Children and Young People's Advocacy House North

Consultation Event
Media City UK
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Final Report

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CYP@Salford
Improving Outcomes for Children,
Young People & Families

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Our research spans health, social care and education, and focuses on enhancing services, improving outcomes and evidencing impacts on children and families. The research group works closely with colleagues in the NHS, Local Authorities, the Charitable Sector, and national and international networks. We have research links with international partners in the Middle East, the Far East, Europe (Scandinavia) and Australia.

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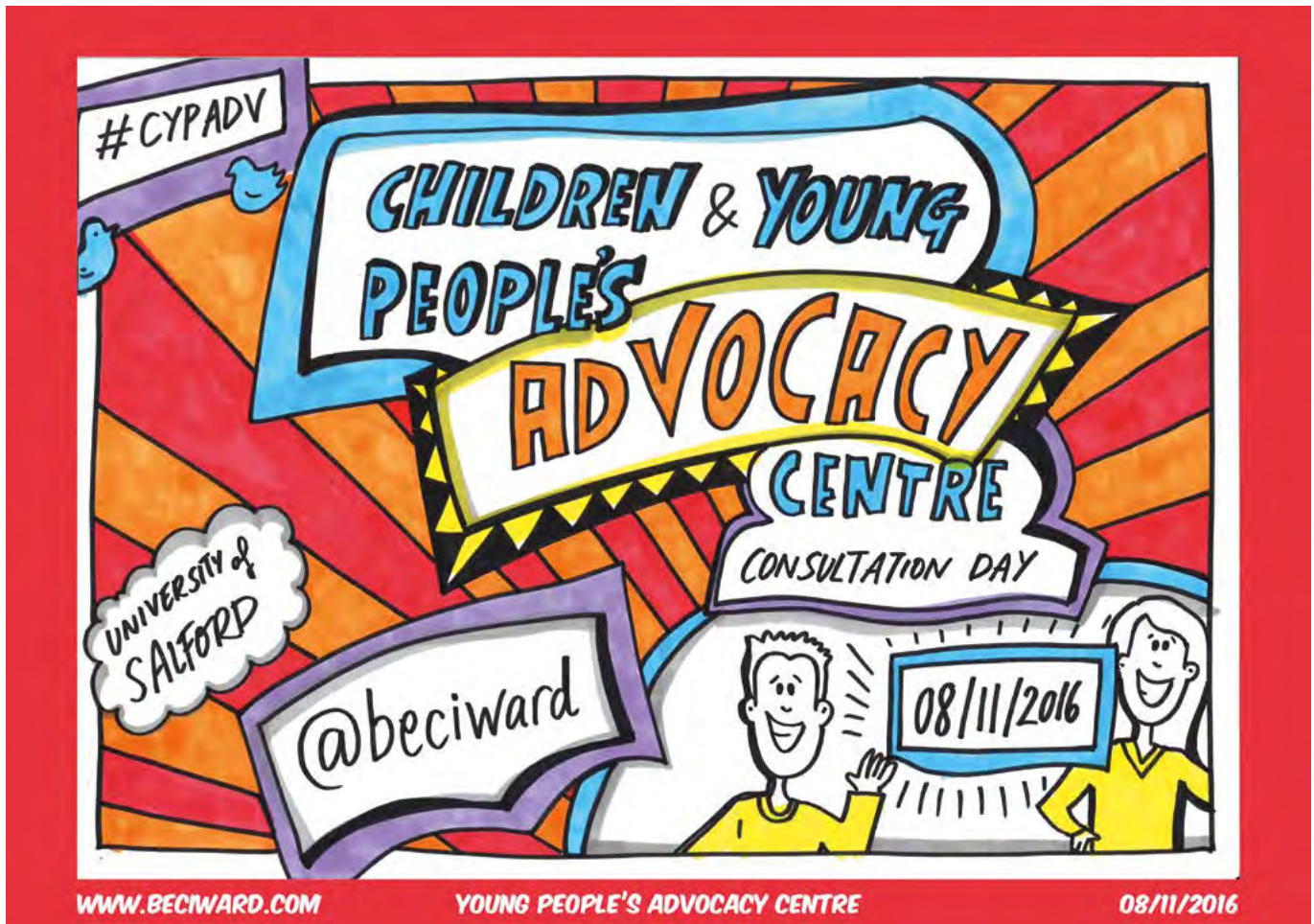
Introduction

