

Investing in Children Membership Award™ Evaluation



Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Healthwatch is an independent national champion for people who use health and social care services. Its purpose is to make sure that those running services, and the government, put people at the heart of health care provision. Healthwatch gives people a powerful voice locally and nationally. Healthwatch Northamptonshire helps local people get the best out of local health and social care services and seeks to involve them in decisions about the future design of those services. Healthwatch Northamptonshire also works to include young people in the debate around health and social care and supports Young Healthwatch, a group of young people aged 11-24, to help enable them influence policy.

I visited Healthwatch at Lakeside House, Northampton on 16th February 2018. I met with Esther Stimpson - Healthwatch Officer and members of Young Healthwatch – Caitlin, Jess, Tanzi, Darcie, Ellie, Moriam, Nancy, Bruna, Jasmine, Anya and Savannah.

Evidence of dialogue leading to change

The following written evidence was provided by Healthwatch. This formed the basis of my discussion with the young people.

- **Young people involved in the design and planning of the Young Healthwatch Re-launch.**

Young people wanted to make sure the event was fun, enjoyable and engaging with fun activities and gift bags for everyone attending. They decided on the date, the venue, food, activities, the décor and the promotion of the event. Young people also designed the posters and social media publicity.

- **At the re-launch, young people were asked what health and social care issues mattered to them most. Mental health and wellbeing was raised as a priority by a majority of the young people.**



Working with the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and local providers, Young Healthwatch is developing its own consultation survey which will go out to around

500 young people in Northamptonshire. The findings will form a report including recommendations to the CCGs and other service providers. The purpose of this wider consultation is to include the input young people have when new services are being designed and older services reviewed.

- **The re-launch also revealed Young Healthwatch members preferred to have regular scheduled meetings rather than meeting on an ad hoc basis. They also suggested that WhatsApp, rather than email, be used to circulate and share important information.**

Young Healthwatch now meets every 6 weeks, the date and time decided by young people via a doodle poll. Meeting days vary from a Sunday evenings to day time meetings during the school holidays. The Young Healthwatch core group of regular attendees is part of the newly created WhatsApp group which receives and communicates important information with the Healthwatch worker.

- **Healthwatch uses both Facebook and Twitter to communicate its message. However, Young Healthwatch pointed out that new forms of social media, such as Snapchat, Instagram and Youtube, are now far more commonly used by young people.**

Snapchat, Instagram and Youtube have been setup in response to the young people's suggestions.

- **Young Healthwatch visited Northampton General Hospital and, from their findings, produced their own report with recommendations.**

The final report was handed to the Head of Safeguarding at Northampton General Hospital and also to the clinical leads for the departments the young people visited. The recommendations are currently being considered by the hospital and Young Healthwatch will hear in due course if their recommendations lead to changes.

Ongoing issues

- **Kettering General Hospital Visit**

A second visit to Kettering General Hospital is being planned. Young people will produce their own report.

- **Redesign of leaflet**

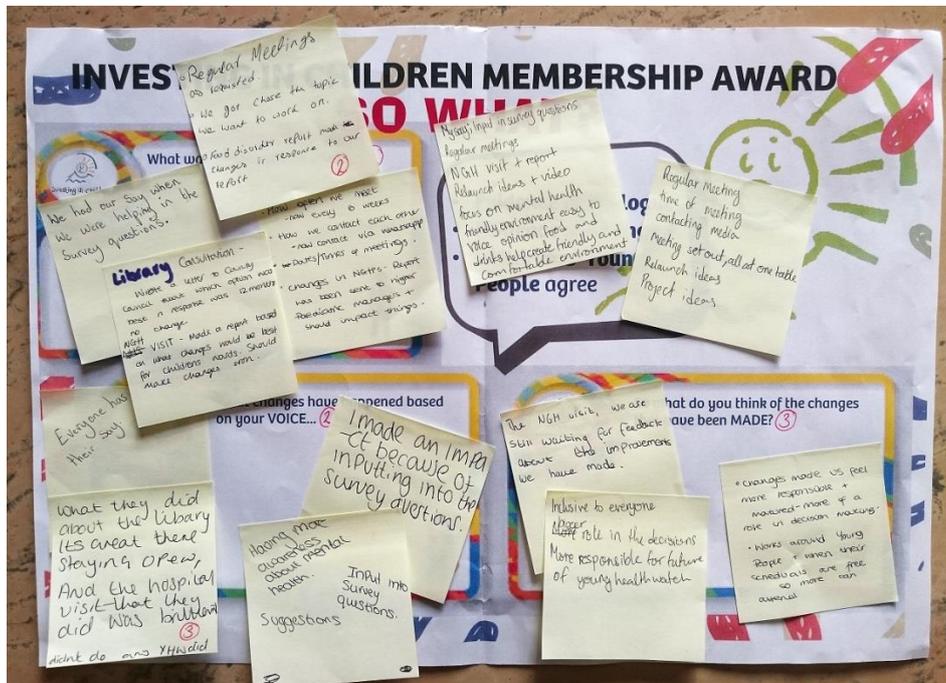
The service aims to produce a new leaflet designed by young people (the current one was designed by young people 2 years ago).

- **Skills and training workshop.**

At the recent re-launch of Young Healthwatch, young people said they wanted improve their skills in areas such as public speaking. Funding will be sought to provide training to the support what is already offered during regular meetings.

Discussion with young people

I joined the young people in a large meeting room at Lakeside House while they were busy working on their various projects. There were flipcharts, post it notes on the walls and a large piece of unfinished artwork which young people add to at each meeting as a way of helping them relax and form their ideas. In preparation for my visit the young people had also worked on the 'Dialogue and Change' sheet –



I asked them about the meetings, the recent re-launch, why they became involved in Young Healthwatch what they enjoy most about meeting as a group.

