

How effective are young people's health liaison officers and why are they needed in our local NHS trust?

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The conclusions reached in this research report have been made by Investing in Children Public and Patient Involvement Research Group and is not necessarily the views of The National Youth Agency.

Introduction

We are a group of young women from Newton Aycliffe in County Durham, in 2006 The PPI (Patient and Public Involvement) Trust commissioned Investing in Children to find out what young people thought about hospitals within County Durham. This piece of research was led by young people who also decided on the methodology used. We wrote up the research in a report format and presented to the Trust Board for Children's Hospital Services in County Durham. There was much interest in our findings and we have been meeting regularly with the Trust Board since then.

One of the findings triggered by hospital staff (who had spoken to young people using their services) was that a young person's liaison officer would be very useful as an intermediary. This has never been fully researched in County Durham to find out if it would be effective and useful to young people.

So, we felt that this was an area worth researching, firstly as it had been raised in our previous research, and was an area we were interested in, secondly because it had also been raised in work that hospital staff had undertaken and finally because there had been no previous research carried out in this area.

Our next step was to come up with a research question, to direct our research. We felt that in order to come up with the right question we would have to encompass all three of the above reasons for carrying out the research, but it would also have to test if this was the right service for children, young people and their families in County Durham, looking at how it would work (if it was a viable service), how much it would cost (would it be value for money) and who and how it would be used?

The question we decided upon was:

How effective are young people's health liaison officers and why are they needed in our local NHS trust?

Our Methodology for testing if this was right for County Durham was:

To test it out with young people to see if this is a viable piece of research and what in particular they would like to know. It has been 2 years since the original research with young people. This informed to some extent how the next stages were to be done. This was to be carried out via an agenda day - which asks open questions in an adult free environment.

The research group also carried out desk top research via internet and phone and where appropriate interview/visit liaison officers in other areas of the country.

Our research target and supporting documents for the research

Disseminate research results to Trust Board - via PowerPoint presentation

and discussion

Disseminate research results to young people - via direct feedback to those involved (meeting/ letter), for all young people IiC and NYA website, IiC newsletter, info to schools via posters for example

Literature Review and background policy which supports this research:

- 1) You're welcome - government initiative to make health services young people friendly
- 2) Every Child Matters - Outcomes; healthy & happy.
- 3) D.O.H - Health improvement programme - big target group for health improvement is young people via sexual health, alcohol misuse, substance misuse, tobacco etc.
- 4) D.O.H - Healthy Living & Food in Schools programme
- 5) Link - local involvement network - which is designed to replace PPI Trust
- 6) D.O.H. - Choosing Health White Paper
- 7) Investing in Children - Patient Public Involvement October 2006 (copy attached)

Research questions and how we decided upon them

We needed to decide on some questions that we could use to gather peoples

opinions.

We wanted to be able to ask the questions to children, young people, parents and health professionals. So, the questions needed to be generic and relevant to all above parties.

One of the things we wanted to find out was if there were any liaison officers anywhere else in the country, and if so how did the service they provide work? We also wanted to know if the young people who used the service felt it was a worthwhile service for them, and what they felt could be improved? Finally we wanted to know if this was a service that would be useful in County Durham.

The three main research questions we decided upon were:

Which NHS trusts use liaison officers?

How effective are young people's liaison officers?

Would young people find liaison officers useful in a health setting environment?

However, as you will find further on in the report these questions were slightly adjusted where we felt necessary to do so. This was done to ensure that the questions were effective for the audience and context in which they were to be used.

Methodology for gathering information and researching this issue

The methods we planned to use were:

Agenda days: are where young people are asked very open questions, and this is an adult free environment

Questionnaires: to young people, health professionals & parents/carers.

Desk top research: to find out where liaison officers are based - through internet and phone.

Sample quota: by region of liaison officers - **interviewing them and observation** of the work they do and how they do it (if possible).

Interviewing staff: by spending a day in a hospital and asking staff if they think a liaison officer would be useful.

Interviewing young people from other areas: speaking to young people who have had experience of working with a liaison officer to find out effectiveness.

Speak to adults in other areas of country: parents/ carers/ health professionals using questionnaires and asking in the clinics to find out how effective liaison officers are.

