



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Durham Children in Need Team

Durham Children in Need held an Agenda Day in August 2005 to begin their application process of Investing in Children membership. Eight children gave their views on contact and supervision in Hopper House and made some recommendations to the team.

1. I recommend that more young people are involved in commenting on the service provided by your team.
2. There has to be a continuous process of dialogue between service users and yourselves.
3. The comments brought to you today can be used to bring about changes.
4. The young people would prefer it if they could be taken to places like cracker jacks when supervision is taking place.
5. They would like the building not to be scruffy and be regularly clean for them.
6. It would be nice for the young people to have comics and new ways of entertainment, for example a television, Sky TV.
7. Continue to be like a friend to the young people and do not be patronising to the young people.

In order to find out if any changes have been made I met with Tracie Metcalfe to discuss developments following on from the Agenda Day. Evidence of dialogue and change is highlighted through the changes presented, and my conversations with two children involved with the service.

Comments on recommendation 1 and 2: Tracie was confident that on a daily basis the whole team ensured that the needs and wants of children and young people on their caseload. For example:

Two children told their social worker that they hated having contact in Hopper House. After a couple of sessions the children were really unhappy. The social worker discussed this with the children and although they would have preferred contact to take place in their family home the social worker discussed how this was not possible. The social worker asked where else did they feel safe, "school!" The social worker contacted the school and now the contact takes place in school and everyone is happy.

Action: After some discussion it was agreed that there could be a way of staff being able to record individual conversations which would clearly demonstrate how the social worker discussed the way forward with the children and young people. When children and young people come into the care system and what is best is agreed, Tracie felt that at the point of entry it would be possible to create a recording sheet which would clearly demonstrate dialogue with children and young people. This could then be updated at the 28 day review and again at the 3 months.

Comments on recommendation 3: I met with Alex (8) and Kieran (7), two children on the caseload of social worker Stephen Lewins, to talk about their experience of being involved with Durham Children in Need. The boys were very lively during our whole

time together but Alex was very confident in his views about how Stephen worked with him and what he felt about Hopper House.

Action: Alex and Kieran's comments:

"This room is cool."

"I like the toys, there are lots of them."

"This (the draughts) is my favourite." Alex then beat me at a game of draughts; he has had lots of practice because he plays it when he comes in to Hopper House.

The Bede Centre - after the agenda day Durham Children in Need team acquired another building where they could accommodate contact visits, an alternative to Hopper House. Stephen took Alex, Kieran and myself to visit it. The centre was just like a big living room, full of toys and activity stuff for children and young people, as well as having a kitchen which provided extra facilities for contact visits. Kieran thought The Bede Centre was "good" but Alex thought it was like an "adult training centre." On our way back Alex explained why he didn't like it "my Dad couldn't get there!" Alex told me again that he "likes Hopper House," and he gives the service he gets 5 out of 5. Kieran then went one better and said "100 out of 100."

Tracie also told me the team decorated the Bede Centre at Christmas and were able to provide contacts with a little bit of extra festive cheer for the children, young people and their families who used the centre. Alex and Kieran both said 'they did.'

Comments on recommendation 4: Alex and Kieran were able to tell me about some of the visits they have been on with Stephen, not just as part of contact arrangements.

- Finchale Priory followed by MacDonald's .
- Langley Park - Diggerland.
- Allensford Park in Consett.
- The Sage in Newcastle.

Tracie told me how the team fund such activities. They fundraise money themselves, such as Christmas Coffee Mornings etc. The team work collectively to think of ideas to bring in extra cash in order to provide extra resources and activities for the children and young people they work with. They have: disco equipment, lights, music and dance mats. During holiday times children and young people have been to Beamish Museum, Hall Hill Farm, gone to pantomimes at Christmas, been for walks in the park, had picnics and enjoyed parties.

Comments on recommendation 5: Throughout my report I think I have been able to highlight that these children are happy with Hopper House.

Comments on recommendation 6: As the room is used for contact there has been no tv added.

Comments on recommendation 7: On the basis of the conversations I had with Alex and Kieran they were keen to say that they are happy with the team through the contact they have facilitated by Stephen and Claire. I also chatted to Tracie Metcalfe – Team Manager about this report and the evidence presented. We talked about the use of the word patronising and whether it was a word used by the children at the Agenda Day or by the facilitators. Tracie felt that it was a word that the children involved in the Agenda Day would not have used. Whilst reading my report I asked Alex and Kieran if they knew what the word patronising meant and they were unsure, however I talked it through with him and they repeated that Stephen was great. Therefore without removing the word from the report I am happy that this is not the view of the children I spoke to.

It is clear by my report that the team have made changes to the contact room as suggested by the children and the young people. Alex and Kieran backed this up and said they “liked the toys and there is plenty of them.”

For the purpose of this evaluation I have only spoken to two young people, Alex and Keiran and because they both agreed with my report I am happy to recommend that the team receive their investing in Children membership. However this is on the understanding that systems are put in place to better provide evidence of dialogue and change in the future. I would also recommend that children and young people are asked as part of the process if they would be prepared to talk to an Investing in Children worker as part of the renewal process.

Helen Mulhearn
Investing in Children
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