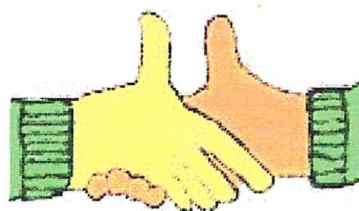


**AN EVALUATION OF THE
YOUNG PEOPLE
LEAVING CARE SERVICE**



***Praxis Care Group
Research Department
October 2003***

An Evaluation of the Young People Leaving Care Service

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For further information, contact

Praxis Care Group
27-31 Lisburn Road
Belfast
BT9 7AA
Tel: (028) 90234555

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to the young people, the volunteers and the referral agents who participated in the evaluation and shared their views on the quality of the service provided. Thanks also to the Project Officer for facilitating the evaluation.

BACKGROUND TO SERVICE

Establishing the Service

Praxis Care Group were successful in securing a tender issued by the Northern Health and Social Services Board (NHSSB) to provide a befriending service to young people leaving care. Praxis Care Group have established befriending services operating across Northern Ireland for people who experience mental ill health or have a learning disability. However, this was a new venture for Praxis Care Group, in terms of providing a service to young people aged between 15-21 years who were leaving a range of care situations including foster care, a children's home or a secure unit and were making their move into more independent living.

The Young People Leaving Care Service is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland. The service is initially funded by the NHSSB as an 18-month pilot scheme. As a way of determining the success of the first 12 months of operation, an evaluation was carried out by the Praxis Care Group Research Department. This report details the findings from the evaluation.

A Project Officer was appointed in November 2002 to initiate and manage the new service. During the first few months of employment, the Project Officer was primarily involved in networking, developing good working relationships with relevant professionals, and drawing up and implementing policies and procedures. After much of this groundwork had taken place, the service was officially launched in February 2003 in the Tullyglass Hotel, County Antrim. Approximately 30 people attended the launch, including the Directors of Childcare for both the Causeway and Homefirst Trusts, a Principal Officer and an Aftercare Team Social Worker for both Trusts, the Director of Care Services and Assistant Director of Communication and Income Generation for Praxis Care Group, a number of young people and a volunteer. The launch provided an opportunity to provide information on the main aims and expectations of the service and the steps already taken in terms of publicising and developing the service.

Geographical Area

The Young People Leaving Care Service covers all areas within the NHSSB, incorporating both the Causeway and Homefirst Health and Social Services Trusts.

This comprises Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Cookstown, Larne, Magherafelt, Moyle and Newtownabbey.

Advertising

One of the primary remits of the Project Officer was to advertise the service to professionals, the young people and members of the public in order to recruit volunteers. Advertising has been constant throughout the first year. This has taken various forms including:

- Posters
- Fliers
- Bus advertising
- Radio advertisements
- Newspaper articles
- Radio interview
- Newsletters
- Volunteer agencies
- Broadcast on UTV live

One of the main advertising initiatives was a television broadcast on UTV live, where the Project Officer was interviewed alongside a volunteer. The service was portrayed in a very positive light and promoted as an innovative and worthwhile opportunity for individuals to become involved in.

Referrals

Young people are referred to the service by members of the Aftercare Team. The Social Worker completes a comprehensive questionnaire providing information on the age, gender, living situation, care history and current circumstances of the young person. The questionnaire also includes a risk assessment that looks at both risk history and current indicators. While each referral is assessed individually, there are certain circumstances that prevent a young person from being accepted into the service. These include convictions for violence and/or the use of drugs, to the extent that the young person could not maintain a relationship.

Once a young person is accepted by the service, the Project Officer is updated by the Social Worker on any changes regarding the young person's living situation, their daytime activities and/or general well-being. In addition, the Project Officer attends the LAC (Looked After Children) reviews, which are also attended by the young

person's main carers, Aftercare Worker and Social Worker. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that all parties are kept up-to-date with the young person's situation.