Surveying: going into youth centres and interviewing young people who were willing to speak to us using the format questions from our questionnaire.

Analysing data effectively: by quantitative methods and qualitative methods

Questionnaires

One method of gathering information that we used was questionnaires, although we felt this method didn't work for us as we had little response and what views we did receive were limited due to the style of questions

used in questionnaires.

Below is a copy of the questionnaire we used:

Young People's Liaison Worker

This questionnaire is to find out what help young people get when using health services in their area. We are also trying to improve help available by trying to get young people's liaison workers for County Durham and Darlington health services.

A liaison worker is somebody who stands by you and helps you through the process when you use health services (inc. doctors, clinics, hospitals, dentists etc.)

Age:

What town do you live in?

1) Have you used any health services in the past 12 months?

Yes No (Please Circle)

2) Which services do you use? Please tick any used.

Local Doctors Surgery

Clinics (e.g. Diabetes, Sexual Health, Teenage Health etc)

please state which clinics

.....

Hospitals Outpatients

Hospitals - overnight stay or longer

Any other health services

3) When using the service, was there anyone to help you apart from the health staff? Please tick.

Youth worker

Children or teenage advisor

Liaison worker

Other Please say type of worker if you know

4) If yes, which health service / clinic was this?

Please turn over

5) If yes, what did the person do for you?

Give information

Offer advice

Support

Other help Please say what help you got

.....

6) If yes, out of 10, how useful did you find the youth / liaison worker?

Please Circle: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(1 is no use and 10 is very useful)

7) If you answered no in question 4, would you have liked a youth / liaison worker with you?

Yes No (Please Circle)

8) Are there any liaison workers in your area?

Yes No (Please Circle)

9) If you'd like a liaison worker helping you in a health care service, what would you like them to do/help you with?

.....
.....
.....

10) Any other comments about health care for young people that you'd like to tell us about.

.....
.....
.....

**Thank you for taking time out to complete this questionnaire!
Our initial report will be due out in October and will be available from
Investing in Children. To get a copy ask one of the workers or phone
0191 3867485.**

Interviews with young people

One of the methods we used were one to one interviews with young people. We did this by going into youth centres and asking young people, who were willing to speak to us, questions. We took these questions from our questionnaire and put together a question and answer sheet to record the young people's views and opinions, as seen below:

**Health Liaison Worker for Children and Young People in County
Durham - Research Project 2008**

Interview with young person

Our group has been looking at health issues for children and young people in County Durham since 2006. Originally commissioned by PPI (Patient Public Involvement) to find out what young people thought about hospitals.

In this original piece of research carried out in 2006, one of the ideas was to introduce liaison workers / officers for children and young people into hospitals.

This piece of work is to find out if children and young people would like a person who can help them through the process when using any health care service such as doctor's surgeries, clinics or hospitals i.e. a liaison worker. They would not be the health worker themselves but someone to help with information, advice, support, and act as go between to ensure the young people understand what the health professional is saying - a youth worker?

Also if young people would like a liaison worker - what would they like them to do and in which healthcare setting.

This research has been funded by the National Youth Agency (NYA) - Young Researcher Network and has to be completed by very early October. We then have to present our findings at a national conference in November. This conference will be health related research projects and the NYA is inviting strategic health managers with decision making powers.

I hope you can help by answering the questions we have and adding anything else you would like to.

**Thank you very much for your time - Rebecca, Ashleigh, Louise & Laura
Male / Female?**

How old are you?

Which town / village do you live in?

Have you used any health services in the last 12 months?

What type of service? e.g. local doctors, hospital, clinic

Where were they located? e.g. Darlington, Durham, Newton Aycliffe etc.

What was the experience like? e.g. what was good and what was bad?

When using the service was there anyone to help you apart from the health staff? e.g. youth worker, teenage adviser, liaison worker.

If yes tell us what the person did. e.g. give information, advice, support etc.

Do you think liaison workers would be useful in County Durham health

care services?

If so what would they do/ what would they help you with? e.g. give information, advice, support, organise transport, book appointments etc.

Where would they work?

(For example hospitals, clinics, doctors surgeries, schools, or would they be mobile and cover many locations depending on what young people needed?)

What would they look like?

