



NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICE



**NYAS Nottingham
Themes and Issues Report for
Nottingham City Council
Corporate Parenting Board**

April 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared at the request of Nottingham City Corporate Parenting Steering Group. It is a response to the request that NYAS continue to assist the group in identifying any themes or issues that are prevalent for Nottingham City young people in Social Care. This account is based on reports from NYAS Residential Visiting Advocates and Issue Based Advocates for the last six months, August 2008 – March 2009.

NYAS represents young people through Issue Based Advocacy, as well as carrying out residential visits to City children's homes on a regular monthly basis. The aim of the Residential Visiting Service is to provide a regular visitor to the young people in residential homes who are independent of the children's home staff.

Once we have received a referral for Issue Based Advocacy (IBA), we aim to make contact with a young person within 24 hours in order to start helping them deal with the issues they have raised. The concerns reported in the initial referrals are from the viewpoint of the young person; they are their perceived beliefs about their own situation. On closer inspection an advocate may find that the young person has not got the "whole" picture, and with some communication between parties, a matter may be resolved relatively easily and quickly. Therefore, this report will contain instances of some young people's anxieties which will have now been dealt with: they are used as examples of the variety of concerns that young people have raised.

Residential Visitors do not provide 1:1 support to young people. If a young person asks the visiting advocate for individual support, the visiting advocates will either signpost the young person to the most appropriate service or discuss with the young person the option of having an issue based advocate.

The children's homes visited are:

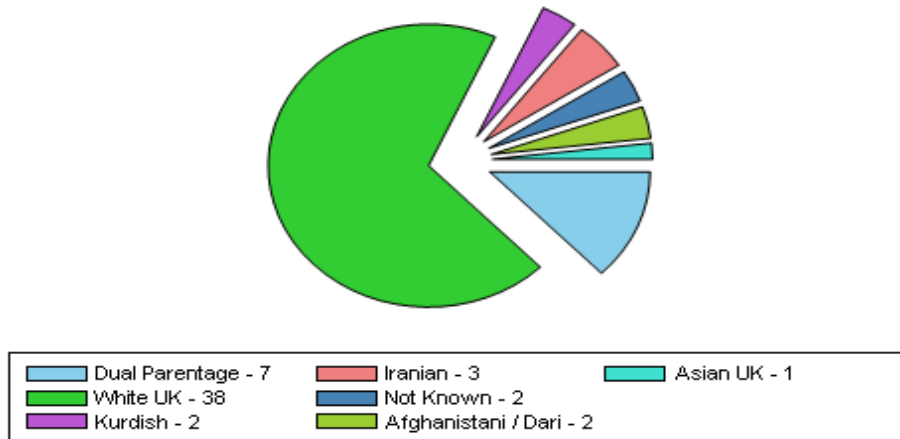
- § Beckhampton Road
- § Crocus Fields x2 (Older and Younger unit)
- § Radford Bridge Road
- § Ranskill Gardens
- § Vivian Avenue

ISSUE BASED ADVOCACY CASES AND HIGHLIGHTS

A breakdown of referrals shows that the gender mix is fairly equal between male and female, with 30 Male and 24 Female for this reporting period.

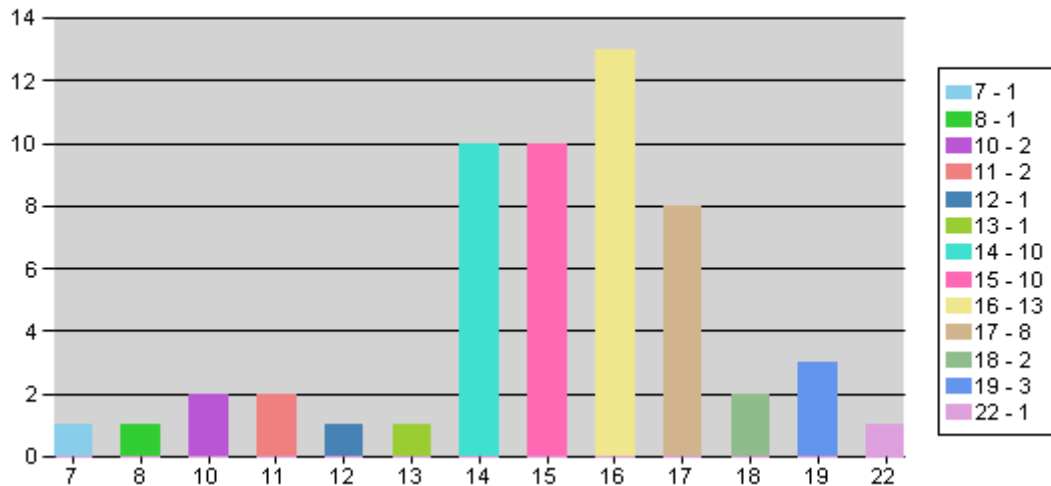
We have in this period also had 8 UASC referrals for young people requiring an interpreter. There has been a steady increase of these cases.