Recruitment and Training of Volunteers

Potential volunteers can make an initial inquiry about the befriending service via telephone, post, email, or in-person. Statistics collated to date have indicated that telephone enquiries are the most common (84% of all enquiries). Potential volunteers then complete an application form, providing the details of two referees. On obtaining two references and a successful police check, the Project Officer meets informally with the volunteer to provide them with more information about the service.

The individual is then invited to attend a formal interview. The interview panel consists of the Project Officer, a Social Worker from the Aftercare Team and one of the young people who benefits from the service. A successful interview then guarantees the volunteer a place on the training course.

The volunteer training course takes place at local venues, using either the Health Trust or Praxis Care Group facilities. The training is organised in a flexible way to suit the needs of the current group. This may involve the training being delivered during a day or over a period of three evenings. The training consists of three parts.

- i. The first part includes information on volunteering and befriending guidelines, which is delivered by the Project Officer. This covers confidentiality, boundaries, discrimination and volunteer support.
- ii. The second part addresses communication skills, which is delivered by an independent trainer.
- iii. The third part of the training deals with the topic of child protection, and is delivered by one of the Praxis Care Group trainers.

Volunteer Support

An essential component of the Project Officer's post is to provide volunteer support. Regular, on-going support is offered to volunteers to ensure they feel valued and prepared for the role they have taken on. The Project Officer meets with each volunteer both informally and formally at 3 monthly supervision meetings and at a 6 monthly befriending review. Volunteers are responsible for keeping the Project Officer informed as to when they are meeting the young person they befriend. Once matched, the volunteers receive a list of contact numbers pertaining to the young

person they befriend. This includes telephone numbers for the Social Worker who referred the young person, a Senior Social Worker, any main carers and the emergency duty team. Providing a range of contact points ensures that the volunteer can make contact with a person involved in the care of the young person any time.

Further training opportunities have been scheduled for existing volunteers. The training will address specialised subjects, such as sexual abuse and self-harm. In addition, a range of social activities have been planned including group outings (a bowling match and Christmas party) and a dinner where volunteers will receive an award in recognition of their work

Volunteers receive travel expenses and occasional funding for specific social activities they engage in with their young person, such as horse-riding or cinema tickets.

The Matching Process

As volunteers progress through the informal meeting, the interview, and the training course, the Project Officer has been afforded a range of opportunities to get to know the volunteer and assess their character and personality. This process is essential when it comes to matching the volunteer to a young person.

During the matching phase, the needs of each young person are paramount. Their personality, hobbies, interests and geographical location are all taken into account when identifying a suitable volunteer befrienders. Once a possible match has been identified, a meeting is set up between the Project Officer and the Aftercare Worker who referred the young person to the service. The main purpose of this meeting is to ensure that the Project Officer has relevant up-to-date information on the young person's circumstances. A separate meeting is then set up with the young person, Project Officer, Aftercare Worker and the volunteer to discuss the potential match. The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the aims of the befriending relationship and determine what the young person needs from the relationship. The date and time of the first meeting is also arranged. This enables the Project Officer to ensure that she can be contacted should any issues arise during the start of the relationship. At the end of the meeting, if everyone is in agreement with the match, all parties sign a Befriending Agreement. This agreement outlines the aims and responsibilities of all parties including the Project Officer and the Aftercare Worker.

UPTAKE OF SERVICE

Young People

18 young people have been referred to the service between April and October 2003: 4 males and 14 females (Figure 1.1). Their ages range from 15 years to 20 years. The majority of referrals to date have come from the Homefirst Community Trust (n=13), with 5 referrals coming from the Causeway Trust. All 18 referrals have been accepted by the service (Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.1
Referrals

