

FAO Mr Ed Balls – The Economic Secretary to the Treasury

Submission from the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) for consideration in the Children and Young People’s Review



The NYAS Signposting Service

Overview of NYAS’ work and the creation of the NYAS Signposting Service

NYAS is a ‘not for profit’ children’s charity which supplies socio-legal advocacy services to children, young people, their parents, carers and professionals. NYAS provides independent representation and advice for those who use the service, thus ensuring that outcomes for children and young people are improved and the voice of children and young people can be heard in all matters affecting them. All NYAS services are also accessible to children who are ‘looked after’ by the local authority or any child, young person or family who are ‘in need’.

NYAS specifically supports children with disabilities both through specialised advocacy provision working with children with communication problems and through signposting to appropriate services in the Birmingham area. This service takes particular account of local transport routes and accessibility issues. By pulling together the full range of appropriate support services for both the family and the child, whilst keeping the child at the centre of the process, we are able to quickly make a difference to the quality of life for the whole family.

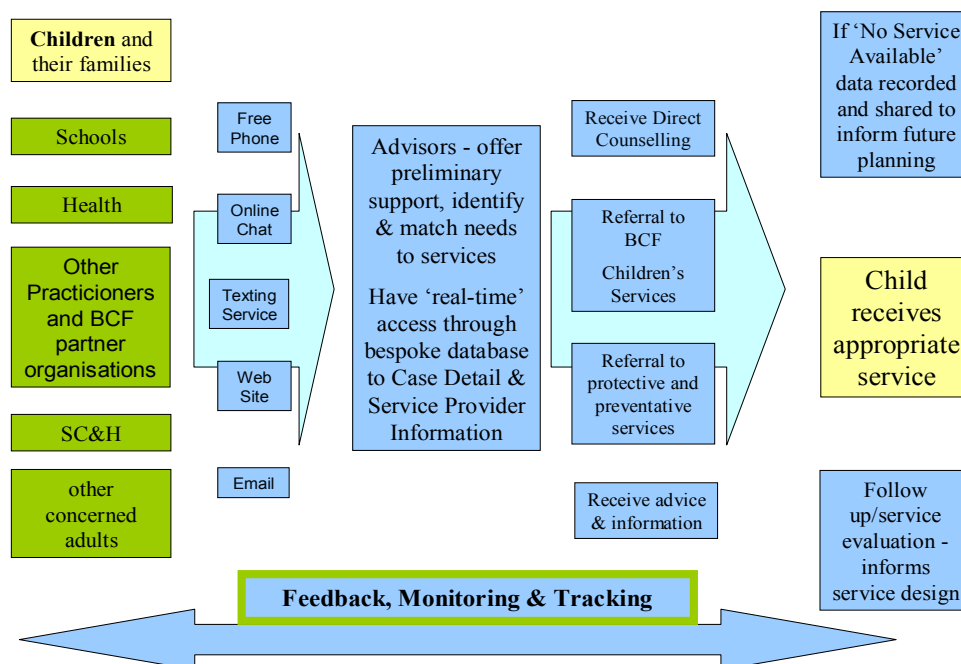
The need for a universal information, referral and monitoring service was identified as part of the Birmingham Children’s Fund initial planning document, submitted to Government in late 2001. Since April 2002 NYAS has been delivering a city-wide signposting service to all of Birmingham’s diverse communities. The NYAS Signposting Service is a unique and innovative project designed to increase the equal and open accessibility of protective and preventative services to all children, young people and families.

Signposting has allowed a partnership approach to prevention and the development of a new approach to the delivery of services for children and young people which places the young person in control of the process whilst referring them quickly into services or local activities that they feel meet their needs. Through a sophisticated mapping and reporting facility local commissioners, for example through the Extended Schools Program, can identify demand for services and successful

existing provision, analyzing gaps in services and poor take up based on a true picture of need.

The NYAS Signposting Service has worked in partnership with 2,500 local services to children in order to compile and maintain a comprehensive database of all the services in the city that are available for children, young people and families. From sports, leisure and art groups to counseling services and those servicing acute needs, the Signposting Service consolidates local directories and knowledge pools and acts as a single referral point for children, adults and professionals alike.

Figure 1 NYAS Signposting Service Delivery Model – (items in blue refer to the elements delivered by Signposting)



What should be the role of universal services in providing access to protective and preventative support, risk assessment and referral?

