



giving a voice to
children, young people
and vulnerable adults

rhoi llais i blant,
pobl ifanc ac oedolion
agored i niwed

NYAS

Cardiff Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service Annual Report 2015



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Background information

1. NYAS

NYAS is a UK charity providing socio-legal services. We offer information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children, young people and vulnerable adults through a network of dedicated paid workers and volunteers throughout England and Wales.

NYAS provides specialist legal advice and assistance. NYAS is a legal aid agency provider for family law.

Through these services NYAS provides a safety net for children, young people and vulnerable adults, who have nowhere else to turn. We work within communities across the UK, with children, with young people, with adults, and with carers, local authorities and professionals such as social workers and lawyers.

2. Cardiff Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service

Remit and purpose

The Cardiff Advocacy scheme offers independent advocacy to all children and young people age 0-25 who are involved with Cardiff Children's Services. The purpose of the project is to enable and empower children and young people to have a voice, both individually and collectively and to effectively participate within decision making processes. We always support young people to advocate for themselves which increases their levels of confidence and self-esteem.

We work to ensure that the rights of children and young people involved with Cardiff Children's Services are upheld in accordance with the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

We provide issue based advocacy, whereby young people define what issues they want help with and decide how they wish to resolve these issues with the

help of their advocate. Once a young person's issue is resolved, or they decide they no longer want advocacy support their case is closed. However, children and young people can return to the project in the future if they require support around other issues.

Activities of the Project

- Provision of confidential and independent advice on young people's rights and entitlements. NYAS has its own dedicated team of child care lawyers who can support the service in delivering this aspect of the service
- Advocacy for young people e.g. support in preparing and /or attending meetings; negotiation with social services departments and other professionals; support in accessing a range of services; support through complaints processes etc.
- Regular visits to Crosslands Residential Unit in Cardiff
- Advocacy support to young people placed in out of county placements
- Consultation and participation work in order to influence the systems that affect the lives children and young people involved with Children's Services and ensure their voices are heard individually and collectively
- Training and consultancy to Children's Services where requested and agreed.

Referrals

The young person, social worker, carer or anyone else, can make referrals but advocacy work will not commence without the agreement of the young person. Referrals can be made via our national helpline or online via our secure website.

Independent Visiting Service

The Independent Visiting Service provides a long term adult befriender to Looked After Children and young people up to the age of 19 where it is deemed to be in their best interests. The process is young person led whereby they have to agree to the service at the outset and children and young people go through a matching process to ensure compatibility with a volunteer. Independent Visitors meet with young people on monthly basis and undertake activities for the purpose of relationship building

Funding Partners

A Service Level Agreement exists between NYAS and Cardiff Children's Services in relation to this Project

1. Introduction

NYAS were successful in being awarded the contract to provide advocacy and independent visitor services in 2015, the service commenced in the month of August 2015. The existing team of staff employed by the previous provider Tros Gynnal Plant transferred over to NYAS which ensured continuity of the service for children and young people in Cardiff. This report will focus on promotion and development of the service, emerging themes/ issues and corresponding recommendations made to Children's Services, Participation and consultation work, feedback from children and young people and delivery of the independent visiting service. The report will conclude with a summary of the services priorities for the next year.

2. Promotion, development and training

As a new provider of the advocacy and independent visiting service in Cardiff NYAS made it a priority at the outset of the contract to promote, raise awareness and develop the service, a publicity plan was devised to ensure widespread and targeted promotion was achieved. Promotional methods included:

- Updated information on all relevant portals such as the Sprout, Meic Helpline. Widespread dissemination of publicity materials both electronically and through direct mail outs to Children's Services and all other relevant organisations and agencies.
- Presentations to all social work teams within Children's Services, the Personal Advisor Service and IROs/Case Conference Chairs. NYAS also delivered presentations to the Children's Services Management Team and the Corporate Parenting Committee within the early months of the contract. The service was also promoted within private foster care agencies and a range of voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people.
- Letters devised making an active offer of advocacy to all children and young people eligible for the service. Agreement reached on how these would be disseminated by Children's Services on a routine basis.

