

## Letters to a President

### **Commended Entry Y11 – Owen Knott**

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington DC

20500

Dear Mr President,

I must begin my letter by thanking you for taking the time to listen to and to respond to the voice of young people from across the world, particularly in England. It is refreshing to see a President in office who values the thoughts and opinions of the youth in his decisions.

My name is Owen, and I am currently in my final year of secondary school in Manchester. I am 16 years old and have a keen interest in both US and UK politics. I am involved in political youth campaigning and representation groups across the Greater Manchester area.

It has been an immense pleasure to witness the involvement of young people in your Presidential Term, beginning with the performance of Amanda Gorman's poetry at your Inauguration Ceremony. Your Inauguration truly did make history and I hope that it has defined a turning point in US politics. I believe that one of the most significant issues facing young people is their mental health.

I think that mental health support must be offered in a setting that young people are comfortable in. If young people have access to the resources that they need, there will be a significant drop in suicide rates.

During my research for this letter, I discovered a report that was released in September 2020 by 'Mental Health America'.

They have reached 31,000,000 people through their education programs. In my opinion, America needs a blanket Citizenship curriculum which teaches pupils about mental health. This will benefit every single American. You have expressed your commitment to prohibiting discrimination in education and I feel that this would help you reach your goal.

I also believe that the introduction of a national healthcare system that makes provisions for all citizens who are struggling with mental health would greatly benefit every American.

Mental Health America have recently pioneered a Young Leaders Council that 'identifies leaders who have created initiatives that fill gaps in mental health support'. As part of their role, young people 'highlight their ideas in a report'.

One statement which stood out to me was:

'Since the start of the pandemic, mental health-related emergency visits increased by 31% for 12-17-year-olds, and 1 in 4 young adults contemplated suicide'.

I know from experience that if a young person is given the resources that they need at an early point, the issues that they face do not escalate. A few years ago, I struggled with anxiety, but I was not able to find the help I needed easily in my community because I had not been signposted to the relevant organisations. Since then, I have become involved in local politics and I have been appointed as my school's Head Boy. I would not have been able to do this without access to these services.

To conclude, I would like to thank you once again for taking the time to read my letter. I believe that a focus on improving young people's mental health services will enable America to 'Build Back Better'.

Yours sincerely,

Owen.