

## **Investing in Children Membership Award™ Evaluation.**



investing in children

### **Youth Advocate Programmes** **Western Region**

Youth Advocate Programmes is based throughout Ireland. YAP Ireland provides intensive, focused support to children, young people and families with a range of needs. The advocates, along with the young people, work intensively on personal development issues using a strength based approach with both the young person and their family. The approach is very much participative and involves listening to the voice of the young person and their carers to bring about positive change. Practice is based upon the development of a trusting relationship between a supportive, trained and skilled adult advocate, the young person and their family. An advocate can meet with their young person for up to 15 hours per week and will continue for six months. The support the young people receive is developed around their individual needs.

YAP Ireland offers a wraparound approach to address the needs of the young person within their family and local community. YAP's goal is to empower young people and their families and to put in place supports that will remain after programme involvement has ended. The model is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of a wide range of client groups. Within the model of support each young person has an Individual Service Plan that sets out the goals for a young person to work towards. All young people get the chance to say who can attend their meeting. Group work is also offered as a means of support to each young person. The young people are afforded the opportunities to participate in activities, events and discussions.

For the purpose of this re-evaluation I met with 13 young people aged between 10 and 17yrs. The 13 young people represented the Midland Counties of Ireland, Co. Galway, Co. Cavan, Co. Longford, Co Meath and Co. Westmeath. Three young people had been involved between one and two weeks. One young person had been involved for one month and one young person had been involved for two months. Five young people had been involved with YAP for about three months. One young person has been involved with YAP for five months and two young people had been involved with YAP for approximately one year. (*See Appendix 1 for young people names and ages.*)

### **Individual Opportunities for Dialogue and Change**

An individual service plan is devised for each young person based on their strengths and their family's strengths. The Service Plan details the types of goals that could be achieved by the young person. When asked how often the young people meet with their advocates there were various responses. Most young people meet their advocates twice weekly and two young people said they met their advocates at least three times a week. All young people have 15 hours allocated on a weekly basis with their advocate.

Mary said that ***“YAP helped me to settle in school in 5<sup>th</sup> year and helped me believe that I can do things in life – self-belief. I can now listen and take in stuff in in my classes with my teachers and I can do the same with YAP.”***

Jessica was very confident about the support from her advocate saying that they go places all the time, like the library. In fact, it was her advocate who supported her to join the library. She said her advocate really does listen to her because she wants to learn to make cheesecakes and that is the plan for their next task.

Gary said that he would talk to his advocate quite a lot about the future. Gary told me that he usually makes the suggestions for activities and his advocate listens to him; for example, he loves bowling and his advocate would take him bowling. Other young people gave examples of going to the cinema or playing pool and eating out. Brian stated that he goes for walks with his advocate. When they go for something to eat, he always suggests where they should eat. Mathew loves history and explained that his advocate has taken him to various museums around the local area. Tyrone's advocate helped him to join a boxing club which was something he had never done before but had always wanted to. Mary meets with her advocate three times a week. They discuss where to go and what to do.

Although Breige said ***“Ultimately the decision is mine about what we do.”***

Kaytlin stated that they ***“drink lots of hot chocolate, go to the library, window shopping, we've been to Roscommon and Ballinasloe.”***

Within each young person's individual plan, they have an opportunity to set goals and targets based on their strengths.

Molly stated, ***“It's like planning for the future.”*** Molly said when she leaves school she wants to be a beautician and her advocate is helping her explore this avenues.

Ikenna wants to do psychology, law and English, ***“either one of these or all of them.”***

Tyrone stated he ***“wants to be an accountant or study science or become an athlete.”***

Katylin and Jesscia want to be a police woman/a guard and Mary said that she is now more focused on her school work because of her advocate as she wants to be a midwife. Brian says since becoming involved with YAP he has more interest in playing the piano and ukulele and is more motivated to go to lessons. John has also said that has more interest in learning to play the drums. Jessica stated that she is hoping that her advocate will help her to play rugby and she is hoping to get started with Longford Rugby Club.

