



## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

### Disabled Children and Families Team

The Disabled Children and Families Team are a countywide team and work with children and young people up to the age of eighteen.

For the purpose of this evaluation I met with young people both individually in their homes and also in small groups at agenda days. An agenda day is facilitated by young people and provides an adult free environment for young people to express their views and opinions freely. The young people I spoke to have all had experience of the team, either currently or in the recent past.

### **Evidence of Dialogue & Change**

#### Contact and Communication with Young People

Many of the young people I met with felt that they enjoyed talking to and spending time with their social worker. The comments from young people about this were:

**“She comes to see me, she’s good.”**

**“She’s easy to talk to.”**

**“She puts stuff on for me.”**

**“We talk about my timetable, my dad and stuff, contact, how it’s going.”**

**“She helps.”**

**“She listens and she talks.”**

**“She checks with me and mum and dad, I like to be included.”**

Some of the young people we spoke to felt that they were able to contact their social worker easily. One young person told me, **“I can chat to my social worker, I ask permission to use the phone and ring her, I leave a message on the answering machine and she gets back to me quickly.”**

Another young person said, **“I like it when they talk to me.”**

A young person at an agenda day commented, **“I’ve had good contact – he gets straight back to me. He sends things out and says this might be of interest to you.”**

Another young person said, **“I could phone her.”**

A young person told us, **“She talks to me on the phone; sometimes she rings or comes to school.”**

There were however, some young people who did not feel that they could contact their social worker as easily as others. The comments they made were:

**“Mine gave their contact details to my mam and dad instead of me, I think that’s wrong because I can use the phone okay and she’s my social worker not my mam and dad’s.”**

A discussion about this problem resulted in a suggestion from the young people that a card or letter with contact details for the social workers could be given to young people when they are contacted so that if, at any time they wanted to get in touch with someone, they knew how to. The young people acknowledged that others may not want to phone or

make contact themselves, they may prefer their parent or carer to do this for them, however, it would feel like they were important in the process if it was the young person themselves who was given the information. This information was fed back to the team managers who have implemented a card with the contact details of the social workers. There were long discussions about how information can be given to young people depending on their method of communication. It was agreed that the simplest plan was to work on making cards initially, as they were within their means. A further plan has been made to work on other forms of communication, working with young people and the county council's information service.

When I spoke to some young people about the card they had received following their suggestions they said:

**“Yes I got one sent out, on a letter with a phone number. My mam’s put it on the notice board for me. It’s good to have it.”**

**“Yes I’ve got one it’s like a letter. It’s alright. If there’s any problems I can get in touch. I haven’t done it yet, but I might.”**

**“I put it in my school bag; maybe it could be laminated to keep it safe.”**

Another young person I spoke to could not recall receiving her information. It maybe, that in the planning of putting this information out to all young people in different forms, the team need to consider making it memorable for the young people they work with.

The team work hard at finding ways to discover the views and feelings of the young people they work with. Sixty percent of the young people on the case load for the team are non-verbal, and they feel it is absolutely not acceptable to report that a young person has no communication. Social workers must carry out observations and put them on file. They must also seek a variety of people's views around the young person, and not just their parents.

The team have had training in different methods of communication such as PEC's and Makaton so that they are familiar with the systems but they haven't always had hands on experience of using them, and there are plans for further training in these areas, with support from their service manager to put an emphasis on this.

## Reviews

The young people we talked to told us about their reviews. One young person told us, **“I’ve had someone involved since I was three, they came to nursery reviews.”** Another young person said, **“She attends my meeting at school and at home, she speaks during the meeting.”**

Other comments made by young people were:

**“My mam tells me the things they’ve talked about, she might re-phrase it to make me feel better.”**

However, there were other young people who had these things to say about their reviews.

**“I am included in meetings but I don’t see why I can just come in at the end, I want to be in all the way through – the review is about me, how come I’m not allowed in all the way through.”**

**“Usually they are there early to talk to mam, I’d like to be there to hear what’s said, but I’m at school.”**

The team managers are aware that young people are not always involved in their reviews and have recently begun to address this. June Robson from the team has begun working with Lorna Smith who is an Independent Reviewing officer. They are looking at ways of engaging with, and including young people in their reviews, and intend to use the “I’ll Go First” CD rom. It will be interesting to see the developments with this work.

## Transition

An issue raised by one young person who has recently moved from children's services to adult services was around the transition process. He said, **"The transition from children to adults, one thing ended the next one started. I needed to tell a stranger my whole life story, I'd already done that with my children's social worker; then I had to let a new person in."**

Changes in a young person's life can be difficult, as one young person said, **"I'd like to keep the same social worker all the way through because they know you, I don't want to tell my life story to someone new."**

Whilst this is not always possible due to staffing changes, one young person commented, **"Sometimes they just leave and don't tell us, left with no explanation."**

However, when this comment was made another young person said, **"One social worker did tell me she was leaving in a month."**

Suggestions made about the transition process were:

**"Information should be shared with new social workers by the old social worker so we don't have to explain our life story time and time again."**

**"Changing over services, you should have options. Old social worker and new social worker and young person, meet at your home."**

**"Young people should have a say where to meet, where they are most comfortable."**

The managers agreed that this was an area that could be improved, and they intend to look at this in the future, using the suggestions made by the young people as a starting point.

It is clear that the team are making strides towards the meaningful involvement of children and young people in dialogue and change in their service. There are exciting plans for the further development of the contact details for young people with different methods of communication, and a clear commitment to involve young people in this development. It will be a carefully planned piece of work to ensure the correct form of information is given to each young person depending upon their needs and method of communication.

Investing in Children Membership requires evidence of dialogue and change. It is obvious from the testimony of the young people that the Disabled Children and Families Team works on the basis of creating *negotiated* programmes, which demand the participation of the young people in an active dialogue. Basing the programmes on the interests and stated preferences of the young people allows them to *shape and change* from the start, the nature of their individual arrangements. This practice clearly meets the required standards of dialogue and change. As I have stated, the team will be continuing their plans to make their service inclusive and I look forward to seeing how this has been achieved in the coming year. The young people I met, felt that they were included and valued by their social workers, and based on their opinions and endorsement of this report I would like to recommend that the Disabled Children and Families team receive Investing in Children membership.

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