

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Longitudinal Evaluation of Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland



Centre for Youth Research and Development

Department of Applied Social Studies

National University of Ireland, Maynooth



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A copy of the full report is available at [www.yapireland.ie](http://www.yapireland.ie).

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In 2002 YAP Ireland, through the support and backing of the Health Boards (now Health Service Executive), piloted the Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) model in the North Dublin, Galway, Roscommon and Mayo areas. YAP Ireland uses a unique strengths based, family focused approach to provide intensive support for six months, to young people and families with complex needs at Level 3 and 4 of the Hardiker Scale referred by HSE children and families social work teams. Advocates recruited and employed from the local community provide up to 15 hours of one to one support per week for a young person and family. The Youth Advocate Programme (YAP) was originally developed in Pennsylvania in 1975 as an intervention for young people who were within the juvenile justice system and today YAP Inc. is one of the largest non-profit Youth and Family Support agencies in the US.

The YAP model is based upon the development of a trust relationship between a supportive, trained and skilled adult Advocate, the young person and their family. The programme has since gone on to expand into regions across Ireland and is currently operating in 21 counties, with plans for further expansion. YAP Ireland is a registered charity managed by a voluntary Board of Directors, employing 32 permanent staff and approximately 150 Advocates on a fixed purpose basis. YAP Ireland also provides Disability, Crisis Intervention, Aftercare and Family Support Programmes. In 2012, 528 young people and their families participated in YAP programmes.

## The Research

The longitudinal evaluation of YAP Ireland sought to address the following research questions:

1. Is the YAP model effective in an Irish context?
2. Are the YAP programmes contributing to positive outcomes for young people and their families?

The research shows that YAP Ireland has a statistically significant impact on the outcomes of young people and families who participated in the programme and that staff are committed to the model and working in a strengths based way.

## The Context

Despite significant advances of recent years, children and young people in Ireland continue to be faced with economic, social and psychosocial challenges, exacerbated by ongoing economic difficulties. The Central Statistics Office reports that children in Ireland are more likely to be in consistent poverty than their European peers, with 7.4% of children under the age of fifteen in consistent poverty in 2010 (CSO, 2012), with young females more likely to be affected. Further, the number of children in state care is rising, with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) report on the state of the nation's children holding that the number of children in the care of the HSE increased by approximately 16% between 2007 and 2011, the majority (90.3%) living with foster families. An Amnesty International report (2011) also found that children and young people are subject to social exclusion, with 50% of those polled agreeing that wider society is particularly prejudiced towards vulnerable groups, including children in care, children who commit crime, Traveller children and children seeking asylum.

Recent research by the Children's Mental Health Coalition (2013) highlights the importance of supporting mental health in children and young people by building protective factors to support their resilience, self-worth and self-efficacy. The report emphasises the need to put greater emphasis on 'at risk' families, with young people experiencing mental health problems diverted from the youth justice system towards community services that address their need, including those that support the whole family.

Evaluations of advocacy and mentoring programmes for vulnerable young people have reported positive outcomes in a wide range of areas, supporting the argument for mentoring as a strategy. "The argument for using mentoring as an intervention strategy is particularly strong when there is an interest in promoting outcomes across multiple areas of a young person's development" (DuBois et al., 2011, 58).

A meta-analysis of 73 mentoring programmes directed at children and young people in the United States (Du Bois et al., 2011) found that overall, mentoring programmes are effective in improving outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional and academic domains for young people's development. It was also found that mentoring as an intervention strategy has the capacity to serve both promotion and prevention aims.

## Research Design

The research design was mixed methods, incorporating qualitative and quantitative components. It was a 'quasi-experimental' design in that the quantitative component included demographic data collection from both a sample of YAP young people and from young people in a broadly similar comparator group who were not participating in YAP or any other structured youth service provision; a series of phased Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) administered longitudinally to the YAP sample of young people, their guardians and the comparator cohort; and a mid-way fidelity study with the YAP cohort.

All new YAP programme participants from September 2011 were briefed on the study by their Case Managers and invited to take part. A total of 191 young people and 180 parents/guardians consented to participate in the research at baseline. By end-point, a total of 102 young people and 94 parents/guardians were still participating. As stated above, data was also collected from a comparator cohort of broadly similar young people. A quasi-experimental design was considered appropriate because a randomised control trial would not have been practicable or ethical in this case (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The comparator group was identified through engagement with youth work outreach services. A total of 130 comparator young people consented to participate in the research at baseline, with 69 still participating at end-point. While of interest for indicative purposes, it is not claimed that the comparator group findings have the robustness of an experimental control group. The data for this group, while referred to in the body of the report, is therefore included as an appendix.