- Induction on the advocacy service delivered to new social workers 3 times this year along with Family Intervention and Support Services and other agencies.
- Widespread recruitment of self-employed advocates has taken place this year; twenty self-employed advocates have successfully completed comprehensive training, induction and mentoring process with NYAS. Many of these self-employed advocates have undertaken work with children and young people in Cardiff, whom have benefitted from having a pool of workers with diverse range of expertise.
- We have had a strategic presence this year within Children's Services through sitting on the Corporate Parenting Committee, Cardiff and the Vale Local Safeguarding Children's Board Communication and Participation sub group as well as the main LSCB .

3. Themes, Issues and Recommendations

NYAS worked with a total of 285 children and young people this year and provided advocacy representation in relation to 353 issues. The largest referral source this year was looked after children closely followed by child protection. A number of themes and issues have emerged through undertaking advocacy casework with children and young people this year:

- It is positive that social workers have been proactive in referring children and young people to the service this year; however referrals from foster carers have been low. Due to their pivotal role in children and young people's lives they are clearly an important avenue through which children and young people who live with them can access the service, especially younger children or those who have additional needs who are more likely to find it difficult to access the service alone. NYAS have taken steps to promote the service to foster carers this year through attendance at a Lunch and Learn session with Cardiff foster carers. We have also delivered talks to

some private foster care agencies. We have also worked closely with Children's Services to incorporate training on advocacy and independent visiting within the mandatory foster carer training which will be taken forward within the next year of the service.

- Referrals for Children in Need have been disappointingly low this year; this is despite widespread promotion within Children's Services. We are hoping that letters devised by NYAS for Children in Need will result in greater awareness of the service once these are distributed by Children's Services on a routine basis. We also recommend that the proposal to create the role of "advocacy champion" within Children's Services is taken forward within the next year.
- Providing advocacy representation within child protection meetings has become our biggest area of work. In undertaking this work some common issues have arisen. It has often proved difficult to gain consent from parents for younger children to access the service and younger children have therefore been denied a voice within child protection decision making processes. It has also proved commonplace for many children and young people to be unaware of why they are subject to child protection processes at the outset of the advocacy intervention, the service has therefore recommended that social workers have a clear and honest discussion with children and young people prior to an advocacy referral being made.

The service has also experienced difficulties with communication with some social workers. This on occasions has resulted in advocates being unable to engage with children and young people in time for their meetings. In response to these difficulties NYAS have recommended that a working protocol is devised and implemented which would seek to provide best practice within this area of service delivery.

- The vast majority of these issues were dealt with through informal negotiation with decision makers. Where issues could not be resolved informally children and young people were supported to make a complaint to Children's Services. 21 complaints were made this year, nearly half of complaints were around being unhappy with social work support, with children and young people either being unhappy with lack of contact, their relationship or having numerous social workers over a short period of time. Other complaints concerned issues such as placement moves, being unhappy with a personal advisor and lack of contact with a parent. All complaints were stage 1 informal complaints. One young person was supported to make a stage 2 complaint about a decision made by another Local Authority.

The advocacy service has worked closely with the Complaints Officer which has proved productive in resolving children and young people's complaints, however a period over the summer saw a drift in complaints being resolved due to systems failures, this was fed back to Children's Services who have acknowledged the need to better embed and strengthen their complaints processes to ensure that complaints are resolved within the necessary timeframes.

4. Participation and Consultation

NYAS have seen it as a priority to ensure the wider voices of children and young people are heard in relation to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services. The service has a contracted participation worker who has taken the lead in this area of work but we have also put additional staffing resources in place to strengthen this aspect the service.

