



Hearing the Voice of the Child

A summary report compiled from a range of services feedback by members of the Sefton Young Advisors team and the Making a Difference to children in care (MAD) group

August 2016

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Who are Sefton Young Advisors?

Young Advisors are young people aged between 15-23 who work in partnership with community leaders and decision makers to enable the voices of young people to be heard in community life.

Young Advisors are trained and employed agents of social action. Their role is to guide and support local organisations – local authorities, housing associations, CCGs, the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector and other local partners on what it is like for a young person to live, work, learn and play in their neighbourhood. They speak out for young people, making sure their thoughts and feelings are considered in decisions that affect them and work closely with adults to support them on how best to engage with young people. Young Advisor teams across the UK are commissioned by organisations to support them to better engage with, and involve young people. We make sure young people are being given the chance to be involved in decision making and influencing change.

The Sefton Young Advisor team is made up of 20 young people from across the Sefton borough. The team has won local and national awards and has worked in partnership with many organisations including; LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children’s Board), Sefton Council, NHS, E-ON, Edge Hill University and NCS. To view examples of our work please visit our website — <http://sefton.youngadvisors.org.uk/examples-of-work>.

Who are the MAD group?

The MAD (Making A Difference for Children in Care) group are the Children in Care Council for Sefton. The group is open to any child or young person, age 14yrs+, who is looked after or a care leaver. The children and young people signed up as members of the council meet every month. Both the Director of Social Care and the Service Manager for LAC regularly attend the monthly meetings. The aim of the group is to support looked after kids and care leavers in having a say about how services are delivered and developed and to influence change. The group also meet once a quarter with the Chief Executive of Sefton Council and The Strategic Director for the People Directorate. Four representatives of the group are members of the Sefton Corporate Parenting Board

What was the purpose/origin of the report?

This Hearing the Voice of the Child report is a Sefton council led initiative, that was first proposed in February 2016, and directly relates to the safety of children and young people across the borough of Sefton.

The purpose of the report is to collate the views and opinions of children and young people across Sefton by working with services that help children to voice their views and opinions. The report also outlines their thoughts and recommendations for what they'd like to see happen, and how they would like to see the services improve.

A range of agencies and services were contacted in February 2016 to complete the signs of safety framework. The following agencies/services completed and returned their findings:

Community Adolescents Service

YOT

Sefton Young Advisors

Parenting 2000

Corporate Parenting

Sefton Early Support Services

Netherton Family Support

PSS Sefton Young Carers

Catch 22

Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association

YKids

Targeted Youth Prevention

Addaction Breaking the Cycle

Addaction

Seaforth Family Centre

Southport Family Centre

Methodology

The Signs of Safety model is a tool which practitioners and service providers can use to carry out safety planning, and risk assessments in child protection cases.

Its main function is to allow professionals from different services to work alongside each other, and with the families and children. The different aspects aid risk assessments, and production of action plans. The different strands allow you to think about what's going well, what's isn't going well, and what needs to change.

The three houses tool is used to gather information. It involves the use of a diagram of three houses, each house represents an area of discussion about safety. The three labels are; "What's worrying you?", "What's working well", and "What would you recommend". The objective is to find out what worries the subject, what makes them feel safe, and what they think would be beneficial for their safety.

Fifteen services were asked to use the three houses tool from the signs of safety model to consult with children and young people, who use their services. The purpose of the consultation was to find out how safe children and young people feel.



Example of the three houses model

The Sefton Young Advisors and representatives from the MAD group read through all the reports and summarised them under the headings above and under the following sub-headings:

- Relationships and home life
- Hobbies
- CSE and e-safety
- Health
- Community Safety
- Involvement with agencies
- Youth Voice

Proforma completed by all services

Name of your agency	
Number of children from your agency involved in this survey feedback	
Please attach the tool / link to website questionnaire that your service used to gather the views you are reporting	
Please briefly explain the role and focus of your agency/service/group and the types of children and young people that you work with and with whom you engaged in this survey work	
Things we want to know from young people	
<p>What Are 'You' Worried About?</p> <p>From the Past:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At home • At school • In the community • On the internet • Anywhere else <p>From the present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At home • At school • In the community • On the internet • Anywhere else <p>Other things that worry you or make you feel unsafe or at risk?</p>	
<p>What's Going Well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your life • At home • In school • In the community • On the internet • With your lead/key worker • Anywhere else? 	
<p>Please state any clear recommendations that you want to make i.e. :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What needs to happen? • What would you like to happen? • To whom?/ By whom?/ By when? 	

