

Investing in Children

Every Child Matters

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investing in children

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Introduction

The research into Every Child Matters began in the summer of 2004. The Investing in Children Every Child Matters group developed from a group of young people who had been previously looking at the integration of children's services. The aim was to find out what young people in County Durham thought of Every Child Matters. We wanted to translate the rather sterile document to real life situations that affect children and young people. We did this by meeting with a number of young people across the county.

We wanted to meet with as many young people as possible in the time allowed. We also wanted to talk to a range of young people who had grown up in different backgrounds with different experiences. The core group comprised of twenty young people aged between fourteen and nineteen. The group organised three agenda days, these provided space for young people to discuss what they thought of the five outcomes, and around ninety young people attended these. After these agenda days we began to look at groups of young people who we had to make extra effort to talk to, or groups of young people who may have a different and interesting story to tell. We went into two primary schools and met with classes of under eights. We then set up meetings with children and young people who didn't go to school, those from the Home and Hospital Support Service and from Behavioural Support. We also spoke to young people with disabilities. We met with children from travelling families. We created opportunities to speak with children and young people from black and ethnic minorities as well as children and young people who were asylum seekers. We also spoke to children and young people who are serving custodial sentences and those who have just come from custody. Therefore the age range of the young people we have met with has been from 6 to 19.

Although this research involved talking to a number of young people from across the county we do not claim to have spoken to all young people and neither do we claim that this research is a representative view of all children and young people. However we do claim that all our research does bring up issues that many children and young people in County Durham would agree with. We also claim that the research was undertaken in such a way that open spaces were created for young people to discuss issues freely that they felt were important to them, not simply issues important to adults.

Our research also involved looking through the Investing in Children archive of reports. Young people have written many of these reports and the content of all these reports have involved research with many groups of young people since 1997. The reports all backed the research we had already carried out.

The following report outlines the main findings of our research. It is divided into sections for each outcome. There is also a section on the crosscutting issues; these are the issues that came up repeatedly under each outcome. The final section of this report is the 'Audit Tool', which was developed alongside the research on the five outcomes.

Stay Safe

Safety concerns are different for all young people growing up in County Durham. There were many issues that arose through this research from safety on public transport to safety in schools. We haven't presented every issue that young people told, however the two most important and frequently mentioned issues are outlined below, these were issues identified by children and by older young people.

Traffic

Many younger children highlighted traffic as their prime safety concern.

Children mentioned, not being able to ride their bike because they weren't allowed to cycle on paths and the roads were too dangerous. Children also felt their parents were less willing to let them go out to play without supervision as their homes and parks are surrounded by busy roads. These safety concerns also have obvious health implications as they restrict the physical activity of young children.

Children find the speeding cars intimidating and say they would like to see more crossings. The young people who were blind said that without pedestrian crossings they would be completely isolated as they would not be allowed to leave their house without a carer. Therefore, in order to allow the young people, especially those with disabilities, to safely 'make a positive contribution' and 'enjoy and achieve' there is a need for more pedestrian crossings.

Children frequently mentioned the importance of the school crossing patrol in keeping them safe.

Solution: In order to reduce traffic accidents, which involve children and young people and to allow children and their families to feel less intimidated by traffic, a 20-mile an hour speed limit should be introduced and strictly enforced around all residential areas, in particular near schools and children's play areas.

Discrimination

Young people often felt that they were discriminated against because of their age. In terms of safety this meant that the safety concern of adults or other groups in society were deemed as more important than their own safety. For example, most young people said they felt most safe when they are with their friends, however, other people in society who are intimidated, often unreasonably, by groups of young people will phone the police to have the group split up and moved on. This then leaves young people in much smaller groups or on their own, jeopardising their own safety.

Children and young people often say they will hang out in places that are well lit, for example shop fronts. However this can cause conflict with shop owners and other members of the public, which will often result in young people being moved from the well-lit areas where they feel safe, to darker and more dangerous places.

Children also felt that they were not safe from discrimination. They said there are obvious signs of open discrimination against all children and young people in almost every town and village in county Durham. This involves signs in shop windows that read 'only 2 children and young people allowed in at any one time', the children argued that if this was a sign against any other group in society, for example women, it would be illegal. Children and young people also said that they are not allowed in sports centres and other places of leisure at certain times, just because of their age.

STAYING SAFE DOES NOT MEAN STAYING AT HOME! Young people said that the message from the police and residents in their area was to stay at home if they wanted to stay safe. However, this conflicts the continuous messages warning of childhood obesity, which comes from many young people always staying at home, playing on computers etc.

Solution: More places for children and young people to go to on evenings and weekends. This could include extended opening hours of youth clubs and schools. It would also include leisure centres and community centres that currently exclude children and young people from using them at certain times. These should have safe public transport links to and from, involving well-lit paths and bus stops.

Be Healthy

Health covers many wide and varied topics. Children and young people we met were very positive about health. Rather than mention illness and cure, young people spoke about fitness and prevention. Many issues were raised regarding health and we have aimed to outline the most important issues below.

Physical Health

Diet

All of the children and young people we spoke to mentioned a good and balanced diet as a key means to staying healthy. However, many young people felt that is difficult to follow a balanced diet for a number of factors. The first of these factors is school meals.

There appeared to be a huge difference in the standard of school meals provided at primary and secondary schools.

Many children at primary school were provided with milk to drink and fruit for snacks. They were also allowed water bottles throughout the day and many primary schools are equipped with water coolers. The standard of the school meals in primary schools also seems to be higher, with less children to cater for in a smaller kitchen allows the cooks to provide better standard of food.

