of young people with an eating disorder. This aligns with the adoption of the Core20PLUS5 approach to reduce health inequalities for young people, including those in the 20% most deprived areas of the population and in ethnic minority communities. You can download the KSS AHSN FREED inequalities toolkit [here](#).

Patient partnership: The voices of young people

KSS AHSN developed a video with young people who received the FREED intervention. The video has been disseminated nationally across FREED programmes, training sessions and social media, and downloaded over 3,600 times.

You can watch the video [here](#).

“I would say that going to treatment (FREED) actually saved my life. I got my sparkle back.”

FREED service user

Sussex Eating Disorder Service

“I was told by my doctor I wouldn’t make it through my twenties if I carried on in the way that I was acting, so I think that early intervention in eating disorders is so crucial. You don’t want to waste your life... you do deserve to get better.”

FREED service user

Sussex Eating Disorder Service

“Anorexia doesn’t let you shine. I almost felt like I was watching life through a TV in my head, like I was there but I wasn’t quite there - and then suddenly you’re there in full force and you’re going out to parties, to dinner with your friends. There was such a risk with it that I would live a life that wasn’t mine - it was anorexia’s - and I’ve got it back. [...] I think early intervention is so important. I’m fully recovered and I’m in such an incredible place in life, and I really really wish and hope that everyone who struggles will end up in that place too, because it is possible.”

FREED service user

Sussex Eating Disorder Service

“I just wanted to say thank you so much for convening a fantastic webinar today. The combination of speakers was superb and I found it profoundly moving to hear what the peer support workers had to say about their experiences of working in NHS services. It has sparked lots of thoughts for me about the evolution that we are living in, in which mental healthcare professionals are starting to share power with people who have lived experience.”

Delegate

South East Peer Support webinar, March 2023

“I thought it was very special that the webinar managed to be both powerful/thought-provoking and highly practical. This is the AHSN Network at its very best, giving frontline staff and people with lived experience access to a range of practical approaches & resources from across the country, to share and learn from.

It also brought me joy to hear the peer support workers talk about the mobilisation of the FREED services in each of their geographies.”

National programme director

AHSN Network



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