The quantitative component of the research also included an online survey of YAP Advocates. The qualitative component included a series of phased one-to-one interviews with participants, their guardians and their Advocates; along with focus group interviews with YAP Managers and Advocates. Qualitative data was also collected from open-ended questions in the online survey of Advocates. Data was also collected through observation of YAP training sessions.

Information from the different components of the research is summarised below. For more details, please see the full report at [www.yapireland.ie](http://www.yapireland.ie).

## Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 2005) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire incorporating 25 attributes, some positive and some negative. The 25 items are divided into five scales including emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour, as well as a composite total difficulties score. The SDQ is a widely used instrument in clinical assessment; outcome and intervention evaluation; and epidemiology. It is used as a research tool internationally, in developmental, genetic, social, clinical and educational studies. For the YAP participants and their parents/guardians, the SDQ was administered four times, at the baseline, mid-point and end-point of the six month programme, and again three months after completion. For the comparator cohort, the SDQ was administered to the young people only, at the beginning and end of a six month period.

## SDQ Findings

The quantitative component of the research yielded predominantly positive results for young people engaged in the programme. SDQ total difficulties scores decreased from baseline to mid-point, and again to end-point for both parents/guardians and young people's self-reports. The mean score for YAP young people's self-reports moved from the 'borderline' category to the 'average' category for total difficulties. Similarly, the mean score for parents decreased, moving from 'at risk' to the lower end of the 'borderline' category. Parent/guardian scores show markedly higher improvements. Parents' perceptions of difficulties were higher than self-reported at baseline. The changes were found to be statistically significant between the baseline and end-point for both young people and their parents'/guardians' reports. The figures indicate that there was an overall perceived improvement in difficulties for respondents who took part in the programme.

Comparing the end of programme score to the three month post-programme scores reveals that there is no significant change in the self-report scores, which suggests that the improvements made were sustained after the programme ended. This is true for four sub-scales, as well as for the total difficulties score. Of note, the pro-social scores improved significantly for self-reports in the post-programme findings, previously remaining statistically unchanged during the programme, possibly suggesting that benefits relating to this aspect of young people's behaviour had accrued over time.

However, in the parent/guardian post-programme scores for total difficulties, a disimprovement can be reported, with the young people moving to the 'at risk' category. However, when outliers (extreme cases) are removed, this change is smaller. Given the relatively smaller number of responses at the three month post-programme phase, sufficient cases were not available to test significance of variance, and thus all of these findings need to be interpreted with caution. A further caveat is that parent/guardian perceptions and apprehensions regarding disengagement from the programme, as expressed in the qualitative strand of the research, may have influenced responses to this item.

## Young People's Views Through Interview Series

Young people participating in the YAP programme also described beneficial outcomes when interviewed. On the whole, they reported positive experiences of their YAP Advocate, including references to the Advocates' interests and hobbies, their ability to listen and offer advice, as well as their ability to engage the young people by 'telling stories', encouraging and joining in activities including supporting school work and, drawing on the YAP model, avoiding judgment and focusing on the strengths of the young person, while listening to their points of view.

*"She is interested in most of the things that I am interested in so there is a lot to do and lots of things to talk about. We watch the same things, we like the same music and things like that. She is a great person."*

*"You actually know someone is listening to you and taking in the information and being able to give you advice on it."*

*"She will always make you feel good about yourself; she would talk to me about positive things."*

The approach is consistent with the 'one good adult' ethos adopted by YAP Ireland, drawing on the Headstrong My World Survey (2012), which finds that the presence of 'one good adult' makes it more likely that a young person will be connected, self-confident, future looking and able to cope with problems (Headstrong, 2013). This is in keeping with long-established insights from the psychological literature: the importance of a mentor as a role-model in youth development is identified in Erikson's life-stage psychosocial development theory (1959), while Bandura's social learning model holds that a young person will reproduce observed behaviours and, if feeling motivated, will continue to engage with positive behaviours.

Qualitative data gathered during the interview series strand of the research indicates that young people on the YAP programme find the experience predominantly positive, reporting improved confidence and increased participation in activities and improved community engagement.