(For example youth worker, health worker, older, younger - or a mixture)

Or would you prefer existing health workers to be more aware of needs of young people - can talk on their own terms in words they can understand etc.? How would you give them those skills?

Is there anything else you would like to add about health services for young people and how they could be improved?

Agenda Days

Agenda days are a model of working devised by Investing in Children, and for this project was the most useful way of gaining children and young peoples view from around County Durham, and is now used nationally by Investing in Children and their partners.

An agenda day is an adult free space, it's planned and facilitated by and for children and young people, in a place that they feel comfortable, generally in local community buildings, such as community centres, village halls, leisure centres, youth centres and so on. Agenda days start with a blank sheet, that is that we have a big sheet of blank paper and ask open questions young people can express any view they have about the topic and their views aren't directed by the questions. we feel this is important when doing research as we then gain view and ideas that we wouldn't of thought of asking about. All views, opinions and ideas are recorded whether we agree or not, as all views that the children and young people take their time to give should be respected and considered. The final component to Agenda days is that all Children and Young People are paid for their time, this is crucial for different reasons, a couple being that children and young people are taking their time to do work for us as adults get paid for going to work children

and young people should be no different, the second reason is that by paying children and young people for their time it means that children and young people who would usually attend such things or give their views have an incentive to attend.

We invite Children and young people to agenda day usually via a letter sent to their home which explains what the agenda day is being held, what the subject is, when it starts and ends, how much they will be paid, a contact number for them to ring with any questions and a consent form to be completed for those under 16 years old, we have attached a copy of a standard letter that is sent out (see appendix)

We held several agenda days in April and August to see what people thought about liaison officers and whether they felt that it would be a useful service for themselves. 20 young people attended the agenda day which was around half the young people we invited.

The questions we asked at the agenda day were:

What should a liaison officer do?

What should they look like?

Have you ever seen one?

Where should they work?

Summary of children and young people's views gathered

Below is what the young people told us:

What should they do?

- Should be highly educated
- Be approachable
- Give good advice
- Work in a relaxed atmosphere
- Have good resources including medical resources
- Be supportive
- Be good listeners
- Friendly, happy, polite, joyful and confident in what they do
- Must be understanding
- Must be confidential when dealing with clients
- Be able to translate technical language so its understood by younger ages
- Break words and phrases down
- Be there when they are needed
- Give out leaflets which have information on which are useful
- Have contact details in which people can contact them on
- Good counselling skills

What should they look like?

- Name tags
- Not suits - might seem intimidating

Dress casual - whatever's comfortable

Smart jeans, t-shirts, casual shirts

Any gender

Age 20-40

Older, so more approachable and don't judge people as much as those who are younger.

Have you ever seen one?

No-one has ever seen a liaison officer and also they hadn't heard of one until they came to the agenda day.

Where should they work?

In offices around the country

In all different health care settings

Doctors

Hospitals

Schools & Colleges

Youth centres

Main Points

To summarise the main points from the views given by the young people on what they wanted from a health liaison officer, what they felt they should do, where they should be and whether one would be useful/if there was a need, were as follows:

The Young people felt a liaison officer should;

- Be available to everyone of all ages, including young people and their parents

- Have contact numbers, including email addresses

- Have good access to medical resources

- Be dressed casually because it can be intimidating to some young people

- Have good counselling skills

- Be there for people when they need the liaison

- Have name tags

- Give the best advice possible, should be well educated

- Be there so people can talk to them

- Have one for each health care setting

Be supportive
And
Everything must be kept confidential unless it is dangerous to the patient.
Must be approachable otherwise people may feel intimidated

Professional Interviews

We interviewed 5 health professionals whilst carrying out our pervious piece of research, and a further 3 health professionals for this research. The information from the pervious 5 interviews can be found in the P.P.I. Report. The PPI Report is attached as the findings from the pervious research effect and are relevant to the research contained in this report (see appendices)

The health professionals we interviewed during this research were:

Paul McGinnety - Integration Co-ordinator for Children with Complex Needs
Chris Kirby - Community Nurse
Colin Smith - Matron for Paediatrics

The transcripts from the 3 above interviews are below:

Paul McGinnety

We met up with Paul McGinnety, he's a Integration Co-ordinator for Children with Complex Needs, we gave him a brief insight about our project, we explained how long we'd been researching for, what we had achieved and what we wanted to accomplish at the end of it. He explained about his research and offered other resources that we could contact too help with our findings. Although we are doing research different too Paul, he helped us too consider issues that might occur later in the process, such as funding, training and actually placing the liaison officer in a work place surrounding. Meeting up with Paul was a great help.