Oisin says that he plays pool a lot with his advocate. For him having an advocate has made a difference in his life because it gets him out of the house,

***“It's a change of scenery.”***

He stated that that his behaviour in school has improved and he is working towards his junior cert exam. He said that

***“I am putting things in place so that next year is better than this year [at school].”***

Briege said ***“YAP is a very good service as it has helped me learn to knit, something that I love to do. I am not your typical teenager, but I like doing things that help me in life.”***

Briege went on to say ***“I now try my best at everything and Cathy [Advocate] will help me for the next five months.”***

### Groupwork

According to the young people, each area has their own participation group where they meet with the advocates on a weekly basis. The young people get the opportunity to suggest what they want to do in the group. It is a mixture of activity based sessions and discussions with the overarching theme about ***“Our voice being heard.”***

Some of the topics have included examining the role of social workers and what makes someone a good social worker. Mathew said that the group work programme helps to show you what young people can do and how it can be done.

Jessica says that young people come up with the suggestions about what to do and the places to go, for example, the group went to Lanesborough, Co. Longford. The Midland Group meet up as a team and do fun activities and according to them, they make suggestions for the activities every Wednesday night.

The young people went on to explain that each group, in each area, are working towards a presentation at the Annual Conference, being held in Croke Park on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

They explained that Siobhan (CEO) chooses a theme and each group have to interpret the theme accordingly. The theme for 2016 is *‘The importance of Young people’s voices in the service they receive.’* During this process, the advocates are available for support but the young people clearly state what they want to do. For example: The Cavan group are in the process of making a film to represent *‘youth voice’* and one young person from Cavan has written a rap song:

***“We are the mid YAP, we don’t just YAP we rap.”***

This is to be presented at the Annual Conference. The young people from Galway are in the process of organising a meeting with a Local TD (Member of Parliament) to talk about their issues in the education system and what it is like to be involved with social services. The young people have devised the questions and are planning to interview the TD. The young people will present their answers at the conference.

## Being Listened Too...

When the young people were asked how they know that they have been listened to. Stephen responded by saying,

***“Because they are not deaf, they have too.”***

In exploring this with Stephen, he clarified his statement by saying that his advocate always listens to him and he knows it because the advocate answers his questions and his advocate remembers what he tells him each week. Jessica says that you know that you are listened to because

***“They [advocates] are there for you when something goes wrong... They come round to your house and talk about your feelings.”***

Ikenna said ***“If something happens that’s bad, they will try and help fix it. If you tell them something, they don’t go and tell everyone about it.”***

Molly says ***“They react to your problems and I feel comfortable with my advocate. I know she is listening to me by her facial expressions.”***

Gary says ***“That they help you set goals. They help you if you get stuck with tests and they help you take action... and they don’t come across as condescending.”***

When asked how or what has changed or how the change has been beneficial. Briege was able to explain that she had nothing to look forward to each week but now she does.

***“I now have three days I look forward to [being out with my advocate.] Since having an advocate, I am more confident with friends and they have been inviting me to do things such as play soccer and next week I have been invited to the Galway Races. The change is friends are now asking me to go along with them, now I have other things to look forward to.”***

Briege was very confident in saying that her advocate has inspired her so much that she would like to be an advocate when she is older.

Jessica said that ***“Being part of YAP helps you not to struggle with stuff and feel more confident and have more self-esteem.”***

Briege reported ***“YAP helps you believe in yourself and I have stopped blaming myself for things in the past... If you have something wrong they help you trust in yourself that everything is going to be fine.”***

Katylin told ***“YAP can help you with your issues and rough edges. Get you into good stuff that helps you take your mind of the issues.”***

Ikenna commented ***“They [advocates and YAP] help you look at the perception of where you are, change how you think about things and lets you see things in a different way as an outsider.”***

Breige gave an example of young people feeling listened to and bringing about change. She talked about the opportunity to participate in the interviewing process for new advocates. She said that she uses her own advocate as a guide for employing potential advocates. She said she uses

***“My own advocate is my benchmark... [when interviewing new recruits.]”***

She said that during the interviews, she would say to herself

***“If I was looking for answers could I ring this person up and feel confidence in them.”***

## Conclusion

YAP provides many opportunities for the young people to build on their strengths and this is evident in the types of activities and events that the young people are involved in. YAP delivers a strength-based programme and it was evident each of the young people feels valued by the support from their advocate. Each young person stated that they feel listened to and they are very much part of the decisions being made about their lives. All of the young people were able to talk about the personal change they have experienced and the fact that life is better for them. This poem written and read aloud by Molly summarised how the young people feel about YAP:

