GATHERING FEEDBACK AND LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE –

CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES

A STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE BLAGRAVE TRUST

SEPTEMBER, 2015

With thanks to all our partners who participated in this study and gave up their time to do so:

Listening to young people: Common challenges

The Blagrave Trust and Keystone Accountability are interested in learning more about what youth-oriented charities do to listen and respond to the young people they help. For Blagrave, this arises from a desire to ensure that accountability to the young people being helped through their grants is given equal priority to other forms of accountability. Blagrave is also interested in testing the hypothesis that obtaining feedback in a consistent and systematic way is a key component of impactful practice.

In order to pursue these ideas, Keystone conducted a short online survey inviting interested Blagrave partners to answer a few questions on their current feedback practices and the obstacles faced in listening. Eight partners were then selected to research more deeply. Keystone then spent half a day with key staff from the eight selected Blagrave partners to understand and document their youth feedback related practices.

The resulting eight case studies are available as a companion to this overview memo, which focuses on common challenges. In the first instance, it bears highlighting that all the organisations were collecting *and using* youth feedback data, something that distinguishes them as practice leaders. The partners involved in this work are all very keen and motivated to improve what they do in regard to feedback. There is among them a growing recognition of the importance and value of listening, and as a result feedback is becoming a higher priority on the respective agendas. It is also very encouraging that, with a little direction, partners can find creative solutions themselves. For example, following a discussion on the difficulties of sharing changes based on listening back to young people, one organisation decided to use their Youth Board as a platform for better two-way communication. Another came up with a plan to engage with teachers and youth workers so as to compare their feedback with feedback received from young people themselves.

The common challenges identified in the case studies divided roughly into two parts: challenges in feedback collection and challenges in acting on the feedback. Partners are more conscious of challenges in collecting feedback than those in maximising the learning and use resulting from feedback. This may be in part because the former are essential technical/practical in nature, while the latter implicate organizational culture.

Gathering feedback – challenges and approaches

In the pre-interview survey partners indicated that collecting feedback was the hardest part of the whole process. Given the people that they work with – primarily youth, and some with complex behavioural issues or disabilities – this is understandable. Having said that, as the case studies demonstrate, all partners are collecting data, which can be useful for their work. Partners tend to use the following data collection methods:

- On-going needs assessments and progress reviews
- Feedback forms – during and after interactions
- Comment and suggestion boxes
- Youth boards and councils
- Informal feedback through conversations and observations
- Young people input on staff recruitment

- Feedback from other constituent groups – parents for example

The vast majority of this feedback is collected by the organisation themselves, although one has a dedicated service user involvement worker, who is seen as semi-independent. Another is using an external consultant to help collect feedback data.

? Challenge: Firstly, one common theme identified was the difficulty of collecting feedback from quite different young people – with different needs, capacities and at different level of engagement. Some young people are also in very difficult places emotionally, and there can be a concern that formal feedback practices will impinge on a delicate relationship between the organisation and the young person. Organisations who provide counselling services were particularly aware of this challenge, and are conscious of undermining efforts to get young people to open up.

Secondly, and very much related, is that other constituent groups like parents and carers may have different abilities for providing feedback. Some organisations have parents who are actively involved and others rarely engage. Some parents may have internet access for online surveys, while others may not. A one-size-fits-all approach to collecting feedback may not be possible.

➔ Recommendation: It is very important to consider the context in which feedback is sought, and there are times that it may not be possible or advisable. One way round this is to have multiple channels available for feedback, so users can choose how and when they give feedback. “Always on” methods, such as comment boxes, or social media platforms can complement pro-active forms and surveys. There are also examples of creative and exciting ways to collect feedback – either through SMS surveys, or social media, or through games for young children – which can be targeted to different groups to keep them engaged. These tools can also be used to collect feedback anonymously, which is what some partners were looking to do more of. One organisation uses mock interviews to collect feedback from young people in a fun and engaging way. In addition, informal feedback, which can also be collected from parents, over and above formal feedback can still be very valuable, as long as it lands in the organisation in a useable way – see below for more of a discussion on this.

? Challenge: Additional challenges were identified around collecting feedback from those who are unhappy or those who disengage from services. This is a common problem as the incentives to give feedback are less clear to such people.