The vision for a children's advocacy centre in the north of England was first mooted in a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust report (Rowland 2014). Having witnessed the work of the child advocacy movement in the USA, Rowland argued that a UK based children's advocacy centre would be an exciting and innovative project that could result in real benefits for children in the area in which it was located. He argued that the children's advocacy centre would fully involve children of all ages in the location, design and service-specification. It would be a place where children could self-refer to get advice and support with a wide range of problems, including physical and mental health, social care, protection, help with relationship difficulties, bullying and schooling. He also acknowledged the importance of co-design and co-production, whereby the children and young people with most to gain from the centre would work with the adults with access to resources (skills and money) to make it happen.

Children in the UK

Children account for 21% of the UK population. Many lead successful lives, reaching their potential and laying solid foundations for their future as adults. However, there remains a substantial number of children for whom life is difficult. These difficulties limit their potential, have consequences for their adult lives and are often multi-faceted and sometimes, persistently resistant to improvement. Although some problems are visible and amenable to existing health and social care services, others remain hidden or are less amenable to existing interventions.

In a recent study, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH 2017) detail some worrying concerns regarding the state of the nation's children and young people's health and well-being. They note that while death rates in young people (10 – 19 years) have decreased, the majority of these deaths are avoidable and the rate of decline has not kept pace with that reported by similar wealthy nations. They report a strong association between deprivation and life-chances and highlight that children and young people living in deprived areas are more likely to die. Moreover, road traffic injures are a leading cause of death in young people, with social deprivation identified as a factor for increased road crashes and fatalities in the under 15 age group. Young people living in deprived communities in the UK are more likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived areas. Girls express lower and decreasing life satisfaction than boys. Overall, the well-being of children and young people in the UK continues to cause concern. This is important given the strong links between the health and resilience experienced during childhood and adolescence and subsequent adult lives.

The RCPCH (2017) identified concern for communication, personal, social and health education, mental health, and poverty as key themes arising from their consultation with UK based children. They noted a need for more effective communication using modern technology to improve the reach and inclusion of children and young people to help them to achieve greater health literacy. They noted concerns for mental health issues, including self-esteem and self-confidence. They also pointed out the need to have sufficient financial resources to plan for a healthy diet and life-style. They argued that inaction or inertia could herald serious consequences for future generations; especially those most vulnerable and least able to count on help and support from others. The RCPCH (2017) also noted that children and young people want to be listened to and heard, and they asserted that they should be involved in the co-production, design and development of services aimed at them.

This chimes with numerous other studies that report that children and young people want to be listened to and be involved in matters that affect their lives, the lives of family members and their wider community.

Children's right to be heard has been acknowledged for decades. The Children's Rights movement has a long history, buoyed further by research evidence of children's agency that points to the benefits that may accrue from children and young people's involvement and participation. For instance, it has been reported that children's participation in the care system is thought to provide a means of improving their safety (Lesley and Mantle et al 2006). Further, there is a consensus that there is a positive relationship between children's participation and social inclusion. Although the notion of involving and engaging with children and young people to realise meaningful participation is not new (Arnstein 1969), the concept of co-production, whereby the users of services are acknowledged as an important, often hidden resource, has added momentum to the call for the public to be actively engaged in the design and development of public services (Boyle and Harris 2009). According to Boyle and Harris (2009), any failure to 'recognise and support' the 'grass roots' social economy may lead to isolation, lack of trust and low levels of engagement; leading to ineffective and inefficient services.

In contrast, co-production with local communities and those who will use services can foster innovation and reset power imbalances; engendering reciprocity and more equal partnerships. Founded on recognition of the social economy and users of services, seeing both as a valuable asset; co-production brings about a radical shift in the planning of services to improve effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. It enables services to be designed such that they are acceptable and accessible to those intended to benefit most from their use. Three notable successes are the youth justice system in Washington (Flowers 2010), the end child trafficking project (Save the Children 2006) and an English school in Somerset.[1] Other claimed benefits are the encouragement of self-help and behaviour change, and growing social networks to support resilience and improve well-being. All consistent with the call to action from the RCPCH (2017).

