

Right Here Evaluation

Young people's perceptions of how the Right Here programme has helped them

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Positive outcomes identified for young people	2
2.1	Learning how to forge and build relationships with others	2
2.2	Providing a first step out of feeling bored or stuck	2
2.3	Increasing confidence	3
2.4	Building skills and feeling empowered to act	3
2.5	Feeling that they are being listened to	5
2.6	Helping to put themselves and their issues in perspective	5
2.7	Developing a sense of purpose and feeling that they can make a difference	6
2.8	Re-scripting their experience of health and support services	7
3.	Closing remarks	7

1. Introduction

Right Here is a five-year, £6m initiative jointly managed by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation running from 2009 to 2014. It aims to develop new approaches to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people in the UK aged 16 to 25. The Institute for Voluntary Action Research works on the formative evaluation of Right Here.

This summary was commissioned by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) and Mental Health Foundation (MHF). It supplements the September 2012 report of the second iteration of the process evaluation of Right Here.

The fieldwork for the second iteration involved a range of interviews with Right Here's stakeholders, including face to face discussions with 18 young people across its four project sites in Brighton and Hove, Fermanagh, Newham and Sheffield. This report summarises the views and opinions of these young people, focusing on what they felt they got out of their involvement in Right Here.

The majority of young people were interviewed in focus group format, the rest were interviewed in more or less informal settings:

- Five young people in Sheffield were interviewed at Chilypep where they had come to attend an existing evening meeting
- Six young people were interviewed in Fermanagh: three in individual interviews (in cafés or where they were working) and three during an existing meeting they were attending with a youth facilitator
- Four young people came to meet the evaluator specifically in the Newham Right Here office
- Three young people came to meet the evaluator specifically in the Brighton and Hove Right Here office.

Limitations to the findings:

1. The interviews were held in the context of a process evaluation, and the questioning was therefore largely around their views on Right Here locally and nationally. We were trying to understand their views on what had worked, and why, and in the course of this comments were offered about what they had got out of their involvement: however, this was not the main focus.
2. Involvement in and awareness of the Right Here programme varied greatly across the interviews. In particular:
 - Some young people described themselves as volunteers for but not users of the programme, others described themselves as both or as users of the programme only

- Some young people had only recently come into contact with Right Here (and therefore had few 'benefits' to report), whereas others had been involved since the beginning
- Some young people had an awareness of a range of activities, including nationally, whereas others had had involvement at a purely local level.

All direct quotes are in italics and are unattributed.

2. Positive outcomes identified for young people

The following sections summarise the benefits reported by the young people of participating in the Right Here programme in their area.

2.1 Learning how to forge and build relationships with others

Involvement in Right Here activities had brought people out of the house and helped them to create new relationships with people they would not otherwise have met. Some also noted that the experience had helped them to develop their social skills and learn how to get on with different sorts of people.

"I like building different relationships. I've only been coming for a month, but me and X have grown quite good friends."

"I've learnt how to give respect to people. We've been given activities to help us – what to do if you are stuck in a group and you want to get to know them. Team building skills and activities. When I first joined it was really useful, there were people locally I could then get to meet. People around me say that I have started talking and talking now."

"I've got a lot more confidence in talking with people. A year and a half ago I would have not been able to talk with you – I have learnt to talk out a bit more, and not be afraid to get into a conversation with somebody I didn't know before."

"I got to meet different people at the national panel. Meeting new people, seeing how they did things, learning about new stuff – that was beneficial."

2.2 Providing a first step out of feeling bored or stuck

For some young people interviewed, Right Here seemed to be providing a step out of feeling stuck in their lives. Interviewees spoke about the fact that they felt that their options were limited and that involvement in Right Here had begun to open their eyes to what else might be possible.

"I liked the fact that [the activity] brought everybody together. It gave you something to do."

"My mum said it might be a good thing for me to do. She said it might be good for young people – it helps keep us out of trouble if you want to"

get out of trouble. When I first started, every week I went there I wished there was more than one session a week. I can't find work... I started a course but they turfed me off it."

2.3 Increasing confidence

Increased confidence was the common denominator of many of the reported benefits, and this increased confidence brought about a range of additional benefits such as new relationships, an ability to go out and about, and even an ability to apply for and hold down jobs.

"The best thing I have got out of all this is that I have gained a lot of confidence – I am meeting new people and friends and at the same time learning about mental health as well. I'm talking about things I wouldn't otherwise have talked about."