*"It has changed me so far as being more open and more confident, getting out there, it has got me involved in stuff."*

Young people also reported improvements in their mental health, leading to decreased stress, in addition to increased self-esteem and resilience, and increased ability to cope with challenges.

*"Maybe I don't feel as stressed because I know if I have an issue I can talk to [my Advocate]."*

*"Yes, I think I have become stronger than before... when I am with [the Advocate], I can just tell her everything that I feel, she doesn't judge me."*

These protective factors are noted as important to a young person's self-worth, self-efficacy and mental health, particularly within 'at risk' families (Children's Mental Health Coalition, 2013).

## The Matching Process

Experiences of the matching process were predominantly positive, with young people and parents/guardians largely reporting positive relationships based on shared interests and tailored to the specific needs of the young person. One contrasting view arose in the interview series, with a guardian and their young person describing the matched Advocate as unsuitable. Findings from the survey of Advocates concur that the process is largely positive, with the majority of Advocates giving accounts of positive matches.

*"I certainly think that yes we are matched well in terms of being able to communicate with each other. And I think [the young person] clearly needed a woman, a mother figure in her life so yes so far I think the match is good."*

*"[The Case Manager] has done a great job on the match... it is working really well."*

Managers also described the process of matching as working very well, with the variety of Advocates providing a pool from which appropriate matches can be drawn.

*“The variety on the panel gives us the opportunity to have really good matches with the young people.”*

Again, a view was expressed that in some regions, it is not always possible to produce an ideal match, with logistical difficulties presenting.

## Activities and Community Engagement

The young people participating in the interview series acknowledged changes in their level of community participation since joining the YAP programme. Those interviewed described their experiences before YAP, including a lack of social outlets and limited participation in community.

*“On the weekends I would stay in bed until around 3pm or 4pm, lie around, get dressed and then I’d go out to the park and I’d come in. Sometimes I wouldn’t come in at all, I’d just stay out. [I would] stay in my friend’s house or stay all night in the streets.”*

They described a range of activities undertaken with their Advocates, including dining out, going to the cinema, going bowling, taking walks and taking horse-riding lessons. Those interviewed were for the most part satisfied with the range of activities they were experiencing on the YAP programme.

*“I love playing pool so we will look into playing pool. I think playing pool, going for walks and getting lunch are the main things that we would be doing.”*

*“We usually go to the library because [the Advocate] wants us to get our homework done and sometimes we go to [shopping centre].”*

Advocates also identified many of the same activities undertaken with their young person, including food and drink based activities, excursions and entertainment activities including cinema visits.

Just under a quarter of Advocates indicated that they would like to have done other activities, with prohibitive factors including logistical and budget constraints, as well as differing levels of engagement of their young person.

*“Like I mentioned earlier, I can’t take [the young person] to things that are costing €40, €50 and €60 and then expect that to be picked up [by the family], after the programme.”*

The views of parents/guardians were largely positive. The young people taking part in the interview series also identified some challenges encountered while participating in the YAP programme. The young people reported finding budget constraints prohibitive, and those in rural areas expressed interest in improved dedicated facilities.

*“I think more money should be added to the budget because you can’t do a lot for €15.”*

## Length of Programme

Evidence indicates that the longevity of relationships impacts on youth outcomes in mentoring programmes (DuBois et al., 2002, Moore et al., 2002). It has also been reported that young people in programmes that terminated within six months reported disimprovement in several areas (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), and that young people in relationships that lasted over a year reported greater improvements (Tierney et al., 1995).

While there was some acknowledgement that the six month period of intervention is short, the

consensus among focus group participants was that this was a sufficient period to achieve results and improve the life of the young person. This is reflected in the statistical data collected for this study, with positive outcomes found. Managers conveyed the need to empower not just the young person, but also the parents or guardians, while also facilitating community engagement during this time.

*“What we’re finding is that the reason they don’t want to be part of communities anymore is they find it very hard to cope...for example if conflict arose, how to resolve those issues, how to deal with conflict in school, at home.”*

Some Advocates also expressed an interest in a phased wind down of the service, with some limited opportunities for contact between the Advocate and young person after the programme has ended. Despite this, longitudinal evidence from this study reports positive outcomes for young people participating in the programme over the six month period.

