



Introduction

Youth Advocate programme

Youth Advocate Programmes Ireland is a leading provider of intensive support programmes for young people and families. The organisation was established in Ireland in 2002. The YAP Model is a unique way of providing intensive, focused support to children, young people and families with a range of needs referred by the Child and Family Agency Social Work teams. The YAP model is based upon the development of a trust relationship built between a supportive, trained, skilled adult advocate, the young person and their family. An individual service plan based on the strengths of the young person and their family is developed and offers a wraparound approach to address all aspects of the needs of the young person within their family and local community. YAP's goal is to empower young people and their families with supports that will remain in place after programme involvement has ended. Youth Advocate Programme provides a range of support services to young people and families: Intensive Support Programme, Crisis Intervention, Family Support, Aftercare and a Disability service.

YAP Ireland's mission is to build partnerships between vulnerable young people, their families and communities to support their full potential through a community based, strengths focused, intensive support model which provides a more effective and economic alternative to society's reliance on the direct provision of state institutions and out of home care services.

YAP was first awarded Investing in Children membership in 2014.

Participants in the re-evaluation

The purpose of this re-evaluation is to review the work with the young people in the Youth Forum and Participation Projects, ensuring that they receive whatever they identify as their need from these groups, and that they feel that they are being listened and also affecting personal changes and organisational changes. This re-evaluation will also explore the Continuation/ Re-launch of the youth CEO Group. The Youth CEO has been a very successful

programme in YAP. It enables young people to have a direct input into decision-making and changes at an organisational level within YAP.

We had the opportunity to meet with staff and young people from the Dublin and surrounding areas. We met with **Reece 11yrs, Ben 17yrs, Ester 17yrs, Chloe 15yrs, Megan 17yrs, and Lauren 17yrs**, the young people we met with have been taking part in YAP from three months to one year.

Opportunities for dialogue

When a child or young person becomes involved with YAP they develop an Individual Service Plan. This plan highlights the types of goals each young person would like to achieve. In order for them to achieve their goals, the plan also details the types of activities they will do with their advocate.

Ben explained that one of his goals was ***“to control his anger... I am short tempered”***. And stated that he decides what he wants to do with his advocate. He says that his advocate is ***“good craic and listens to what I have to say”***. He says he likes going to play football with his advocate. Reece also agreed that that his advocate also lets him choose their activities when they are out on a one-to-one. He goes to the cinema or goes for something to eat with his advocate.

Both Megan and Chloe have the same advocate and spoke very highly of her. They both do many activities with her. Some examples include: going to the Cinema, Shopping, getting nails and eyebrows done. Their advocate has even taken them to Howth Head beach and cliffs. They have a choice of going together or meeting with their advocate separate. One goal both girls chose to do together was to get fitter and in order for them to do this, they both attended Zumba and Boxercises classes with their advocate.

Lauren says her goals was to do her Driving Theory and also look at improving her CV. She plans to go to do a make-up course as she wants to be a make-up artist so she can work with a company. Her advocate is helping her research this and spends time with her looking at the Driving Theory Test.

Ester’s goal was to progress her singing voice and her advocate helped her get a voice coach to enable her to sing in a Country and Western style. She has also been given the support by

her advocate to explore business and computing courses at college. Chloe also stated that her advocate is helping her look at suitable colleges to do a career either in hairdressing or childcare.

All of the young people we talked to said that they were actively involved and listened to from the very beginning. They feel listened to and valued by their advocates and know they can also get help when they need it. They all agreed that they were actively involved in making the plan and their views and ideas taken into account. Reece says ***“it is important to be able to talk to your advocate especially if you can’t talk to your parents”***.

Group Work

Within YAP, all young people have an opportunity to take part in the participation programme that involves group activities and group projects. Young people can take part in these programmes even though they have finished their time with an advocate. These participation programmes help them stay in touch with YAP. Lauren highlighted that she did not attend these group but this was her choice and did not feel any pressure to attend anything other than meeting with her advocate. ***“I am not forced into a participation group”***. All other young people said they choose to be part of the participation group work programmes in their area. Reece says he loves the group because ***“we get to talk to each other because we don’t get to see each other unless we are in the group”***. The young people stated that within each participation group there is a community project. The common themes throughout each of the community projects are that it must be a benefit to the community or help make a positive change to the community. Ben stated ***“we get to decide what projects we wanted to do.”*** Ben and Reece talked about choosing the Dogs Trust as their project. They helped design artistic posters promoting the care of pups. Reece wrote a letter asking the Dog Trust’s how YAP participants could help. In response to the Reece’s letter the group was asked to donate blankets. The young people gathered many blankets from home and took them to the Dog Trust location. Some of the young people volunteered. Another project that Reece was part of was ***“Adopt a Fire Station”***. The young people gathered food for the fire personnel and took it to them to thank the fire men and women for all their hard work. Ben also talked about a community project that he was involved in, ***“Adopt a Road”*** and this included picking up litter in a particular area of Dublin. Both boys say they are more aware and more appreciative of how hard other people work including those in the fire service and in the Dog’s Trust and the people who clean the streets.