➔ Recommendation: One solution here is to really limit the amount of feedback being gathered. Standardizing on just one or two questions can dramatically alter the survey respondent's effort-to-benefit calculation? Perhaps also feedback can be sought from those around the young person – parents, carers, teachers etc – and again, a short one or two-question survey is likely to improve the response rate. One charity sent an online survey to the parents of non-service users to better understand what they would like to see offered and what would move them to engage with the organisation.

? Challenge: The last common theme around collection was survey fatigue. Organisations are well aware that their involvement with some young people is limited and trying to get them to focus on completing forms is difficult. This is all the more so, as many other services will also be asking the same young people for lengthy feedback.

➔ Recommendation: This again is a common problem. The key is making sure users know why you are seeking their voices, what will it lead to? How will you use the data? If they think it is worthwhile, they will engage with it. Keeping any surveys short and light-touch can help. But most important is to make sure survey results and intended improvements are articulated back to the young people themselves. "We asked you. You told us. Here is what we propose. What do you think of that?"

Organisational challenges

While collecting feedback was identified by organisations in the pre-selection survey as the hardest part of the listening process, *using* the feedback – both in terms of understanding it and then using it for improvements – was seen as significantly easier. The follow-up discussions with the eight partners demonstrated organizations were underestimating or overlooking the challenges to using feedback in the survey. Partly this is a definitional issue. Keystone posits the definition of using feedback as making improvements that are validated through subsequent surveys. One feedback specialist that we work with, Integrity Action, calls this the Fix Rate.

? Challenge: There are a number of factors that make using feedback to drive improvements difficult. They are often inter-related and include the following:

- Feedback collection is not consistent/systematic; it is collected in an ad hoc way, and as a result is often not processed within the organisation in a disciplined way either. This means that data come fraught with questions about validity, which raises doubts for staff who understandably struggle to interpret – let along act on – the information.

- Relatedly, organisations struggle to have solid management systems to process feedback, and as a result are not as effective when analysing data, including comparing it to other sources of data (such as objective success measures) sharing the feedback internally or externally, and ultimately using it for change.
- The feedback being collected is often informal – a combination of stories and anecdotes. This is still valuable information, but given the lack of strong management systems to bring this data together, a lot of this information only resides in individuals' heads and can easily get lost. This makes managing to this type of data even harder.
- A very common challenge is the lack of in-house staff who can manage the listening process. This is a two-fold challenge; the first is there is a lack of staff *capacity*, people are stretched, and there are blurred lines of responsibility, with feedback often falling between several job descriptions. The second is *capabilities*, staff are often social workers or child workers, and conducting effective feedback loops – designing surveys, using different survey tools, discussing the feedback and engaging with constituents around the data – is not necessarily part of their skill set.

➔ Recommendation: There are a number of characteristics that can help an organisation maximise the use it derives from its listening processes. These include:

1. A systematic approach sees feedback as part of the DNA of an organisation, not as an add-on, separate to programmes and service delivery. A systematic approach:
    a. Collects feedback as quantitative data (includes questions with scales) consistently, over time, and is accessible for regular analysis.
    b. Analyse feedback – make sense of it, and how it relates to other data, such as outcome data and ad hoc feedback. Once analysed, presenting it with clear visuals such as graphs can help with the next step.
    c. Discuss it internally – include feedback in regular meeting agendas to ensure it becomes ingrained across an organisation.
    d. Dialogue – discuss the feedback with young people to co-create ways forward and then reporting back to all constituents (including funders) about what you will do differently as a result.
    e. Improve – make the agreed changes, including where appropriate changes to the feedback mechanism itself.
2. When considering how data land in management systems organisations should avoid an overly bureaucratic process, otherwise it will not last long. The key is proportionality. Systematic does not mean bureaucratic, but rather a disciplined approach that adds value to the organisation.

A variety of tools and resources are needed to make this work easier and faster. Some of this requires external material (see below), but also organisations need to be clearer about who is responsible for different parts of the listening process and find material to make each task easier. Most of this can be created fairly readily by organisations themselves, if they have the commitment.