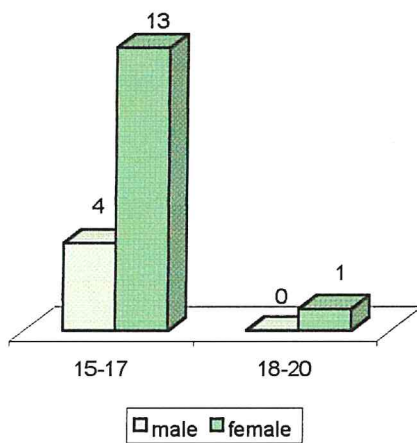
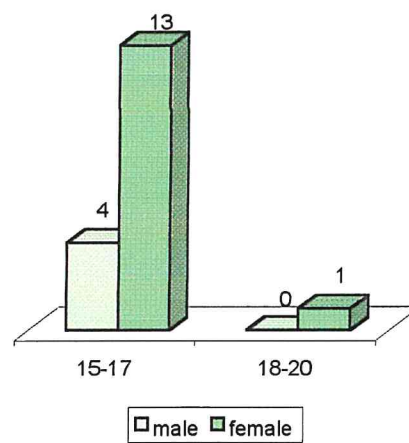


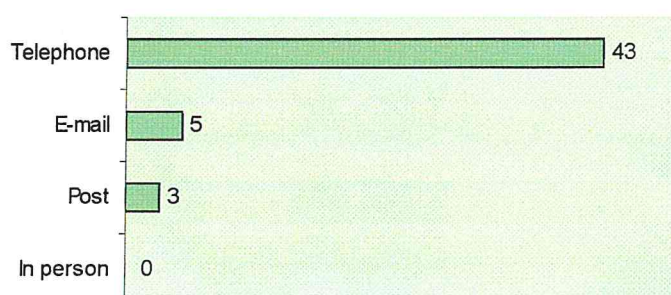
FIGURE 1.2
Acceptances



Volunteers

51 enquiries were received from potential volunteers between April and October. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of these have been via telephone (84%; n=43). E-mail has been utilised by 5 individuals (10%) and 3 potential volunteers contacted the Project Officer by post (6%).

FIGURE 2: VOLUNTEER ENQUIRIES



Applications: The majority of applications were from females, aged over 26 years (Table 1). 22 applications were made in total, 20 from females, 2 from males. 17 applicants were interviewed; the Project Officer is currently awaiting references from the remaining 5 applicants.

Training: 14 individuals have undergone volunteer training and 12 have completed the training to date. 3 individuals are currently awaiting training or in the process of training. 2 individuals did not complete the training programme and are no longer in contact with the service. One of these individuals has moved away from the area. The other decided that she wasn't suited to the role of volunteer befriender.

TABLE 1

	MALES	FEMALES			TOTAL
	26 YRS >	18-20 YRS	24-26 YRS	26 YRS >	
Applications completed	2	1	1	18	22
Individuals interviewed	2	1	0	14	17
Participated in training	1	1	0	12	14
Completed training	1	1	0	10	12
Did not complete training	0	0	0	2	2
Awaiting/in training	1	0	0	2	3

Matches

9 matches were arranged during the 7-month period between April and October. 6 matches were within the Homefirst Trust area; 3 were within the Causeway Trust area. The majority of visits were planned to take place weekly. As shown in Table 2, the aims of the relationship were primarily to provide friendship to the young person and encourage their involvement in social activities/improve social skills. Increasing motivation was also a factor for establishing one match. One match was ended due to the young person no longer wanting a volunteer to visit.

TABLE 2: AIMS OF RELATIONSHIP

Friendship	4
Social	4
Motivation	1

CLIENT OUTCOME

Referral Agents and matched volunteers were asked to indicate how they felt the young person they referred/befriended has benefited since using the service. This data was available for 5 young people. Interviews were also held with 3 young people themselves to determine their views on their outcome from using the service.