Chris Kirby

We visited Durham University Hospital to speak to Chris and Colin, Chris is a community nurse, he's participating in a project working along with Leeds Met University including 18-20 mentors for young people aged between 12 and 17 years. It's about looking after people from a wellness point of view; starting in September 2008 he'll be working within the Durham, Chester-Lee-Street area every weekend. This project will be evaluated for Investing in Children membership which will show what young people will think of the service and if they have been involved in decision making. We spoke to him about our project and what we'd like to accomplish by the end of it all, after a brief introduction as to who we were; we asked him some questions. The main points we received from Chris were:

That Liaison officers would be supportive for young people and the way hospitals work, e.g. when doctors come round.

They will understand and be able to tell the young people the experience of being in a hospital, this will accomplish stress.

He also gave us resources that could help progress our research, Peter Paul being one of these resources.

Colin Smith

We visited Colin Smith at Durham University Hospital; he is a matron for paediatrics, whose main responsibilities include standards of care and nursing standards on children's wards. Like Chris Kirby, we also gave him a brief introduction of who we were and what we were researching, we asked him the same questions. The main points we received from Colin were:

They have a PALs Service (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) who are there for everybody and not just young people, it's mainly about the complaints that they get.

He would see a liaison officer as someone who would guide people through issues.

He also said, 'in a way it's like a nurses job, they work with the young people after the doctor has'

He said liaison officers would speak in 'young peoples language'

He gave us resources too us that may help in our research including Practice managers, Primary care trust workers and a worker within Piper House.

Findings and summary

From all the research we did we found that there was a need from a Health Liaison officer in County Durham.

The main recommendations for how a liaison officer in County Durham would work, where they would be based and how they would be accessed was:

- They should be approachable and relaxed.
- They need to understand health settings so they can give us advice and translate information for us.
- They MUST understand and keep Confidentiality.
- Give out information i.e. leaflets which we understand.
- They need to be identifiable and there when you need them
- You need to know where to find them.
- They should be able to help with all aspects of health- both in hospital and in the community.
- Should be there for parents and children and young people
- There should be one than one officer so that there is one in each area of the county

Dissemination

To disseminate the findings and recommendations for this research we have spoken at two national conferences the first being the Association for Young People's Health -Researching Adolescent Health Conference in London on the 23rd October, the second being the Involve conference in Nottingham on the 11th November 2008 and plan to attend and speak at the YRN Conference on Saturday the 15th November, copy of presentation attached (see appendices). This is also where our report will be disseminated, but unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances this report will have to be disseminated at the above conference as an incomplete draft.

All participants in the research have been involved in collating the information and in the recommendations put forward and until they have all endorsed the report the report remains a draft.

We are awaiting a date to present our findings to the trust board, and find out how they will use the research and take the recommendations forward

Appendices

MF/TD

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0191 386 7492
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Angela Stobbart

«Firstname» «Surname»

«Add1»

«Add2»

«Add3» «Add4»

28 March 2007

Dear «Firstname»

I would like to invite you to an Agenda day. The aim of the day will be looking at how we can get **Liaison Officers** within County Durham, which is basically somebody that can help young people through the process when using health services.

Tuesday **19th August, 12.00 – 1.30pm** at Abby Leisure Centre, Abby Rd, Durham, County Durham, DH1 5DQ

You will be paid £7.50 plus travel expenses, refreshments will be provided, if you have any dietary requests please contact me.

If you have any problems with transport please do not hesitate to contact myself on 0191 3867485.

It is important that you let your parents/carers read this letter and sign the consent form and bring it along with you on Tuesday.

You can confirm your attendance by ringing Angela.

Hope to see you on Tuesday!

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Telephone no:

Address:

I, being the parent/carer ofgive consent to him/her attending the

Agenda Day on Tuesday 19th August, 12.00 – 1.30pm at Abby Leisure Centre

.....Name

.....Signature

Please use the back of this slip to provide information on dietary requirements or any medical conditions you think we should know about.