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The Strengths and Challenges of the YAP Community Based Advocate Model

RESEARCH STUDY

Key Findings

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Youth **Advocate**
PROGRAMMES IRELAND

This research study examines the unique aspects of the YAP Ireland programme – namely the use of community-based Advocates to improve the lives of young people and their families. The strengths and challenges associated with the Community-Based Advocate Model are explored from the perspectives of key stakeholders, including young people, their parents or guardians, staff, and referrers.

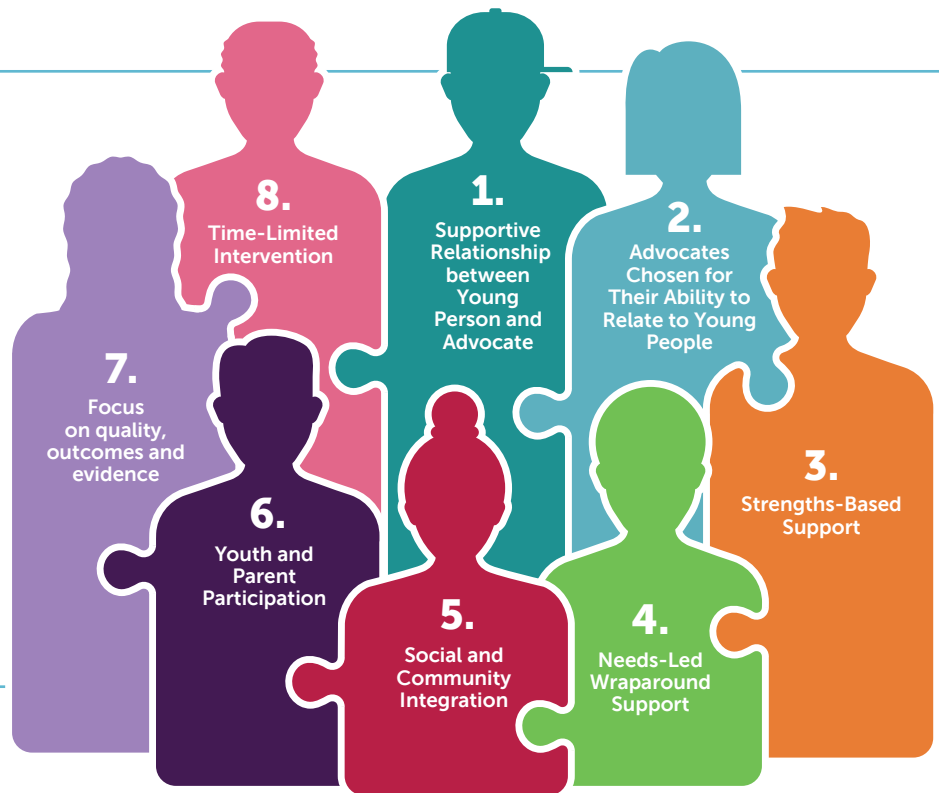
Methodology

This study used a mixed-method research design using a number of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research design and methodology were agreed in collaboration with a Research Working Group from YAP Ireland. There were two key phases to the research:

Phase One: Identifying the Key Components of the Model

The key components of the model were identified and agreed, based on interviews with key stakeholders and a secondary data analysis on all documents available on the YAP Ireland website.

Components of the Community-Based Advocate Model



Youth Advocate Programme – Key Components of the Model

Supportive relationship between Young Person and Advocate

The programme facilitates the development of a relationship between an Advocate and a young person. The match is based on personality, interests, and location of both young person and Advocate.

Advocates chosen for their ability to relate to young people

Advocates are not required to have professional qualifications but must be suited to working with young people in the community.

Strengths-based support

YAP Ireland focuses on the positives and strengths of the young person and their family. It highlights the talents and abilities of the young person.

YAP Ireland encourages the development of resilience and self-esteem and operates a 'no reject, no eject' policy.

Needs-led wraparound support

Services are tailored to the needs of the young person and their family, are personalised and flexible. An intensive service is offered to respond to these needs as required (emergency line 24/7).

Social and community integration

Local advocates facilitate the young persons' integration into the community and access to social outlets and opportunities.

Youth and parent participation

Emphasis on listening to the voice of service users.

Participation groups, youth forums, parent forums, and youth-led research.

Focus on quality, outcomes, and evidence

There is an organisational emphasis on quality assurance and monitoring.

Case-by-case outcomes evaluation.

Emphasis on monitoring, fidelity to the model, and continuous training for all staff.

Time-limited intervention

This is a six-month programme (with an option to apply for extension depending on the needs of the young person).

Phase Two: Examining the Key Components of the Community Based Advocate Model

The key components of the model were identified by undertaking five specific research strands: case studies (n = 50), focus groups (n=85), a staff survey (n=163), a literature review, and secondary analysis.