"The big challenges for me before were talking to strangers. And also I used to not be able to go on public transport – I used to be very nervous about that, and about public spaces. But that's getting better. And I'm realising it's not just me who feels like this."

"I really feel better. My CPN [community psychiatric nurse] was talking about the last four years, and said that they had really noticed the difference in my confidence and my talking. Those have been the biggest improvements I think. I would have been wary of talking to you two years ago, but it doesn't seem so scary now. I also seem to have more energy – I am not afraid to go out and do activities. I was locking myself away, but now I'm going out canoeing and fishing and doing things which is giving me the confidence to do things when at home. I'm not stuck in the house all day. My hope for myself is to move to Australia. And I haven't given up on that yet, I am hoping some day that I will have the confidence and the will to go and do it."

"I have seen how some of the young people have moved through this [Right Here programme]... one person has moved from really bad social skills and being very inside his own bubble to now... We are seeing him really come out of his shell. He is happier, he has gone into a different college altogether which he loves, he has got a job."

2.4 Building skills and feeling empowered to act

Some young people mentioned training or skills development which they felt they had gained through contact with the Right Here programme. It should be noted that we were not exploring this in interview so this is what was volunteered without prompting.

"You learn more about your mental health, learning what a healthy lifestyle is and how that's important to you."

"I took part in the media training down in London: how to take on media questions... how to answer interviews clearly... since then we have been on the radio."

Some young people, particularly (but not exclusively) those involved at national panel level, felt that they had developed leadership and facilitation skills. It was noticeable, for instance, that some young people offered a confident critique of the Steering Group meetings and the reason why, in their view, they had not worked so well for young people.

“I’ve tried my best and I’ve been in a lot of groups before. This group is different – I’m a volunteer and take on a slight leadership role... I feel like I have tried my real best with this and especially on Mental Health Day – I really liked that, getting people to answer the question.”

“I think that the Steering Group meetings were boring, with no icebreaker... if you are working with young people you want to relay information differently from the way those meetings were doing it... It’s kind of pointless just relaying information in a factual way as it’s unlikely to be really listened to.”

Some young people also reported a developed awareness of the mental health field and the mental health services on offer, both in their local area and nationally.

“The fact that this initiative is so unique and it is based right here in Newham was great – you don’t get this sort of opportunity normally. It definitely made me more aware of stuff that’s going on in Newham.”

“I found it useful to work out what was going on in other areas... The big thing for me was how youth work works in England rather than Northern Ireland, and what they have done to combat drug and alcohol issues there. Comparing social issues here to there... homelessness, for instance. It’s made me think about that. It just made me think differently.”

“When we visited Northern Ireland we really experienced the community and what was going on elsewhere.”

Several young people described the activities that they had been involved in with Right Here in a highly animated way. They had obviously been pleased that they had made something happen and been part of something.

“On Mental Health Day, [name of person] was running out and grabbing people... loads of people answered stuff. We were asking questions as part of Right Here, questions about the barriers to accessing health care.”

“We did a parade here... we just decided to do it. And then they helped us. We did a fair day as well... we counted people coming in at it.”

“I think that I have done quite a lot with [name of activity] in the short space of time I have been here. I would like to think I have moved it on a bit. The creative consultations and the Mental Health Day... that will show in our progress and what we need to do next and what we can offer.”

2.5 Feeling that they are being listened to

Several young people mentioned that Right Here had given them a sense of being listened to, which seemed for some a novel experience. It is possible that this in turn was beginning to help reframe their expectations of what the world could bring and how they would be treated though, of course, this would need to be followed up with them over time. Many of them were pleased and even incredulous at the attention and respect they had received.

“We get our voices heard. We came up with postcards and got a graphic designer in and we could choose the characters.”

“The fact that you are taking young people from the streets and giving them choices is really amazing. Children and young people as a whole round here are normally quite brushed off. Adults don’t take on board what they say. That’s silly. Children are the future.”

“I think [being part of a national initiative] shows that it is happening nationally and not just in [location]. So we know that it is being listened to in different parts of the country. I think that helps. I think the awareness needs to be out there more than just here.”

“Going out and speaking at conferences gives you more credibility at a local level. People elsewhere were really impressed with our work, and it gets us listened to more.”

“For me it has been a real big booster – the project has done so much for me, I can’t thank them enough, especially the workers they are amazing. Any ideas that come out of your head they take them into account.”

“I met the minister, we showed him the things we had made. We had that wee pen thing... We showed him that. I was shocked – I never thought I would be talking at Stormont. Never thought I could do it.”