- The beginning of the year saw the continuation of our Looked After Newsletter Group who produced a newsletter which was distributed to all looked after children and young people age 11 plus. However, through consultation with group members and Children's Services it was decided to create a general participation group for children and young people. This has enabled young people who are not looked

after to join the group and has provided greater opportunity for children and young people to have a say in the planning, delivery and evaluation of Children's Services. Key achievements of the group this year have been:

- Design of publicity materials to promote the group to new members
 - Participation in the ACRF reporting framework whereby an event was held at County Hall in June. Prior to the event the young people were supported to devise a number of questions through scrutinising the Director's Report. On the day of the event these questions were then put to a panel which included the Director of Children's Services, Operational Management and Cardiff Councillors. The event was a great success and young people's contributions were incorporated into the reporting process.
 - Review and redesign of Children's Services Fostering Handbook for children and young people.
- NYAS has continued to have a strategic presence in Wales through regular attendance on the Advocacy Providers Group and through attending the Task and Finish Group within the Welsh Government that will look to take forward the national approach to statutory advocacy in Wales.

5. Feedback from Children and Young People

NYAS aim to achieve 100% feedback from children and young people at the point of case closure. This year the Cardiff Service closed 194 issues and received feedback from children and young people by way of feedback forms, feedback 1-5 scale and verbal feedback from children and young people.

Quantitative feedback from young peoples completed evaluation forms is presented in the accompanying RBA report. Further feedback received from young people this year is included in appendices 1 and 2.

6. Independent Visiting Service

Five volunteer independent Visitors transferred over to NYAS from the previous provider Tros Gynnal Plant providing continuity to those young people they were volunteering with. The initial agreed number of matches within the contract was 12 this was subsequently increased to 20, as it was felt that we had capacity to provide the service to a greater number of young people. Key achievements and challenges this year include:

- NYAS provided independent visitors to eight young people this year and recruited and trained nine new volunteers.
- These eight young people have greatly benefitted from having an independent visitor in their lives; several young people were supported by their independent visitor within important times of transition such as leaving care and change of placement. One young person has particularly benefitted from the work her independent visitor has done with her in compiling a scrapbook of memories of visits and activities that they have undertaken together. NYAS carried out a small scale review of the service this year whereby feedback from young people, foster carers and social workers was overwhelmingly positive about the service.
- The Manager and Coordinator have taken steps to promote the service through distributing leaflets to the Social Work Teams and LAC Review Chairs as well as delivering presentations to the Social Work Teams and Independent Reviewing Officers. However, despite widespread promotion of the service, we have received only 6 referrals this year from social workers. Further promotion and training needs to be undertaken to ensure that social workers have a good understanding of the role and eligibility criteria.

- The service has experienced some difficulties in matching young people who are placed out of county, widespread efforts have been made to promote within out of county areas and work in partnership with other NYAS services where possible.
- NYAS see it as a priority to raise the profile of the service in the next year and provide regular feedback to Children's Services on the progress of the independent visitor relationship whilst maintaining the independence and confidentiality of this unique relationship.

7. Conclusion and priorities for next year

This has been an extremely busy year for NYAS. Widespread promotion and awareness raising has resulted in a high number of referrals to the service. We have delivered a quality advocacy service to a number of vulnerable children involved with Cardiff Children's Services. These young people have been supported with a wide range of issues, with the majority of these issues been resolved through informal processes of challenge and negotiation.

We have also provided a regular visiting advocacy service to Crosslands Residential Unit on a monthly basis this year. The advocate has engaged well with the children and young people and has been able to inform children and young people about the service and receive any referrals in person during these visits. Participation work within the project has also been developed to ensure a greater number of young people can participate and have a voice on the systems that impact upon their lives. Children and young people's wider issues have also been highlighted on a routine basis through our strategic involvement with the Corporate Parenting Committee and Cardiff and Vale LSCB as well as our contract monitoring arrangements with Children's Services.

The Independent Visitor Service has been promoted and developed this year, new volunteers have been recruited and 8 young people have been in receipt of this valuable service.

