



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Looked After Social Work Service (North and South)

The Looked After Social Work Service is a countywide service with two bases at Hopper House in Durham City and at Aycliffe Young Peoples Centre.

The service works with those children and young people who need to be looked after on a longer term basis and for whom a return home to their family is not possible within the foreseeable future. Children and young people experience different types of placements including foster care, residential care, with relatives and in independent living.

To help me write this evaluation I had the pleasure of meeting with Craig, Paul, Gemma, Alex, Dale, Laurkan, Matthew and Alex.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Agenda Day

The team have organised two Agenda Days to find out what children and young people from north and south Durham who use their services think about the service they receive. Also to look at how it could be improved or developed. Twenty seven young people attended and there these were facilitated by young people from the Listening to Children Reference Group.

Lots of issues and suggestions were raised by the young people. These ranged from young people saying they would prefer to do different activities through to wanting their friends to be able to sleep over. Also lots of comments were made about their social workers such as, **“they help you with problems”** and **“they arrange things like seeing your family and take you to places like McDonalds and Burger King.”**

Gemma said, **“I attended the Agenda Day. I said social workers weren’t doing the right stuff, or what young people were saying. But since social workers have prop changed.”** Then Gemma laughed and said, **“But they could still do better.”**

One important point concluded in the Agenda Day Reports was that the Team should continue dialogue with children and young people. In response to this, the team have tried to develop new ways of doing this. One such way was to send out a written response covering the main points raised by children and young people. (See attached)

The Response from the Looked After Social Work Service

The Looked After Social Work team sent out an easy to understand response that covers concerns raised at the Agenda Day. Some young people said their social worker didn’t always turn up on time, sometimes they did not ring to cancel and they were not always informed when their social worker is off work. Paul told me about changes that had been made. He said, **“I got a letter off my social worker to say she was going on holiday this summer. It told me who the duty social worker was. It’s a good idea and lets us know what’s going on.”** (See letters attached) The Looked After Social Work Service also now send out letters to children and young people if the social worker is off work due to sickness. (See attached)

Alex said he thought this response from the team was important and **“let people know what they could expect.”**

Staff Appraisals

The team have in place different procedures and policies to ensure that children and young people have a voice and are listened to. For example, as part of the Evidenced Based Supervision and Appraisal process, the teams ask some children and young people who they work with to fill in questionnaires. These ask direct questions such as “Do I change the way I work with you because of what you tell me?”, “Do I listen to what you say and what you want?” and “Do I respect and treat you fairly?” These questionnaires can be used to review and change individual practice. (See attached)

Gemma said, **“I have had a questionnaire about how well my social worker was doing her job. I said that she kinda listens to me. I keep asking about driving lessons and she does go away and finds things out.”**

Alex told me that it was important that young people are listened to and continued to tell me about an occasion when he felt his social worker took on board his wishes and feelings. Alex said on one occasion he was not informed about his social worker bringing a student on a visit. **“She brought a trainee social worker with her, but I didn’t want no stranger. So I told her and she didn’t bring her back.”**

Interviewing

6 young people have been formally trained so far to undertake recruitment and selection. This piece of work is informed by the MALAP Reference Group. I spoke to four young people who have been involved in the recent recruitment of social workers for the Looked After Team. Paul told me, **“I got a flyer through asking me to go to an opening evening about why they wanted young people on interview panels. So I put my name forward to do it.”** Alex added, **“I think I got a phone call asking me if I wanted to interview for new staff.”** Paul continued, **“We did some training on a couple of Monday nights, and we got paid. It was good cos we looked at things like confidentiality and all that.”** Alex said, **“I’ve interviewed about 7 or 8 staff. We asked them these questions that we made. Like why do you like working with kids, what experience do you have? So they have to give you a good enough answer.** Gemma told me, **“We wanted to put in our own standards. We put in our own words and interviewed with our own questions.”** Craig told me, **“After the interviews we then discuss things about the answers. Then we rate how they did. On the last interview, we did give one person 1 out of 5. Everyone took notice of us and that person didn’t get the job. Some answers were excellent and some were disgraceful.”** Alex added, **“We get to see what people are like and we have a say in who gets it and who doesn’t. I interviewed the manager before she got the job here.”** Gemma continued, **“You get to know. It’s better than the adults speaking. The kids know what they want. Who are in it for the money and who aren’t.”** Craig finished by telling me, **“It’s a really good idea. Young people know what they need out of staff best. We can find out who will be best suited. Adults might think an answer is excellent, which is actually rubbish.”**

Boys Group

One of the issues highlighted by the young people at the Agenda Day was that they wanted a say in activities they do. As a result the Team are working with a group of young people and Education in the Community to start a Boys Group. In August an event was arranged so everyone could get together and meet each other. Matthew said, **“We met in August and we did spray painting. No, like graffiti.”** Laurkan added, **“I did Dr Who. And I ate all the Jaffa Cakes and biscuits.”** After the initial meeting on the morning, the group took part in activities involving an artist and a DJ. The young people said they would like a further meeting so they could decide where, when and how often they want to meet up. The young people, supported by Jon Niblo are putting together a bid for money from the Youth Opportunity Fund. Matthew said, **“We saw a video tape,**

and you have to convince these people who can help, to give you money. So we are doing that tonight, trying to get the money for our club.”

Alex explained why he decided to join the group, He said, **“When my social worker asked if I wanted to come to the group and she said you get free pizza, I said aye. Cos I use to go out with CATS, but they never turned up half the time, so I wanted something to do.”** Dale added, **“Me foster carers told us. I chose to come and we get to decide to do games and stuff. Cos I just use to play out or stay in, so it’s different.”** The group are also they are looking at ways they think could best open up the group to more young people.

The Looked After Social Work Service Team have worked very hard at listening to the views and opinions of children and young people and at bringing about the changes they are asking for. They are trying to involve everyone in decision making. For example, the MALAP Reference Group are running Agenda Days for the team to help maintain the process of dialogue This helps the Team continually review and plan in order to consider what children and young people are saying they need and what would improve things.

I would like to thank everyone for helping me write this evaluation. All the young people I spoke to are happy with what has been said. As they are in full agreement I have no hesitation in recommending that the Looked After Social Work Service (North and South) should receive Investing In Children Membership. Very well done.

**Glenys Newby
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