<u>Roundtable Meeting of Participating organisations</u>

The *Listening to Young People* project and specifically the common challenges were discussed by the participating organisations in a roundtable discussion.

A number of issues emerged from the process and discussions that organisations felt should be covered further in whatever next steps might follow. These included:

- The importance of context when thinking about feedback: the environment an organisation was working in, and the constituent groups they work with. Related, was the importance of an organisation's culture, and what implications this might have on formal listening practices;
- The challenge of keeping a sense of proportionality when systematising feedback systems;
- The difficulty of capturing the voice of the left-out or those who disengage from services;
- Balancing funder demands for constituent feedback with internal uses;
- How to document and learn from valuable and on-going informal and ad hoc feedback. How to move from informal to formal without becoming "numbers driven";
- How to ensure listening is beyond tokenistic and is actually meaningful to both the organisation and constituents;
- How to address the challenge of responding to feedback where it is not consistent with how funds are allocated. This challenge is part of a larger challenge in moving from a top-down management model to an adaptive management model;
- The relevance of feedback to the separate issue of impact assessment.
- The opportunity to get more formal feedback from other important constituents, such as parents, government officials, peer/partner organizations, and funders.

What organisations need and next steps

Time. As mentioned above, when given the opportunity to discuss these issues, and explore solutions as a team, many organisations found creative and exciting approaches to follow-up in the future. Therefore one simple thing needed is the time and space to come together around the topic of listening. Organisations do not regularly sit down and discuss feedback as part of their core work as a team. It is understandable, everyday business – service delivery, especially in the stretched current financial climate – gets in the way and takes priority. Dedicating time to these discussions may feel like a luxury, but simply adding feedback as an agenda item in weekly meetings, and giving it some thought will help with many of the challenges raised above. Moreover, when given the chance to talk about the issues, partners find ways to improve themselves. One important top-level take-away therefore is to make the effort to carve out that dedicated time to discuss these issues together as a team. For specific discrete activities, including collecting feedback and analysing it, perhaps local students could be used, making it part of their coursework or project.

Funding. Following on from the issue of time, organisations need to dedicate actual resources to doing this work. If listening is to move beyond being a desired add-on to an integral part of daily business, then it needs funding, especially if funders themselves are requesting the use of feedback by partners. In addition, funders should be clear and consistent on what they want organisations to collect and measure – some want feedback data, others want output data - and understandably, organisations are responding first to what funders want rather than their own internal use of feedback. Funders should have a co-ordinated and sophisticated approach, getting the incentives right, so both carrots (funding and materials to do it) and sticks (demanding evidence of feedback data and its use, perhaps at the expense of other time-consuming data demands, such as outputs) are aligned across the board.

Idea Exchange. Many of the organisations are dealing with common issues across similar constituent groups. A community of practice, which can share creative and innovative ideas could be a helpful resource. This might start as a Blagrave partner initiative, and the eight case studies are a start, but soon such a community could extend to include other agencies with experience of working with children, especially those with disabilities or behavioural issues. One partner suggested approaching some of the larger national child charities with a request for them to share some of their stories and tools about listening to their young people. As an initial next step, it was suggested that each participating organisation involved in the project should discuss their experiences with one other Blagrave partner, to share lessons learned.

Tools. Organisations expressed a clear interest in having more hands-on tools and guides for various stages of the feedback process. There is an important balance between off-the-shelf feedback products and individual organisations' needs and requirements, but generally there is an interest in understanding best practice, and applying that to their own contexts. This extends to technology, where people are also looking for standard tools beyond the more well-know examples of survey monkey. There are many free and cheap solutions that could help streamline listening, freeing-up more staff time to focus on how to act in response to what they hear. As a start Keystone can suggest the following resources:

Blogs

- Feedback Informed Treatment: http://www.scottdmiller.com/category/feedback-informed-treatment-fit/
- Keystone Accountability: https://keystoneaccountability.wordpress.com/
- Feedback Labs: http://feedbacklabs.org/blog/

Tools and tutorials

- Self-diagnostic tool that can help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your feedback practices: http://feedbacklabs.org/quiz-page/
- A short tutorial on conducting feedback: http://api.feedbackcommons.org/delighted
- A short tutorial on designing a feedback system: http://api.feedbackcommons.org/feedback_system

Guides and resources

- Keystone's Constituent Voice technical note: http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/sites/default/files/Constituent%20Voice%20Technical%20Note%201.1.pdf
- Online compendium of tools and service providers which can help with each stage of the feedback cycle: http://thefeedbackstore.com/

Listening to young people: a case study of *Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust*

Introduction

The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust is a national charity that helps young people regain confidence on their way to recovery from cancer. It offers sailing activity, together with other support over a number of years, after long-term illness. It aims to improve confidence, sense of empowerment and independence in order to help young people reengage with life and succeed in education or employment after illness.