Since its launch the NYAS Signposting Service has been founded on the fundamental idea that universal access to services enhances protective and preventative support for children and young people, which in turn improves outcomes for them and their families. Analysis has highlighted that this approach also reduces pressure on statutory services by deflecting demand to other community provision at an earlier stage.¹ It was found that not only was the demand for statutory provision reduced, but parents directly accessed Signposting Advisors to seek parenting support – reporting real improvements in children’s behaviour.

It is our view that universal services must act together to provide access to the most appropriate protective, preventative and statutory support. With good

¹ Yardley Pilot Study 2005

communication and the cooperation of children and families we know there can be affective risk assessment and speedy referral.

How can targeted and specialist services intervene earlier to address problems before they become acute?

It is NYAS experience as a whole that listening properly to children and young people and their families allows us to identify, address and resolve problems before they become acute. Advocacy services which are child-led are able to act as a safety net which ensures that children's problems are sorted out before they become serious issues. Similarly through Signposting we know that the early provision of supportive community services prevents problems from deteriorating to the extent that they need more serious, acute intervention.

How can the impact of intervention to prevent children, young people and families with complex needs repeatedly moving in and out of contact with targeted services be sustained?

Again it is our experience that by placing the child with complex needs and his or her family at the heart of decision making it is possible to ensure that they retain and make best use of targeted services. Parents tell us that they are relieved and delighted to be given rapid access to appropriate services and they are quick to tell us if those needs change. We are often told that a key factor is our independence in the process, mediating between troubled families and acute services. We feel there is a need to redress the balance of professionalism so that service users are genuinely equal partners in decision making.

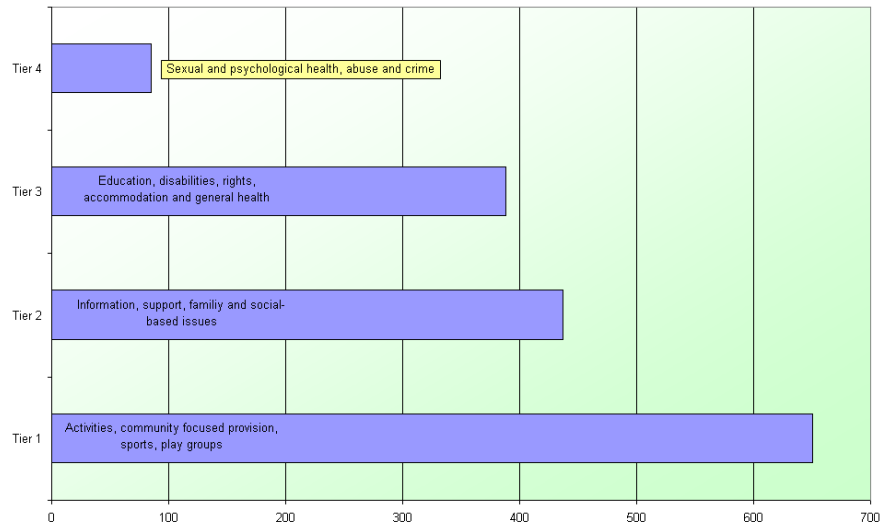
How can rights and responsibilities for individuals, families and communities be integrated into services to improve the lives of children and young people?

NYAS is a children's rights organisation which works to ensure that both rights and responsibilities for children and families are integrated into the services they receive. We consider there to be a need for better understanding of those rights and responsibilities and for 'respect' to be experienced by young people as a two-way process. It is our view that this holistic approach can only be achieved through a new approach to the three 'Rs' – Respect, Recognition and Representation for individuals, families and communities. It is our experience that this process is significantly influenced with the help of qualified advocates bringing children, families and services together.

What would be the impact of more preventative services and early intervention on the life chances of children and young people and on the value for money of public spending on children, young people and families?

The Signposting Service receives an average of 25,000 calls per year leading to 3,500 children supported and sustained in local services. These interventions have directly affected life opportunities for children and families across Birmingham. Results can be measured in terms of the Five Outcomes as identified in Every Child Matters and are demonstrated here in relation to interventions across all four tiers of need (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Support provided by NYAS Signposting in relation to the Tiers of Provision - April-Sept 2005



The NYAS Signposting Service diverts children and families away from statutory services when they first ask for support. We know from the feedback we receive that this makes a genuine impact on the improvement of their lives and the life chances of their children and by making use of existing community capacity it increases the capacity of statutory services to address the most acute need while reducing overall demand on public spending.