2.6 Helping to put themselves and their issues in perspective

Young people in all four projects spoke about how the activities helped them and others get their mental health issues into perspective. A range of benefits were reported including the fact that some of the activities help them externalise and therefore explore some of the emotions relating to their mental health issues:

“I think young people will tell you one thing but actually mean another... it’s a taboo subject... Young people bottle things up – they don’t realise until afterwards what is happening... so doing the Be Positive activities, it explores emotions that they are not going to explore at home – that’s a release of emotion. It’s about them forgetting about things that are negative in their life.”

Some young people in Sheffield had designed a board game and in describing this showed both awareness of, and the ability to discuss, the experience of mental health:

“We came up with a board game because we thought that mental health was like a theme park. Always like obstacles, in your way, halls of mirrors, the ups and down of life... I was one of the people who developed that. We went on a residential and developed it. We have got it into a couple of schools...”

Several young people mentioned that they had realized that they were not on their own, and that mental health issues were not uncommon.

“What really helped me is realising that it is not just me who feels like this.”

“It has really helped me in confidence and in understanding it a bit more clearly... How? Well I’ve learnt that mental health is both a good thing and a bad thing. It affects every single one of us.”

One person talked about being depressed and isolated prior to joining the programme but said that the programme had helped him connect with and focus on others: *“They encouraged me to do a charity abseil for disabled kids – I raised some money for that. That’s something I wouldn’t have thought of doing before.”* Putting one’s own problems alongside those of others helped one or two people begin to focus on others’ issues and reach out to help them: *“[Name of adviser] and I have been talking about doing something for another boy to help him. He is a bit lost.”*

Developing a sense of what alternatives exist has helped some young people to reappraise what they knew about where they live. This applied to those who had participated in the exchange scheme with other projects:

“You learn to accept how you are and where you live. I realise from going away that there are positives to coming from Newham... It has opened my eyes to living in the world. I’m streetwise and that’s good.”

“It was the welcoming in Fermanagh that got me – we went out for a late night stroll and there was a group of boys in a car outside. In Newham you would not talk to them but they were smiling at us, and they explained where to go to us two or three times. When we got lost we asked some others... You wouldn’t be able to do that in Newham... It showed me the difference in the culture and the way we live.”

2.7 Developing a sense of purpose and feeling that they can make a difference

One young volunteer described the various skills that they had gained around anger management, evaluation and working in a team. Though they said they greatly welcomed learning these, they still describe their biggest gain as awareness that they can make a difference to the lives of young people: *“The training is brilliant, but for me it’s about seeing the benefit it brings to the young people we are working with. Resilience building is a massive thing for us.”*

Other young people also reported that they are beginning to learn that they can make a difference and that they ‘matter’.

“I haven’t seen much change nationally... But locally I’ve seen more posters about.”

“One of the best things for me about Right Here is that you help more people... you have got more of a national influence. If you help more people you feel good about yourself. It helps you feel better. I don’t know if you know, but we get certificates as well – it could count towards a qualification. It benefits us and it helps young people’s future.”

“I found out I’m really good at working on this stuff. I would like to do this for however long it takes.”

2.8 Re-scripting their experience of health and support services

Several young people spoke about having had, or having witnessed, negative experiences of health services. For them, part of the benefit of Right Here was that it transformed that negative experience into something positive.

“Being part of this means we can get more help going... [name] had a bad experience where she was sent to a GP and then pushed away. So now we have got the opportunity to be training GPs.”

“I have had a few bad experiences of mental health myself and services – that’s why I do this. I have got stuff out of it, they have kept me involved, now I want to go on being engaged.”

“I wanted to volunteer for selfish reasons. I wanted to know more about it – my mum had [mental health issues]. I want to work with children with mental health problems and a bit older so this is useful experience for the future. I’ve learnt a lot at the training days.”

“I suffer from depression myself. There was never anything to help me and nobody knew what to do. Everything I did to get better was down to me. So this is about getting other people information, talking through things.”

3. Closing remarks

The young people interviewed had gained a range of benefits from being in contact with the Right Here programme and taking part in some of its activities. Personal gains of increased confidence and self esteem were complemented by other, less obvious benefits of ‘re-scripting’ their experience to date. Benefits here included feeling listened to, having positive experiences of health services and feeling able to develop friendships. And finally, there were indications of young people looking to the future in terms of having more skills to deploy, getting jobs and thinking about what they want to be doing over the coming months and even years.