

Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland

Friday 30th November 2018

“I WOULD PREFER TO HAVE HAD ONE SOCIAL WORKER RATHER THAN TWO OR THREE” – YOUNG PEOPLE LAUNCH REPORT SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORK IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A group of young people have launched a report highlighting the experiences of young people in the social work system in their own words at an event in the Mansion House today. The report – “What Do You Think About Social Work Services?” was researched, drafted and launched by YAP Ireland’s Youth CEOs, a group of young people with experience of engaging with social work. The group interviewed other young people asking them about their experiences and what they think should be changed.

The YAP Ireland Youth CEOs are a group of young people aged 13 to 17 who have taken part on the YAP programme and expressed an interest in taking a leadership role in the organisation. They interviewed 48 young people on the YAP programme in Dublin, Limerick and Meath to find out their experiences of engaging with social work. They asked what young people thought of social work, what their relationships were like with their social workers, and how things could be made to work better.

“I only kind of knew what a social worker was.”

“I was happy to meet my social worker.”

The responses were mixed – with both positive and negative feedback. Young people were confused about what a social worker was and felt they could do with getting more information about what was going on.

“I trust my social worker because he takes me seriously and our meetings are always confidential. He doesn’t look at me in a racist way. I have a good relationship with him because he respects me.”

“I always have to ring them first. They never called me just to ask how I am.”

Lots of young people did get on well with their social worker, but they felt that it was difficult to build a relationship as their social worker would change too often and they didn’t see them enough.

“They never answered the phone when I needed them.”

“She has supported me and helped me make choices and decisions.”

Many young people did feel that their lives had improved since getting involved with social work, whether it was because they were no longer living where they were,

because they were referred to YAP or because things had gotten better at home. About half of the young people said no or only a little bit. Many hoped it would have helped more.

The report makes a number of recommendations based around three key themes – communication, building relationships and decision making. Some of the recommendations include that social workers should be available out of hours, that more basic information should be given to young people when they are first introduced to their social worker and that social workers should not be changed as often to allow young people to build trust with them.

Speaking before the launch YAP Ireland CEO, Siobhán O'Dwyer said, "We are so proud of the work that our Youth CEO group has produced. They went out, did the research and compiled the responses themselves. It is a fantastic piece of work that we hope will be very useful to policy-makers within Tusla and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The report aims to be constructive and I believe it provides some practical and easy to introduce changes that could make a huge difference to the lives of young people who are engaging with social work."

YAP Ireland Youth CEO group member Jenny, said, "We wanted to ask other young people about how they feel about social work because we thought they would be more comfortable opening up to us in a way they wouldn't with adults. We hope that social workers and the people who make decisions in the Government and in Tusla will read our report and make changes to how they work. Our recommendations are small steps that could achieve big things in changing the relationship young people have with their social workers."

The report was launched by the Ombudsman of Children, Dr. Niall Muldoon. Speaking ahead of the event Dr. Muldoon said, "I am delighted to launch YAP's Youth CEO Action Research, a piece of work that exemplifies a young person's right to be heard, a right that is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the child.

"As Ombudsman for Children I am always urging organisations to include children in all aspects of the work they do and it is a great credit to the YAP organisation that they have gone a step further by getting young people not only to take part, but also to carry out the research. This concept of youth as researchers is a very important development in children's rights and one to be applauded.

"The responses to this report, which asks participants what they think about social work services, are extremely important. Tusla must ensure that the views given by young people are integrated into their work.

"One striking recommendation made is that young people should have more regular contact with their social worker, and not just when there is a problem. Considering the heavy workload placed on social workers, it is vital that this recommendation is considered, at the highest level. It is the development of personal relationships that

will ultimately help young people to garner new skills and resilience so that they will eventually not need the support of Tusla”.

ENDS

For further information, please contact Shannon Reilly, Communications Officer, YAP Ireland on 087-2312111 or by email at sreilly@yapireland.ie

Siobhán O'Dwyer and other YAP representatives are available for interview.

Notes for the editor:

- YAP Ireland is a leading provider of intensive support programmes for young people and families. It uses a strengths-based, family focused approach delivering intensive support over 6 months to young people with complex needs helping them to achieve their goals. For more information, please visit www.yapireland.ie
- YAP Ireland was founded in 2002 and today is operating in 22 counties across Ireland. YAP Ireland employs 32 permanent staff and approximately 150 advocates. In 2017, 487 young people and their families participated on the YAP programme, including 280 referred for the first time.
- In 2017, 83% of young people on the YAP programme reported an improvement in their self-esteem and confidence, 89% reported an improvement in self-harm behaviours, 86% reported an improvement in substance abuse, 77% reported an improvement in anger issues and 83% reported an improvement in their emotional wellbeing. These outcomes are based on data for 1690 young people who YAP have worked with between January 2011 and October 2017, with views of the young people, families, referrers, advocates and managers measured when the young people enter the programme and then again at their exit.