“The relaunch was really about taking a fresh look at the work we do and an opportunity to look at new ways of improving our meetings.”

“We wanted more regular meetings at a time that suited us; we now meet every six weeks.”

“We have made changes to the way we contact each other and keep in touch; we decide when we have our meetings.”

“I became involved because I wanted to be part of making changes in services to young people.”

“I think we have all made friends and gained confidence, I am much more confident speaking to professionals.”

“Before I joined Young Healthwatch, I could see the influence it had in making changes to the health services. Now I am a member of this group. I

have a particular interest in cancer care for young people, which is very poor at present.”

“You can do so much more by working in a group and sharing thoughts and ideas, we are always encouraged to work together.”

Prior to my visit, I read some of the material Esther had sent me about work the group had been involved in recently. I was keen to find out more about how Healthwatch had supported the young people to challenge the decision makers in health and social care. The following is only brief summary of the impressive volume of work young people have carried out recently and, if space allowed, I would have included more detail here.

Research and Reports

Members of Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire have produced two reports (mentioned above) from research carried out at children’s wards in two Hospitals in Northamptonshire - Kettering General Hospital in July 2016 and Northampton General Hospital in October 2017. They met staff, young patients and their parents. Healthwatch Northamptonshire staff accompanied the young people and training was provided to prepare them. Young people told me –

“We have visited hospitals and looked at how healthcare is provided to children and young people of different ages.”

We talked to children, listened to their experiences and recommended changes.”

“Some of the changes we have made include charging points for mobile phones and dust free fans.”

“Also age appropriate games for older teenagers, stools for young people to sit and read and wash basins at the appropriate height for children and young people of all ages.”

Young Healthwatch has also carried out research and produced reports in a range of areas including GP Practices, mental health and young people’s wellbeing, eating disorders and library closures -

“We met and listened to the views of younger children visiting their GP.”



“We have worked to help persuade GPs to focus on young people’s mental health and we also produced an eating disorders report.”

“The work around Library closures was important because we see Libraries not just as shelves of books but resource centres for young people to access.”

Our conversation turned back to the regular meetings of Young Healthwatch members. The young people, had by now, talked a lot about Esther so I asked about the particular qualities that she and other Healthwatch workers possess in terms of how they listen to and support young people –

“Everyone treats us with respect here, we are never talked down to or patronized.”

“Healthwatch is always open to new ideas.”

“Esther sits back and lets us take the lead but is always there for support and encouragement.”

“She has prepared us so well that professionals take notice of what we say.”

“Of course Esther comes up with good ideas too but she always encourages us to add our own touch and shape things how we want.”

“Esther knows we see things from a different perspective from adults so she always encourages us to present our ideas in our own words.”

“I think we feel part of changing things but we have gained a lot as individuals, our self-esteem, our confidence and maturity.”

Recommendations for the future

Despite my prompting, the young people could not come up with any recommendations to improve their experience of Young Healthwatch, nor could they think of any issues they were unhappy with. All cited the recent re-launch as an example of the way the service is always looking to refresh and take a new look at its organisation.

No recommendation was made by the young people.

Investing in Children Membership Award™ status.

We talked about the *Investing in Children Membership Award™* and I immediately detected a genuine interest from the young people in Investing in Children and I was asked questions about its work. I asked everyone to write down their thoughts as to

whether Young Healthwatch deserves be awarded *Investing in Children Membership Award™* status. Below are their handwritten statements:

Young health watch
Should definitely be
a part of investing in
children because it
focuses on young peoples
opinions.
Nancy

Young healthwatch is
very ~~helpful~~ inclusive +
listens to young people
and makes changes happen.
They make sure your
voice is heard + do every-
thing in their power to make
it happen. A very friendly
organisation who take your
ideas on board.

The young health
watch is good
because everyone has
an input and they
consider everyone's
thoughts.

Why Young health watch should be
a member?
It's an all inclusive
organisation that takes on
board any ideas suggested
by the young people and
makes me feel like a valued,
core member of young
health watch.

YHealth watch
improving influence
on county council
and CC G, schools and
worked towards key issues,
hasn't shyed away from
important things

The young health
watch should be
something invested
in because it gives
young people a voice
to change aspects
of their own health
and well being.

YHW main aim is
to improve the services
people receive, especially
as we focus so much
of our work on children/
Adolescence.

Because people
enjoy coming
here, and we don't
just sit and talk
we build friendships
and do activities
that I would have
never done before.

Conclusion

It was a real pleasure to meet Esther and members of Northamptonshire Young Healthwatch. The young people described how becoming involved with Healthwatch has given them the confidence and the skills to become fully engaged in the debate around health and social care services in their area. They have carried out research, conducted surveys, produced reports, met with and challenged service providers to improve the outcomes for children and young people accessing health and social

care services. They have also influenced and increased the effectiveness of their own Young Healthwatch group with their ideas on social media, meeting times and information sharing. The young people are extremely and rightly proud of their achievements but also acknowledge that none of this would have been possible without Esther and Healthwatch workers who have listened, encouraged and supported young people to participate and speak for themselves. It is also important to note that some young people also talked about how much they had gained personally from their experiences, in terms of their own self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of belonging, since joining the group.

For respecting the human rights of children and young people to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, I wholeheartedly endorse the comments of the young people in recommending that Northamptonshire Young Healthwatch be awarded *Investing in Children Membership Award™* status.

This report has been endorsed by the young people.

B.Stock
Sessional Project Worker
Investing in Children CIC
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