TABLE 3: OUTCOME

YP		Confidence	Independence	Get out/about	Social skills	Self-esteem	Deal with problems
A	RA	Great imp	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Great imp	Some imp
	VOL	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp
	YP	Great imp	Some imp	Great imp	Great imp	Some imp	Some imp
B	RA	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Same	Some imp	Same
	VOL	Some imp	Some imp	Great imp	Great imp	Some imp	Same
	YP	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same
C	RA	Great imp	Great imp	Great imp	Great imp	Great imp	Great imp
	VOL	Some imp	Some imp	Great imp	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp
	YP	Great imp	Great imp	Great imp	Same	Great imp	Some imp
D	RA	Some imp	Same	Some imp	Same	Same	Same
	VOL	Some imp	Same	Some imp	Same	Same	Same
E	RA	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Same	Some imp	Same
	VOL	Some imp	Some imp	Some imp	Same	Some imp	Some imp

KEY: RA – Referral Agent VOL – Volunteer YP – Young Person
Great imp – Great improvement **Some imp** – Some improvement

Table 3 presents the Referral Agents', volunteers' and, where available, young peoples' ratings on a number of key indicators – Confidence; Independence; Opportunity to get out and about; Social skills; Self-esteem; and Ability to deal with problems. Respondents were asked to rate each of these indicators on a 5-point scale, ranging from:

A great improvement	Some improvement	Same	Some deterioration	A lot of deterioration
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As indicated in the Table, 4 of the young people were rated as showing either 'a great improvement' or 'some improvement' in most of the areas. Young Person C arguably showed the greatest improvement across the 6 areas, particularly in Getting out and about, Confidence, Independence and Self-esteem. Young Person D did not improve in 4 of the areas, although she showed some improvement in terms of Confidence and Getting out and about more. None of the young people showed any deterioration in any of the 6 areas.

Overall, these ratings suggest that, although the service is still relatively new, there have been a number of positive benefits for the young people as a result of being involved in a befriending relationship.

Young Peoples' Views

In the interviews, the young people were asked to describe their relationship with their befriender. One described it as 'friendly and exciting', while another responded:

'[My volunteer] is like a big sister to me ... I am close to her ... I have only known her a couple of months but I am close to her and can tell her anything. She is very protective over me'.

Having a befriender has helped the young people in a number of ways, such as improving confidence, increasing feelings of happiness and just being there for the young person:

'It gives me more confidence'

'I feel happier'

'Whenever I have been down or anything, she has been there, I just have to phone her'.

One of the best things about having a befriender for the young people was having a person they could talk to:

'Having someone there to talk to and someone you can just phone'.

The value of the befriending relationship for one young person can only be best explained in her own words:

'...It just gives you a bit of life back, a bit more confidence in yourself, and you can be yourself...'

Volunteers' Views

Volunteers also identified having someone to talk to as a main benefit of the service:

'Someone to talk to openly who can provide practical support on a non-judgemental basis'

'The young person has found a person that s/he can trust and who is willing to help him/her'.

Improving social skills and gaining more life experience were reported as important outcomes for the young person.

Referral Agents' Views

The Referral Agents also identified improved confidence, increased self-esteem and greater social experiences as being main outcomes for the young people using the service. Comments included:

'...The young people feel involved, respected and more confident'

'Great increase in confidence and self esteem. She is delighted to have choices about what she can do with the volunteer'

'Getting out and about and growing in confidence and independence'.

VOLUNTEER VIEWS

Both matched (n=5) and unmatched (n=5) volunteers were asked to complete a questionnaire to elicit their views on the service. 6 volunteers came from within the Homefirst Community Trust area; 4 came from Causeway Trust. All were female, with a mean age of 38 years (ranging from 22 to 63 years). Most had been involved with the service between 3 and 5 months (n=6), although 2 volunteers had been involved between 6 and 12 months.

Reasons for Volunteering

As indicated in Table 4, most volunteers initially found out about the service through a newspaper article (n=8).