We have identified a number of priorities for the following year which we believe will further enhance and develop the service to children and young people in Cardiff:

- Work in partnership with Cardiff Children's Services to increase the number of referrals from Children in need including children and young people with disabilities. Develop the role of "advocacy champions" within Children's Services in a bid to increase referrals.
- Deliver training on advocacy and children's rights to social workers and foster carers as part of Cardiff and the Vale training programme
- Increase referrals to support and represent children and young people's views, wishes and feelings in relation to Special Guardianship Orders.
- Work jointly with Children's Services to implement a working protocol on providing advocacy for children and young people within the Child Protection process.
- Provide value added services to Cardiff children and young people through NYAS Peer Mentoring Services.
- Increase feedback on the service from children and young people through widespread implementation of NYAS outcomes framework.
- Recruit new members to our Participation Group and undertake specific pieces of work with children and young people within the Child Protection process and where able work collaboratively with Cardiff and the Vale LSCB.
- Improve upon Independent Visitor matching for out of county young people

- Promote the Independent Visiting Service and strengthen communication with social workers in relation to existing matches.
- Continue to ensure children and young people's issues are regularly fed back to Children's Services through contract monitoring, attendance at Corporate Parenting Committee, membership of Cardiff and the Vale LSCB and participation and consultation events.

Children and Young People's Feedback

Appendix 1

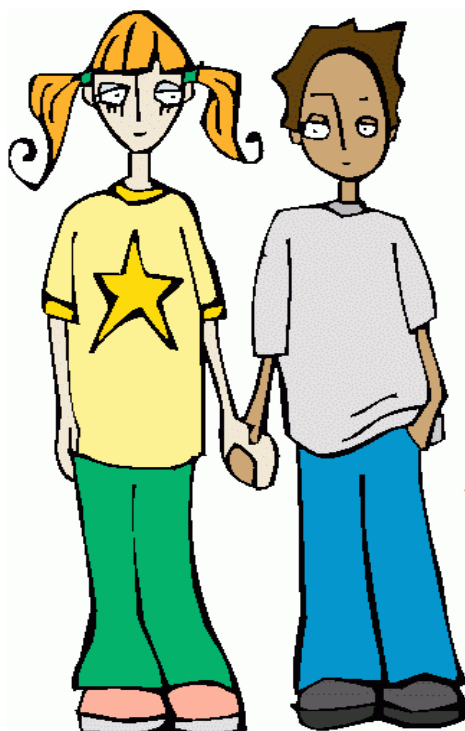
Very informed, you know what you are talking about and very efficient

X is Cool!

I feel people listened to my wishes and feelings and what I wanted

I felt people listened to my wishes

Advocate helped the situation and NYAS



I know how to contact advocacy if I have any issues or need help at a meeting

I think you are really good coming

I think NYAS should be more involved by visiting more often

I will use an advocate in the future

Happy for X to contact me on email

I want to say thanks for all the help X has been good every time. I need her she comes to see me. I know she is there.

Thank you X, thank you for being my advocate

Thank you X, I will be in touch when I am ready to take things further

I don't know if I need to see X

Young People Feedback

Appendix 1.1

Thank you for helping me again, I will call you if something comes up

NYAS made it better

Want feedback from mum not Advocate – nice worker, wouldn't want to see her again

X helps me a lot

I like X visiting and talking to me about things

Thank you for working with me you really make a start in my life. Thank you

I do need to see X

It really helped, thank you X

Happy for the Advocate to contact me after the meeting

You helped a lot thank you

I feel that X listens to me and I trust X more than my old Advocate. X is always there when something is wrong