The story in secondary schools seems to be quite different. None of the secondary school children we spoke to were allowed water in lessons and none of the schools provided places to fill up water bottles apart from taps in toilets. Young people also claimed that healthy food is always the most expensive. There were few breakfast clubs available which meant a lot of young people would skip breakfast. Also, as the standard of school meals was so poor many young people resorted to leaving school premises for lunch, however the type of food available outside of school may be better value for money and more substantial but can be equally unhealthy and the practice of allowing young people out of schools for lunch is being stopped by many schools.

Jamie Oliver made it quite clear what he thought of school dinners by saying most children were served with a diet of “reconstituted rubbish” and called for the Government to increase spending on the provision of school dinners.

Many young people have stressed that it should not have taken the voice of someone famous to make the Government realise how bad school dinners can be. Young people have been campaigning on issues around school dinners for years.

Young people also said that nutritional studies should be incorporated into PSHE and PE. In many schools cookery lessons were no longer available

and young people said that they couldn't learn how to make healthy snacks and meals.

Solution: Provision of drinking water in all schools as well as increasing the quality and provision of school meals. There should be an opening up of a debate on nutrition.

Physical Activity

Alongside diet, physical activity was also pointed out as one of the most important ways to maintain good health. Children and young people said there could be a number of changes put in place in order to encourage and allow children and young people to get involved in more exercise.

Leisure centres play a big part in young people's involvement in exercise but our research seemed to show a worrying trend that less young people were using leisure centres. This is to do with a number of issues, cost, activities, accessibility and attitude.

Firstly, young people said the cost of leisure centres is far beyond their means. Going to the gym can cost nearly four pounds and under sixteen's are restricted to the times and equipment they can use.

Young people also often mention the fact that there is not a lot available for them to participate in at their local leisure centre, they say that the majority of activities and classes are for younger children or adults.

Young people also feel that they are treated differently in leisure centres and there are certain rules that only apply to them. Many leisure centres have a policy where no children and young people are allowed in after a certain time. Less formally, young people feel they are treated with little respect by some members of staff who can be unhelpful, rude and undermining.

Some young people find it a challenge to access the leisure centres because they have to rely on public transport. There are many issues to do with public transport that will be addressed later in this report.

Solution: make leisure centres cheaper for young people to use and allow them more choice in activities and classes available. Provide a cheap bus service to and from leisure centres. Remove restrictions on young people's access to places that provide leisure services.

Sexual Health

With regards to sex education in school young people think it should be taught earlier and the teaching methods and syllabus should be dramatically changed.

Many young people described their sex education lessons as 'biology'. The education was often delivered by a form tutor or science teacher with little

specialist knowledge. Also, many young people had had previous contact with the schoolteacher they were less comfortable asking questions. Nearly all of the young people expressed the need for trained professionals to deliver sex education. They also said that the nature of sex education needs to be geared around STD's and pregnancy rather than just the biology and this message needs to be delivered from an early age as many young people can become sexually active before this advice is given.

Young people feel that there should be more access to confidential information in schools as well as out of school. The majority of comprehensive schools student only have access to a school nurse at lunchtime, one day a week, if that. In some cases young people have complained that the school nurse doesn't have her own medical room where the students can speak to her in private, instead they have to find where she is in the school and talk to her wherever they can. They feel that this is unacceptable because adults would not expect to have to talk to their doctor in the waiting area of the practice.

Solution: Have a school nurse available at more convenient times to children and young people and ensure that they can be seen in private. Also have the school nurse in school more than one day a week.

Mental Health

The main issue surrounding mental health was 'information and awareness'. Young people have highlighted that they are unsure what a 'mental illness' actually is and at what point should they go and see a doctor. They also said more people, including professionals, need to be more sympathetic in terms of mental illness and have better strategies on how to deal with someone who has a mental illness. Also young people said that information on mental health, for example symptoms and treatments, should be talked about in PSHE lessons.

Many young people highlighted if they had a mental health issue they did not know who they could go and talk to about it. They said there should be a telephone line where free confidential advice on mental health and emotional advice is available. They also said if they had more opportunity to see their school nurse in private that would provide perfect opportunity for advice and counselling.

Solution: Increase awareness and information on mental health issues. Make sure young people have private access to a school nurse.

Enjoy and Achieve

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT SCHOOL.

Enjoying and achieving for most children and young people happens everywhere, everyday. Outside of school young people participate in clubs, youth clubs, playing for their local football team and many other activities. However, out of the five aims under 'Enjoy and Achieve,' four focus on education and employment. Leaving only one aim that states 'Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation'.

Most young people we spoke to agreed that enjoying and achieving go hand in hand. If a young person enjoys something they are more likely to achieve and visa versa.

Most of our research focused around secondary education. It was clear that children who attended primary schools had a much better sense of 'enjoying and achieving' and this was for a variety of reasons. Within a primary setting there are less children for the staff to get to know this allows staff to get to know the children better and form strong relationships. The nature of secondary schools are very different, the school day is broken down in such a way that there is little time for building relationships. Also there is a major difference between the way younger children and teenagers are perceived in general.

The four key issues that came up under enjoying and achieving focus on issues inside **and** outside of school. They are; respect and understanding, delivery and options of lessons, resources and facilities and places to go – things to do

Respect

Young people always talk about how they are treated in schools and this always seems to be down to a lack of respect. Teachers often say that students have no respect for them and many of the young people we speak to would not deny this, but they also argue that respect is a two way process and they cannot show respect when they are not being respected themselves. Something young people often get frustrated at is that some teachers use their power to such an extent its no wonder young people rebel, and this can simply be by standing up for themselves.