Children's Advocacy Centres

In the USA, children's advocacy centres are child-focussed, facility based programmes with representatives from many disciplines working together to effectively investigate, treat and prosecute the abuse of children. The locations are not only children-focussed but are designed to create a sense of safety and security for child victims. They are a single place in which interviews, examinations and on-going therapy are offered to young victims and their families with a focus on help and emotional and physical healing. The first children's advocacy centre in the USA was formed in 1985 in Alabama. Now, there are over 750 centres across the USA. Texas, alone, has 68 centres. In the USA, children's advocacy centres are held in high regard and receive a high level of support from the local communities they serve (Cross, Jones and Walsh et al., 2008).

Rowland (2014) recommended that the first similar UK centre be opened as a pilot with a full evaluation taking place over time in order to make recommendations about the desirability, acceptability and outcomes of opening further centres in other areas of the country. The advocacy centre would aim to empower children to engage and contribute to health and social service design and development and to build a strong local community with children at the centre. He acknowledged that the first centre would start small but would have real potential to grow into something of which the region could be proud and which would really change the lives of many children and families living in the area.

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[1] http://www.learntolead.org.uk/introduction-video/

The UK pilot would build on the USA model, but go beyond helping victims of child abuse. The centre could incorporate some of the functions of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), with multi-disciplinary involvement including child welfare services, health, education, police, legal teams, psychological services and long-term follow up of children who come into contact with the service. The centre could co-locate key members of the team responsible for instigating investigations under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 including the supporting legal teams (both civil and criminal), key members responsible for the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences against children. Key health members would be on hand to provide advice and input from the initial referral in a comprehensive, child-friendly environment where children could be assessed, examined, supported and followed up throughout their journey within the child welfare and health system.

Children and families would be involved in the co-production of the centre and not only have the ability to self-refer but be involved in the design and service development; be empowered to evaluate and make modifications to the service and be key stake-holders to ensure that the environment, service and interaction with the local community are all fit for purpose.

The Aim and Objectives of the Consultation

NHS England (North Region) commissioned the CYP@Salford research team to find out from children and young people ("the young consultants"), their views and opinions on the possible creation of a children's advocacy centre in the North of England. From the start, the young consultants preferred the term "Advocacy House" so this was adopted.[2]

Evaluation Aim

The aim of the consultation was two-fold. The first was to find out from young people what they thought about the idea of an Advocacy House in the north of England (Manchester). The second to determine how young people could be involved in the co-design and co-production of such a house, from design to the delivery and evaluation of services provided, if the concept was taken forward.

Objectives:

1. To explore children and young people's understanding and meaning of the term advocacy

2. To establish in what circumstances they may have or would contact such a centre

3. To establish what such a centre may look like and what should be provided to ensure that it is acceptable to children and young people.

4. To establish the facilitators and barriers in them accessing such an advocacy centre.

Consultation Design

Informed by the principles of co-production, a pragmatic, inclusive approach was taken. This acknowledged the need to bring together young people with those educated, trained and with some control over resources to help them. The consultation team wanted to privilege, listen to, record and communicate the views and opinions of the young participants. Central to this was the use of inclusive methods that were fluid and flexible enough to enable the young participants to engage in the consultation while offering enough structure to ensure the objectives for the day were met.

The consultation was held in a large open space at the University of Salford campus at MediaCityUK. The timings for the day were arranged so that the young people could take their usual transport to and from school and allow them to register for the school day in the usual way. The young people were welcomed with refreshments, allocated to within school groups of no more than 10 and introduced to their group facilitators. The facilitators sat amongst and stayed with their groups throughout the day.