What used to worry you

Relationships and home life

Relationships and home life is a broad topic range and the concerns relate to a number of different issues. The main concern in this theme relates to the behaviour of a parent, which in itself is a broad theme, some examples of this are; witnessing frightening behaviour from parents and/or their partners (Domestic violence). This is seen in a number of reports ranging from just arguments to aggressive behaviour. A further worry is concern about the parents behaviour such as staying in bed all day or worries about their health, this ties in to abuse of alcohol and drugs which can increase the likelihood of illness. Also the arrest of family members is a further issue that was brought up by C&YP. This overall theme of parents' behaviour does appear in all of the reports*.

*(Southport Family Centre, Seaforth Family Centre, Parenting 2000, PSS Sefton Young Carers, Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association, Ykids, Netherpton Family Support, Corporate Parenting Service, YOT, Addaction)

Hobbies

Hobbies featured quite a lot in certain reports because C&YP think it is important to have something to do and people to do things with, and a large part of past worries stem from social issues and not having things to do with friends. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) reported that 79% of the young people they spoke to live in an area where this is nothing to do, whereas Addaction, and PSS Sefton Young Carers both reported that C&YP were concerned due to issues surrounding not being able to see friends anymore, or not going out with friends anymore or having them round to the house.

CSE and E-safety

Upon reading the reports in order to find things that were relative to CSE/E-safety, it was noticed that the general consensus that featured contained within the "worries from the past" section of the reports (that were relevant to the theme) seemed to be that the internet was a dangerous/nasty place when misused. The individual service reports specifically mentioned cyber bullying which helped to provide an insight into just how the internet can be a dangerous place for some young people.

Community safety

The worries relating to community safety from the past that C&YP brought up most often was related to violence, this broad worry incorporates concerns with gangs as well, mainly due to the association with gang violence. 7* of the services do mention of violence, gangs or 'serious crime' and there is a lot of evidence of young people's concerns about areas of the local community where C&YP felt most unsafe such as 'Alleyways, streets and parks'.

A further worry that was most prevalent was the concern for drugs, although this was not mentioned by every group it was mentioned by a few often centring the use and dealing of drugs. This again also links into the gang culture that was previously mentioned. YOT found that 70% of young people live in an area that is easy to get drugs and 61% know friends are users showing that it is a major concern.

*(YOT, Netherton Family Support, Ykids, Community Adolescent Service, Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association, Sefton CVS, Addaction)

Youth voice and participation

Although Youth Voice and Participation is important within services that deal with young people, there wasn't a lot contained within the reports that reflected anything to do with it. Sefton Corporate Parenting Services did report that young people don't always go to their review meetings, and that there needed to be more done to make sure that C&YP get encouragement and support to attend, and that C&YP don't feel involved enough when their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are being put together (10yrs+) however, their report was carried out via 2 surveys, one being 5-9yrs, and then 10yrs+, so the issues were different for each demographic. (Sefton corporate Parenting Services)

What worries you now?

Relationships and home life

Again the worries that C&YP have relate to a wide range of topics with one of the biggest issues being the behaviour of a parent and there is a lot of overlap and repetition with the previously mentioned worries, and as above this has a wide range of topics within it ranging from arguments and not getting on with parents to concerns about drug and alcohol abuse. A further topic that is often brought up as a concern is the health of family members as multiple reports mention this as a big worry. One final concern that is apparent is being worried about seeing family members when not living with them, concerns raised often are 'Worried my mum won't come for contact' and 'Don't want dad to live back at the flat'.

Hobbies

There weren't many present issues surrounding hobbies found in the reports, but Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association did report that C&YP were concerned that there were not enough out of school activities in which they could participate, and another worry was that Youth Clubs were not opening as much due to cuts. Ykids spoke to a YP that was concerned about wanting to start a dance club but having existing commitments which would stand in their way.

CSE and E-safety

Found within the "worries from the present" section, the issues seemed to centre more on protection, and education. Addaction, and the Woodvale and Ainsdale community association reports were very much focused on highlighting the solution to the problem, e.g. Addaction said "Making sure we protect our identity when speaking to other children we don't know on the internet." Whereas Sefton Young Advisors highlighted the existence of the problem itself "Not taught About CSE ..." and "general fear is that ... people are unaware ... wouldn't know what to do."

What worries you now? contd

Health

Our findings in relation to health show that mental health issues appear to be the main worries of young people in Sefton. Sefton Young Advisors consulted with young people who raised the worry that at present there is 'not enough education around mental health', while Southport Family Centre were concerned about 'living with a parent with mental health issues'.

'I have worries about the 'miserable cow' in my head that tells me to say mean things, I feel uncomfortable and stuck in the middle of arguments' -Girl aged 10 years, Parenting 2000.

