

Introduction

Healthwatch Northamptonshire works to help local people get the best out of their health and social care services, whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Healthwatch gives people a powerful voice in Northamptonshire and nationally. Healthwatch is about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services. Not just for people that use them but for anyone who might need to in the future.

Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire is for young people in Northamptonshire aged between 11-24 years old who are keen to make a difference in health and social care locally.

For the purpose of this re-evaluation, I spoke with several young people involved via a 'WhatsApp' video call. The discussions went really well and the young people were all able to give positive examples of dialogue resulting in change, which I have captured in this report.

I would like to say a big thanks to Ellie, Darrell, Kyle, Phil, Izzie, Kia, Anya and Jess. All the young people have been involved in the project between 2 months and 3 years.

Opportunities for Dialogue resulting in Change

I first asked the young people to describe their role and what the project is all about. I was told:

"To make sure young people in Northamptonshire have a say about Health and Social Care".

"We meet monthly. We kind of all decide together what we talk about".

"We are busy working our way through them and our agenda is based on that!"

"One of the things we have been discussing is the emotional well-being of young carers".

"Everyone has a laugh too".

Priority Setting

At the meeting in October, we were asked to set our priorities and to elect a new chair.

"At the beginning of the year we pick our priorities/topics".

"We all decided together. We jotted down ideas and things we wanted to discuss and change".

Young Healthwatch identified 2 key priorities: Mental health and primary care. As an organisation they are now working with providers and commissioners to ensure that this work is carried out and the responses to the findings are listened to and are making a difference to young people. The work plan for Young Healthwatch has been centred around these two priorities.

“Anyone can stand for chair. You have to do a speech and then we all vote”.

Kettering General Hospital

A visit to Kettering General Hospital was carried out following the 15 steps criteria as set out by NHS England. The young people that attended then wrote a report, which included recommendations for the hospital to address.

“When we visited A&E, we noticed that the signs were not clear and child friendly. We fed this back and now they have child friendly signs which include a cartoon fish and are on the walls and floors”.

“Another suggestion we made was for the signage in the car park to be improved. They have now changed that too!”

“We went around the children’s ward and children’s areas to see if it was safe and welcoming. We did this as part of Take Over day in collaboration with Shooting Stars – a project for young people with disabilities”.

The final report was published on the Healthwatch website and released into the public domain. The hospital addressed the recommendations in the report and as a result drew up an action plan so that they could tackle those issues.

“We presented the report to the doctors”.

T-Shirts

It has been agreed that Young Healthwatch can have t-shirts made. The slogan on the back was needed. Young Healthwatch came up with various slogans and then voted on them.

The slogan that was selected was the one with the most votes: **“Every Voice Counts”**.

“We now have them!”

Displays and Leaflets

Young Healthwatch have designed new leaflets and decided what pictures to place on the current display board.

Surveys

When a new survey for young people is needed. Young Healthwatch design the survey with the support of staff. The group are challenged in decisions that they make and ensure that they consider all young people and not just themselves. The result is a survey that can be shared

with a wide audience ensuring that the voice of children and young people is heard, not just in their organisation but in-service design and delivery across Northamptonshire. The results of the survey are then put into a report.

“We designed a survey on PHSE and what it meant”.

“We all got together and discussed points such as colour schemes, age groups, the questions and categories”.

“We then shared it across social media and directed it at the age we chose 13 to 15-year olds. It went into schools and is still live now. We made it so that there wasn’t much writing and used scoring scales such as 1 to 10”.

Life Skills

Young people said they wanted to learn valuable life skills from volunteering with Healthwatch.

As a result of this the project have given young people the opportunity to learn the skills they identified in unique and different ways. It is now part of every meeting to work on these key skills such as confidence building, teamwork, public speaking, report writing and leadership skills.

“We learn leadership skills. At the last meeting Zoe came in to support us with this”.

“It is great that the group helps you with all this”.

In the past 12 months Young Healthwatch have presented their findings from reports to the senior management board at Kettering General Hospital and have presented at the Healthwatch Northamptonshire Annual Meeting.

Board Member

To ensure they continue to hear the voice of young people, the Chair of Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire has a space on the Healthwatch Northamptonshire board. The time of day of the Healthwatch Annual meeting has also been set at a time outside of the school day so that our young volunteers can attend.

“The last meeting, we went to!”

“Our chair sits on the board and tells them the things we are involved in”.

Feedback

After every session, young people are asked to feedback on what went well and what didn't.

“It’s a comfortable place anyway so we all can say things throughout the meetings so there is always this opportunity”.

Few words

I asked the young people to describe in a few words, what the project means to them and was told the following:

- ***“Fun, brings opportunities and engaging”.***
- ***“Helps with your confidence quite a lot”.***
- ***“Great opportunity”.***
- ***“Fun, you can have a say and people will respect you and your opinion”.***
- ***“Fun I guess, opportunistic and informative”.***
- ***“Fun, you get to meet new people, everyone is kind and there are no arguments”.***
- ***“Fun and very productive. We get a lot done and people listen to you!”***

Recommendation

During our discussions, I asked the young people if they would like to suggest any recommendations for the project. The only suggestion made was regarding improving the feedback the group get from services along with recognition of their involvement.

“This could be improved as we generally know things have been done as we see them but we don’t get to know enough from the people who change it!”

Conclusion

My report clearly demonstrates the ways young people influence decision making in the area. Everyone I met with spoke highly of the project and the ways they have a voice.

I look forward to hearing how the recommendation of improving feedback to the group takes shape over the year.

When I asked the young people if they felt their organisation should receive the Investing in Children Membership Award™ for another year. They all said and agreed:

“Definitely – Everything we do is tailored to what we say, and things get changed”.

“Changes happen! We all get listened to!”

I therefore have no hesitation in recommending this.

This report has been endorsed by the young people I met with.

Well Done!

**Eleanor Seed
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