Recruitment and approvals

A 'whole class' invitation was sent to two Greater Manchester High Schools. Both agreed to participate. In School A, the young people's participation was negotiated via a class teacher working with year 9, Key Stage 4 drama students. For school B, a classroom teacher negotiated with the Pastoral Manager of Year 7. Both schools had robust pre-arranged processes to undertake a risk assessment of what was proposed, obtain parental permission for attendance and the use of appropriate images in the report and on social media platforms, in this instance Twitter©. Details of dietary requirements, special needs including

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[2] The term Advocacy House also helped to differentiate the concept from that of an Advocacy Centre (USA).

mobility or communication difficulties, and allergies, were also sought as part of the risk assessment. Both schools classes were made up of mixed ability young people, some with special needs and others gifted and talented. Some had known allergies (e.g. peanut) others known health problems (e.g. asthma) and mobility or cognitive processing difficulties. Special dietary requirements (on moral and religious grounds) were also noted.

Participants

A total of 56 young people (chaperoned by 6 school staff) participated in the day.

Table 1

School A (Year 7 Key Stage 3)		School B (Year 9 Key Stage 4)		Total
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
13	16	15	12	56

The facilitators included people from CYP@Salford (10) and guest facilitators from local and national health and social care organisations (7). These included the Dean of the School of Health and Society, University of Salford, representatives from Public Health England, NHS England, Alder Hey NHS Foundation Trust Hospital, The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, St. Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (England). In addition, The Ceremonial Mayor of the City of Salford and a local Stockport Member of Parliament (MP) agreed to welcome the young people to the event. The Interim Mayor of Greater Manchester attended for a question and answer session with the young people. Two members from the board of Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity also attended.
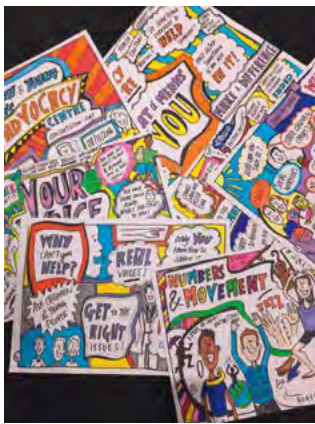
Beci Ward,[3] a co-creative illustrator, attended to visually communicate the individual stories and experiences shared by the young people. Beci also provided large A0 drawings of the exterior and interior of 4 different house styles; these were used to facilitate group work.

Gayathri Ganapathi from the social enterprise Equilibrium Dance and Arts and a Bharatanatyam dance artist, facilitated a session on dance and storytelling to illustrate how dance gestures can be used as an alternative to verbal communication.
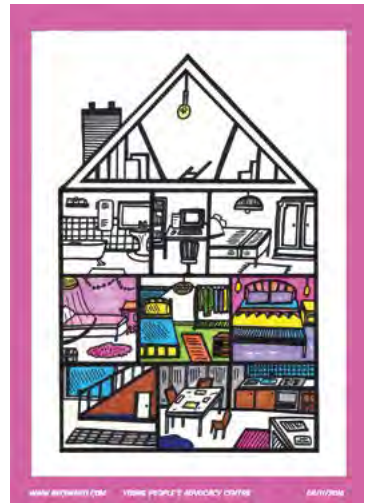
The school staff attending with the children proved to be an important presence. While they were not directly involved in the sessions, unless invited to join in by the young people, they provided important boundaries for the young people to ensure their safety was maintained. For example, the young people knew that they had not to leave the premises nor wander to different floors in the building without a chaperone. The school staff provided registers, had knowledge of allergies and food preferences and restrictions and, knowing that there would a food outlet, had set a financial limit with parents on what their children could spend on the day. They also ensured that the children arrived to the event and back to school safely.

[3] http://beciward.com/

Refreshments were provided throughout the day, with many of the young people opting for hot rather than cold drinks. A sandwich lunch with snack and fruit was provided. Vegetarian and Halal options were also available.

Structure of the day

A timetable of events was planned to guide the young people and facilitators throughout the day. These were designed in 30 minute time slots to mirror the structure of the school day as much as possible. The strategies used were chosen to balance the knowledge of adult facilitators with the insights and experiences of the young people. The facilitators were there to coach and support the young people such that they could engage in a mutual exchange of knowledge. Each group had an iPad© which could be used to record the discussions with and between the young people. In some groups, the young people took charge of these for the entirety of the event.