Approach

To collect feedback, the Trust reaches its stakeholders through 6 primary communication channels, which include; forms, focus groups, observations, interviews, social media, boards and unsolicited comment. It administers a paper survey at the end of each trip, which is posted out with a self-addressed envelope. The forms, which are age appropriate cover young people's experience of the sailing trip, what they enjoyed and didn't, as well as how it made them feel, such as confident or independent. The forms have a response rate of about 50%, and the Trust are considering what other formats it could use – including online surveys – to improve learning.

In addition, the Trust obtains feedback during sailing trips themselves. Each evening staff facilitate an informal focus group to elicit what people enjoyed and what people struggled with. They also collect feedback on elements of the service itself; food for example. This feedback is used to plan for the following days' activities. These sessions are also used to bring people together, to foster a sense of community and togetherness. Throughout the trips the staff observe individuals' behaviour and respond to subtle indications of inclusiveness, belonging and happiness. Staff respond to these signs, and try to ensure each young person has a fun and worthwhile experience, recognising that each young person will have slightly different needs.

Feedback is also collected from the parents of under 18s, which asks about their experience, how they think their child perceived the trip and how they think it made their child feel. Lastly the Trust operates a Youth Board, where young people are consulted on a variety of issues, including to some extent other feedback received. The Trust values both regular feedback and themed deep dive feedback designed to learn about a particular area, topic or impact

The team at the Trust meet with sailing staff and volunteers after every activity to have a detailed debrief on the trip, what worked for the young people and what could be improved for next time. The Trust are trying to replicate this detailed discussion of ad-hoc feedback collected during the trip with the formal feedback collected once children return home.

The Trust produces yearly feedback reports which are shared and discussed internally and which compare feedback with the previous year. Trustees review the feedback report annually. The trust recognises the importance of a balanced portfolio of feedback collection and is trying to conduct more regular, light-touch feedback.

Results

There are many retuning children and previous young people who return as volunteers, which suggests the Trust provides value to both children and parents. Feedback received supports this. The organisation works hard to create an open and welcoming atmosphere, and the prevalence of ad-hoc real-time feedback on trips is testament to this.

Conclusions

The Trust has recently grown in size, and is developing its feedback practices accordingly. In particular they want to report back more on feedback received to young people, and feel that one forum for this would be the Youth Board. In addition, it plans to use its restricted access but very active Facebook page as a means for both collecting and reporting back on feedback.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Extratime*

Introduction

Extratime offers inclusive play and leisure activities for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities in the Brighton area. Many of these young people have severe learning disabilities and many are unable to communicate verbally. It's services include after-school clubs, play schemes and holiday activities.

Approach

Extratime tries to tailor activities to individual children, and regularly uses a variety of communication methods, including pictures to understand what different children would like to do. The pictures used differ depending on a child's level of disability, and feedback is documented and used in all planning processes. Moreover, staff are constantly looking for ad-hoc indications of satisfaction from children, and make a note of any feedback, however informal.

As an additional exercise, *Extratime* is conducting an external stakeholder consultation with young people, parents and professional colleagues. The work is on-going, and includes a Survey Monkey survey of the parent carers of both service users and non-users. Given the challenges of collecting detailed feedback from disabled children directly, parents are a key constituent group. The survey includes feedback on service quality, parents' perception of *Extratime's* impact on their child and their thoughts on how to develop *Extratime* services. There is a desire to embed this approach and make it more systematic and regular.

Given the user group *Extratime* works with, there are inherent challenges in including their voices. As feedback continues to rise up the agenda, *Extratime* has recruited an external facilitator to help find innovative and creative ways to consult with their children and young people. The staff team welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues, which can be lost within day-to-day business.