## The Disengagement Process

Case Managers reported positively on the disengagement process, describing how the young person is prepared for the service wind down during wrap meetings and during their time spent with their Advocate. Managers also described YAP’s extension policy, indicating that occasionally the request for an extension may come from an external service. Advocates also commented on the disengagement process with the young people, recording the importance of openness and clarity when working with the young people and drawing on their training, to avoid undue attachment or dependence. Advocates reported preparing their young person(s) for life after YAP.

*“I think there is no doubt that if the relationship has worked well, any exit process is going to be difficult for both. For them to acknowledge that is incredibly powerful as well, it is part of life, endings and beginnings.”*

However, a disparity presented between the views of the Managers on the disengagement process and those of the young people and their families interviewed. The main concern focused on perceptions of preparedness for the disengagement process, with parents expressing fear that their young person would return to exhibiting previous challenging behaviours, while others expressed concerns about managing once services were withdrawn. This data indicates a concern among some parents/guardians, understandable perhaps given their positive assessment of the programme, about ‘life after YAP’ and support without the programme.

*“I’ll be very sad when it comes to an end because I know she can’t have any more contact with us and I am going to be lost without her, when [the Advocate is gone], I don’t have anyone then...I can’t see myself managing too well to be totally honest.”*

## Parents’ Views

The parents/guardians of young people participating in the YAP evaluation interview series predominantly spoke positively about their experiences of YAP Advocates, discussing the benefits of having the additional support of the YAP worker, which was having a positive effect on the young person’s home life; and also providing support to the guardian in motivating or encouraging the young person, in line with YAP’s core principle of partnering with parents.

*“She has started to talk now, she tells me about things happening at school that she doesn’t like, it is different from before.”*



Parents/guardians also report positive outcomes for their young people, including improved communication and social skills, and increased confidence and community engagement. The responses are by and large in line with YAP's core principles, including 'partnership with parents' and a 'focus on strengths' approach. Parents also identified improvements that met the specific needs of their young person, aligning to YAP's 'individualised service planning' approach.

*"She has more self-esteem with people, she has more confidence."*

Parents and guardians discussed the prospect of their young person continuing to engage in the activities undertaken on the YAP programme. Responses varied, with some indicating that their young person would maintain levels of engagement, with others reporting that their young person would be less likely to maintain activity levels after the disengagement process, especially where activities were dependent on the company of the Advocate, or would likely present a financial burden.

## Advocates' Views

Advocates currently employed by YAP Ireland come from a variety of work backgrounds, including community and youth work, social care work, education, retail and sports/recreation. This reflects YAP Ireland's policy of recruiting people with the necessary aptitudes, and ideally living in the local community, rather than having specific qualifications. The majority of matched Advocates were working with one or two young people at the time of this research, typically spending 6-10 hours with their young person.

YAP Advocates were by and large well-informed of the YAP model and conscious of the need to apply the model in practice. Advocates identified positive features of the model, including 'one to one interaction' with the young people, 'the strengths based approach', 'focusing on positives', providing 'a support network' for the young person, and YAP's 'no reject, no eject' policy. The responses are in keeping with YAP's strengths based wraparound model.

*"I am the young person's voice and support. My role is for [young person], right now as we sit it is for [the young person] regarding whatever support she needs be it education, social skills."*

*"I really believe in the model and I have seen from my first case how it works and it has worked for me."*

In reporting on their experiences of working as an Advocate for YAP Ireland, responses varied. Survey results show that Advocates are confident in their roles and feel well-matched with their young people. Substantial majorities of Advocates surveyed feel confident and supported in their roles and agree that their work with YAP Ireland contributes to their professional development. Responses are also positive, but less decisively so, regarding the adequacy of feedback received; 59% (n=48) think it is 'Certainly True' they are given adequate feedback and 37% (n=30) think it is 'Somewhat True'.

Advocates reported facing challenges in their roles. Advocates identified difficulties in motivating their young person to engage in activities, and apprehension in dealing with complex cases, particularly where the young person has exhibited or threatened violent behaviour. In some instances, it was reported that further training, or the selection of an Advocate with specific experience would benefit a challenging or crisis situation.

*"The biggest challenge has been getting [the young person] into school, I've tried everything."*

*"Just dealing with when the day goes wrong, dealing with how much effort you have put into your job and then you are dissatisfied going home. That is disheartening sometimes."*

## Managers' Views

Service and Case Managers working with YAP Ireland described the young people on the YAP programme, often in terms of the challenges faced and how these could be overcome utilising the YAP model. They described young people on the YAP programme as lacking a sense of contribution to society and community, manifesting in a sense of being mistreated or let down, as well as isolated. They also highlighted the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse among YAP clients, emphasising the at-risk nature of the young people on the programme.