Poor self-esteem came up twice, in Southport Family Centre and Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association.

They are particularly concerned for their parents; mothers appear to be the main cause of worry.

'N identified in the past she was 'always' worried about her mother's drinking, not knowing what she was coming home to each day after school. She was also previously worried about her mother's smoking, because her mother would always cough and sound short of breath. N explained that her mother would also smoke more when she drank alcohol and this worried her as she knew it wasn't safe'

'I'm worried about my mum, I just want her to be ok, I'm worried about her being in bed all day' – Findings from boy aged 13 years, Parenting 2000.

Another area of concern is personal health, not only for the parent but also for the individual.

'N is worried about her mother's health and if she would die if she continued to smoke and drink alcohol. N also suffers from asthma and doesn't like to be around smoke' - Findings from Addaction.

Young Carers highlighted concerns related to their situation rather than general worries - 'difficulties around medication (of parent/sibling being cared for)'

Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association was the only group to mention 'sexual health – sexually transmitted diseases' as a present worry.

Community safety

The main worries that C&YP have at present often have a large overlap with the worries that were had in the past, with violence and drug use being the main concerns, the only additional concern came from, Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association, which also had concerns around road safety.

Involvement with agencies

In terms of what they were worried about with their involvement with agencies and what they wanted to improve they mainly had issues about contacting agencies they were working with and if anything would change without their knowledge or consent. For example, one person was worried if their social worker (who they have a good relationship with) would ever change and another YP was worried about their social worker not keeping in contact regularly and eventually losing all contact with them whatsoever.

What's going well?

Relationships and Home Life

In the various report C&YP stated a number of issues were being resolved and were going well, as many of the concerns were related to parents therefore it makes sense that a large proportion of what is going well also relates parents. This differs in reports but a reduction in conflict leading to more positive relationships is generally what is going well. This reduction in conflict can be down to itself a variety of factors such as the family engaging with identified services or regular spot checks force parents to cleans and maintain suitable environment for the child allowing them to feel safer leading to less arguments and the parents being motivated in making change happen . Moreover C&YP also brought up the fact in a number of reports that seeing family members on a regular basis was a good thing a going well for example 'I can talk to mum and dad everyday on the phone and see them at the family centre' and 'I like seeing dad at Nannas house'.

Hobbies

What seemed to be going well however, was that a lot of young people were engaging in numerous activities and they were maintaining healthy relationships with friends, who they saw regularly. Parenting 2000 reported about multiple young people including on who attended boxing with a family member "Uncle Ste" twice a week, and another who liked to play on their iPad, watch "Tipping Point", and had aspirations to join beavers, or Cubs. Sefton Corporate Parenting Services report mentioned that young people get to join in the things that they like doing, and that they are supported to take part in their hobbies and things that interest them. Sefton Young advisors commented on the amount of things to do within the community and the amount of youth clubs that there were for young people to engage with.

CSE/E-Safety

There seemed to be more contained within the "going well" section of the report, which seemed to highlight a range of positives ranging from education and safety, all the way to personal expression. Being "able to have own individual interests on the internet", was mentioned by a YP who had spoken to someone within Addaction, and something similar was mentioned by Parenting 2000; "On Instagram but no worries no bullying or anything like that" other thing that were mentioned were an increased knowledge of internet safety, and the fact that issues/knowledge are being shared amongst other services

Health

When the young people were asked what was going well, education on health issues and 'receiving support' stood out.

'You get help to keep yourself healthy and you get help to go to the dentist for regular check-ups. You have regular health and dental checks. You have enough information about how to keep yourself healthy and safe' - Corporate Parenting Service

Mum is not drinking and is getting help - Addaction

What's going well? contd

Health continued

Two of the young people from Netherton Family Support fed back that they were 'not self-harming since December' and were 'keeping clean' by 'having a shower regularly'.

For the 10 year old girl from Parenting 2000 *'the 'arl cow' has gone on holiday'*.

Education

Friends and support were mentioned continually when the young people were asked what was going well.

'I have good friends in school' - Girl aged 10 years, Parenting 2000.

Sefton Young Advisors found that their young people felt safe in school and enjoyed range of activities. They also had ample support from teachers and friends. A good relationship with teachers and peers was also present in what was going well for Netherton Family Support.

'You get lots of help at school and that you know how to get help at school if you have any problems' -
Corporate Parenting Service

Young Carers felt safe 'most of the time' in school. They didn't feel alone and felt supported by family, school and enjoyed Young Carers groups.

Improved attendance was highlighted by Southport Family Centre and Addaction.