The team at *Extratime*, who are all part-time, meet regularly, where they share feedback and learning from their work. Being spread out across different locations can make effective internal learning and sharing hard, which are amplified by time pressures on staff. In order to find the time to meet with staff, *Extratime* puts on consultation evenings to gather staff ideas and feedback.

Extratime collects regular feedback from staff – both verbally in debrief meetings and through evaluation forms – which is used to reflect further on feedback from service users; both young people themselves and parents. The feedback is collected at the end of daily sessions, and at the end of a season on paper forms.

Results

Initial stakeholder engagement survey results suggest *Extratime* is an in-demand service, and both services and staff are rated highly and trusted by parents. In addition, parents report their children have fun and build their confidence and self-esteem. Feedback on the future of *Extratime* is valuable in defining the service moving forward, and ensures the organisation can respond to the changing needs around them. On-going child feedback on activities is useful for planning purposes, and helps ensure child have fun and engage with *Extratime*.

Conclusions

Extratime plans to make feedback more systematic throughout its services. In particular they want to be more systematic in how they discuss feedback internally. They also want to use the feedback to advocate for legislation and policy change affecting their service users and to help get young people's voices heard within various local authority decision-making forums. Lastly, they plan to use child-friendly posters to report back on feedback, as well as social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Barnardo's* BASE Project

Introduction

Barnardo's BASE project offers specialist sexual exploitation services across Avon and Somerset. Its multi-disciplinary staff team support young people under 18 who have been, or continue to be, victims of sexual exploitation by individuals, gangs, groups or online.

Approach

Barnardo's BASE Project emphasises an informal feedback system, which stems from its approach that all children are different, and all services need to be bespoke and tailored. Each user is assigned a key worker, who builds a relationship with the young person at a suitable pace. Staff are trained to respond to instant feedback such a body language, and use this to determine how to structure sessions. Given the vulnerability of the young people that *BASE Project* engages with, and given they are often bombarded from other service providers for feedback, *the BASE Project* often leave formal feedback for when they are "in recovery" or when the young person identifies that they feel able to give feedback in this way.

Barnardo's BASE Project uses an assessment tool called *My Life*, looking at specific individual needs from the young person's point of view. Periodically during the time together, the assessments, which are age appropriate, are revisited and adjusted as needed. If a young person is not engaging with their key worker, a *BASE* manager might try and gather feedback and help get the relationship back on track or to consider where the service could have supported that child better. In addition, *BASE* obtains feedback once a course of sessions has ended, and includes perceptions on the quality of service and important relationship questions such as if they felt welcomed and understood by their key worker. All feedback is collected on paper forms anonymously, and entered manually into a computer for analysis.

BASE also operates a small Young Person's council, who input on all staff recruitment processes, to ensure their perspectives of what makes a "good candidate" are taken into account. There is also a suggestion box which is advertised to all young people.

All feedback, however informal, is written in case notes, which are reviewed by senior managers. Being spread out across Avon and Somerset can make effective internal learning and sharing hard, which are amplified by time pressures on staff. Feedback is often recorded in case studies and user stories which are shared with funders. Feedback is discussed with individual children, and occasionally feedback collected in group activities is presented in posters throughout the office.

The BASE Project works alongside many constituents over and above young people, including parents and other providers. In the past they have done Survey Monkey surveys of other service providers, and are considering doing something similar with parents and carers. Where relevant parents and carers are included in young people's action plans.

<u>Results</u>

Feedback is very important, and helps shape services. Prioritising informal feedback means key workers can focus on helping vulnerable users. Emphasising the development of open and trusting relationships is crucial to *BASE's* success*.* As with others, if *BASE* could effectively capture feedback from those who dis-engage from its services, it would be very valuable to them.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Barnardo's BASE Project's work has expanded recently, and as an organisation has doubled in size in the last year. As a result, it faces a tension between making feedback more systematic throughout its services and working with delicate and vulnerable people. One area they are looking to focus on is the internal capturing of data and subsequent sharing within the organisation, without burdening service users or staff. *BASE* plans to make more use of the Young Person's council, and developing mechanisms for young people and carers to be involved in 360° feedback on staff performance.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Its Your Choice*

Introduction

It's Your Choice offers counselling, drop-in and casework support services for 12-25 years old in the New Forest area, working closely with schools and other service providers. Its services cover mental health, homelessness, NEET's , personal relationships, sexual health, and other local youth issues.