"Teachers should have the same rules as young people."

Quote from a young person

Young people believe teachers should have the same rules applied to them, for example, teachers are allowed to wear what they want, be it their own choice of clothing, jewellery, footwear, etc. Students aren't allowed to shout at teachers but everyday teachers shout at students.

“Teachers should not be allowed to shout or threaten young people because young people are not allowed to shout or threaten teachers.”

Quote from a young person

The relationship between teachers and pupils need to be improved if school life for all involved is to be an enjoyable and happy experience. Young people feel that once they get into trouble, teachers will label them and then have no time for them. Young people feel if you are less academic then the teachers don't take you seriously and you can be labelled 'thick'.

Young people sometimes feel teachers don't seem to understand them. In some cases young people end up getting excluded from school for having behavioural problems that are not always their fault. For example ADHD, which is a developmental disorder that affects a persons' ability to concentrate on tasks, avoid distractions, to sit still, and to think about the consequences before they act. ADHD is a disorder most common in school-aged children with approximately 3% to 7% of school-aged children suffering from the disorder. However, young people feel teachers lack in understanding why a young person maybe misbehaving in school.

“Some young people are threatened by teachers because of their lack of understanding of their needs”.

Quote from a young person

Solution: Open a substantial debate on how school rules are decided and applied, and the fairness of these rules need to be questioned.

Delivery Of Lesson and Options

Every young person we spoke to about school said that at least some of their lessons were boring and uninspiring. Lessons need to be made more interactive, fun and appropriate support need to be provided for those who need it.

“Disruption starts if teachers set the work too high or too low”

Quote from an ex-teacher

The older young people we spoke to, particularly those in year 9, 10 and 11 said schools should introduce more vocational subjects instead of having to study lots of GCSE subjects. Young people said they felt that some subjects are totally irrelevant.

Young people feel that they are expected to study far too many subjects in one go and this can sometimes be a strain on young people, yet again some young people find GCSE's easy and feel they are not challenged to their full potential.. Therefore schools need to design tailor made education programmes for individual students rather than lumping all students together in one category.

Solution: there should be a bigger choice of subjects, including more vocational subjects such as mechanics and childcare. Introduce an earlier option of dropping certain subjects, for example, learning a foreign language or Religious Studies should be an option for students.

Some year 11 pupils complained they got little or no study leave. Every person learns differently, some prefer taught lessons whereas other people prefer to revise themselves. Therefore young people said the option of coming into school for support and advice should be available but working from home should also be an option. Younger pupils said that they would like support with homework after school, especially in the summer holidays as they get far too much homework when it is supposed to be their leisure time.

Young people agreed that everyone should be offered a mentor for personal, emotional and academic support.

For those young people who do not attend school they said that home tuition was a good idea because they can get through work faster and learn a lot more at their own pace.

Finally, young people thought it might be a good idea if lessons were shorter, or if they had more breaks or even free periods to help them relax and chat with friends and stop them from being distracted easily in lessons.

Solution: The option of study leave should be available to all young people in year 11. The issue of stress caused by exams need to be looked at by schools and the examining bodies.

Resources and Facilities

Young people mentioned the fact that their schools could do with new facilities and better equipment. Young people mentioned the fact that there is nothing for them to do at break time unless you are in six form where you normally have access to a common room. If you compare a primary school – schoolyard to a comprehensive school – schoolyard there is a big difference. Primary schools have more equipment for children to play with at break and lunchtime.

However, despite this everyone agreed that schools are an excellent resource and that they are not used to their full potential. School gyms and swimming pools should be used at weekends and evenings and local groups and clubs should use the school more.

Solution: Increase activities available in school time. Extend the opening times of schools so that they can be used to their full potential.

Places To Go – Things To Do

Outside of school hours there is little for children and young people to do, there is not a lot of opportunity for children and young people to 'enjoy and achieve,' 'make a positive contribution', 'be healthy', or 'stay safe'.

While most schools do offer after school clubs, from sports clubs to ICT clubs, etc, there are obstacles that get in their way of lots of young people attending them.

County Durham is a semi-rural area therefore transport home from after school activities can be a problem. School buses leave at 3:30 and in some areas there is no public transport which means relying on parents for lifts, which is not possible for all young people.

Young people said the type of after school activities needs to be varied. Girls asked for more non-competitive sports. There appears to be a need for specialist instructors to come in from outside the school. Young people also said that there should be more after school activities that are not sport orientated where young people can learn a foreign language or do arts and crafts.

Opportunities to participate, make a positive contribution, stay safe and enjoy and achieve outside of schools is restricted because there is nowhere safe, accessible and affordable for young people to go. Some young people may have the opportunity to attend a young club one night a week, but there are not a lot open full time. Youth centres do not open during the weekend or in the school holidays but isn't that when young people need them the most? You don't see pubs or private gyms closed over holiday periods!

Children and young people have all said that there should be more parks, skate parks and roller blade areas where they can play and socialise without any hassle from the police or the general public.

Solution: Do not restrict access for young people to leisure centres, community centres and other available centre's. Extend opening hours of youth clubs and schools. Ensure good public transport links to all of the above places.

