



investing in children

Evaluation for Investing in Children Membership

North, North East Dublin Regional Youth Advocate Programme

For the purpose of this evaluation for Investing in Children membership I had the opportunity to meet with Nikita, Martin, Alannah, Michaela, Siobhan, Louise and Niamh, who access the Youth Advocate Programme (YAP) in North Dublin and the North East region.

The Young Advocate Programme (YAP) was established in 2002 to provide vulnerable young people, their families and communities support through a community based, strengths focused, intensive support model.

The programme then expanded in 2004, with the support of Health Boards (now the Health Service Executive) establishing programmes in Louth and Meath, as well as Dublin North and these form the North East Region of Youth Advocate Programme. The teams offer support to young people and families from these communities and surrounding areas and are made up of case managers and several locally based advocates. A young person will be allocated an advocate at the beginning of their involvement, according to shared interests and individual strengths. Young people will then work with the advocate for up to 15 hours per week over a six month period.

I had the opportunity to meet with some young people who are supported by the teams. I was told by the young people that they are supported to express their own views and opinions throughout their participation in the programme. This report will highlight the opportunities young people have had to participate in decision making and will identify any changes that have taken place.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change

Individual Service Planning and Goal Setting

All of the young people spoke to me about how much input they had at the beginning of their involvement with YAP.

Nikita told me, **“I found this meeting really helpful because they asked me what I like and, when I said music, they tried to match me with an advocate who had the same taste in music as me, which is what happened.”**

Siobhan informed me about what goals she established. She explained: **“I want to discover myself and look at my weaknesses and build on my strengths.”** She added: **“They help me look at what I am good at and look for ways that I can keep on doing these things.”**

Michaela highlighted: **“They spoke to me about what I wanted to do and how they could work with me to do it.”**

Niamh informed me: **“I spoke about getting on with my mum and they told me how they can help me with this.”**

The young people also told me how they valued the opportunity to be listened to and were able to paint a vivid picture about what is happening in their lives and how the support they had received had impacted so positively.

Reviewing Service Plans

The young people are given the opportunity to meet with their advocate and case manager to discuss how their individual service plan is progressing and review the goals they have set.

Martin informed me: **“It is good that you get the chance to meet and discuss how things are going and if there is anything you want to change.”**

Niamh gave details of the reviewing process. She explained: **“I found these meetings very helpful as I could talk to my advocate about anything, because they listen to me, and it was so different to meetings I've had before with my psychologist.”**

Nikita told me: **“They really listened to me from the start and asked me what things I want to improve in my life.”** She added: **“I spoke about going to school more and behaving at both school and home, and working on my anger with my family and friends and getting on better with my brother and mother.”**

Alannah highlighted: **“The review meetings are set up so you can have your say about how things are going.”**

It was evident from the conversations I had with these young people that they felt in control of their reviews and could make contributions that were significant in making positive changes in their lives.

Working with the Advocates

All of the young people I met with expressed pleasure that the individual support they received from their advocate was good and that this part of the service was where they felt listened to the most. They could see the change in their individual lives.

Martin explained: **“They really listen to you and help you change things in your life.”**

Alannah added: **“I have not been in school for a year and they have not told me that I need to go back to school. Instead they are helping me to get on a course called Youth Reach in Louth.”**

Group work

These meetings allow young people the opportunity to raise issues that are important to them and to participate in community based events.

Some young people were also involved in decision making regarding a YAP Ireland National Citizenship event titled, “I am a Citizen”, which was held on the 23rd of October this year.

Nikita explained: **“There were three young people who worked on the citizenship project and we decided to do a survey in three different schools to find out what makes young people feel like they are citizens.”**

Niamh explained: **“Some young people have been helping YAP with the website and decided to make some videos about what we thought of the YAP and how it has helped us, so all the young people know something about it in case they use it.”**

Recommendations made by young people

When I met with these young people I asked if anything could be improved within the YAP programme.

Martin explained: **“The advocates only get 15 Euros a week to do things with us and I think YAP should put it up, because you can’t do much with that amount.”**

They also told me that it would be good if social workers could learn from the way YAP work.

Martin explained: **“I think we should talk to social workers about how YAP is so different.”** He added: **“All they do is put you down whereas YAP lift you up.”**

Alannah added, **“The social workers I have had have never really listened to me about what is going on in my life, and judge me for the stupid things I have done before.”**

Nikita explained: **“I think social workers need to make young people more aware of YAP, because my social worker did not tell me anything before I was referred and I had no idea what to expect.”**

I would, therefore, like to recommend that these young people are given the opportunity to come together and explore how the advocacy programme can impact on the practice of social work.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly the YAP programme in Louth and Meath is built on the principle that young people have the right to be heard, be listened to and to see that their views bring about meaningful changes in their lives. The young people I met with were adamant that, throughout these regions, YAP involves them in all decisions affecting them.

They also told me that working with the advocates works really well because they listen to them and enable them to make their views known. Young people’s views and ideas are respected and I am sure that the young people’s ideas to engage with social workers will be supported in the future.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to write this evaluation. When I asked the young people if they agreed that Dublin North, North East Youth Advocate Programme should get Investing in Children membership they all said yes! Therefore, I have no hesitation in recommending that the Dublin North, North East Region of the National Youth Advocate Programme receive Investing in Children membership.

The following young people have read and agreed with the report and recommend that Dublin North, North East Youth Advocate Programme receives Investing in Children Membership. They were Nikita, Martin, Alannah, Michaela, Siobhan, Louise and Niamh, who all accessed the programme when the report was written.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to write this evaluation and finish by saying, "Well done".

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