Approach

It's Your Choice begins its counselling sessions with an initial assessment, looking at specific individual requirements which the young person would like to address. These needs are often aggregated so broad patterns can be identified. For example, a recent aggregation of these initial assessments highlighted the growing trend for self-harm, which could then be pro-actively tackled through group work activities. Throughout their time together, agreed goals based on the initial needs assessment are revised as needed. Progress against these goals is regularly monitored from the young persons' perspective in counselling sessions.

In addition, *It's Your Choice* obtains feedback once a course of sessions has ended, and includes perceptions on the location and venue, the quality of service, results, and important relationship questions such as: *I feel that the people who saw me listened to me* and *My views and worries were taken seriously*. Results questions focus on young people's perceptions of their own confidence as well as physical and financial improvements. All feedback is collected on paper forms and deposited anonymously in a secure box. This data is collated into quarterly reports, and entered into Charity Log, an information management system. Charity Log reports are shared internally and with funders.

***I**t's Your Choice* also operates an ad hoc small steering group made up of young people, who can help identify local needs and can reflect on some of the other findings brought up through the feedback process. Young people also input on certain staff recruitment processes, to ensure their perspectives of what makes a "good candidate" are taken into account,

The small team at *It's Your Choice* meet regularly, where they share emerging trends and learning from their work. Being spread out across different locations can make effective internal learning and sharing hard, which are amplified by time pressures on staff. To try and combat this, *It's Your Choice* has trained its staff in multiple areas, so they can all input and discuss together where possible.

While *It's Your Choice* works alongside many constituents over and above young people, including parents and other providers, it focuses its feedback on young people. It has consciously chosen not to engage too closely with parents, as it wants to be seen as impartial and a safe unbiased place for young people.

Results

People often return to *It's Your Choice*, seeking on-going support for existing issues and with new concerns and needs. This would suggest *It's Your Choice* succeeds in making vulnerable young people welcome and supported. The team put this, in part, down to their on-going tracking of relationships. In addition, the regular reviewing of goals and progress towards those goals means services can be modified to maximise how the young person experiences them.

Conclusions

It's Your Choice plans to make feedback more systematic throughout its services. In particular they want to engage with the steering committee more regularly using them to dialogue the feedback received, and to use the website and social media more for both collection and reporting back of feedback data. The main constraint to all this is time, which like many similar organisations, is already stretched.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Mentoring Plus*

Introduction

Mentoring Plus offers matched mentoring services to young people, to reduce potential criminal and disruptive behaviour. Mentors recruited, trained and supported by the charity work with young people for about a year, aiming to increase the mentee's self-esteem, confidence and education or employment prospects.

Approach

Mentoring Plus conducts a detailed assessment of both young person and volunteer before matching, which outlines specific needs and goals for the young person, using solution-focused numeric scaling methods. These assessments are done by professional youth practitioners once a young person has been referred to *Mentoring Plus*. These are revisited every quarter when both practitioners and mentors will meet face-to-face with the young person to informally discuss progress and any issues. If necessary, this will be done without the mentor, as the practitioner is seen as separate and somewhat independent.

In addition, *Mentoring Plus* operates a Youth Representative scheme, whereby young people who have been through the mentoring process can return and remain involved with the organisation. One way they currently do this is by collecting informal feedback from current mentees, mainly through face-to-face dialogue. There is an opportunity to make more of this group of engaged young people, and collect more consistent feedback. Lastly, *Mentoring Plus* puts on activities and events – such as sports days or dance classes – separate to mentoring, which are used as an informal way to engage and listen to young people, including those on the waiting list for a mentor, in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

Mentoring Plus collects monthly feedback from mentors on progress with their mentee, in a semi-structured discussion with a professional practitioner. To complement this, *Mentoring Plus* also conducts mentor exit interviews once a placement has come to an end, which are conducted by a trustee for a level of independence. These touch on their experiences of *Mentoring Plus*, the support they received and how they feel the organisation could be improved, as well as their perceptions of how the young person has developed over the year. Where relevant *Mentoring Plus* gets informal input and feedback on a child's progress from teachers, or other services too.