Achieve Economic Well-Being

'Achieving Economic Well-Being' may seem like a difficult topic to discuss with children and young people but once they gained a full understanding of what it meant the young people began to raise a number of very important issues. Below are a number of issues that we chose to mention in detail as the children and young people we met brought these up most frequently.

Education

A major concern for many young people now is the cost of higher education. Many young people are put off higher education before they have even thought about what they would like to study.

"The average student currently graduates with £10,977 of debt... a child aged 11 now can expect to pay nearly £40,000 on university top-up fees and living costs."

www.growingbusiness.co.uk

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and more often those from middle classes are frightened of the huge debt they will be left with after university. Young people we spoke to who had made their mind up about not going to university said the only thing that would change their mind would be if fees were abolished altogether.

However, it is not only higher education that favours the better off. So-called 'free' primary and secondary education is becoming more and more expensive, as the following research shows:

New research ... that the costs of sending a child to secondary school now adds up to nearly £1,000 a year.... It found that the average annual cost of sending a child to secondary school was £948.11 while for primary school it was £563.15.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Young people said that Educational Maintenance Allowance should be provided at an earlier age and be open to all young people. Also everyone agreed that school trips should be subsidised for those less well off and grants should be given to help people pay for uniforms.

Below is an account of a young woman who grew up in poverty, some of this time was spent living in County Durham.

As a young child, I lived with my three siblings and my Mother. My parents split up when I was quite young, and of course my Mother took on the role as the sole parent. As many people will realise, this meant that it was difficult for my Mother to work full time and raise four children. However, to complicate matters further, my Mother also suffered from M.E. which is a disease that attacks the immune system. Therefore, the only income we survived on were benefits provided by the Welfare state.

My Father, on the other hand, failed to pay any money to the Child Support Agency (CSA). Due to the policy in place that protects the privacy of the parent or spouse, it was very difficult for the CSA to actually assess my Father's income. Therefore, in about the last ten years the CSA have been trying to track my Father he has made only two payments.

As a consequence my Mother was left to struggle to find the money to cover the loss of income. Often she would have to use catalogues in order to buy essential items, such as school uniforms and P.E. kits; even though she knew that she could not afford to repay the debt. We also relied on the handouts provided by our local church.

The experience of poverty as a child has had a profound effect. Not only through my experiences as a child, but also as a hindrance later on in life. Mainly my experience of child poverty was an effect of the culture I grew up in. For example, there are many things that I would not have considered doing when I was younger that have greatly affected my ability as a young adult. I had never considered going to Sixth-form or University. In fact I was not interested in educational attainment at all. However, as a result I now struggle with a basic understanding of literacy and numeracy, as a result of not being astute whilst at school.

However, as much as it was an individual choice to behave disruptively as a child, it is very much a part of the culture I grew up in. The culture I refer to nurtures a deviant subculture if you like. In that it promotes deviant behaviour such as the regular use of recreational drugs.

Many of my peer group used recreational drugs in order to make themselves seem more sociable. For much of my early teenage years I also used recreational drugs as a release. I felt as if the things I was lacking could somehow be compensated for through the use of drugs.

It was not until I was 15 when I was diagnosed with depression as a result of drug abuse. I was lucky in the sense that I did not slip through the net as many of my friends did. Due to the help I received through psychotherapy I began to realise my potential as a student. This is when I decided that I wanted to achieve educational success.

The definition of poverty as having a lack of income or resources is a misconception. The definition of poverty is much more than that, in the sense

that it perpetuates a culture of delinquency and disenchantment with the educational system. Not only does it financially restrain the individual's life chances, but also it culturally predetermines many to fail in society.

As a young adult I have now had to endure more hard work than many of my middle class peers in order to achieve educational success. However, though I was able to break out of the culture I grew up in, I am still greatly disadvantaged in comparison to others in my current situation. For example, I am still having to learn basic grammar in order to carry on with my studies.

It seems a great injustice that I should have less G.C.S.E.s than my middle class peers, simply on the basis that I went to a poorer educational establishment. I could not attend the 'good' school in my area, as the bus passes provided by the council only allow you to travel to your nearest school.

Not only are my life chances reduced by my personal situation, but it seems also that social policy is also ineffective at allowing freedom of opportunity. I am restrained from freedom of opportunity, which is valued so highly in our society.

Even though it appears that I have broken out of the 'poverty cycle', as an adult I will still experience the effects of suffering poverty as a child. This is why more needs to be understood about the culture surrounding children suffering from poverty

Solution: There needs to be a coordinated campaign on child poverty in County Durham

Money and Benefits

Very few young people are aware of the benefits that are available. They said they would not know where to find out about benefits or how to apply for benefits.

Connexions service offers a wide range of services, one of these services include advice on housing and benefits. Although almost every young person we spoke to had used the Connexions service, nobody we spoke to described the service as anything more than 'careers'. Young people said that if Connexions is going to offer a wide range of services young people need to find out what these services are and how they can access them.

National minimum wage is seen to be unfair towards young people. At just £3 an hour for 16 – 17 year olds, £4.10 for 18 – 21 year olds and £4.85 for 22 years olds plus. What's more is that 16 and 17-year-old modern apprentices are exempt from the young workers rate.

Young people feel that this is unfair because, for example, if a young person has worked for a company for 2 or 3 years then an inexperienced adult started to work for the company, the inexperienced adult will get paid more.

Solution: Great equity in benefits and wages.

Public Transport

Access to public transport is vital if young people are to 'achieve economic well-being'. However the public transport system in Durham is so poor that it completely disadvantages those who rely on cars. Public transport in County Durham also affects their ability. Later in this report we address the issue of public transport and it's effects on young people who wish to travel independently.