TABLE 4: FINDING OUT ABOUT THE SERVICE

Newspaper Article	Article in Volunteer Talk	Article in Causeway/ Homefirst Newsletter	Radio Broadcast	Postcard Advertising	
8	0	0	0	1	
Bus Advertising	Information Leaflet	Word of Mouth	Shop Window		NB Volunteers could indicate more than one option
1	1	1	1		

A variety of reasons¹ were given for deciding to volunteer, the most common being:

- ▶ 'Interested in working with young people' (n=9)
- ▶ 'Wanting a new challenge' (n=9)
- ▶ 'Having spare time' (n=7)

50% of volunteers (n=5) decided to volunteer befriended because they either had 'experience of befriending' (n=3) or 'experience of working with young people' (n=2). 4 volunteered to meet new people and one wanted to help a young person.

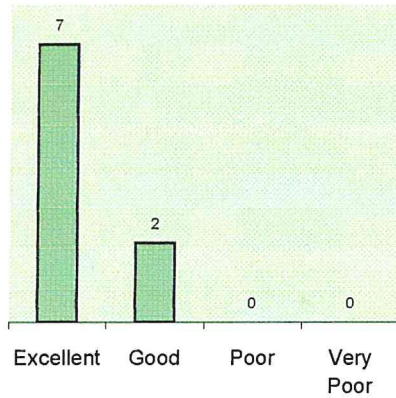
Training

At the time of the evaluation, all the volunteers had completed the scheme training programme. As indicated in the charts below (Figure 3), the quality of the training was rated very highly by the volunteers (n=7 rated it as 'excellent'). All the volunteers but one (who didn't respond to this question), rated the training as being either 'very relevant' or 'relevant' (n=9) and 6 indicated that it 'fully prepared' them for their role as a volunteer to a young person leaving care. Some of the volunteers suggested

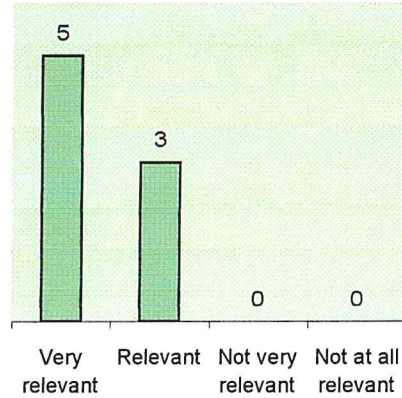
¹ Respondents could give more than one reason for volunteering

that additional training would also be useful, such as training in legal rights, communication skills and counselling.

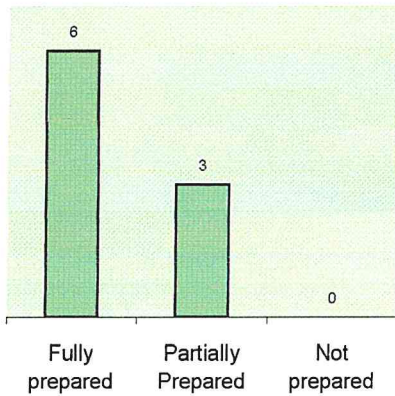
FIGURE 3: VOLUNTEER TRAINING



3.1. Quality of Training



3.2. Relevance of Training



NB Numbers do not total 10 due to missing responses

3.3. Extent Training Prepared Volunteer

Support

All volunteers responded that they received one-to-one support from the Befriending Project Officer and all indicated that they received enough support in carrying out their befriending role. In addition to the support currently provided, one volunteer suggested having a support meeting every 8 weeks where

'Volunteers meet to discuss problems that they might be having and to hear what other volunteers have to say'.