*"To some degree what is facing them is that they have lost their connection with communities."*

*"There are certain events happening, mental health issues have always come up."*

Family and home circumstances were also reported as potentially contributing to problems, with accounts that some young people may be responding to behaviours witnessed in their home environment.

*"In the cases I work with there's a lot of dysfunction and the kids are taking on the parents' issues."*

Staff were positive about the YAP model in responding to the needs of vulnerable young people and young people with complex needs, in keeping with the evidence in the literature which reports that mentoring relationships produce more marked outcomes and are most effective where the participating young people have either had pre-existing difficulties or been exposed to significant levels of environmental risk (DuBois et al., 2011). Managers occasionally expressed concern at their workload and the associated expectations, describing how they often balanced a variety of competing tasks, while continuing to remain as involved as possible with their cases.

*"From recruiting to training, we are heavily involved from short listing, through to the training through to checking references and child protection clearance."*

## Training

The characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship have been identified in the literature, with studies emphasising the importance of mentor recruitment and training. Moreover, positive outcomes have been deemed to be dependent on, and moderated by, measures such as guidelines for practice in the field and the screening and training of mentors (Du Bois et al., 2002). Findings from the observation of YAP training and from focus groups and the survey of Advocates suggest that participants have had positive experiences and have benefited from the training provided.

During training observations, staff training was positively received by those present. Group dynamics were positive across the training sessions, with good levels of group interaction, and opportunity for questions and feedback. The trainers frequently drew on professional experience and knowledge of YAP and related work, a process that was undoubtedly beneficial for those present. While focus group responses were also positive, a small number of Managers identified the need for improved induction or training for Case Managers, with an emphasis on opportunities to share experience and learn from one another.

## Summary of Research Findings

This evaluation study concludes that the YAP programme is implemented as intended, with treatment fidelity. Managers and Advocates working for YAP Ireland believe in the YAP model, and are also positive about the application of the YAP model in practice, and the benefits for the young people and families participating in the programme. Staff were positive about the YAP model in responding to the needs of vulnerable young people and young people with complex needs, in keeping with the evidence in the literature which reports that mentoring relationships are most effective where the participating young people have either had pre-existing difficulties or been exposed to significant levels of environmental risk (DuBois et al., 2011).

Staff, young people and parents/guardians were positive about the matching process and working with Advocates, in line with the literature, which holds that positive outcomes are more likely to be reported where the mentor and young person have been paired based on similarities of interest (DuBois et al., 2002).

Young people participating in the programme have positive outcomes, as measured statistically through the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Overall the findings signify improved wellbeing for young people participating in the programme. Parents/guardians of participants also recorded positive outcomes overall through the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire. The reported improvements as evidenced by the qualitative data and quantitative SDQ findings represent significant positive outcomes for the young people participating in the YAP programme. The outcomes show improvements in factors which enhance wellbeing, as described in the literature. Happiness and health are associated with physical participation in life, spending time with friends and a sense of belonging within families and communities (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). Correspondingly, resilience and the maintenance of wellbeing in the presence of adversity have been linked to individual factors such as self-esteem and leisure interests; social factors such as a sense of belonging and a pro-social peer group; and community factors such as attachment to community networks and access to support services (National Youth Health Programme, 2004). These reported findings in relation to wellbeing suggest that there are clear positive outcomes for young people who participate in the YAP programme.

### Strengths

Based on the findings of this research, it is possible to identify a number of strengths of the YAP programme in practice.

- Young people participating in the YAP Ireland programme have positive outcomes, as measured statistically through the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire. Young people's self-report scores for total difficulties improved significantly across the six month time frame. Participants also perceived positive outcomes on a range of sub-scales across the six month time frame, including the emotional symptoms, conduct problems and hyperactivity scales. While young people showed a small improvement on the peer problems scale and a small increase in risk on the pro-social scale, these were not deemed to be statistically significant. Overall the findings signify improved wellbeing for young people participating in the programme.
- Parents/guardians of young people participating in the YAP Ireland programme perceived positive outcomes for their young people, in addition to highlighting the benefits of YAP's programme to the family, particularly in terms of support provision. This is in line with YAP's core principle of 'partnership with parents'. Parents/guardians of participants also recorded positive outcomes through the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire. Scores for total difficulties improved significantly across the six month time frame. Parent/guardian reports also showed significant improvements across a range of sub-scales, including the emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems scales.