(See the crosscutting issues section for more details on public transport.)

Make a Positive Contribution

When we met with children and young people to discuss making a positive contribution the only topic that was mentioned over and over again was 'having their voices heard'. They described making a positive contribution as:

“being taken seriously and treated as a citizen”

Having Voices Heard

School Councils

Once again there is a huge difference between primary schools and comprehensive schools – school councils. What makes the most difference is the amount of pupils in comprehensive school, so it seems a lot harder to listen the voices of all young people, the fact that young people are always moving to different classrooms where they are not always in the same classes as each other also effects the effectiveness of the school council.

School council meetings tend to be in lunch or break times so there is not really enough time to get listen to every issue raised into a good debate. The fact that there is a teacher that is present in the meeting overrules the effectiveness of the school council, young people feel that they can not bring up issues such as teacher behaviour or teaching styles as this would be a threat to teachers. The school council's agenda is often adult lead and final decisions are also down to teachers.

School councils tend to be representative, they do not listen to the views of those young people who may be less articulate or willing to participate, however, they still have views and their views should still be heard.

We visited schools to talk to the school council members and some of the other students to find out what they think about their school council. We wanted to find out if they thought school councils were a good and effective way of listening to and consult with all children and young people.

Here are two example of a good and bad school council given by young people that we spoke to (both schools are comprehensive schools in County Durham);

Bad School Council

“Our school council is a bad school council – they take young peoples ideas and agree with them then change their minds. We wanted to get a graffiti wall in the school yard, we helped raise money for it, in the end the head teacher pulled out and bought fruit for all the classrooms.”

Good School Council

“Our school council seems to be a good school council and the head teacher really gets involved in listening to young people to the young people.”

So what about outside of school?

Some of the young people that we spoke to suggested some effective ways to involving them in community life. Apart from having more youth clubs that open more than once or twice a week, more and better facilitated community centres and leisure centres, young people agreed that they would like to become actively involved in community meetings so that they have a chance to be heard, express their ideas and have a chance to contribute to some of the decisions that are made within the community. At the moment young people feel that they are not properly listened to and that most people don't take them seriously. Young people feel that there needs to be more opportunities for them to make a positive contribution in the community. Young people suggested that they should become involved in fundraising to help pay for better safer places to socialise with their friends and to provide better facilities such as skate parks.

Solution: We need to create and ensure a variety of ways of young people to have a say in decisions that affect them. This could be done in a variety of ways but their effectiveness needs to be constantly reviewed by children and young people.

Crosscutting issues

Through gathering our research and talking to children and young people it became obvious that there were a number of threads that ran throughout each outcome. They are as follows:

- Transport,
- Respect/discrimination and
- Poverty.

Transport

Public transport is a major issue for children and young people living in County Durham. Children and young people are totally dependent upon public transport if they need or wish to travel independently. Young people that we have spoke to have raised many issues mainly about the unreliability of the bus service. There are constant stories of young people waiting a very long time for a bus to come for it then to drive straight past them. There's also the cost of the bus service, transport in County Durham is generally expensive but young people have to pay full fare at age 14. This is seen unreasonable to nearly everybody, except the County Council who have to pay the subsidies to the bus companies.

More importantly young people thought that transport was a key issue to achieving the ECM five outcomes. For example, if you people cannot get to the leisure centre or the doctors surgery they may find it difficult to 'be healthy' or if they have to walk a long way home on an evening because the bus stops running too early, then young people will find it difficult to 'stay safe'.

Here is a list of just some of the complaints young people have with the bus service that they receive;

1. Bus drivers who deliberately drive past you when waiting at a bus stop,!
2. Bus drivers who refuse to believe you when telling them your age!
3. Drivers that are rude and unfriendly!
4. Dirty, smelly buses!
5. Buses late!
6. Buses drive too fast!
7. No seat belts!
8. It costs too much!
9. Young people don't know where to go to complain!

Investing in Children have carried out a lot of research into public transport over the past 6 years, However is the public transport system changing for the better with regards to children and young people? The answer, NO!

For example, there was a group of young researcher from Investing in Children who produced a report called 'fares fair.' The group wanted to draw particular attention to some of the problems people face in getting around, and the consequences that can be caused by the lack of mobility. For

example, if you live in a village, getting to a leisure centre can be a major and expensive expedition, particularly if you are over 14 and have to pay full fare.

The group arranged meetings initially at Durham County Hall with representatives of the major bus companies like Go Ahead Northern and Arriva. At this meeting they talked about the bus fares and how they are too expensive, attitudes of **some** of the drivers and the frequency of buses. The group found the meeting very disappointing as they felt no one was taking any notice of them, the group concluded that in order for them to take part in a in the effective debate with the bus companies and the County Council, one of the vital things they needed to do was to get information about how transport systems were arranged elsewhere.

The group then not only arranged to visit County Councils from Cumbria, Derbyshire and Northumbria but they also visited Holland.

The group then wrote a report where they summed up what they had learnt about transport in that previous year. They also came up with some suggestions that they believed would make it easier for children and young people to get around safely and independently. They also believed that their suggestions, particularly about fares, would create a more equal system, which doesn't favour the better off. This resulted in the Investing in Children travel card being issued which allows 14 and 15 year olds to get half price fares. However, this has not solved all the problems, many young people and bus drivers do not know about the card, therefore it is not always accepted. The card can also only be used at certain times of the day. Also, the card obviously does not solve the issues of the where and when the buses run and the attitude of some bus drivers.