Matching

At the time of the evaluation, 5 volunteers had been matched with a young person. 3 had been involved in the befriending relationship between 3 and 5 months and one for less than 2 months (one volunteer did not provide this information). 3 volunteers rated the match as being 'successful'. One rated it as 'very successful'. The volunteers were asked to indicate why they felt their match was successful. These comments are reported in the box below:

'The young person and I have lots in common, giving us a greater understanding of each others needs'

'[The young person] is a friendly, chatty girl who is easy to relate to'

'The young person has learnt to trust me [and] looks forward to [the] visit'

'Personal hygiene has greatly improved. She also has had more contact with her family'

The volunteers reported taking part in a variety of activities with the young person, including:

- Shopping
- Eating out/Going for coffee
- Swimming
- Horse-riding
- Walking
- Chatting
- Going for a drive
- Going for a drink
- Ten-pin bowling

In relation to other activities they feel would be beneficial for the young person, one volunteer suggested that some contact with the young person's family would be useful, while another volunteer felt that the young person would benefit from involvement in youth activities.

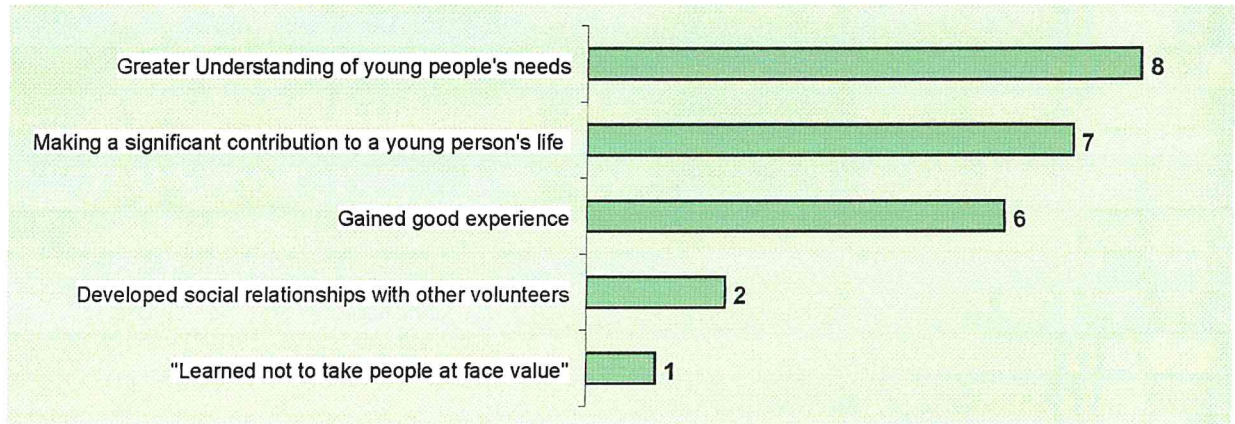
Of the 5 volunteers waiting to be matched, all had been waiting for less than 3 months. There were no problems reported with this waiting time.

Benefits of Volunteering

The volunteers were asked to indicate what personal benefits they have received since they started volunteering with the service. As can be seen in Figure 4, most of the volunteers reported benefits related to the young person – namely developing a 'greater understanding of the young person's needs' (n=8) and 'making a significant

contribution to their lives' (n=7). 'Gaining experience' was also reported as a benefit (n=6). No disadvantages were reported as arising from their befriending experience.

FIGURE 4: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING



Overall Views on the Service

All the volunteers were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high), the quality of the service provided. Views on the quality of the service were very high. 70% (n=7) of volunteers rated the service as a '10', with the other 30% (n=3) rating it as a '9'.

Volunteers liked a number of things about the service, particularly the impact the service had on the young person's life. The social aspect of the service was also valued:

- 'A chance to make a difference'
- 'Being able to contribute to another person's well-being'
- 'Making a difference in someone's life'
- 'Helping young people to gain confidence to adapt to the circumstances and improve their self-worth'
- 'Hearing how we can be a friend and see a young person happy'
- 'The social aspects'
- 'Meeting people'
- 'Plenty of support'

Volunteers were asked what they liked least about the service and where they felt improvements could be made. In terms of areas least liked, a few comments were made:

- Form filling
- Lack of funding
- Sparing enough time to have quality time with the young person
- Hearing about the difficult experiences of the young people

One of the volunteers added

'It is such a shame that these young people ever had to suffer in the first place'.