Through the participation programme, Ester mentioned that she had been provided one day training along with 7 or 8 other young people to sit on the interview panels to recruit the current intake of Advocates. She said she loved this because it allowed her to have a say in who was to be employed

In the summer of 2019 all young people involved in YAP are given an opportunity to go to Croke Park, YAP's annual Young People's Conference. This year the choice of themes will include:

- Mental Health
- The Environment
- Homelessness

In the past years, the young people vote on the theme. Then the young people in each of the YAP areas chose the projects that best represents their theme. The young people then are provided the opportunity during the conference to present their project in different formats, including video presentation, writing and performing a song, or presenting a PowerPoint presentation.

Other evidence of dialogue between the adults and the young people of YAP is the Young CEO group. Reece mentioned that six or seven young people get together and meet at least once a month, however in the summer it is increased to every two weeks. In his group he has looked at mental health and suicide as it is a major issue in his local area. Ester mentioned that the Young CEO group went to meet with Siobhan to give her ideas

Opportunities for change

All the young people have stated that having an advocate does help them make a personal change. **Megan said “my advocate is always there for me, at my beckon call. She won't let me down”**. Lauren also mentioned that having an advocate has helped her get a job in a local store. This a monumental change for someone who would have gone missing on a number of occasions. Lauren says now she would never think of running away. Megan also stated that **“I used to run away at least once a week, now I am completely different – there is no running away”**. Ben noted that as a result of being involved in YAP he has **“become more mature”**. Whilst, Reece stated that he **“feels more responsible”** since being with YAP. Ester says that being involved with YAP has **“definitely given me more confidence”**.

Ester, Chloe and Megan have sang for the YAP Board of Directors and Megan is singing at Croke Park. The girls say this is a huge step for them and it has really boosted their confidence and given them a sense of achievement, something to be proud of.

According to Ben ***“the group work programme helps with behaviour and socialising with other kids”***.

Recommendations made by young people

All of the young people we spoke were very complimentary and positive about YAP and their advocate. When asked if they were in charge of YAP what changes would they make as the CEO.

- Five of the young people who have been in the programme for more than three months, know that their time with their advocate is ending. All five young people have really enjoyed that time and would like it to extend beyond 6mths. They suggested that rather than an intensive 15hours per week. It could be a few less hours but over longer weeks, extending their time with their advocate beyond six months.
- All the young people said they can make the decisions about what activities they want to do and how they spend their 15.00euro. However, Megan recommended that they should be ***“able to carry forward the money into the following weeks or save it to do something bigger”***.
- All young people loved their group-work programmes and the projects they were involved in. However, four of the young people said they would like more trips out of Dublin and even suggested an overnight residential.
- One young person suggested that the two participation groups did not need to be separated according to age. He has recommended that both groups should be amalgamated into one group. He says because he is at the borderline age, he has friends in the both groups, but he can only attend the older age group. ***“It was better when everyone was together, it was better craic”***.
- Three of the young people recommended that two or three young people should sit on the Board of Directors, to represent all the young people involved in YAP.
- One other young person mentioned that he would like a sensory room in the YAP building or somewhere in the local community because it would benefit someone

who has sensory issues like his brother. Another young person stated that if he was YAP CEO he would look at getting a building that could have a fun room/games room

Conclusion

All of the young people reported that there were lots of opportunities for them to be at the centre of decisions about the support they receive through YAP. They were all able to describe how their personal situation had changed and improved as a result of the support they received during their time on the programme.

Some of the young people also had the chance to take part in group activities and events which were not only fun but which also allowed them to meet young people with similar experiences which they really valued. The community project gives them and insight into how other people work but also a sense of social responsibility and appreciation.

We would like to thank all the young people Ben, Reece, Ester, Megan, Lauren and Chloe who participated in this evaluation for their open and honest opinions and congratulate them on their achievements on the programme. We would like to thank the staff members for supporting their young person to attend the assessment. It is obvious that there is a mutual respect between the advocates and the young people from the interactions and conversations that we have taken part in.

We have no hesitation in recommending YAP to continue as member of the Investing in Children Membership Award™ Scheme. I wish the staff and young people the very best in the next 12 months.

Endorsement by Young People

YAP have confirmed that the young people who took part in this assessment have read and agreed with the report and recommend that Dublin North Youth Advocate Programme's membership of the Investing in Children Scheme is renewed.

Donna O'Kane and Caoimhe Coyle
On Behalf of Investing in Children CIC UK
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