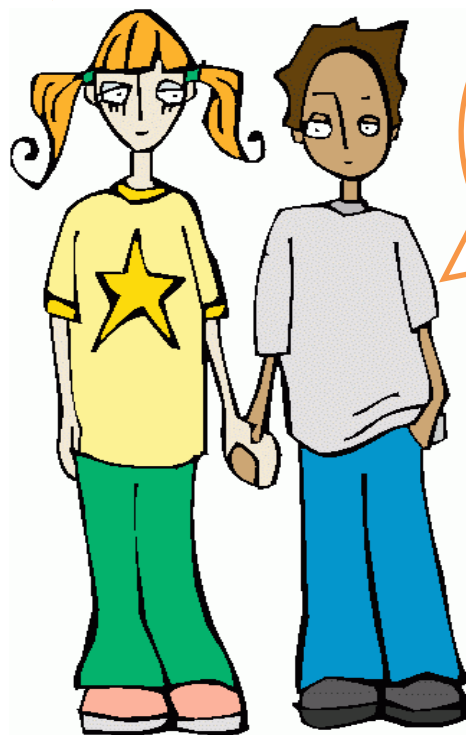
Don't want to see you again

I will contact X if I have any more problems

I am happy for X to come to my meeting and speak for

Having an Advocate has helped me understand what is happening

I like that you listen to me



D is a looked after young person living at home under Placement with Parents Regulations 1991. D has a learning disability, and has been assessed as having special educational needs. D had worked with the same advocate previously around ensuring his wishes and feelings were heard within care proceedings. D asked for the same advocate to help him again because he wanted the local authority to now discharge his care order, D said:

“I want the care order to be taken off. I have been home over a year and I am 16 and everything is going good, I don't need it. I don't want to have LAC reviews, I don't want a Social Worker, and I don't want someone coming to see me to weigh me. It makes me feel sad and embarrassed. Being on a care order really worries me because I feel if one little thing goes wrong I will be taken away again. I get so worried sometimes that I get nose bleeds. Even a letter through the door from social services about my LAC review or someone is coming to see me makes me start worrying and stressing. Please can it be taken off?”

What the advocate did

- Met with D and clarified the issue and current situation, taking into account their communication needs
- Explored options with D to seek resolution to the issue.
- Informed D of implications of discharge of Care Order
- Agreed course of Action with D
- Wrote report of D's wishes and feelings for LAC Review
- Supported and represented D at LAC Review
- Followed up D's request for discharge of Care Order with Social Worker after the review as well as other issues raised.
- Informed D of feedback from Children's Services
- Met with D at close of issue to carry out evaluation of advocacy intervention and to ensure D happy with outcome.

Outcomes

- D better informed of rights, entitlements and legal implications
- Wishes and feelings made known to decision makers
- Representation within LAC Review Meeting
- Local Authority made the decision to apply for care order to be discharged.

R is 16 and living in an out of county children's home. They contacted advocacy because they were unhappy with plans to move him from the children's home into a hostel. R wanted to move into their own flat instead which was near to his place of work.

What the advocate did

- Met with R and listened to their views, wishes and feelings and clarified the issue, including reasons why Social Services objected to this and his view on this.
- Explored options with R as to how best this could be taken forward. R wanted a meeting with their Social Worker and support from his advocate to put his views across.
- Advocate identified that R did not have a Personal Advisor and agreed to also take this forward
- Advocate supported R in their meeting and helped him to self-advocate. They explained to his Social Worker that he felt he had the necessary independent living skills, and would cope much better independently, believing their mental health would be affected if they moved into hostel accommodation. The Advocate also supported R to explain to residential staff who were called into the meeting what R's preferences were
- The Advocate highlighted R's rights and entitlements within the meeting and sought agreement from the Social Worker about what payments and benefits R would receive. After the meeting the Advocate continued to liaise with R's Social Worker regarding living arrangements and kept R informed of progress.
- On close of the issue the Advocate evaluated the advocacy intervention and ascertained whether R had any further issues.

Outcomes

- Professionals were made aware of the young person's wishes and feeling, primarily through the young person self-advocating with support.
- The young person was made aware of their leaving care rights and entitlements
- Social Services agreed that the young person could move into a flat that they had found, and financially support them to do so. Residential staff agreed in the meeting to provide outreach support to the young person to help with the transition.
- On close of this issue the young person approached the advocate to support him with a new issue.