***“I go to YAP every day  
All my problems I say  
It helps me through the da.***

***Before I went I was really shy  
But they told me it was ok to cry.***

***With Annie I go on walks  
With Annie she always talks.***

***All my friends are there  
They always compliment my hair.***

***We talk, we play, we laugh  
They're like my other half.***

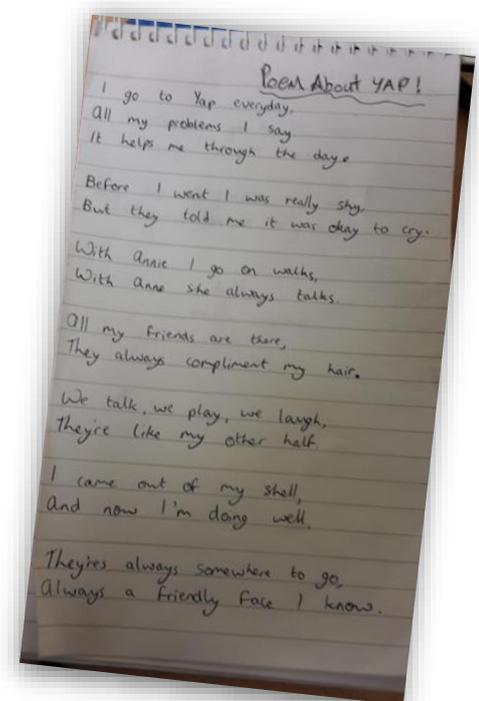
***I came out of my shell  
And now I am doing well.***

***There's always somewhere to go  
Always a friendly face I know.***

***In Navan we go  
to the Zone  
It's like my  
second home.***

***In me YAP has  
sparkled a light  
It makes my  
future bright.”***

***By Molly age  
14.***



During the assessment it was noticeable that all the young people were involved in group work. At last year's evaluation visit, only a few young people had been involved in group work programmes leading to the presentations at the Annual Conference. This year more young people were able to talk about their involvement and how they have really benefitted from being part of a team and working towards a common goal. They seemed to enjoy, not only working towards an end project, but the group activities that took place also.

Throughout the assessment all young people gave examples of participating in events and activities that would not happen in their everyday lives. They spoke about the impact that YAP has had on their lives and about the importance of being part of a group with a sense of belonging,

***“Our group just gelled from the start.”*** or having someone just for them,

***“My advocate is very special to me.”***

## Recommendations

- One young person said that he would like to do something fun every day, like the cinema because talking is not always fun.
- One young person said he would love to do more street soccer, because the teams get to make up their own rules and no one referees.
- One young person mentioned that they wish they could have their advocate for longer as they are just really getting to know each other. She said six months is too short.
- Continue with the group work programmes incorporating a project with a common goal and fun activities.

***Daily Fun Activities.***

***More Street Soccer Games.***

***Continue with the group work programmes incorporating a project with a common goal and fun activities.***

***Extend duration of YAP programme.***

I would like to thank all the young people who participated in this evaluation for their open and honest opinions and congratulate them on their achievements on the programme. I would like to thank the advocates for supporting their young person to attend the assessment. It is obvious that there is mutual respect between each advocate and their young person from the interactions and conversations that I have witnessed.

I have no hesitation in recommending that Youth Advocate Programmes Western Region retains their Investing in Children Membership Award™.

***The Young People I have met have endorsed this report.***

**Well Done!**

**Donna O’Kane  
Voice of People in Care Northern Ireland  
On behalf of Investing in Children CIC  
January 2017**

## Investing in Children Assessment

### Mid and West Ireland

July 2016

<b>Details of young people involved in assessment</b>					
	<b>NAME</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>Time with YAP</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>County</b>
1	Kaytlin	14	1 year	Bailieborough	Co. Cavan
2	Molly	14	3 months	Shercock	Co. Cavan
3	Jessica	14	1 week	Longford	Co. Longford
4	Briege	16	1 month	Galway	Co. Galway
5	Oisin	14	3 months	Navan	Co. Meath
6	Gary	10	1 year	Mullingar	Co. Westmeath
7	Mary	17	2 months	Galway	Co. Galway
8	Tyrone	14	2 weeks	Galway	Co. Galway
9	Sean	13	3 months	Ferbane	Co. Galway
10	Brian	13	3 months	Ferbane	Co. Galway
11	Ikenna	17	3 months	Oranmore	Co. Galway
12	Stephen	14	5 months	Longford	Co. Longford
13	Mathew	12	Almost a year	Edgesworthtown	Co. Longford

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***Voice of Young People in Care Northern Ireland is an Investing in Children CIC Partner.***

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