

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

15th March 2022

NYAS Cardiff Advocacy Service Update

Reasons for the Report

1. The report aims to inform the Committee on the work undertaken by NYAS Cardiff Advocacy Service for the reporting period of 1st April 2021 – 31st December 2021.

Background to the Service

2. The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a national charity providing information, advice, advocacy, and legal representation to some of the most vulnerable children, young people and adults across the UK. NYAS Cymru is a registered provider of advocacy services under RISCA 2016.
3. NYAS Cymru is commissioned by Cardiff and the Vale to provide a regional advocacy services to children and young people in receipt of support from Children's Services.
4. NYAS Cardiff Advocacy Service offers independent professional advocacy (IPA) to children and young people age 0-25 who are involved with Cardiff Children's Services. The overall remit of the project is to enable and empower children and young people to have a voice and to effectively participate within decision making processes.

5. The service ensures that the rights of children and young people involved with Cardiff Children's Services are upheld in accordance with legislative and policy framework within Wales.
6. The service provides both the active offer of advocacy and an issue-based advocacy service.

Active offer

7. The National Approach to Advocacy (NASA) places a duty on Children's Services to ensure all children and young people who become either looked after by or part of the child protection system are provided with the opportunity to meet with an advocate and receive timely information on how the advocacy service can support them. Following an active offer meeting, the child or young person can either decline or accept the offer of advocacy.

Issue based Advocacy

8. This service provides issue-based advocacy, whereby children and young people define the issues they want help with and decide how they wish to resolve these issues with the help of their advocate. Once their issue is resolved, or they decide they no longer want advocacy to support them the referral is closed. However, children and young people can return to the project in the future if they require support around other issues.

Overview of Referrals Received

9. For the financial year April 2021 and up to date till December 2021 the following breakdown of referrals were received - 286 Issue Based Referrals with a total of 333 interventions and 322 Active Offer Referrals.
10. Most service requests were to support children and young people within the Child Protection System, closely followed by requests from care-experienced children and young people. The service also received referrals from care leavers as well

as children and young people who were 'care and support' (outside of child protection) but these numbers were comparatively much lower in total.

11. The majority of referrals were made by social services (189) and by children and young people themselves (85). Where issue-based referrals resulted from the active offer of advocacy these were recorded as self-referrals as the young person had identified the issue, they wanted support with themselves.
12. Of the issues presented to date during this financial year the majority of requests were to support children and young people to have a voice and for them to participate within their children looked after and child protection meetings. The service has also so far received 57 contact issues, 41 placement issues, 23 school-based issues, 12 financial issues, 10 care leaver issues and 15 social services-based issues. A total of 7 complaints have been received to date which included issues around transport between placements, contact, mistreatment by foster carers, late EMA/LA payments and placement moves and a young person felt that social services had failed them.
13. The service has continued to provide an accessible and inclusive support for those referred in for support and have provided support to 21 UASC, 24 children with disabilities and 1 LGBTQ+ child and 27 were children or young people placed out of county.

Awareness Raising

14. The service attended a meeting with Ysgol-y- Deri staff to share both instructed advocacy and also non instructed advocacy and share how advocacy can support learners with additional learning and communication needs.
15. The service attended meetings with education settings and third sector agencies and parent support group to widen the referral pathway to ensure all children and young people could access Advocacy if they were entitled to the support.

16. Virtual drop ins with Children's Services staff that had previously set up were replaced with visits to Team meetings and one to one support for any new members of staff to inform them of advocacy and the Active offer.
17. A range of publicity information for children and young people was made available to Children's Services to disseminate to the workforce.
18. Age-appropriate letters were sent out to Children and young people to explain the service and the way that we could support them with advocacy.
19. The service has held meetings with St David's College and is hoping to develop links with the large number of care experienced children and young people who attend and support any advocacy needs they may have.

Key Achievements and Challenges

20. The Service responded quickly and adapted well to ensure advocacy was made available to children and young people during the pandemic, with the service being provided remotely via a range of virtual methods. As the COVID19 restrictions changed we were able to use this method to deliver a child led support service that could offer both Face to face (Following Welsh Government guidance for Safe Working) which was blended with virtual support which has proved effective in meeting large numbers of referrals into the service despite restrictions.
21. Despite operating around the challenges of a pandemic the service saw a steady referral for advocacy support.
22. The service implemented advocacy plans into practice, which is a requirement of the new advocacy regulations, and has contributed to ensuring the service is issue based, child led and better able to evidence outcomes.

23. The service has identified through the service improvement group that it wanted to further develop key skills for staff and create resources to improve some areas of the service we provide to the groups of children and young people we work with. The service has developed task and finish groups for UASC and ALN groups of children and young people to create a more inclusive range of support resources as well as staff training workshops to improve the overall service that can be offered in Wales.
24. Children and young people were routinely asked to provide feedback on the service, although this did prove challenging due to working virtually. Of the feedback we have been able to record children and young people were extremely positive about their experiences and felt that advocacy had helped them have their voice, wishes and feelings heard in all meetings about them and also have the issues they felt they were facing resolved.
25. Children and young people were regularly afforded the opportunity to participate in the running of the service and took part in recruitment of staff and helped devise their advocacy plans and develop the newly implemented service guide that is currently being disseminated.
26. The service continued to see an increase in active offer referrals, incomplete referral information sometimes led to delays in children and young people accessing the service. The service has continued to seek solutions by working with Children's Services for this issue and have implemented a variety of solution focused approaches that the service hopes will have a positive impact.
27. Due to the continuation of the pandemic and children and young people being out of school for significant periods of time, this sometimes impacted on both the service being able to gain access to children and young people (especially younger children within child protection) and it was often challenging to deliver a confidential advocacy service away from caregivers and their home environment. We have continued to be led by the wishes of the children and young people we support and have held meetings via Teams or face to face in line with their wishes as well as age appropriate methods following Welsh Government guidelines.

28. Whilst referrals continued to increase from care experienced children and young people and those within the child protection system, referrals remained low from children and young people subject to care and support outside of the child protection arena. The service has been raising awareness by meeting with teams from the relevant Children's Services departments to raise awareness and promote the service.

29. 2 referrals were received by the service to provide an appropriate adult to young people within the age assessment process.

Financial Implications

30. The absence of any financial context in the report limits the commentary on the report and the effectiveness of the spend commission. Consideration of additional indicators with a financial context should be considered for future reports in order to provide some level of insight on the effectiveness of the spend and its connection to outcomes sought. In preparation for the next procurement arrangements, serious consideration should be given to undertaking a dialogue with Cardiff & Vale on which appropriate financial / performance indicators can be included in the tender requirements.

Legal Implications

31. There are no legal implications arising from the report

RECOMMENDATION

32. The Committee are recommended to note the Advocacy Service update and to make any observations or comments.

DEBORAH DRIFFIELD
Director of Children's Services

23rd February 2022