Most of the volunteers did not identify any improvements that could be made to the service. However, one volunteer did highlight the need for more funding, while another suggested:

'It would be good to do some group activities. Or to have some money provided to take each individual on some trips'.

REFERRAL AGENT VIEWS

Referral Agents were asked to provide their views on the befriending service in general and also on the impact the service has had on the young people. 4 Referral Agents completed questionnaires for 5 young people².

Provision of Information & Accessing the Service

The 4 Referral Agents heard about the service from various professional sources: Senior Management within the Trust; the Project Officer; and an information evening. One Referral Agent indicated that she had been involved with the project from the outset. When asked how they would rate the information they received about the service, 3 Referral Agents reported that the information they received was either 'excellent' or 'good'. One indicated that the information she received was 'fair', explaining that this was due to the fact that she was not working when the service was introduced.

2 Referral Agents felt that the service publicity could not be improved upon. Another indicated that radio advertisements could be utilised, although added that 'generally, publicity efforts have been excellent'. A fourth Referral Agent suggested that the service could be promoted more widely throughout the Trust.

Referrals Agents were asked how easy it was for them to access the service for the young person. All 4 indicated that it was 'very easy' to access the service. Reasons given for this are highlighted in the box below:

'Good communication and systems review with [project officer]'

'Referral processed very effectively and efficiently'

'Referral forms were handed to team leader and following referral we received a prompt response'

'I have had no difficulty in accessing the service. Only delays have been due to the young person - not the management of the service'

² One Referral Agent provided data on 3 young people. Two provided data on one young person each. A fourth Referral Agent had not individually referred a young person to the service at the time of the evaluation and therefore, for the most part, provided general views on the service.

The Referral Agents did not identify any ways of making the service easier to access.

Support for Young Person

All 4 Referral Agents were ‘very satisfied’ with the support the young people receive from the service. A number of positive comments were made:

‘Every effort is made to match the young person to an appropriate volunteer. The relationship is monitored and any difficulties fed back to the referring agent’

‘Well-organised meetings - re-organised meetings when young person doesn’t turn up. Good stickability!’

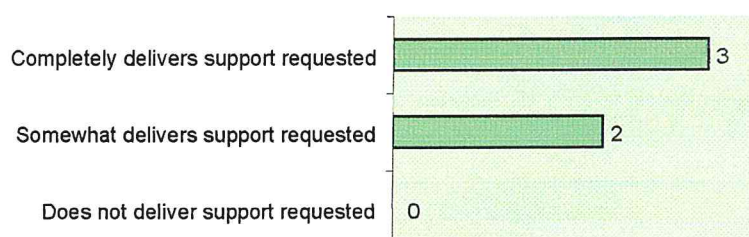
‘Ongoing constant support for young person’

‘Very regular contact between young person and her befriender’

The Referral Agents did not suggest any ways in which they would like to see support for the young person changed. Indeed, all indicated that they found the service ‘very responsive’ to the young peoples’ needs. Their reasons for this rating were primarily concerned with the work put in by the volunteers, with words such as ‘dedicated’ and ‘committed’ used. Referral Agents also highlighted operational procedures such as the comprehensive nature of the referral form and risk assessment. The fact that the young people’s needs are considered and understood was also valued.

The Referral Agents were also asked to indicate whether the service delivers the support they requested for the young people. As shown in Figure 5, the Referral Agents indicated that the service ‘completely delivered the support requested’ for 3 young people. The service ‘somewhat delivered the support requested’ for 2 young people.