- Young people engaged in the YAP Ireland programme typically reported beneficial experiences of participation, including improved community engagement and the benefits of new experiences in their day-to-day lives. Young people also perceived improved confidence and self-esteem, which are qualities linked to resilience in young people, and of particular importance to at risk groups.
- The YAP programme is implemented as intended, with treatment fidelity scores consistently positive, from the perspectives of the young people and their parents/guardians. Young people were particularly positive about feeling heard, understood and respected on the YAP programme, while parents/guardians reported particular satisfaction with the matching process.
- YAP's matching process is predominantly effective, drawing on a variety of Advocates and implementing YAP's core principle of 'individualised service planning'.
- Managers and Advocates working for YAP Ireland believe in the YAP model, including features of the model aligning to YAP's core principles, notably the strengths based wraparound approach and the core principle of empowerment. Managers and Advocates were also positive about the application of the YAP model in practice, and the benefits for the young people participating in the programme, with shared understandings of positive outcomes achieved for participants and their families.
- The training provided by YAP Ireland is well-received by potential and matched Advocates and staff, with particularly positive responses to specialised training relating to specific risk factors for young people participating in the programme.

## Challenges

A number of challenges have been identified through the research, highlighting opportunities for learning for YAP Ireland.

- Some Advocates identified difficulties in motivating their young person to engage in activities, and apprehension in dealing with complex cases, particularly where the young person has exhibited or threatened violent behaviour. It may be possible to address this through further training, with training relating to specific risk factors particularly well-received by Advocates.
- In a small number of cases, where a match is not successful, the programme may not be as effective in supporting the young person to achieve positive outcomes.
- Managers also identified challenges faced in dealing with some cases, sometimes linked to external services, including social work services and in some cases, treatment of the young person in the school environment.
- Some Advocates are not satisfied with the pay they receive for the work that they do. When asked if they were paid fairly for the work that they do, 42% (n=34) found this to be 'Somewhat True', with 16% (n=13) finding this to be 'Not True'.
- A small number of Managers participating in focus groups occasionally expressed frustration at their workload and the associated expectations, describing how they often balanced a variety of competing tasks, while continuing to remain as involved as possible with their cases. For a small number of new Case Managers the on-call time was challenging.

- Parents expressed concern about 'life after YAP' and losing the support provided by YAP Ireland. Consequently, it is important that sustainable community engagement is emphasised as vital to the YAP process and visited and revisited at meetings throughout the young person's participation in the programme.
- While Case Managers and Advocates were well-informed of the disengagement process, some parents expressed fear that their young person would return to exhibiting previous challenging behaviours, while others expressed concerns about managing once services were withdrawn. This data further highlights a perceived concern among some parents/guardians about 'life after YAP' and support without the programme.
- The administration of the research was resource-intensive, requiring ongoing organisational support for staff and young people. It is important that YAP staff have an understanding of the research process and handling of research material but also of the value of the research within the context of the overall work of the organisation.

## Recommendations

Based on the strengths and challenges identified here, the following recommendations can be made:

- It may be possible to address more challenging cases through further training, with current training relating to specific risk factors particularly well-received by Advocates. The opportunity for accreditation of the current training was also identified.
- The issues of Advocates' pay and conditions merit further consideration. While acknowledging severe financial constraints, it is recommended that YAP Ireland considers a review of the overall package provided to Advocates.
- In consideration of Managers' workloads, YAP should review the support and training for staff providing the on-call service and strengthen induction for new staff.
- The perceived concern among some parents/guardians about 'life after YAP' and sustained support without the programme could be further addressed throughout programme engagement, including at wraparound meetings, for young people and their families. YAP Ireland should consider the option of a phased aftercare plan to support families and young people participating in the programme. This would help to alleviate apprehension around the disengagement process, while facilitating sustained community engagement and supporting sustained outcomes for young people.
- YAP Ireland should consider what more could be done to encourage related organisations to work in a strengths based, youth-friendly way, promoting advocacy within the youth sector, and influencing change more broadly.

Based on analysis of the data collected through this longitudinal evaluation, it can confidently be concluded that the YAP model is effective in an Irish context and the YAP programme contributes to positive outcomes for young people and their families.

## **RESEARCH TEAM & CONTRIBUTORS**

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