



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Young People's Service

For the purpose of this evaluation I met with Melissa, Paul, Tony, Abbey, Cheryl, Sarah, James, Jamie and Brian.

The Young People's Service within Durham County Council was set up as a direct response to the 'Leaving Care Act, 2000'. The key requirements for this service are to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17, who are in care or leavers care, and to keep in touch with care leavers until they are at least 21. Every eligible young person in care should also receive a comprehensive pathway plan when they turn 16.

Each young person should have a Young Person's Advisor, who will coordinate the provision of support and assistance to meet the needs of young people. Particular emphasis is placed on helping young people into education, training or employment. Another key requirement for the service is to provide a clear system of financial support for care leavers and to ensure young people understand what financial support young people can access.

This report will highlight opportunities some young people who access this service have to enter into dialogue regarding these requirements. It will also identify recommendations made by some young people to develop the service and identify any changes and developments in the service that have been made through dialogue.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change.

Participation Group.

The Young People's Service has established a participation group to try to develop and increase the opportunities young people have to discuss what they think of the service and any other relevant services they might access. Members of the participation group have met with the Corporate Parenting Group of Durham County Council, which is built up of senior managers, local councillors and other representatives, to discuss with them different issues that are important to young people.

Paul, a member of the participation group, explained, "We have met with members of Durham County Council to discuss different issues about being in care and leaving care budgets and other general stuff". Through this process young people are encouraged to evaluate the Young People's Service and make developments to the service, such as their involvement in the development of an information pack which is now issued to all young people who access the service.

Cheryl, another member of the participation group, suggested, "It would be better if we met more regularly so we can discuss more issues and try to improve things about the Young People's Service and other things that are important to young people".

All young people are given the opportunity to get involved in the participation group, as the Young People's Service writes to all young people who can access the service to ask

for their input. They are also thinking about producing a newsletter to keep people updated.

Paul went on to explain, "You get the chance to discuss your experiences of social services and what can be improved".

Brian, a young person who also uses the service, suggested, "I think the participation group is a good idea but think they should look at things like evaluating the benefits of pathway plans and reviewing the condition of accommodation for young people leaving care".

It is too early at this stage to fully evaluate the impact the participation group is having on the developments of the Young People's Service. It will be interesting to discover, when coming to re-evaluation next year, how the young people share ideas about the service and incorporate this into service developments.

Supported Lodgings.

The service aims to provide homes for people aged 16 and over who have been in local authority care or who may be homeless. Supported Lodgings promotes independence in young people by allowing them to live a semi-independent lifestyle to prepare them for the future. It has recently changed the panel process to involve a young person in the supported lodging panel.

Pathway Plans.

Pathway plans seem to give young people the opportunity to direct the support and service they receive from the Young People's Service on an individual basis. The Pathway plan can be accessed until a young person is at least 21yrs old and is reviewed every 6 months. This can extend up to 24 yrs if the young person is pursuing further education.

Some young people did have direct experiences and recommendations about Pathway Plans. James explained, "I have not had one and I am now 21 years old and am not that bothered now because things have turned out ok for me".

Cheryl suggested, "It should be up to the young person if they want to have one". She went on to add, "It has not really helped me that much because I still do not know what I want to do".

Paul had this to say, "I wanted to do joinery and was placed on the 'Education to Employment' course but did not get to do joinery through the pathway plan and think it could have been better".

Sarah spoke very positively about the process, "It has helped me plan what I want to do and through this I was supported into college and have just got a grant to buy a laptop to help me with my A-levels".

Young People Advisors.

All young people who access the service have a full time Young Person's Advisor, who supports them with such issues as education, employment and other issues young people raise.

The young people did have direct experiences and recommendations about Young People's Advisors. Abbey, a young person who accesses the YPA service explained, "I have had difficulty contacting my YPA and have left several messages for her to contact me". Abby went on to explain, "I found out that she was on the sick and think that the duty manger should have contacted me instead of waiting till my YPA got back off the sick as I had some things I needed to talk about". Abbey also told me, however, "Since

my Young Person's Advisor has been back off the sick she has been really supportive with the problems I have been having".

The Young People's Service have now made a change to the service, through the introduction of a standard letter sent out to young people explaining that their Young Person's Advisor has been absent from work for a week and gives details of who they can contact instead.

Melissa said, "I had the same YPA for two years and she has been really supportive with my ideas and has always listened to me".

Paul mentioned, "I think it would be good if the Young People Advisors would interact more with you and do the paper work after the meeting". He did go on to explain, "I think it is much better having a Young Person's Advisor than what it was like with social services and they definitely listen to your ideas".

Tony a young person who also accesses the service, told me, "I have been in care since I was five, and think the service has become better since it changed to the Young People's Service". Tony went on explain, "My Personal Advisor has been class and has helped me get a house and supported me with getting a job, in the past all my care accommodation broke down and I was always getting moved about".

Brian's experience was, "Young Person's Advisors are sometimes helpful but more often I have found that that has been down to an individual. Brian added, "I have also had a Young Person's Advisor who was really slow in responding to my needs and do not think it should be like this because they should all be the same".

The majority of young people that I met felt that they do get listened to by their Young Person's Advisor and that their Young Person's Advisor is ensuring that these young people are participating in decision making that effect their lives. Some of these young people also had recommendations about how to improve the role of the Young Person's Advisor, which the Young People's Service could take into consideration when looking to develop the service based on the recommendations of young people who use the service.

Financial Support.

Mathew explained, "It took me nine weeks to get a washer dryer machine and I do not think this is acceptable and should not have had to wait this long". Mathew went on to add, "I think it was because my Young Person's Advisors was off sick". Mathew added, "We need to do a supervised spend but why could someone else from the team not come out and help me. They did help me with other things in my flat which was good".

Most young people with whom I met felt that, in most cases, they do get listened to and that their individual circumstances were supported with the appropriate financial support. Changes were made to their financial support based on their needs, which was the case with Matthew.

The Young People's Service has started to develop opportunities where some young people can discuss their individual experiences through the development of a participation group. There have been some changes made to how the service responds to members of staff being off sick. This is shown in the introduction of the new format to let young people know when their Young Person's Advisor has been off sick. Young people spoke about how they direct individual support through pathway plans and they spoke about the financial support they receive. They also spoke of the development of a new information pack.

For these reasons I would like to recommend that the Young People's Service receives Investing in Children membership. I look forward to seeing further developments made over the next year in partnership with young people who access the team.

This report has been read and agreed by the following young people who access the Young People Service:-Melissa, Paul, Tony, Abbey, Cheryl, Sarah, James, Jamie and Brian.

Rob Johnson
Investing in Children
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