Ethnic Origin (Top 10)

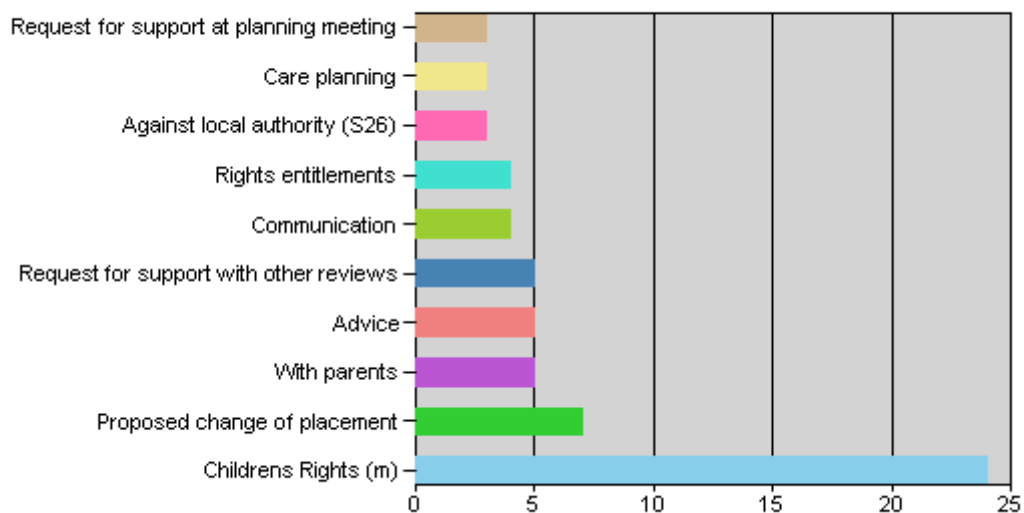


As reported previously, young people appear to have concerns with their future and leaving care, as is demonstrated by the number of young people of this age group asking for an advocate. We are hopeful that the new structure provided by the leaving care team will work toward addressing these issues.

Age



Issues (Top 10)



The cases for which we have received referrals for Issue Based Advocacy are wide and varied. Each case in its own right raises concerns when it comes to the Rights of the Child. Below are highlighted two cases to give an idea of some of the reasons young people are requesting an advocate

Case Study 1

'B' was concerned that since turning 18 he had not received any income - he was unsure what he was entitled to and what his foster carers would be entitled to if he were to continue to live with them. He said that he had not had contact with the Leaving Care Team or his social worker.

The advocate spoke to 'B' and his foster carer to clarify the issues: 'B' stated that he needed support in finding out what he was entitled to and how to claim it. The advocate telephoned his Leaving Care worker and found out that 'B' had had a meeting with the team, but did not seem to understand the information provided. The advocate then contacted the Housing department and the benefits helpline at 'B's request: she ascertained that he was entitled to various benefits, and arranged for him and his foster carer to visit the Town Council to receive support in claiming these. She also arranged a telephone interview with Jobcentre Plus to clarify his entitlement to Income Support and for him to make a claim for this. The advocate gave this information to 'B' and sent a letter detailing the action she had taken. The advocate followed this up two days later with a telephone call and 'B' confirmed that he did not require further assistance at this time.

'B' seemed relieved that he could get financial support, and that he now knew where to make a claim and how to do so. We also clarified that he would be fully transferred to the Leaving Care Team within a week. (Ref: NYR 36525)

Case Study 2

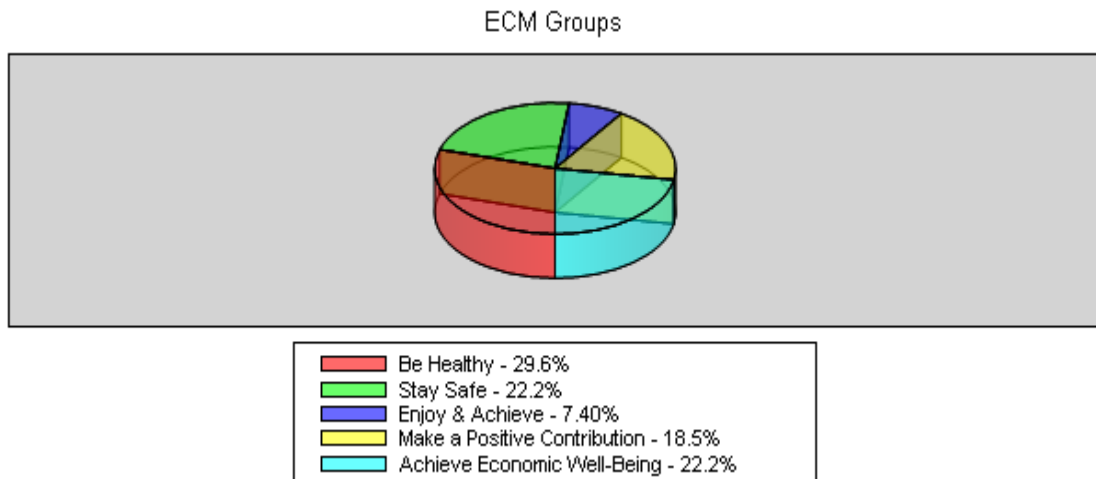
'L' requested that the advocate support her in her review meeting. 'L' wanted her wishes and feelings regarding her placement, education and family contact to be considered at the meeting. She also wanted to have some possessions returned from a previous placement and to help to organise her attending her aunt's funeral.