Feedback from both mentors and young people is discussed among practitioners and social workers, and used to refine plans for individual young people where appropriate. If necessary, this will involve referrals to other services. The feedback is also used for new mentor training, which happens at intervals throughout the year.

Results

People often return to *Mentoring Plus* once they have completed a years' mentoring to remain involved in the organisation. This would suggest *Mentoring Plus* succeeds in making vulnerable young people feel welcomed and supported. One reason for this is the extensive efforts gone to when matching young people with mentors, and supporting both regularly throughout their time together. The feedback data is very useful for service delivery needs, and gives the team the best chance of helping a wide range of different young people, each with specific challenges.

Conclusions

Mentoring Plus are looking to have more regular feedback from young people directly, and are trying to balance the need for systematic feedback across the whole cohort with the different specific needs their users have. They also want to look at doing similar exit interviews with young people themselves, perhaps via SMS, as well as looking to get feedback from children's families too.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Relate: Mid Wiltshire*

Introduction

Relate Mid Wiltshire (RMW) offers one-to-one counselling services to young people from the age of seven upwards. It's services cover both primary and secondary schools, as well as outreach beyond the school system. Counselling sessions emphasise empowerment and self-identification of goals in a safe environment.

Approach

RMW begins a course of counselling sessions with an initial assessment, looking at specific individual requirements which the young person would like to address. If the young person is below 10, the parents will also be consulted. This assessment is followed up regularly with informal feedback, to understand how the young person feels progress against specific goals is going. This allows goals or sessions to be tweaked to maximise the impact. Some users, who might be particularly vulnerable, are not so forthcoming with their thoughts on progress, so extra work might be needed.

In addition, *RMW* obtains written feedback once a course of sessions has ended. Questions include the service quality, and whether or not young people feel listened to, feel safe and if they can trust their counsellor and *RMW.* The feedback is collected on paper forms. The forms are tailored to the age of the young person, using either standard numbered scales or smiley faces scales. The feedback is analysed and summarised into reports annually, but senior managers review the forms regular looking for serious issues in need of immediate response. Specific concerns can also be discussed with clinical mangers and individual councillors in monthly meetings.

The small management team at *RMW* meet regularly, although given much of the formal feedback is about individual counsellors directly, it can be difficult to discuss feedback as a team. A possible place for this is Group Supervision where Counsellors can respond and suggest developments where issues for improvement are identified. Clinical management meet with counsellors monthly to discuss individual cases and progress. Given the nature of the sensitive work conducted, and the therapeutic role of services, it is important to have a clinical overview of all work, including the feedback process. There is also, as a result, a tension between where to focus time and energy; feedback or counselling services.

While *RMW* works alongside many constituents over and above young people, including parents and other providers, it focuses its feedback on young people. Including parents is potentially challenging, and every effort is made to keep *RMW* as a safe unbiased place for the young people.

Results

Feedback results suggest *RMW* helps and supports its young people, and that the vast majority would recommend its services to a friend. Young People also feel safe to talk openly and express their concerns, which is very important to their wellbeing. The most valuable feedback happens informally in sessions where goals and progress are reviewed, as this is when changes can be made, and different areas can be looked at, including bringing in to other social services.

Conclusions

RMW plans to increase its collection of feedback, especially from those who disengage from services or who do not complete the full course of sessions. To do so will require more use of social media and SMS surveys, which will also provide a level of anonymity to young people. They also plan to regularly discuss feedback more and respond to young people about what they plan to do to address issues emerging from the feedback received.

Listening to young people: a case study of *The Roberts Centre*

Introduction

The Roberts Centre offers support and assistance to families dealing predominately with housing and relationship issues. It’s services include day care, accommodation services and a safe and neutral contact centre separated families.

Approach

The Roberts Centre has included feedback since its inception, and as a result feedback practices have grown as the organisation has expanded, and is an integral part of its organisation culture. Since 2004 *The Roberts Centre* has a part-time (30 hours per week) Service User Involvement worker who is seen as independent from the core team who can collect impartial feedback direct from young people and parents. The Service User Involvement worker conducts satisfaction surveys either face-to-face, as young people leave the centre, or over the phone, with the former preferred for a higher response rate.

