



Working together to reach your goals

Residential Short Breaks Consultation 2011

Consultation Findings and Recommendations Report

Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Project Overview	Page 3
Method	Page 4
Key Findings	Pages 5 - 7
Conclusion & Recommendations	Pages 8 - 10
For further information	Page 11
Definition of Terms	Page 11

1. Introduction:

Following on from Buckinghamshire County Council's (BCC) recently retendered residential short breaks service, (RSB) the new service provider, Action for Children, has now been appointed and have taken over the management of the RSB service.

On behalf of the Commissioning team at BCC, The BCC Disability Participation Worker, and a member of the Participation Team (The Workers) conducted interactive follow up consultation sessions with children and young people to find out their experiences of the RSB service as Phase 2 of the RSB Consultation.

The sessions took place at the Action for Children unit, Aylesbury where children who previously received respite at either Action for Children or The Grove RSB units are being cared for while refurbishment works take place at The Grove, Aylesbury.

The aim of the consultation and participation exercise was to identify if the change in service provider had had any impact, positive or negative, on the children and young people who receive respite care.

The key questions the workers were asked to consult with children and young people on were:

- What they particularly liked about the service
- What they particularly disliked about the service
- If they had noticed any changes
- How they felt about the changes

2. Project Overview:

During January and February 2011 a total of 9 Children and young people were consulted with who accessed the RSB service at either Action for Children or The Grove. This was a mix gender group, with 7 male and 2 female. The age range of these children and young people was between 13 and 17 years old.

The consultation was open to children and young people with a range of disabilities and / or learning disabilities who could meaningfully take part in Phase two of the RSB consultation and who were nominated to take part in the consultation by the Unit Staff.

3. Method:

Sessions with the children and young people were as inclusive and participative as possible, taking into account the groups needs along with time and location constraints. For example, all children and young people were asked the same questions but different methods were used where needed to allow the children and young people to express their views such as group discussions, colouring and writing, using toys and emoticon cushions, selecting choices from pictures, or enabling the children and young people to guide us around the unit and show us the things they liked.

The children and young people were shown a photograph of Jenny Perkins, (BCC Commissioning Team) and the Bucks County Council building, along with a map of Buckinghamshire which showed the location of the RSB units. It was explained to the children and young people who Jenny was, who she worked for and why she had asked the workers to come and talk to them. Children and young people were told the information they provided the Workers would be used to help make the RSB service better.

In all sessions children and young people's answers were recorded on paper roll and children and young people were assured they could be completely open and honest. RSB staff from the unit were also present during the sessions due to their own child protection procedures and were also available to help with the children and young people's individual needs as required.

To help children and young people discuss any changes they had noticed and what they liked / disliked about the service the following topics were used when giving examples; activities, staff, food, bedrooms, bathrooms and building. For example:

- "What do you like / dislike about the activities?"
- "What do you like / dislike about the building?"
- "What do you like / dislike about Action for Children / The Grove?"

4. **Key Findings:**

When asked what activities children and young people liked and disliked while at the RSB units, the following answers came up:

Activities - Likes:

- CD players – listening to music
- Drawing / Colouring / Art
- Playing ball / catching game
- Pool table
- Watching TV
- Going to the Park to: Play football matches / go for a walk
- Listening to the radio
- Watching Video's / DVD's – Funny films, Disney and Music
- Console Games: Playstation / Nintendo Wii / PSP
- Arts and crafts – drawing, painting, making cards
- Going on the computer
- Dancing
- Going outside
- Going in the garden
- Books / Reading
- Spending time in own bedroom
- Making music – drumming and keyboard
- Relaxing at weekends – watch TV, play computer games, listen to music
- Freesat – Music channels available at The Grove but not at 201
- Play games
- Bikes at The Grove
- Football

Children and young people also said:

- “I would like to join a football club but I wouldn't be able to go if I came to the unit”
- “I would like some of the wipeable panels – I like rubbing my writing out” (Young person is referring to a communication aid which we used during the consultation)
- “I like doing nothing.”
- “Birthday parties are fun at the unit”
- “I look forward to going back to The Grove to play pool”

One of the young people; a wheelchair user really enjoyed being pushed up and down the hall in their wheelchair, with the person pushing the chair running. When this young person also played ball, they particularly liked being able to throw the ball and being pushed to get it. However this young person wanted to be given the opportunity to get out of their wheelchair so that they themselves could pick up the ball to throw it again and this opportunity was not facilitated.

Activities - Dislikes:

There were no specific indoor activities that were disliked; however one of the older young people did say the following:

- “I’m too old for all this – it’s too babyish”

This young person is 17 years old and is referring to the games and activities which are available at the unit.

When discussing the environment at the RSB units with the children and young people – the building, the bathrooms and bedrooms; children and young people said the following:

Environment - Likes:

- “I like it here at 201”
- “I like seeing my friends at unit”
- “I like having baths it helps loosen my legs up”
- “I meet new children and young people at 201 - Changes are lovely.”
- “I’m looking forward to getting back to The Grove to see the new areas.”
- “I like it here at 201 because there are no door alarms. I can walk quietly to the toilet in the night at 201. The alarms go off at The Grove so everyone can hear – it wakes everybody up. It’s embarrassing.”

Environment – Dislikes:

Two young people said:

- “I would like to choose which days I come so I can be with my friends”

One young person said:

- “I don’t like being here (201) – it’s too babyish and it’s too small. There’s more space at The Grove but I’m too old for The Grove too.”
- “I don’t like it when ‘R’ screams / it’s noisy – I need ear protectors.”

This is the same young person as referred to above in the Activities – Dislike section. This young person was clearly showing signs that he is ready to leave the unit. Please see additional comments in Conclusion and Recommendations section.