Eliciting and privileging young people's views

Although the structure of day was fixed, the young people were free to move the discussion in the direction they wanted. The main facilitators were all experienced in working with young people and confident in following their lead. The young people were also free to leave their groups and draw or write using any of the means provided. In this way they could find quiet time or busy themselves with artwork or filming to communicate their views. The diverse range of methods used were important to ensure that the young people could share their views in the small groups, the large group or individually. Digital photographs of the young people working and their artwork were taken throughout the day. Images and messages were shared on Twitter© to extend the reach beyond the event to other individuals and organisations. This proved to be a great success with one parent tweeting that the event must be important given those following the event. On the day, the event was trending on twitter© second only to the USA election. A Twitter© storify[4] of the whole event alongside a Twitter© storify[5] privileging the young participant views was collated and used as part of the data set.

1

The welcome and introduction was given jointly by the Ceremonial Mayor of the City of Salford and the MP for Stockport. Following this, the guest facilitators took turns to read out their 500 word stories, starting with *'I once knew a young person who…'* and ending *'I am going to take this story and put it in the adult Advocacy House…'*. The stories involved experiences of work with young people experiencing physical and mental health problems, bereavement, bullying and abuse. This session set the context for the day, and helped to demonstrate the level of knowledge and experience that the adults in the room had regarding their work with young people. The stories were designed to give the young people some insight into adult perceptions of when advocacy may be needed.

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[4] https://storify.com/wlasinclair/cypadv
[5] https://storify.com/wlasinclair/cypadv-voices

2

Following this the young participants performed a drama titled '**Steve: A day in my life**'. The drama had been written by the drama group to communicate some of the frustrations, difficulties, problems or worries facing young people in their day-to-day lives. The issues in the drama ranged from disruptive others in a cinema, being overlooked to play the lead in a school play, a mother that could not cook and finished with a young person called Steve who repeatedly missed out on social events with his friends due to repeated hospital admissions for his heart complaint.

3

Gayathri Ganapathi led a session using Bharatanatyam dance to explain the story of Prince Rama and Princess Seeta to demonstrate how good can triumph over evil. Hand gestures and body postures conveyed the dramatic nature of a small prince overcoming the bullying ways of a monster. Learning how to communicate the letters of the alphabet followed, providing a fun opportunity for the young people and their facilitators to practise the ancient art of Indian dance and consider alternative means to share stories.

4

The young people then went into their break-out groups around interactive tables to consider the meaning of advocacy. The prompts for this group work included worries; who helped the young people; where they went for help and who they approached for help. Issue prompts were also used to expand the discussion into areas that may not have spontaneously been considered and to give permission to talk about issues that other group members had not raised. These included; domestic abuse, bullying, internet safety, mental health problems, anxiety and depression, loneliness, caring for children, babies and parents, alcohol and substance misuse, exploitation, abuse and smoking.

5

The young people were given mock post-cards on which they were encouraged to write questions and messages for the Interim Mayor of Greater Manchester ("the Mayor").

An audience with the Mayor followed. The young people asked the Mayor many questions. These included why he had become Mayor, how he felt about this, how his childhood compared with theirs.

6

Lunch time provided the young participants with an opportunity to record some of their stories. They were invited to write their wishes or worries onto paper leaves to hang on their wishing and worry tree.

A graffiti floor was available for them write or draw their comments or their thoughts so far. Two digital cameras were available for them to film 'talking heads' and communicate their wants, wishes and views. Some of the young people worked with the artist to help colour and add to her illustrations from the day.

7

After lunch, the small groups came together again to consider the values on which an Advocacy House could be founded and they worked on incorporating these values into visual logos for the Advocacy House. The young participants were asked, when possible, to rank the values using diamond ranking – see Clark (2012) for an explanation of this process.
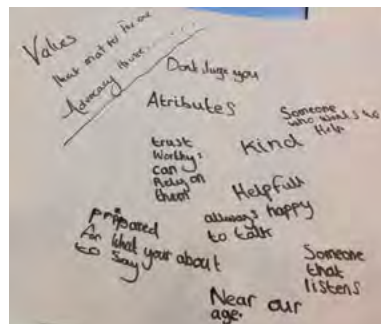
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The day concluded with a plenary session in which the young people offered their final thoughts and asked any outstanding questions. A final vote was taken of the young people and adults in favour of the Advocacy House.