The advocate visited 'L' in her new foster placement and spent some time talking through the issues she wanted raised at her review and with her social worker. The advocate then presented these issues on paper for the meeting and sent a copy to 'L' for her approval. She was happy with the issues raised, but did not want to attend her review if her mother was going to be there. 'L' was keen to attend the review though, so the advocate contacted her social worker and arranged that 'L' would attend the first half of her review and her mother attend the second half: 'L' was happy with this arrangement. The advocate also informed, with 'L's permission, her social worker of 'L's wish to attend her Aunt's funeral, and this was then organised. The advocate attended the review meeting and left with 'L'. They discussed the first half of the review and the advocate agreed to speak to the social worker and inform 'L' of the final outcomes of the meeting. The advocate telephoned the social worker and then 'L' who was pleased with the review and felt her wishes and feelings had been heard. 'L' said that she did not need any further help at this stage, but would contact NYAS if she needed further support.

A good outcome – ‘L’ felt her wishes and feelings were heard by the review, and were facilitated in attending a review meeting without the need for family contact. (Ref: NYR 37636)

IBA. ECM OUTCOMES FOR THE REPORTING PERIOD

These are outcomes following on from the interventions from advocates on the issues presented by young people.



THEMES AND ISSUES FROM RESIDENTIAL VISITING ADVOCATES

One issue arose of a non-English speaking young person being placed at a children’s home and the staff not having the immediate ability to communicate with him. This issue was resolved by the home staff accessing ‘Language Line’: there was however a delay in this. The solution would be for all Nottingham City Children’s homes to be issued with a simple laminated translated greeting card in various languages. The expressions could be those used to reassure the young person of their safety and asking basic questions for example, would you like a cup of tea or coffee?
(Ref: RBR Oct 08)

A young person from a residential home voiced their concerns to their RVA that they had seen a complaint they had written to the complaints officer in the bin in the office. The matter was taken up by the RVA with the staff and the Complaint Manager. The complaints had been inadvertently put in the bin, the belief being that they were from a young person who no longer wished to complain. However he did still want to complain, but not by himself. It has been agreed by the complaint manager that if the young people want to complain as a group instead of individually she will be willing to hear their joint complaint. The complaint manager has also agreed to look at the process of complaint for young people to ensure that it is accessible and without ‘gatekeepers’. (Ref: RBR Sept 08)

Two of Nottingham City residential homes have had situations in the last few months that have had an unsettling affect on some of the young people who live there. Vivian Avenue is having a new roof put on and Radford Bridge Road is closing. Both of these situations have given cause for anxiety to some of the young people there. The issues and anxieties have been raised with the

respective RVA's. It appears the young people may have been told or heard of these possibilities before any firm decisions were made. For example with Vivian Avenue, some of the young people were unsettled, as they were not sure where they would be going during the renovations and for how long. They were of course eventually told, once things had been decided and organised, however it left a period of uncertainty. With Radford Bridge Road, the young people heard of the possibility of closure before definite plans were in place. One of the perceptions voiced to the RVA was that not as much was being spent on the young people's food as they felt the quality had deteriorated. This was put to the RVA as, "They think we're just scum so they can treat us like that". The RVA looked into the matter and was able to reassure the young people that the amount of money spent on food was the same. The change in the food had been because the cook was off and the staff had been cooking the meals. (Ref: RBR Feb 09 & Viv Oct 08)

Both of the issues above are used to highlight the subject of how information is being communicated to young people in residential care. One solution may be to have a young person representative from each of the homes, who will be able to feedback and disseminate correct information to the other young people about planned changes that are definite, not possibilities.

OTHER AREAS OF POSSIBLE CONCERN

As the local authority move towards a model of small group homes and independent residential placements for the care of looked after young people, thought should be given to the independent voice of the young people. At present the young people may be told of NYAS advocacy services and their right to access them, but this is not necessarily to all eligible young people. Currently residential advocacy visits are completed on a monthly basis to the main Nottingham City homes. The private homes do not receive a visit. Therefore the local authority is relying on the private homes taking the responsibility to inform the young people placed there of their right to advocacy. This may leave young people vulnerable and without a voice. At present we are not fully aware of the private residential homes, where they are, how many young people are there or if they know of their rights etc. Discussions need to be held and decisions made as to the best solution for this problem.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the situation regarding young people and their feelings around the subject of leaving care continues to be one of the main issues for people of this age group. We are receiving more referrals for UASC, we continue to access Nottingham City translation services, and the problems reported when we first started to use the service appear to have been ironed out. The advocates are now all reporting an efficient service.