FIGURE 5: SUPPORT DELIVERED



Volunteer Training

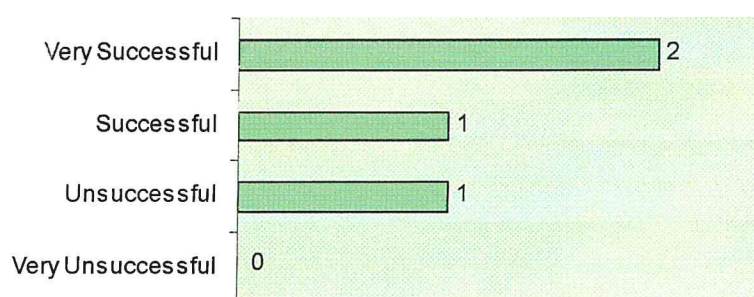
Referral Agents were asked to rate the quality of the in-house training provided to the volunteers. One Referral Agent was not aware of the specific training volunteers received and therefore was unable to answer this question. 2 rated the training as 'good', and a third rated it is 'excellent'. The Referral Agents did not suggest any ways in which the training could be improved.

Volunteer Matching

The 4 Referral Agents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their involvement in the matching process. In terms of how the process of matching could be improved, one Agent suggested that matching should be more 'age appropriate', with the young person having more choice. A second Referral Agent indicated that the Social worker should always be kept informed.

All the young people referred to the service by the Referral Agents were matched with a volunteer within 3 months. This length of time was either 'very' (n=4) or 'quite satisfactory' (n=1) for the Referral Agents. In terms of the success of the current matches, 2 matches were described as 'very successful', 1 was described as 'successful' and one was described as 'unsuccessful' (Figure 6). The reason provided for the unsuccessful rating was due to the young person feeling that the age gap was too large between the volunteer and herself.

FIGURE 6: MATCHING



The Referral Agents provided a number of reasons as to why they viewed the match as successful, including:

'They share similar interests and hobbies. Volunteer is outgoing and would encourage young person regarding activities, independent living etc'

'Age appropriate. Very supportive'

'Similar age, background and interests. Unsure of match initially but now feel it's working well'

'Young but mature outlook on life. Very supportive'

Overall Views on the Service

The Referral Agents were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high), the quality of the service provided. Views on the service were rated highly, with 2 ratings of '8' and 2 ratings of '9'. In terms of what was liked best about the befriending service, Referral Agents emphasised the many benefits the young people receive:

'Young person's needs are taken into consideration before any match meeting. Befriending service offers something outside of social services for young people who may feel isolated and need someone to talk to'

'Support for young people. Good liaison with the befriending scheme coordinator'

'Great resource for care leavers'

'Social outlet. Confidence building'

The Referral Agents did not identify any areas of the service that they liked least. In terms of changes or improvements, one suggested the recruitment of a greater number of younger volunteers. The Referral Agents were asked whether they would like to add any other comments on the service. One pointed out that the service was 'very supportive and flexible'. Another wished to find out whether volunteers were checked for previous social work involvement, in addition to their police check. A third Referral Agent responded:

'I have found this service to be well organised and it has the needs of young people at its core. It has filled an important gap in the provision of services for those leaving care'.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation documents the development of the Young People Leaving Care Befriending Service. In doing so, it gathered the views of a number of primary stakeholders – the young people themselves; the volunteer befrienders and the Referral Agents. As this report shows, the findings have been very positive. Both the volunteers and Referral Agents have commended the practices and procedures put in place to ensure the effective and efficient operation of the service. All those involved in the evaluation have recognised the value of the service provided to the young people, and the benefits for both the young people and the volunteers.

An additional achievement of the service within its first year has been its nomination for 2 awards:

- The first nomination is for The George Quigley Award. This award is given for new ventures aimed at helping people in the community. This amount for this award is £2,000.
- The second nomination is for The Community Care Awards under the category of protecting children and young people. The amount for this award is £8,000.

The final comment rests with the Project Officer:

"I was very pleased to have the opportunity to set up this new service. I have set high standards and hope the evaluation portrays an innovative worthwhile service which is benefiting the young people. It is very rewarding for me, when I hear from the young people themselves, that having a befriender is helping them and making a difference to their lives".