



investing in children

## Evaluation for Investing in Children Membership

### South Regional Youth Advocate Programme

For the purpose of this evaluation for Investing in Children membership I had the opportunity to meet with Keith, Serena, Daniel and David, who access the Youth Advocate Programme (YAP) South Region of the Republic of Ireland.

The Young Advocate Programme (YAP) was established in 2002 to provide vulnerable young people, their families and the community in which they live an intensive support model using a community based approach.

Each team comprises of case managers and several community-based advocates, using a “strengths based” approach with young people and their families. This approach finds out what the young people are good at and encourages them to use these skills. The approach allows young people and their family’s voices to be heard regarding what can be done when facing a variety of social and personal circumstances.

The project supports young people and families from Limerick and Cork and the surrounding communities. Support is offered to young people either individually or through groups to undertake specific projects to support some young people to re-engage in community life.

I had the opportunity to meet with some young people, who are supported by the Limerick team. I was told by the young people that they are supported to express their own views and opinions throughout their participation in the programme.

This report will highlight some of the opportunities young people have had to be active members of the YAP in decision-making. It will also identify any changes that have occurred as a result of this.

### Opportunities for Dialogue and Change

#### **Needs Based Assessment**

Before a young person can access the advocacy programme they will meet with a case manager to complete an assessment.

Daniel explained: **"When I first met them it all started with what my favourite things were that I want to do and it went from there"**.

Serena said: **"One of first things I told them was that I liked dancing and would really like to do something like that"**. She added: **"They also asked me what type of advocate I would like and she turned out to be nice"**.

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The assessment is structured to allow a young person to talk with the case manager about how YAP can support them, looking at the young person's strengths in order to improve their circumstances.

### **Individual Service Plan and Goal Setting**

The individual service plan is carried out at the start of the young person's involvement with YAP.

Keith informed me: **"I get a say in everything and if you don't want to do something you don't have to"**. He added, **"I've been coming to YAP on and off for the last two years and I am on to my third advocate, who is helping me to get back into school"**.

Daniel told me all about his individual plan and goal settings. He said: **"I want to control my anger better and make new friends, which has started to happen because they helped me get into a martial arts class"**.

### **Review of Service Plans**

These take place at the two, four and five month stages of the programme so young people can review their goals, their experience of their advocate and the overall support they receive from YAP.

Daniel told me all about the review meeting and what he thought of them. He explained: **"You meet up with your advocate and talk about the things you want to talk about and the things YAP are helping you with, like my anger"**.

He continued: **"I have had a couple of these meetings where they ask you what you think of YAP and how things are going and about the goals you set and if you want to change them"**.

### **Group work**

These meetings allow young people the opportunity to raise issues that are important to them and to participate in community based events.

Some young people were also involved in decision making regarding a YAP Ireland National Citizenship event titled, "I am a Citizen", which was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2013. They undertook some local research for the event.

Serena told me all about her involvement in this and what she decided to do: **"I thought it would be a good idea to interview one of the barbers in Limerick because he has been there years and I wanted to find out if he thought he was a citizen of Limerick"**.

### **Working with the Advocate**

All of the young people with whom I met viewed this as a very important aspect of the project in respect of how they are listened to.

Keith expressed: **"I spent time with my advocate talking about how I can get back into school and what I need to do to stay in school"**.

David explained: **"I do meetings with Gary and talk about what things I want to do and work different things"**. He added:, **"I told him I would really like to do some martial arts, which was one of the first things I said when I met him and a few weeks later he had sorted it out for me"**.

### **Recommendations made by young people**

David explained: **"I think it would be really good to do something with other young people and their advocates, like going on trips or something"**. He added: **"When we went to Dublin to do the citizenship project I got to meet Daniel and found out that he had similar experiences to me and now we have become friends, which is why I think it will be good to do things with other young people within the programme, as we can help each other, with the support of the advocates"**.

I feel certain that Daniel would be supported to discuss this idea further.

### **Conclusion**

The South Regional YAP programme certainly supports inclusive dialogue between young people and project staff, allowing many young people the opportunity to influence how the programme has expanded.

All of the young people confirmed that their advocates listened to them and were able to describe how the individual support received from YAP was adapted to suit their circumstances. They also explained how they were able to set their own personal goals and evaluate the programme at different stages. It was also very encouraging to discover that the support the young people receive allow them to engage in community activities of their choice.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to write this evaluation. When I asked the young people if they agreed that South Regional Youth Advocate programme should get Investing in Children membership they all said: **"Yes!"** Therefore, I have no hesitation in recommending that the South Region of the Youth Advocate Programme receive Investing in Children membership.

The following young people have endorsed this report: Keith, Serena, Daniel and David.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to write this evaluation and finish by saying, "Well done".

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