The Roberts Centre also uses a standard assessments tool every 6-12 weeks, to monitor progress against agreed goals, and to refine action plans together with other agencies and services (e.g., housing and social care). This is in addition to regular feedback on activities, which are used for planning purposes. With young children, *The Roberts Centre* tries to use creative methods, such as mock interviews to make the process fun and engaging.

Getting hold of parents for feedback can be hard, so *The Roberts Centre* holds informal events where the Service User Involvement worker can engage informally with parents and collect feedback that way. Parent feedback includes their experience of services, as well as behavioural changes in their child. In addition, anonymous comments are encouraged through a secure box left near reception. 85% of all recruitment also has service users on the shortlisting and interview panels.

Feedback is analysed and compared to other information sources by the User Involvement worker and is included in quarterly reports, which are shared with trustees. Feedback is also discussed in all team and management team meetings, where resulting changes and reporting back to young people is also agreed upon. Feedback received and proposed improvements are presented in child-friendly posters on display in the reception area.

Results

There are a number of simple examples of how feedback has led to changes, for example improving the rooms to meet different age groups' needs; rooms used for those being reintegrated into the school system were designed to be a mock-up of a classroom. The on-going feedback on activities ensure days are fun and stimulating, and the presence of an independent staff member dedicated to listening and engaging with constituents makes timely anonymous feedback possible.

Conclusions

The Roberts Centre plans to include more questions on possible future services, and use user feedback to shape future provision not just input on current services. It also wants to create a Youth Council, and is in the early stages of creating that as a forum to both provide and discuss feedback. As with others, *The Roberts Centre* is also looking at how to engage with and collect feedback from those who disengage from its services.

Listening to young people: a case study of *Youth Action Wiltshire*

Introduction

Youth Action offers a variety of services in Wiltshire, and is part of a national network. It's services includes, positive activities and mentoring, volunteer programmes, young carers support and specific NEET projects.

Approach

Youth Action often begins with a needs assessment, which includes specific questions on perceptions such as confidence and self-esteem. This assessment is used to create an action plan, and the perceptual indicators are regular revisited so progress can be tracked. The frequency is tailored to each young person, so as not to overload particularly vulnerable children.

Each session with a young person follows the "plan – do – review" approach, so each session is reflected on, and taken into consideration for the next planning phase. The review part is done informally as a group, and covers what was fun, what could be improved and how the young people could help make the activity or session more successful. Key conclusions from the review process are shared with other team members informally where relevant.

In addition, *Youth Action* obtains feedback through standard Ofsted approved satisfaction surveys. Specific programmes have their own specific feedback forms, which are collected on paper non-anonymously. These surveys include feedback on aspects of the service received, the staff, and whether or not the young person would recommend the service to friends or family. Where possible, feedback is compared across different services.

Youth Action works alongside many constituents over and above young people, including teachers and other providers. Feedback from these groups tends to be an informal exchange of experiences, but still provides valuable insight into how young people view and interact with *Youth Action*.

Feedback is presented in case studies, and more detailed data is shared in quarterly reports to trustees. *Youth Action* uses VIEWS, an online data capturing system, for certain projects which allows it to export specific data reports, and share information easily with funders. As with all systems it takes some time and practice to master. Specific feedback is discussed in staff meetings, but as with other organisations, this is mostly ad hoc.

Results

On-going feedback and progress reviews are used to bring in other service providers, to ensure young people are supported as fully as possible. The staff at *Youth Action* actively welcome feedback and the organisation culture encourages it. As a result young people are quite open in their feedback, providing *Youth Action* with robust data on what it does well and where it can improve.

Conclusions

Youth Action plans to include a young person on the board. They also want to be more systematic in their review of feedback, moving beyond simple case studies and make feedback data a valuable, organisation-wide learning tool. One specific idea they have is to compare the perceptual indicators, such as confidence with other 'hard' indicators, such as securing a job or entering higher education. They also want to develop methods for reporting on feedback and proposed improvements to young people.