The service received a referral to provide advocacy representation for a sibling group of 5. The three male children/young people were allocated to a Male Advocate whilst the two female children/young people were allocated to a female advocate. This was a particularly challenging case in that the one child had made allegations against a family member and the service needed to be mindful that there would be no conflict in each advocate representing each child/young person's views wishes and feelings.

What the Advocate(s) did

- Met with each child separately within school setting. This was important to enable them to freely express their views wishes and feelings away from the family home. Each Advocate explained about their role, confidentiality and its limits as well as their right to raise any concerns about the advocacy service. . The children/young people were able to discuss their views, wishes and feelings on a wide range of issues including who they wanted to live with, contact with the alleged abuser, relationship with mum and school. One of the children was of a very young age (age 5) and the advocate used a range of age appropriate tools to ascertain their views wishes and feelings for the Review Case Conference. Advocates were also able to further explain the child protection process to them, explaining the purpose of the meeting, who would attend, and how they wished to be involved.
- Each child/young person's views wishes and feelings were written up in report format and checked for accuracy
- Advocates represented the children /young people within the case conference, due to either the child/young person not wanting to directly participate or this not being age appropriate for the youngest children especially given the fact there was conflict between the parents.
- Advocate fed back to each child/young person what was discussed at the meeting and what the outcomes were, as well as explaining next steps in the process.
- The children and young people's cases were closed following visits as they felt there was not a further role for advocacy. The children and young people were asks to evaluate the service and provide feedback and were reminded of how they could access the service again if needed.

Outcomes

Appendix 4

- The children and young people were able to participate and have a voice with the child protection process within particularly complex and emotive circumstances.
- The children and young people were made further aware of child protection processes and their rights.
- The children and young people fed back to their advocates that they felt pleased they were listened too and that family members understood better where they were coming from. Mum fed back to one of the advocates that she felt the advocacy process had been very empowering for her children stating "Thank you so much for all the brilliant work you have done with my children, at the meeting it was like I'd closed my eyes and the kids were their speaking when you read out your report. X doesn't speak to anyone so I'm so glad he opened up to you, and to be able to hear X's voice was really emotional. Thank you". The social worker also feedback to the advocate that our intervention had been very much valued.

The service received a referral to provide advocacy representation for D who has communication difficulties around their wishes and feelings about placement. The social worker was concerned that D was unhappy with a proposed move to foster care. D's parents were reluctant for the service to be involved from the outset, and wanted to be present when meetings were taking place with the young person and advocate. The social worker was able to explain the role of advocacy to the parents and stress the importance of D having someone to voice his views wishes and feelings which enabled the advocacy process to go ahead .

What the advocate did

- Liaised with the social worker and school about D's communication needs prior to visiting D,
- Met with D and used microphone to aid Ds hearing and used worksheets to gather Ds views, wishes and feelings when verbal communication proved difficult due to Ds speech difficulties.
- Views, wishes and feelings were gathered into a report for the pending LAC Review which the advocate forwarded to the social worker with the young person's agreement.
- Review was cancelled, advocate therefore fed back D's views wishes and feelings around placement to their social worker making social worker aware of Ds concerns and the need for plans around placement to be clarified with D The advocate visited D again because of time lapse to ensure D had the opportunity to provide any new input for their rescheduled LAC Review.

Outcomes

- Through the advocacy process D was able to explain to his advocate that they wanted to move from a residential placement as they were not happy there, but also that they were very worried that a move to foster placement would mean that he would never return home. The social worker was able to explain to D that this was not the case and the plan was still for D to return home when improvements had been made.
- D gained a better understanding of their rights within the looked after system
- D's views wishes and feelings formally fed into LAC Review process.
- Parents gained a better understanding of advocacy and its importance for their child.