When discussing likes and dislikes about the food provided at the RSB units children and young people said the following:

Food - Likes:

- “I like choosing food I eat – sometimes I choose. I have different dinners.”
- “I like takeaway nights”
- “I like it that I don’t have to eat food I don’t like”

Children and young people did not report anything they particularly did not like. It was clear that staff made efforts to make meals that they knew the children and young people liked, even though this sometimes meant several different meals at once. It was clear that staff consistently gave the children and young people the opportunity to make choices through asking the children and young people what they would like to eat or drink.

When asked what children and young people liked / disliked about the staff, children and young people said the following:

Staff - Likes:

- “The staff are excellent”
- “I’m looking forward to seeing Liz again” (The Grove Staff)
- “I like the people – young people and the staff”
- “I like talking to my friends and the staff about the radio”
- “I like chatty people”

None of the children and young people reported any dislikes. It was clear from the positive comments made by the children and young people and from observing the interaction between the staff and children and young people, that the children and young people really enjoyed the company of, and interaction with the staff.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations:

In conclusion having listened to the children and young people and having looked through all of the evidence, it is clear that children and young people have started to become aware of changes to the service.

The main noticeable changes have related to their immediate environment, such as new children and young people, new staff and for those children and young people who originally received respite at The Grove, the location.

In addition to listening to the children, staff did comment that the change has been hard on the children and young people. For example, staff thought one young person new to them could not verbally communicate as the young person did not talk during their first few visits. However, one day the young person spoke and staff then realised the young person could talk but that it took them a while to open up to new people.

Given that the new provider, Action for Children took over the tender from September, the changes reported by the children and young people are as expected. It is important to recognise that while some of the children and young people had noticed a change in staff, the children and young people spoke very highly of them. It is evident from listening to the children and young people that the quality of the care provided by the staff has not decreased.

As with Phase 1 of the RSB Consultation, it is clear that children and young people want an RSB service that will provide them with a wide range, variety and choice of activities. Children and young people clearly expressed and need this range, variety and choice to keep them stimulated and engaged with the RSB service environment. It was also clear that children and young people wanted to be given choices about the RSB service as a whole, to be listened to and on some levels have more independence.

Reflecting back to the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the RSB Consultation Finding and Recommendations Report 2010, although staff did report that there had been a brief handover before the Action for Children staff left, it was not evident if the new provider had provided opportunities for staff from all units to come together and share good practise through previously recommended workshops / spending time at each others units so that staff could experience working practises at each unit first hand.

In addition to the previous report recommendations, it is recommended that the new provider:

- Introduces Teenage nights at the unit
- Introduces relationship workshops with older young people, which focuses on helping them to identify the different types of relationships and how young people can safeguard themselves in relationships. Where unit staff may not feel appropriately equipped to discuss such subjects, alternative agencies such as the Youth Service or Talkback could be approached to deliver such sessions.
- Introduces a suggestion board. One side for children and young people to pin up their views / suggestions with staff pinning up the outcome / actions resulting from the children and young people's views / suggestions on the opposite side. This is an opportunity for new provider to evidence that children and young people are able to make changes in the unit.
- Introduces a working group to take the above mentioned children and young people's views and suggestions forward and regularly review how they are meeting needs expressed by children and young people.
- In addition to suggestion board, unit staff to consult with children and young people when decisions need to be made regarding the unit – this will enable the children and young people to have more ability to make decisions at strategic level not just individual level.
- Ensure planned activities are available for the children and young people to take part in. Activities should provide opportunities for children and young people from both units to interact with each other, so that social skills can be built upon during this period of transition.
- Incorporates more flexibility in planning the children and young people's respite dates so that children and young people have a choice of when they receive respite
- Work with parents / adult respite units / other respite provisions where appropriate to respect the wishes of the young people that feel too old for respite care.
- Introduces communication books for all children and young people that attend the unit as apposed to some.
- Consults with staff regarding the recently introduced paperwork procedures and works with them to establish an effective administration system.
- Organises a team day to help improve staff moral and so that staff have the opportunity to gel as a team with the new service provider & discuss staff concerns, for example paperwork, and staffing levels. It was evident that staff from The Grove had found the absence of Action for Children staff particularly challenging and confusing and had faced difficulties during the transition.

It is also recommended that follow up consultation sessions are to be carried out again later on in 2011 to monitor any impact the changes in the service have on the children and young people and that:

- The Commissioning Team, with the new provider, go back over recommendations of 2010 report to evidence what action was taken following the recommendations of the report.
- Moving forward, the Commissioning Team consults with unit staff first about needs of children and young people at unit / unit needs as apposed to purchasing goods for the unit first which were felt to be not needed.

‘Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account’

- *Article 12, The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child.*

6. For further information

Please contact Jessica Baker, Disability Participation Worker, Participation Team, Youth Services, Children's & Young People's Services, Buckinghamshire County Council.

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The Children and Young People's Trust would like to thank all those children and young people that took part in this valuable consultation & to also thank the Residential Short Break staff for their cooperation.

7. Definition of Terms:

Consultation

'The process of seeking the views of a range of children in order to inform and improve decision making.' (*Children as Partners in Planning – Save the Children.*)

Participation

'Participation is a term increasingly used by those working with children and young people to mean children and young people thinking for themselves, expressing their views effectively, and interacting in a positive way with other people; it means involving children in the decisions which affect their lives, the lives of their community and the larger society in which they live.'

(*Introduction to Policy on Children's Participation – Save the Children*)

Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) defines a person with a disability as someone who has 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

Physical or mental impairment includes sensory impairments and also hidden impairments. In the DDA 'substantial' means 'more than minor or trivial'. 'Long-term' means has lasted or is likely to last more than 12 months.