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**October 10, 2018: World Mental Health Day  
'Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World'**

<http://www.efpa.eu/news/october-10-2018world-mental-health-day-young-people-and-mental-health-in-a-changing-world>

Adolescence and the early years of adulthood are a period of life with many transitions. The young person is growing up both physically and psychologically, learning how to safely spend time away from their family with friends and partners.

This can be a time where the young person may take on new roles that are rewarding and challenging. There also can be times of great stress, sometimes leading to mental distress, maybe severe distress.

Adolescence is also a period of life where the main health problems are in general not infections nor age related, but instead are behaviours. They may be health-compromising behaviours or high-risk behaviours that can lead to serious harm, and these behaviours can sometimes even be fatal. The most serious are associated with substance misuse, poor life conditions, poor health-related quality of life and poor mental health.

In recent decades an approach to prevention has emerged, where seeking the wellbeing of all young people is the best way to deal with adolescents' mental health problems, rather than focusing on helping one person at a time after they became unwell. This approach aims to avoid risks and keep them away from situations that could harm them.

This approach has made a dramatic change. **Promotion and prevention are seen as two sides of the same coin, aiming to increase young people's behavioural capacity to cope with life challenges with minimum harmful effects and at the same time maximising their wellbeing, self-fulfilment, and social engagement.**

Life conditions in most areas of the world have been generally improving and fatalities among young people have been falling. However, they face many novel challenges:

- the technological world where personal relationships online can be very different than in the real world;
- they also face, along with all age groups the environmental, political and socioeconomic changes that have led to armed conflicts and humanitarian crises, forcing many families, with young members, to flee from their homes.

**Psychologists have a key role in the field of prevention science**

The European Federation of Psychologists' Associations EFPA stresses the urgent need to develop public policies that are based on firm evidence developed by researchers, including psychologists, from the field of prevention science and urges its member associations to take action in their own countries to support this.

These public policies need to be 'adolescent friendly' and aim to promote their personal and social competence, their social engagement and their life opportunities, so as to build strong support peer networks for young people.

Psychologists have a key role in this field drawing on psychological science and practice.

**Two projects led by psychologists, supporting young people**

Examples of programmes that aim to support young people having a good start in life and a flourishing adolescence are illustrated by work led by psychologists in **Denmark and Portugal.**



**The Danish led programme is called the Fairstart Foundation.**

Millions of children and youth grow up without parents - in orphanages, foster care, migrant and refugee camps. Due to overworked, uneducated and underprivileged caregivers and teachers, only half of these children pass the 9th grade and enter the job market in adulthood.

To improve mental health and learning, the Fairstart Foundation offers four months, research based training programs online for groups of caregivers in attachment-based care. In cooperation with NGOs, governments and professional organisations, Fairstart so far has developed free versions in 20 languages, applied by partners in 26 countries.

To further support local care systems expertise building, the international online instructor education in group training has educated 420 students from all continents, forming an international exchange network working from uniform standards of quality care. These instructors have now trained the caregivers of more than 30.000 placed children and youth, making Fairstart the only programme to educate underprivileged caregivers from Greenland to Chile.

**A second example, in Portugal is the Dream Teens project.**

The Dream Teens are a national network of teenagers responding to the need to “give a voice” to young people. The project has provided a support structure so that their ideas can be heard, and can have an impact promoting youths’ participation in social contexts and in public policies in the areas of well-being, health and active citizenship.

Created in 2014, the Dream Teens network involved a total of 147 Portuguese young people, aged between 11 and 18 years, from all over Portugal, who were trained and motivated to active intervention in the area of health and well-being, through FaceBook and SKYPE. Now-a-days, endowed with action-research skills as junior-research specialists, these young people continue to promote their health, and the health of their communities

There are more good examples of work in this field [on the EFPA Promotion and Prevention website](#).

**Action needed**

In celebrating World Mental Health Day 2018 EFPA stresses that this focus on universal prevention and on general wellbeing and social engagement will not prevent all mental health problems among adolescents. Those who do develop problems have a right to have access to a local, sustainable, health system to address them and provide adequate care.

Mental health services have much work to do to improve their standards as shown by the **UN Special Rapporteur report**. Psychologists have much to offer as positive alternatives and should work to ensure that all mental health services prioritize prevention and respect human rights.

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**Margarida Gaspar de Matos**, Convener of the EFPA Board of Prevention and Promotion

**Tony Wainwright**, Deputy Convener of the EFPA Board of Prevention and Promotion

<http://preventionintervention.efpa.eu/resources/children-and-young-people-programmes/>

<http://www.dreamteens-en.aventurasocial.com/>

<http://fairstartfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/International-Online-Child-and-Youth-Care-Education-How-to-Train-Care-Worker-Groups.pdf>

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21689>