The illustrator showed the young people her illustrations from the day and the Indian dance artist helped one group to communicate the values they wanted to underpin the Advocacy House in the form of expressive dance. One facilitator shared the Twitter© trending news with the group which the young participants received with delight.
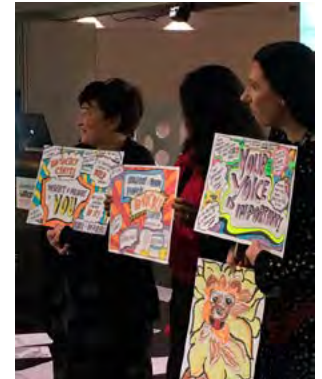
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The young participants received a Certificate of Participation and were told that the facilitators would visit them at school to share the findings from the day so that they could have the final say on the recommendations made in the report.

10

A de-brief session with the adult facilitators was undertaken to explore their initial thoughts and feelings about the day and what the young participants had shared.

Dealing with the Data

Audio or video-recorded data was converted to text manually (with additional field notes for video data). These were themed along with the wishes and worries communicated on the wishes and worry tree, the views expressed on the Graffiti floor and comments from the Twitter© storify. The young participant voices were privileged by means of simple framework analysis, constructed from the consultation objectives to derive meaning and synthesis across the diverse range of data. This included the meaning advocacy for the young people, in what circumstances advocacy might be needed, what an advocacy house for young people might look like, and the values on which such a service should be founded.

Findings (1) What is the meaning of advocacy?
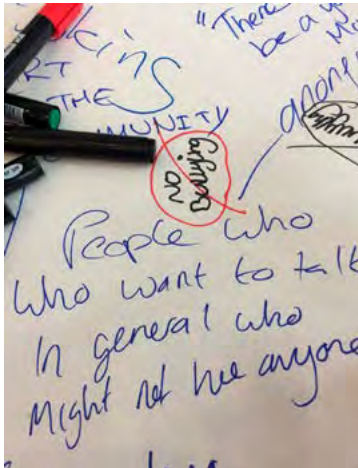
Many of the young people used the term '*helping*' to convey what they thought an Advocacy House could provide. One young person expressed their view that they wished to start a '**helping house**' while another wrote that they wished for '*happy children in the house*'. Another hoped that the Advocacy House for kids would work out and that it would help lots of children.


"Help children to work stuff out or help them with their problems… help talk to them if they have no-one to talk to…"

There was considerable agreement among the young people that an Advocacy House, in some form, would benefit children and young people. Many expressed clear insights, sometimes with remarkable clarity regarding unmet needs faced by young people. Key in this was a desire for their views and opinions to be included by those making decisions that impact on their lives.
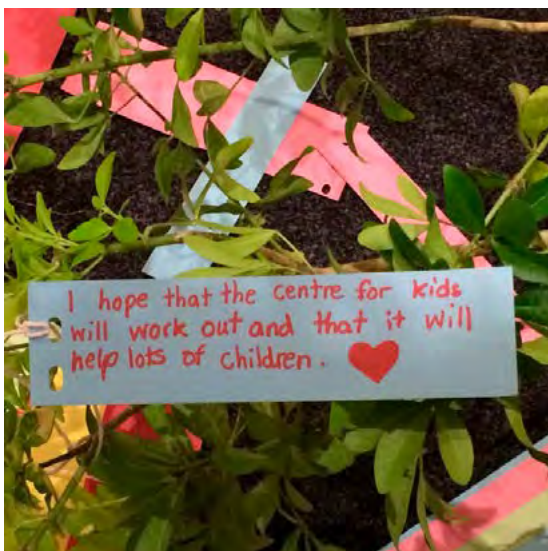
"…If you don't listen to what the child's saying you won't know what the problem is…"

"I think this idea is quite good because it gives children the opportunity to share ideas, just like we're doing now…"

Findings (2) In what circumstances may an Advocacy House be needed?

Thematic analysis of the findings from this aspect identified three themes: *'My worries – safety, mental health and anxiety', 'Worrying about others', 'The good and the not so good: hospital experiences'.* Key to all of these was a desire to be involved, included and listened to.

My worries

While some young people expressed their view that they had a voice and could use their voice to make a difference, others wanted somewhere and someone they could go for help, advice, support and guidance that was not available elsewhere.

