

Investing in Children Membership Award™

Re-evaluation of Western Youth Advocate Programme



Introduction

Western 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 using the model of The Youth Advocate Programme in the US. 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 re-evaluation

The re-evaluation took place on Thursday 27th June from 4pm – 6pm. Young people travelled to YAPs Cavan office with their advocates and were met by Caoimhe Coyle and Donna O Kane from VOYPIC, who carried out the reassessment. Nine young people were in attendance, four young people were from Cavan, 2 from Navan, 2 from Monaghan and 1 came from Bettystown. The young people that took part in the assessment were Zara, Natasha, Andrew, Conor, Oskar, Callum, Edward, Alisha and Reece. The participant's time on the programme ranged from 3 weeks to 20 months.

Opportunities for Dialogue

The young people explained to the assessors that when they started with YAP, they met with their advocates and devised an individual plan, specific to their needs. This plan sets out personal goals that they would work towards with their advocates over their 6 months on the programme. Some of these goals included:

- Support with homework
- Support to get back into school

The Sjovoll Centre, Front Street, Pity Me, Durham, DH1 5BZ

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- Building my confidence
- Help improve relationships with others

It was evident from our conversations with the young people that they were involved in the types of goals that were set. They all spoke highly of their advocates. Callum told us that his advocate was **“good craic, we get to go to loads of places and talk about loads of things”**. Young people talked about what they did on a weekly basis and how they managed their £15 budget. When deciding how they would spend their budget all of the group said that they **“decided how the money was spent with their advocate”**. Young people also commented that **“you are always asked to express your opinion in all meetings”**. The group explained that they could have their say at **“youth forums and group activities”**.

The young people talked about having an input into the types of activities they did at these forums and planning for the coming months. One young person suggested that if this group met outside of Dublin then young people from their area might get more involved. Some of the young people also suggested that it would be nice for the CEO to come to their group programme so that they could meet her and tell her about **“all of the things that we do with our advocates in here”**.

Group Work and Activities

All of the young people talked about the activities that they did with their advocates. These included trips to Tayto Park, go karting, cooking, cinema, trampolining and making sculptures. The young people told us that when they are deciding on group work activities, everyone has the opportunity to put forward their suggestions and then the group decides together which activity they want to do. When we asked the young people what their favourite group activity was they said, **“we all loved Tayto Park”** and **“we loved Go-Karting”**.

Reece told us that he wanted a career in racing so his advocate took him to Mondello Park, to let him experience what it would be like.

The group also chatted about their current group programme, which was based around cooking. They explained that the sessions were held weekly from 5.30 – 8.30 at YAPs Cavan office. The group decide together what they were going to cook each week and then they would work out a budget and go and buy the ingredients they needed. The group activities gave them the opportunity to meet other young people on the programme and other advocates.

Opportunities for change

All of the young people spoke highly of their advocates and the support they received from them. Those who were on the programme longer, like Eddie explained that when he was first referred to the programme, he said **“I wasn’t attending school, I moved about a lot and I was very shy”**. Since being involved in YAP, his advocate had **“helped to build my confidence. I’m now back in school and I’ve just completed my junior cert”**.

Natasha explained that her advocate had helped improve her relationships at home, previous to YAP her relationships with people weren’t always good.

Oskar stated that **“I can chat about everything and they listen to me”**.

The group felt that these changes happened because their advocates listened to them.

Recommendations made by young people

- Two of the young people we talked to who had been on the programme for 9 months and 20 months, said that they would have been upset if their time on YAP had ended after the 6 months. They felt that 6 months was not long enough and they were thankful that their time had been extended beyond this.
- The young people really enjoyed the opportunities to come together weekly in a group setting. This gave them opportunities to meet other young people and have fun in a group setting. The young people suggested doing something similar with the young people from other regions of YAP e.g. Dublin. They also suggested having a residential where all young people could come together from all areas.
- All of the young people would like to have the budget increased from £15 a week, to enable them to do more activities with their advocates. When we discussed this with the group and talked about resources, Reece said that he had supplemented the budget with his pocket money in order to do more activities. The young people also pointed out that they could save up their money to do more expensive activities as a treat.
- Not all of the young people were aware of or had an understanding of the young CEO group. (This may also be attributed to the fact that a number of young people in the group were only new to the programme). One young person suggested that if this group met outside of Dublin then young people from their area might get more involved. Some of the young people also suggested that it would be nice for the CEO to come to their group programme so that they could meet her.

The above recommendations, given by the young people, clearly highlight the value they place on YAPs supports. YAP may want to consider further conversations with the group to explore these recommendations, in particular how they could support young people from rural areas to engage with the young CEO group.

Conclusion

It was evident from our conversations with the group of young people that they had very good relationships with their advocates. The young people trusted them to talk about a variety of topics and they felt they always listened to them. One young person commented, ***“my advocate rings me up to see how I’m getting on”***.

The young people could avail of individual support through their weekly meetings with their advocates and were also offered the opportunities to meet as a group to participate in group programmes. Weekly activities and group programmes were always decided by the young people themselves.

Given the geographical spread of the group and the fact that some of the young people we spoke to had only started the programme, it was difficult for them to evidence how their VOICE had brought about strategic change within the organisation. However, the young people were

able to clearly demonstrate that through dialogue with their advocates, they had achieved personal change, with numerous examples being given of how the programme has impacted on their lives in a positive way and the value they place on the supports they receive.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the young people who gave up their time to meet with us and to their advocates for facilitating their engagement in this reassessment. We would have no hesitation in recommending that Western Youth Advocate Programme continue to hold their Investing in Children Membership Award™.

This report has been endorsed by the following young people Zara, Natasha, Andrew, Conor, Oskar, Callum, Edward, Alisha and Reece.

Thank-you

Caoimhe Coyle and Donna O’Kane
Assessor VOYPIC/IIC
On behalf of Investing in Children CIC UK
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