Solution: Cheaper and more efficient transport system that meets the need of the user rather than the supplier of the service.

School Bus System

Getting a free bus to school can be a bit of a pain for young people, especially for those who want to participate in extra curricular activities. After all, if a young person is unable to get a lift off their parents then they will have no way of getting home safely.

The current system also means that young people have little choice in the school they want to go to. If they do not attend the nearest school to them the County Council will not subsidise any travelling costs. However, this once again is unfair, young people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds will have no choice in the school or sixth form they attend if their parents cannot afford the bus fare. So, many young people will have to attend a school a college they do not feel is the best for them, which could include not achieving their full potential.

Solutions: Schools need to renegotiate contracts with bus companies so that young people can be provided with free transport home after school activities.

The County Council also needs to review its policies on subsidising transport to education costs, so that, especially post 16 students can have more choice in the educational establishment they wish to study.

Respect and Discrimination

Young people often get frustrated at the fact they are discriminated against so much in everyday life. Some shops have signs that read "Only two young people allowed in at one time" or leisure centre have signs that read "No under 16's after 6pm unless accompanied by an adult." Imagine if those signs have said 'no black or disabled people after 6pm unless accompanied by a responsible white person.' Surprisingly that would be seen as unlawful and discriminative, and would not be allowed, yet it is seen as totally fine to discriminate against young people.

Respect and Discrimination was an issue that affected all of the five outcomes. For example, many young people do not feel respected in schools and therefore are less likely to 'enjoy and achieve'. Discrimination against young people also means they are not allowed into leisure centres at certain times, they are therefore less likely to 'be healthy'.

Another good example of discrimination against young people is the latest ban on "hoodies" and baseball caps in shopping centres. Just because young people wear something that covers their face it does not mean they are covering their face from CCTV and certainly doesn't mean to say they are "yobs". But is this a ban for children and young people only or is our grandparents not allowed to wear headscarves in shopping centres and do Muslim women have to take off their burka or hijab before entering the shopping centre?

Bluewater shopping centre near Dartford was the first shopping centre to enforce the ban.

Mathew Clements, of Bluewater, stressed that the ban covered only groups acting in an aggressive or intimidating way who were using hoods or baseball caps to hide their identities. Individuals walking through the centre in a hooded sweatshirt were unlikely to be asked to expose their faces for the benefit of security cameras

On the other hand, is there not a better way of tackling this situation instead of simply moving the problem somewhere else? Arndale and Spindles shopping centre seem to believe so and it has emerged that Oldham will not be joining the ban.

An Arndale spokeswoman said: "Our security staff will approach and talk to those acting anti-socially. We like to deal with these things on a personal level, to talk rather than to eject."

Solution; Discrimination against children and young people should be seen as unlawful and therefore treated with the same punishments as other discriminative acts. There should be more education about discrimination and its affects.

Poverty

Throughout the research into the five outcomes the issue of money and poverty stands out as very important in terms of achieving the five outcomes. In regards to staying safe, young people who cannot afford to attend activities on an evening will often hang around outside, which is obviously not the safest place for young people to be.

In terms of education as I have already mentioned research shows young people from less well off backgrounds generally do not do as well as their fellow students from middle classes.

Also linked with enjoying and achieving, young people who cannot afford to go to join clubs and activities have less opportunity to achieve. Award schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh and most clubs cost money to participate and on top of that cost is the cost of transport to and from the venues.

This also links with 'be healthy' as young people who can't afford to use leisure centres a limited to the type of physical activity they can do. Research also shows there is a strong link between low income and obesity.

There also appears to be a connection with poverty and 'making a positive contribution'. In the more formal structures of youth forums and councils young people from middle class families tend to be the kind of young people who are involved. Therefore young people from families of low income will often have less chance to get involved in decision-making.

Solution: There needs to be a coordinated campaign on child poverty in County Durham.

Audit Tool

Introduction

We began to develop this audit tool a number of weeks into researching the Every Child Matters five outcomes. The main issues that emerged from the five outcomes then formed the basis of our audit tool.

We audited police, leisure services, schools and education, transport, health services and making a positive contribution, as these were the most important services and issues that young people mentioned.

Our audit tool was basically a set of questions in the form of a questionnaire that we asked to various groups of adults and young people. Below is an example of questions we asked people regarding the police.

1. Do you have a positive or negative view of the police?
2. How many times have you been moved on by the police when stood with your friends in a public place?
3. Do you feel the police treat you differently to other people?
4. Do the police talk to you in a respectful manner?
5. Does a police presence make you feel intimidated or safe?
6. Have you encountered any problems when trying to report an incident?

We designed our Audit Tool the way we have for a number of reasons. Firstly we wanted to check *quality* and *quantity* of the services available for children and young people in County Durham. The questions we ask are designed to get measurable opinions of user of the services. We thought the best way to measure services would be to ask the users of the service.

By quality and quantity we meant that we did not just want to measure how many schools or services there are in the area, but how good these schools and services actually are.

The other important factor we considered when designing this tool was *equivalency*, this meant asking what do adults receive from a service and what do young people get from this service. If there is a service that adults do not commonly receive, for example, education, then we look at the nearest alternative, which for adults is employment. We wanted to test if adults are serious about treating young people as equal citizens then they should

receive the same services as adults. This includes being able to access leisure centres at the same time and being treated by the police in the same way.

