



Re-Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

NCH Family Mediation and Children's Support Services

Ear 4 U continue to be the voice of children and young people on and behalf of this project. Most of the young people I met with at the beginning of this project have continued to be involved and looking to extend the groups membership by encouraging other children and young people to become involved. I met with some of the current group members Gaby, Kieran, Tasmyn and Emma, alongside Heather and a new worker Stefan. Since last year Catherine has moved on to pastures new, but Stefan is now supporting Heather in facilitating Ear 4 U.

Since last year there has been continued developments for the group and there is naturally plenty **evidence of dialogue and change:**

❖ INTERVIEWS

Young people continue to be involved in the employment of new staff members. Once again Heather worked through the process with the young people involved and the young people devised their own questions in order to ensure that their expectations of new staff would be met. Please see the questions asked by the young people and their feedback form attached.

Taz. Gaby and Kieran told me that they have been involved in interviewing staff, they interviewed three people for the Administrator's post and they also interviewed Stefan.

❖ EAR 4 U Meetings

The group have continued to meet, every month when possible. The session always start with snacks, which **all of the young people enjoy!** Gaby told me that apart from the interviews the group have met and:

- ✓ Made marzipan fruits
- ✓ Made baubles and cards at Christmas
- ✓ Been to London to make a film

LONDON – YOUNG VOICE

Following on from the DVD that the young people created as a training resource for NCH their fame spread to London to an organisation called Young Voice. A charity who were in the process of making a pack for parents giving advice on separation and divorce. They thought that the DVD that Ear 4 U created was fantastic and invited the young people to come to London and be part of their young people's discussion group to help with the pack and create a film for them to. The young people had an all expenses paid adventure. Emma, Gaby, Tom and another young person from another organisation flew to London with their parents to be part of this work.

Gaby and Emma told me that **“one of the days we had to work all day learning lines for the film. It was interesting but long and boring.”** Then Gaby said **“but I think our way is better we had more choice, when making our DVD they asked us about the script and we made some suggestions to make it sound like we were saying it,**” Emma continued and said **“ In London they just said it didn't sound good the stuff we said and we go told just to read our lines.”** I think this clearly highlights the difference between meaningful participation and young people's involvement. The girls did enjoy themselves they told me they got to go on the London Eye and do some other sightseeing.

During this meeting Gaby asked **“what has happened with the DVD.”** Heather told the group that it continues to be used as a resource in the work that NCH does in schools. Heather, in Newcastle and Tara, in Durham. After the sessions in the schools the workers do an evaluation and the children and young people give feedback on how the session affected them and if they want to make comment.

Heather told the group that most young people say that **“they love the film, it is the best bit.”** As part of the on-going work with the schools, both Heather and Tara are writing a ‘Teachers Pack’. Part of tonight’s session is for the group to consider what makes a lesson interesting. Tom, who was not able to attend this meeting, has suggested a **“wordsearch.”**

The wordsearch and other materials for the training pack have been drafted by the design department in London. The young people sat down to discuss the draft documents and what they thought. The London office sent a questionnaire for them to fill in their thoughts. Please see copy attached.

Gaby, Taz, Emma and Kieran all had plenty to say on the materials, they each filled in their own questionnaire and gave plenty opinions and observations for the team to think about. As this is a work in progress I look forward to seeing the end result next time. Another suggestion for meetings in the future is for the group to look at designing a leaflet for parents about separation and divorce from the children and young people’s perspective. But first the group would like to recruit new members.

“How can we achieve this?” – the group made suggestions on activities they would like to do to invite other young people to join them at Ear 4 U. Suggestions included the **cinema, eating pizza or making ceramics.** My meeting to check out my evaluation is at ***The Kids Kabin in Walker where we will be making ceramics.***

At this session I joined Ear 4 U in making things out of clay. The group really enjoyed this session and enjoyed being creative. The finished items included plates, trinket boxes, plaques and masks. Ethan and Joe, siblings of some of the young people in the group also enjoyed the session. All of the group said they would love to come back!
Comments about the session were:

“It’s been wicked”

“It’s been class”

“I’ve enjoyed being creative”

“We all want to do it again”

NCH Family Mediation and Children’s Support Services have been very busy over the last year or so, supporting children and young people a say in the service delivery and who delivers it, as well as supporting children and young people individually to make sense of their life for them following on from the trauma of separation and divorce. The children and young people involved in Ear 4 U have an important role in ensuring that their voice is heard and I feel this is clearly highlighted throughout my evaluation. It has been quite a difficult year with the organisation suffering from staff shortages; it always means that ensuring that children and young people are able to participate in the decision making process someone needs to have the time to commit to this. Since Catherine’s departure Heather has successfully maintained the group, latterly with support from Stefan but is very pleased that NCH have managed to negotiate some support from Children’s Rights also based in Mea House.

In light of the continued commitment from the whole team in ensuring this work is done and in recognition of the time Heather and Stefan make in their ever demanding day to facilitate Ear 4 U, ensuring the opportunity of involvement for all children and young people who use their service and of course with the endorsement of Gaby, Emma, Tasmyn, Kieran, and Tom, I would like to recommend that NCH Family Mediation and Children’s Support Services remain Investing in Children members.

**Helen Mulhearn
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