



Empowerment Consultation

A consultation with vulnerable children and young people exploring their views about the nature of support services they require.

August 2008

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Strategic Partnership for Children Young People and Families (SPCYPF) for Nottingham City is currently exploring the reconfiguration of services for children and young people in the following target groups:

1. Children affected by domestic violence
2. Children affected by parental substance misuse
3. Young carers
4. Refugee and asylum seeking children affected by trauma



The vision for the contract is to create integrated services offering a range of activities from signposting to therapeutic support across clear care pathways.

As part of the process the SPCYPF committed to seeking the views of children and young people to ensure these are considered as part of the contract development process. To ensure this they commissioned the Children's Participation Consultancy (www.childrensparticipation.co.uk) to consult with 100 children and young people from the target groups and to make those views available to the commissioning process.

Methodology

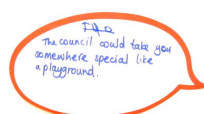
Following consultation with the commissioning team, we identified key questions that became the focus of the consultation. These were represented by an accessible visual graphic. 100 children and young people were consulted with, whose ages ranged from 5-17 (59% primary age, 41% secondary age, 35 female, 65 male). 12% of these were in receipt of specialist services. 48% were of an ethnic group other than White British and 23% had additional needs.



Results

Individual Support & Group Work

Overall, 42% of children would prefer a 1:1 worker, 28% group provision and 24% both of these, with boys showing a preference for 1:1 (44%). The majority preferred their input to be in school (42%) during school hours, rather than in their community or town. 61% of children felt it more important to have input from a specialist rather than someone who was already known to them.



Only 21% indicated wanting support from peers, the majority of these being of primary age. Most (74%) thought their parents should know about the input they were receiving, although this was less so in the substance misuse group (only 38%).

Creative Engagement

74% of all children thought being in their situation made access to school and leisure more difficult. Reasons cited included: worrying about the parent/carer when at school, being in a bad mood when at school and more likely to get into trouble, getting ready in the morning meaning they were sometimes late, Refugees cited the language barrier and understanding a new culture.

Solutions that the children suggested included giving them and their parents someone to talk to, meeting others in the same situation, providing school transport and free activities and tackling bullying.

Education Link Role

The majority of children (65%) reported that their friends did not know about their situation. The children least likely to have friends that knew about their situation were the young carers (25%), followed by children from the substance misuse group (35%) and domestic violence group (36%). This contrasted with the refugee / asylum seeker group (59%).

The stigma around substance misuse, domestic violence and young carers was apparent with only 25% of children from the substance misuse group and 28% of the domestic violence group wanting their friends to know. The main reasons cited for this was fear of children telling others (other children and adults), and the resulting consequences of this (often cited were bullying and fear of social services or police involvement)

“(my friends) might tell their Mum and Dad who would call someone, then they would take me away, Mum would be sad, which would cause another argument, and then you’d be blamed and it would make it worse and worse”

(9 year old boy, substance misuse and domestic violence)



62% of children thought teachers knew about their situation, with only half of young carers (53%) and the domestic violence group (50%) believing they did. However, it was noted that these figures included a proportion who were unaware that their teachers knew. Overall, the majority of children thought teachers did not understand their situation (62%). Those who felt least understood were the substance misuse group, with only 38% saying teachers did understand, whereas 93% of the refugee / asylum seeker group felt understood by their teachers:

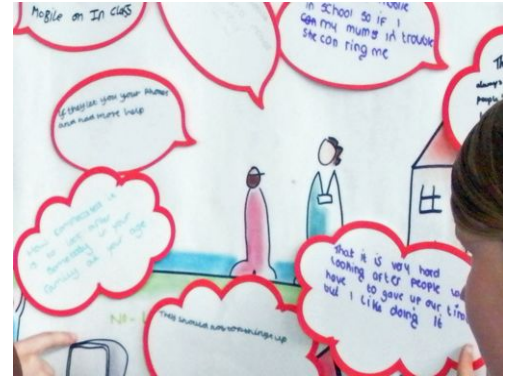
“If you are new to this class, the teacher can help you in any way she can”

(10 year old girl, refugee / asylum seeker group)

88% of children thought all children should be taught about what it was like to be in their situation.

Communications

The majority of those consulted would prefer to find out about a new service via a person telling them about it (83%). The second most popular was the use of posters and leaflets (66%), displayed in public places and at school, as well as generic mail outs to all children and families. 56% of children thought a generic website with access to information and support was a good idea (80% of secondary aged children, 41% of primary aged children).



The preferred method that children identified for involving them in the future was group activities (72%). In addition, 45% would like 1:1 consultations, 26% would like questionnaires and 20% emails. Only 16% wanted text questions.

Workforce Development

The children were asked to indicate what they thought would be important messages for people to hear and learn from. These have been grouped into key themes:

- Understanding & Acknowledging their feelings and situation
- Impact of stigma & secrecy
- Support for Parents
- Advice for other children

"It's not made up, it's real and happens every day"

(12 year old girl, domestic violence group)

"the council could hire a carer for the ill person so the young carer could have a clear mind and make new friends"

(11 year old boy, young carer)

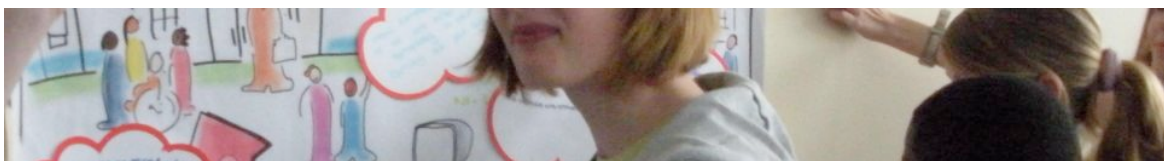
"It's scary, then you be happy"

(8 year old boy, refugee / asylum seeker group)

Conclusion

The impact of children's fears should their situation become known e.g. bullying from peers, rumour and gossip, getting themselves and others into trouble and the situation deteriorating due to external intervention was notable. The consultants feel that these fears place an unreasonable and damaging burden of secrecy on these children creating barriers to accessing support, and that adults have a responsibility to play a part in removing this burden by being explicit and persistent in their support despite the barriers that may be in place.

There are many areas of commonality across the four groups. All groups felt it important that professionals and their peers understood the issues faced by children in their situation, and that there was access to support. They also strongly felt it was positive and important for adults to listen to their views.



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Children's Participation Consultancy 2008

This consultation was designed and undertaken by
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