The aim is that this audit tool will be able to be used by any young person or groups of young people who wishes to audit their town or village in County Durham and beyond. It has been designed to be accessible to as wide a range of young people as possible.

What we wish to achieve from this audit tool is that by listening to children and young peoples views on some of the services available to them we can start establishing evidence of the in-equality of some services that are available to children and young people compared to those of adults.

We piloted this audit tool with our big group of young people who had assisted our research all the way along. Below are our initial findings of what can be obtained by using our audit tool. We think it is important that this research continues, it will measure the five outcomes and if this research is taken seriously and acted upon then we should see a positive change in the results.

Overall two hundred and thirty five people took part in our audit, of which there were one hundred and thirty three children and young people and one hundred and two adults.

Police

From our audit tool we found that there are considerable differences between the way children and young people feel the police deal with them compared to what adults think.

Even though the majority of children and young people, and adults seem to have a positive view of the police, more than half of children and young people felt the police treat them differently to other people in society, compared to a third of adults. Again over half of children and young people feel the police talk to them in a respectful manner.

The majority of both children and young people and adults felt that a police presence makes them feel safe rather than intimidated, with a sixth of children and young people who thought that it depends on the police officer.

Again the majority of both children and young people, and adults said they have not encountered any problems when reporting an incident.

There is a significant difference between how the police treat children and young people on the streets compared to how they would treat a group of adults. Only one adult (aged between 19-21) said that the police have at some point moved them on, compared to 29 young people who claim that they have been moved on by police while standing in the street.

Finally, both children and young people, and adults think there should be more police on the streets, with a small number of children and young people wanting more police in certain places, for example, patrolling a skate park to keep an eye on the different group of young people and to make sure no trouble starts between them.

Overall people seem to appreciate the police, yet there appears to be an issue around the way police communicate and interact with different people in society, especially children and young people in groups.

Make a Positive Contribution

From looking at the results of our audit it seems that there is a lack of communication between people in the community. The majority of people today do not feel they are a valued member of the community, with almost three quarters of children and young people and just over three quarters of adults agreeing they do not feel valued.

Again equally children and young people, and adults feel that there is no opportunity for them to make a positive contribution. 89% of children and young people and 86% of adults felt that there is no opportunity to become involved in decision making on issues that effect their lives in the community, resulting in the majority of children and young people and adults who feel that their voices are not heard by politicians and councillors that represent them. Again the majority of children and young people and adults said they do not get the chance to meet the politician and councillors that represent them either.

This is interesting as it shows that most people in general feel disillusioned by British politics. Our findings show that most people do not feel that their politicians represent them, therefore there is no use in lowering the voting age to 16. The voting age might as well be lowered to age 2, as most people obviously don't seem to feel that voting makes much difference. Therefore in order for young people and adults to feel that they are able to make a positive contribution there needs to be changes in how citizenship is treated in general. This may be the politicians are actually held accountable to promises they make and do more to fulfil the needs of the people they represent, including young people who aren't able to vote. There also needs to be more effort made into involving all members of the public in the planning and delivery of services, such as leisure centres, parks, elderly care homes etc. Otherwise young people who grow up feeling they are not treated as citizens will become adults who also feel they are not given any chance to have a say in decisions that affect them.

Transport

It is clear that the majority of people use public transport at some point, for some reason but we wanted to know what people think of the service they receive.

Surprisingly, we found that all of the children and young people who took part in our audit felt that the providers of public transport respect them. This is contrary to previous findings into our Every Child Matters research where many young people felt they were discriminated against by bus drivers, for example, young people have said that bus drivers often do not believe their age and therefore try to charge them adult fares. However adults on the other hand were not so sure, with just over two thirds agreeing they felt respected.

Finally, we wanted to know if anyone had experienced problems when waiting for a bus to arrive i.e. the bus being late, not turning up at all or driving straight past you. We found that everyone said they have experienced some problems with the bus service turning up late or not stopping for them at some point in their lives, causing an inconvenience.

However, it was the results of our audit that told us that more children and young people depend on the use of public transport, as they do not have access to their own car, because they are too young. Therefore children and young people are more likely to be disadvantaged by public transport if there are failures to meet standards within the service.

Health

For our health audit we wanted establish the different views of children and young people to adults towards confidentiality and information. We wanted to establish how aware people are of their rights within the health care system, for example, do children and young people know if they can make an appointment or pick up prescriptions on their own? And do people feel confident speaking to health professionals?

While it is clear from our audit tool results that the majority of both children and young people and adults said they would obtain information on health from the local GP, and are confident that their GP would respect their confidentiality. There are some differs in opinion on whether the service they receive is suited to everyone, for example, opening times and separate sessions for children and young people. For instance, while over half of the children and young people who participated in the health audit felt that they could make an appointment on their own, there were still doubts from some who either thought they could not make appointments without their parents.

This maybe the result of a lack of information provided to everyone who may want to use the NHS services. It is clear that those wanting to use the service, especially children and young people, are uncertain about whether they can pick up their own prescriptions, make an appointment and see health professionals by themselves.

Overall there seems to be a generally positive view on the attitude and ability to interact with patients from health professionals, with just under a third of children and young people feeling they are not treated with respect by medical staff and just over a third feeling they have been made welcome and comfortable when they have been admitted to hospital.

Looking back at the results we got from the question on whether people feel that their GP would respect their confidentiality, there is a slight difference to children and young people feeling their GP would respect their confidentiality (over two thirds said yes) and whether they feel confident actually discussing a medical issue with their GP (just under half said yes).