'Less days off so I don't miss lessons' – Addaction

Involvement with Agencies

When looking through the reports for examples of young people having involvement with agencies we found multiple examples of YP giving us their opinion on the support and help they receive from agencies in Sefton. The main agencies that were mentioned frequently throughout the reports offered the YP and their families support from a social worker and the programmes that they were introduced to, for example the likes of In My Shoes, In Touch with your Teens, Incredible Years and No Xcuses.

Examples of things that went well in their involvement with agencies were that they were receiving good support from them and that they had a good relationship with their family support worker. In addition to that, they also enjoyed their family engaging with Lifestory Work and enjoying attending their Strengthening Families Programme.

Community Safety

Very little was mentioned about what was going well with community safety which is one concern barring Sefton CVS who found that there was a high police presence which C&YP felt was a good thing and made them feel safe.

Youth Voice and Participation

The corporate Parenting Service, across both of its surveys reported that "Your social worker asks you what you think about things" (5-9yrs) "You feel involved and included when decisions are being made about your care" (10yrs+) "You feel included in the review of your care plans" (10yrs+) and "You were involved in planning who you had contact with" (10yrs+) and Parenting 2000 worked with a YP who was involved with a local youth club where they'd help out.

What needs to change?

Relationships and Home Life

The recommendations from the various groups and encompass a wide range of things but they only apply to individuals as opposed to the wider community of young people in general. The recommendations fall into two categories, one being that family members need to engage with their child or young person more and try to be a 'family'. The second relates to programmes that parents are recommended to take part in such as No Xcuses, parenting programmes, breaking the Cycle and continuous home visits from groups such as the Family centres.

Hobbies

A handful of young people provided responses that fit into this topic in terms of what needs to change; one young person who wanted to see her mum continue working on the house; C&YP would like to see happen with regards to themselves, which included (but are not limited to) wanting to start going to the cinema more, wanting to start Brownies/ Beavers and have more opportunities to see friends at their local youth club. Other young people reflected they would like to see things happen more within the community itself, saying they wanted "More things to do in the area that do not cost too much so young people have things to do.

CSE and E-safety

The only recommendation observed, was that young people felt the topic of CSE and E-safety needed more promotion, and there needed to be more education for C&YP on how they can keep themselves safe. Young people also reflected that they would like to be better equipped to support themselves and their friends– this would happen with better education, establishing peer mentor programmes and challenging the stigma.

What needs to change? contd

Health

Recommendations regarding health came in two main themes – mental health and sexual health.

‘Young people need to be more aware of sexual health issues and understand who they can speak to/ where they can go for more information and support. Young people do not feel it is widely promoted and there should be more support in this area as soon as possible. It is a concern for many young people and needs to be better promoted in schools, colleges and other places where young people go’

‘Mental health issues need to be more openly discussed, taking some of the stigma away. Young people need to be better informed of the types of mental health issues that people struggle with and also they need to be more aware of where to go if they feel they are struggling and need support’

‘Young people to be referred to a more specialist service – CAMHS’ and to receive more support with health clinic appointments

Education

Four services offered recommendations – Parenting 2000 mainly focused on spending more time with friends outside of school; Young Carers discussed the importance of schools, the council and how everybody should be aware of the challenges young carers have in families, school and the wider community; while Southport Family Centre recommended referrals for young people to attend appropriate extracurricular activities and groups to aid and promote self esteem/confidence and develop peer group support and relationships. Sefton Young Advisors recommended training older students to be mentors, letting schools know about the range of opportunities their students could be involved in and encouraging students to talk about subjects like mental health and bullying.

Community Safety

The recommendations vary from service to service with what the Community Adolescent Service being the most applicable that recommendations only apply to individuals as opposed to the wider community of young people in general. In relation to the concerns above the Sefton CVS recommendations are the most applicable as they relate to ways to reduce violence, gang and drug concerns, some of these recommendations are; Increased police presence in the right places at the right times, improve CCTV and lighting in areas of danger, teach C&YP about local issue (gun, gang, mental health), build better relationships with police and create more places for young people to be safe and engage in positive activities.

What needs to change? contd

Involvement with agencies

In terms of recommendations and changes to their involvement with agencies it was mainly based on changes to support and how they are contacted by them. One recommendation that was made was for their involvement was that their SW/FSW should make more frequent house visits as some of them are in houses where substance abuse occurs making it a dangerous environment, so they would like someone to visit so they can assure their safety. Another recommendation that was given was that YP should be referred to other services and groups by their SW more often, like Camhelions, who work with YP with mental health issues and youth councils for those who want to have a say in local and national changes. This would give them a chance to meet new people and to gain an interest in different things they may not have thought about previously.