



## Re- Evaluation for Investing in Children membership: Mulberry Centre, Darlington CAMHS

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in Darlington are based at the Mulberry Centre. During my visits for this evaluation I spoke with Richard Parkin and Christine Needham. They informed me that there have been many changes over the last year with new people coming into the team. However, the team is still strongly committed to providing an essential service with the participation of the children and young people.

I would like to thank everyone Rhiannon, George, Amy and everyone else who worked with me on this evaluation. (Not everyone wanted their names included in this report)

### **Evidence of Dialogue and Change**

The team use a variety of ways to include the children and young people in dialogue. As the children and young people all respond to different things, the team try to be sensitive to their preferences. Amy said, **“They always ask me what I want to do. There’s nothing really I would change, but if I did I would just talk to someone.”** Children and young people are regularly asked what kind of things they think could be used during the sessions (see attached). George told me, **“I like to make stuff. I have made some Christmas stuff and a school thing. But I pick what I want to do.”** This has also led to many suggestions which the team try to use. For example, **“games,” “I.T things,” “role play,” “drawing,”** and **“using clay”**. Rhiannon said, **“I can talk to Christine about stuff and do arts and crafts. I tell Christine what I want to do and she lets me choose.”**

### **Waiting Room**

The team at Darlington CAHMS are constantly monitoring their service to children and young people. One way they do this is by providing the opportunity for everyone to complete a “Comments and Suggestions” form.

It also became apparent that one important issue for the children and young people is that the waiting area is **“boring”** and **“smells”**. To investigate these concerns, lots of posters were put in the waiting room for children and young people to write their comments about how the waiting area could be improved and made friendlier. This generated lots of ideas and discussion. George said, **“I think the waiting room should have some tea or coffee for my mam. I am going to put that on one of them posters, cos I don’t really like to tell when other people are there.”** Comments were posted such as **“teen magazines,” “put a T.V in here,” “it’s too hot,” “more jigsaws,” “snooker table,”** and **“Put Galaxy on radio all of the time.”** (See posters attached)

However, not all the young people choose to use the suggestion posters. Rhiannon said, **“I’ve seen the posters on the wall for suggestions, but if I have an idea I prefer just to tell them, cos I have got to know them better now.”** Amy agreed,

**“The waiting room is comfortable enough, but if I did want to change anything I would probably tell them. I have seen the suggestion posters, but I haven’t used them.”**

As a result of all dialogue, different toys have been bought, teenage magazines are purchased on a regular basis and now Galaxy Radio is played into the waiting area. Also Richard is meeting with Estates and they are looking at getting air conditioning in the waiting area, hopefully in time for the summer. Richard said, **“We put updated letters up in the waiting room telling everyone what we have done. But we also feed back what we can’t do. It’s important to tell everyone and explain why.”** Christine added, **“Sometimes there are practicality issues like space. But we like to explain.”**

### **Display Boards**

In the corridor of the Mulberry Centre there are two display boards which are updated by the children and young people. Erica told me, **“We have a Feelings and Anger board. The children and young people put how they feel on the board in any way they choose.”** George said, **“I like the display boards, I like the faces where they are angry happy and sad.”**

Erica also told me that she is going to put another display board in the waiting room. She is going to work with the children and young people who will decide the issues that they want displaying. These issues will be changed regularly so that all the issues the young people decide on get displayed. Lots of information will also be available which other young people can take away.

### **Appointment Times**

Another issue brought to the team’s attention was the length of time people were waiting at their appointments. One young person commented, **“Don’t keep us waiting half an hour past the appointment time.”** This was brought up with the team. They are now trying different strategies. For example, the team have started to use “Choose and Book.” This is where the secretaries give the families information on the available appointments and then the children and families choose the best time for them. So far this is proving to be successful. Rhiannon confirmed, **“I have been coming here for six weeks and I have never had to wait, they’re always been on time.”** George added, **“I never have to wait very long, it’s good.”**

### **Teenagers Room**

Some young people have mentioned to the team that they would like their own space. In response to this, there has been a room identified at the Mulberry Centre for “teenagers”. The team have been asking the young people on a one to one basis how they would like the room to look and what furniture and equipment they would like. The young people have come up with lots of ideas including, **“really soft seats,” “bright coloured walls,” “posters and leaflets for teenagers”** and **“a computer,”** As well as talking individually with young people, some chose to write down their ideas. (See attached) Such ideas have included, **“carpets to make it feel warmer and cosier,” “bean bags,” “soft lighting,” “blinds at the windows,”** and **“drinks”**. Richard informed me that a computer has already been purchased and the process of getting the young people’s views and opinions is still continuing.

### **Future Plans**

Christine told me that she has just started her new role within the Mulberry Centre team, but she is already working on new ideas to continue getting children and young people involved in the decision making process. Christine said she is hoping to ask young people if they would like to work as a group to develop the “Teenager’s Room”. However she is waiting for the funding to be released before she starts this

process. She is also hoping to involve those interested in looking at different issues that are important to them. This sounds very exciting and I look forward to hearing all about their work next year.

During all my visits to the Mulberry Centre I was made to feel welcome. I was left in no doubt that the views and opinions of children and young people are heard, respected and valued by the staff at Darlington CAHMS. There is lots of evidence of children and young people being involved in decision making and there are lots of plans to develop this even further. George said, **“I think they listen to me and should get the certificate.”** Rhiannon and Amy also agree that CAHMS in Darlington receives membership. Therefore I have no hesitation in recommending that this service once again receives Investing In Children Membership.

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