Findings

The findings of the study are very positive overall, indicating that the Community Based Advocate model achieves positive outcomes for young people. Young People, Parents, Advocates, staff, board members, and referrers believe strongly in the YAP Ireland model and are enthusiastic about its unique strengths as an approach to working with vulnerable young people and their families.

The YAP Ireland model is based on a number of core and essential service and practice components or principles. This study finds that the eight central components of the model as identified in this research are the 'critical ingredients' (Whittaker, 2009) in determining the success of the programme. These components are the essence of the YAP Ireland programme and how it operates.

Supportive relationship between Young Person and Advocate

The one-to-one, needs-led, intensive relationship-based approach was seen as an essential feature of the YAP model. The YAP Ireland programme facilitates the development of a supportive relationship between an Advocate and a young person, from which positive changes occurred.

“YAP get young people to go out, to talk to about things; they are there if you have problems and help you have ways to handle these. ... They listen to you and show you ways how to handle it. Because normally I would lash out and everything, but now I don't really do that anymore”

(Young person, case study 8)

Advocates chosen for their ability to relate to young people

In order for a close relationship to develop between the Advocate and young person, Advocates are carefully chosen for their aptitude and ability to work with young people in the community.

“It is good that they can listen to you and share their experiences with you. If you've gone through something, they could say, 'Well, I've gone through something like this.'”

(Young person, case study 5)

Strengths-Based Support

The strengths-based focus, which emphasises what is working for the young person, is seen as critical to the YAP Ireland approach. A core element of the model is that there is a focus on the positives and strengths of the young person and their family.

“Before this started, my daughter was very withdrawn and she'd no self-esteem, and sometimes she wouldn't feel comfortable around people or whatever. It's helped her through it, like. Yeah I thought it was brilliant, now. She seems more confident now, I think.”

(Parent, case study 3)

Needs-Led Wraparound Support

Placing the young person and their family at the centre of the planning and review process and listening to their needs, experiences, and goals is seen as critical to the YAP Ireland model.

“I thought it was just going to be someone coming down and talking, and that's it, like. But it was all about what you wanted to do. Like what you'd prefer to do, or if you wanted to go somewhere to talk about something, you could do that. If you wanted to stay at home, you could do that, like. It all revolved around you.”

(Young person, case study 2)

Social and community integration

An important task for the Advocate is to establish connections with relevant people in the community, such as youth workers or sports coaches, who could support the young person to integrate into community activities and look out for the young person on an ongoing basis.

“When I had my YAP Ireland worker, we did do like stuff with our community and stuff like, with dancing and Zumba dancing and stuff, but most of our thing was based with the community. It was helping me to like build my confidence.”

(Young people's focus group 2)

Challenges in supporting young people to become involved in their communities included a lack of interest, mental health issues, or perceptions that their communities are unsafe or unwelcoming. Furthermore, logistical challenges, such as lack of transport or facilities, can make sustainable social and community integration challenging.

Youth and parent participation

YAP Ireland listens attentively to young people and families as part of the case planning and review and operates a range of participation groups, youth forums, parent forums, and youth led research to hear the voice of young people and parents on their experiences of YAP Ireland programmes and other issues affecting their lives.

“They have a thing on a Wednesday now for parents which is brilliant as well. You're not on your own, you know. I know most people think, 'Well, this is only happening to me', but it's not. You can listen to the problems that they have and you can relate to them and then get ideas about going ahead.”

(Parent, case study 10)

Focus on quality, outcomes, and evidence

The YAP Ireland model assesses the effectiveness of its involvement with each young person and their family. Specific goals are set for each case, and progress is monitored on a continuous basis.

“We'd sit down with the boys and say, Well, did we make it to the goals, what changed, what happened, will we do this. It was very helpful to have stuff like that.”

(Parent, Case study 6)

Time-limited intervention

YAP Ireland offers a six-month programme to young people, with an option to apply for extension towards the end of that period if the outcomes have not been achieved. Mixed views were expressed on the time-limited nature of the programme.

“The six months, like, it goes so quickly and it takes a few weeks to settle and get to know people and to get to trust the staff and their leader. It takes a while, and then when they settle, all of a sudden it's coming to the end.”

(Parent, case study 5)

“Long-term sometimes isn't the answer, because it becomes repetitive, it becomes essentially very familiar. It's not goal-specific then, and things just, I don't know, they get a little bit fuzzy, whereas when it's a time-limited intervention you have the ability to push and challenge people a little bit more.”

(Team leader, case study 4)

This research has highlighted the significance of the individual components of the YAP Ireland model as critical features that are integral to the programme's positive outcomes. To see the full reports please see <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/cfrc/publications/policyreports/>



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