Leisure

With regards to leisure we wanted to find out who uses leisure centres, what is available, to whom are they directed at, and how children and young people felt they were treated by the leisure centre staff compared to adults.

In our Every Child Matters research it became clear that children and young people were disappointed with the kind of service leisure centres provided. We found that children and young people thought leisure centres were too expensive and they do not provide sufficient activities for young people, a shocking criticism was that most leisure centres discriminate against children and young people by not allowing children and young people in after 6pm. However, the results of our audit tool conclude that children and young people seem quite happy with leisure centres. In our audit we found that, out of the children and young people who participated 40% said they thought the leisure centres were reasonably priced and 35% said they weren't, leaving a quarter unsure. There was a similar response from adults also, 39% thought leisure centres were reasonably priced, 28% disagreed and 33% were unsure.

When we asked if they knew if there were any restrictions as to when they could use the leisure centre only 20% of children and young people said yes and 50% were unsure. All of adults who participated said they were also unsure.

Everyone seemed happy with the overall attitude of leisure centre staff. Only 35% of children and young people and 11% of adults felt they are not treated with respect of some leisure centre staff. 74% of children and young people and 94% of adults felt that they are not treated differently than anyone else or other group of people.

Schools

We looked at three secondary schools in County Durham and looked the provision of school toilets, social areas, school meals, the school nurse and extra curricular activities. We wanted to find out if children and young people had similar rights as those of adults working within the school.

School toilets

We found that there are far more functioning toilets for staff than there are for pupils, it seems that there are also more toiletries available for teachers e.g. soap/towels. There appears to be more opportunities for staff to use the toilets in their own time, without having to get sufficient consent or without having to get a key to unlock the doors first. One of the schools pupils who carried out the research stated that planners must be signed with permission to be out of class, signed by the staff with good reason. On the other had another pupil said there was no need for special permission to use the toilets.

Social areas

There is a considerable difference to what there is offered to children and young people in school compared to staff with regards to social areas.

Overall the staff have rooms where they can go during break and lunch times and free periods. The staff rooms contain chairs, tables, lockers, toilets, a kitchen area with microwaves, fridges and kettles, etc. The students on the other hand have the schoolyard with pretty much nothing more than a few benches. Bearing in mind that if the weather is bad they still have to stand out in the rain and snow (some schools may allow students to sit in the hall or allocated classrooms, however this is not always the case).

Our audit does show that not all pupils are treated in the same way. In one school we audited there is a student block for year 10 and 11 pupils where they can go at lunch and break times and for free periods. Here they have access to vending machines, toilets, water fountains, a kettle, tables and chairs (pretty much the same as the staff room but not as well equipped). Another school have a library and S.N.R room where students with passes can go during dinner time, this offers chairs, tables and computers for studying.

School Meals

Out of all the three schools that were audited all three do not let students out of school grounds for their dinner unless they have a letter of consent to go home for dinner from their parents/carer. However, staff can leave whenever they please.

The price of a meal and drink is averaged at around £1.45. According to the results of our audit it seems that there is a wider choice of food available for non-vegetarians than vegetarians.

School Nurse

It is compulsory to have a school nurse. However it is clear that the school nurse is not accessible to all students. This is because, on average, the school nurse only visits the school for one half day a week, normally for a lunch time period. All three schools said that their school nurse is available at lunchtime only. Bearing in mind that pupils normally only have forty-five minutes to an hour for their dinner it almost seems impossible that a good number of young people will be able to comfortably consult with the school nurse within this time scale.

It is also shocking to find out that some school nurses do not always have their own room for consultation. Out of the three schools we audited, we found that the school nurse did not have her own allocated room. One school pupil said that the school nurse just sees you in a classroom where people can walk in and out freely. The question is would adults be comfortable with the same kind of service at their local GP Practice? Would adults feel comfortable just catching their GP in the corridor and consulting with them in a public manner where there is no opportunity for privacy?

Respect

When it comes to the inequality of school rules it becomes obvious that there are a great deal more rules that apply to pupils but do not apply to staff. For example, children and young people may not be able to wear jewellery – teachers are, children and young people have to wear a uniform – teachers don't, children and young people are not allowed to wear their own choice of foot wear – teachers are, etc. There was also mention of the fact that teachers are allowed to shout at pupils and get away with it (their way of showing authority) but yet if a pupil shouted at a teacher they would more than likely receive some form of discipline.

There also seems to be no form of complaints procedure in place for students to complain about staff or anything else that maybe bothering them. Students tend to think teachers stick together and that their complaint will not be taken seriously.

Extra Curriculum Activities

Overall there seems to be a good number of extra curriculum activities available in all three schools. However, the schools do not seem to have taken into consideration how students will get home after school hours when the school bus has left at 3:30pm. For those students who do not live locally and who's parents/carers do not have access to a car, this could either cause them problems getting home or prevent them participating in extra curricular activities.

Recommendations

We both agreed that carrying out the pilot of the audit tool was more difficult and when carrying this out again we would look at our method and think about what changes we would make.

We do recommend that Investing in Children be commissioned to continue this work in order to see if an improvement to the lived lives of children and young people in County Durham is being carried out.

A structured and planned process of audits across the County, on a regular basis, will eventually develop a picture of what the County is like from a young persons prospective.

It will also help to measure the impact of any changes.

When we carry out the audits in the future we plan to work alongside the head teachers of schools and the County Council members to try and improve the communities for children and young people.

July 2005