



investing in children

Evaluation for Investing in Children Membership

Dublin Mid-Leinster Region Youth Advocate Programme

Introduction

For the purpose of this evaluation I had the opportunity to meet with some young people from Dublin and the surrounding communities. They were Chelsea, Georgina, Teaghen and Katie.

Dublin Mid – Leinster Region Youth Advocate Programme aims to ensure that young people have access to advice and support on a wide range of lifestyle issues, including education, family issues, health and personal support.

They also support some young people in out-of-home care provision by providing opportunities for these young people to discuss their experience of the care they are receiving. The young people who are referred into the community-based projects have a variety of difficulties, including home life, education, behaviour and community issues.

The young people are supported to access 15 hours per week guidance from a community-based advocate over a six month period. This provides young people with an opportunity to be listened to and supported, through a strength based approach, to deal with any difficulties they might face.

The teams also encourage young people to get involved in decision-making and talk about how the service as a whole can better support them.

Developments have been made to the service based on this dialogue and involvement.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change

Individual Service Planning and Goal Setting

Individual service plans and goal setting allows the young people the opportunity to discuss issues they want to improve with their case manager.

Katie explained: **"I got involved to help with my confidence and was really pleased when they started listening and speaking to me instead of to my parents."**

Teaghen also told me: **"I chatted with them about going back to school and told them the reasons why I wasn't going to school."**

The young people explained that it is during this stage of their involvement with YAP that they spend time deciding on and establishing goals they want to achieve. They are then supported by an advocate to accomplish their goals.

Reviewing Service Plans

The reviews are carried out every few months, allowing young people the opportunity to discuss how well they think the programme is going.

Chelsea explained: "**At one of the meetings I asked about continuing to see my advocate because the end of the six months was coming up.**" She added: "**I wanted to know if they could extend it a bit, which they did from six months to nine months.**"

Katie told me: "**You get books to write stuff in and every two months you review it.**" She was very pleased to tell me: "**I nearly always spoke about going back to school and have gone to school every day this week and have just started to reduce my medication.**"

After reviewing the evaluation; Teaghen and Georgina recommended all young people should be given the option to use a book like Katie and would like Yap to consider this.

Some young people also explained that they became more confident in expressing their ideas and opinions at these meetings, because they felt respected, valued and listened to.

Group work

Chelsea also informed me: "**We also devised a new leaflet to make it more colourful and with more pictures so more people could understand better.**" These young people also told me how they and other young people have attended national participation events to discuss their ideas to develop the programme nationally.

Recommendations Made by Young People

When I met with the young people, a discussion took place about whether they had any ideas to improve the Youth Advocacy Programme. Below is what some young people told me.

Katie told me about her stay in hospital and how she received emotional well-being support. She made a recommendation that she would like YAP to consider. She explained: "**More people need to know about YAP, especially when they have been in hospital.**" She added: "**It's like being in a big bubble when you leave and getting some information and feedback from YAP would really be good.**"

We also discussed the possibility of YAP advocates supporting young people within mental health hospitals and I am sure further discussion on this would be welcome.

Chelsea said: "**I think YAP should get you to talk to young people about social workers as so many young people don't like them and it would be good if they could have the chance to have their say, like we are having about YAP.**"

Katie explained: **“It took a really long time to get on to YAP and it would have been good if someone could have come out and explained why.”**

Conclusion

The young people informed me that there were many opportunities on an individual basis to participate in decision making regarding the support and guidance they receive. The young people have also had opportunities to impact on specific aspects of the service, which have resulted in positive changes.

The young people informed me that their personal situation had improved as a direct result of the advice and support they had received from Dublin Mid-Leinster Region Youth Advocate Programme.

There are some great examples of how the team has given young people the opportunity to have an impact on new developments, which include updates to YAP Ireland’s website and improvements to information leaflets. This has allowed changes to take place based on the ideas of the young people.

For these reasons I would like to recommend that Dublin Mid-Leinster Region Youth Advocate Program receives Investing in Children Membership status and look forward to further developments made by the young people when coming to re-evaluate the project in the near future

The following young people have read and agreed with the report and recommend that Dublin Mid-Leinster Region Youth Advocate Programme receives Investing in Children Membership. They were Georgina, Teaghen and Katie who all accessed the programme when the report was written.

I would like to finish by saying ‘Thank you and well done’ to all the young people and staff for their support and contributions to this evaluation for Investing in Children Membership.

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