Some young people wished for more money, another young person had simply written *'More food'.* A desire for more food was noted on the worry and wishing tree and the graffiti floor. One young person made a direct plea to the Interim Mayor for *'more jobs in the future…'* (Postcard to Mayor).

One young person wished for *'no homework'.*

Safety – out and about

The young people repeatedly brought up the issue of safety. This related mostly to them not feeling safe, especially in the evenings and in areas where street lighting was non-existent or poor. They asked the Interim Mayor what he could do *'to keep the streets safe'.* They asked for safe streets and suggested more funding for the police and more street lighting;

"Keep the streets safe, I want to play out at night…" (Video).

"There is a path on Moorside Park with no street light at all, which gets extremely dark on nights, now that it's getting darker earlier…" (Postcard to Mayor).

"I think that you should increase the funds for the police to make the streets of Manchester safer…" (Postcard to Mayor).

They seemed to associate safety on the streets with freedom and social inclusion;

"I think we should fund the police more so the children in the streets can feel more freedom and to try and calm down the people igniting social media trends, like the clowns and more things that will make people feel scared and isolated…" (Postcard to Mayor)

"I think it (Advocacy House) would be safer than playing on the streets or in the park…" (Video).

They suggested a young person's *'bus service'* could be introduced so that they could safely navigate between the places in which they wanted to spend time.

Safety – at home

The young people also expressed their view that for some children home was not a safe place;

"Home doesn't always feel safe and secure or the right place to be…" (Video).

Others explained that would not always go to their parents to discuss their worries, choosing instead to confide in trusted friends;

"I wouldn't ask mum and dad, I'd ask my friend 'cos they know a couple of things about me…" (Video).
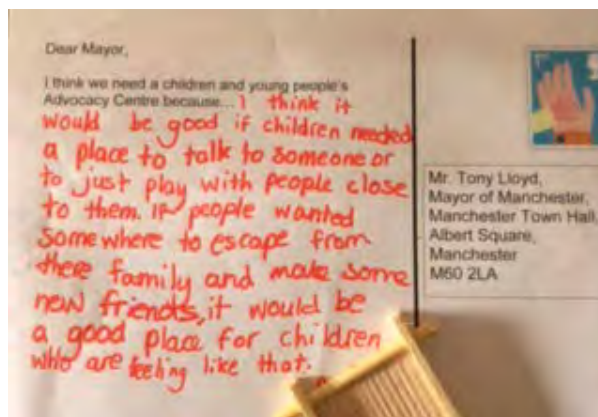
Sometimes the young people wanted other adults to advocate on their behalf;

"If the child's parents are giving the child a hard time, maybe they could talk to them to let them now their child's not happy…" (Group work).

"The people would help the children to work stuff out and help them with their problems…" (Group work).

"If things were really bad, someone and their friend could have a sleep-over there…" (Video).

At other times, parents were wanted but not available;

"I wish my mum would always be with me whenever something was wrong…" (Wishing tree).

There was a strong consensus around the need for someone to help some children and young people communicate concerns to parents or to stand in for parents who were absent. There was also the notion of the Advocacy House being somewhere children and young people could use as a safe house when things at home were too difficult, or when they needed to be calm and quiet. However, the young people also identified the need for a space where physical needs could be met. One young person had expressed a need to go somewhere where they could clean themselves, while another wanted somewhere quiet to sleep.

Mental Health and Anxiety

Some of the unmet needs identified related to mental health issues. One young person had written that they '*felt sad a lot'* and they also wanted to help others that they thought felt this way. Others had written that they tried to think of things that had helped them in the past, such as '*calm breathing*' '*to try to get their mind off worries'.* One young person had written that they worried their anxiety would '*spiral out of control*'.

"Troubled children need people to talk to but in a fun environment; a place to be happy…" (Postcard to Mayor).

Bullying was a repeatedly mentioned. One young person worried that '*kids…might be worried about bullying*.' Linked to this was a need to find help and protection from bullying, whether they were themselves being bullied or knew that friends or others were being bullied. They acknowledged that bullying was '*not fair'* and that it led to '*feeling alone and isolated'* One young person had signed his name against the statement that '*bullying stops'*, and that '*bullying can lead to suicide'.*
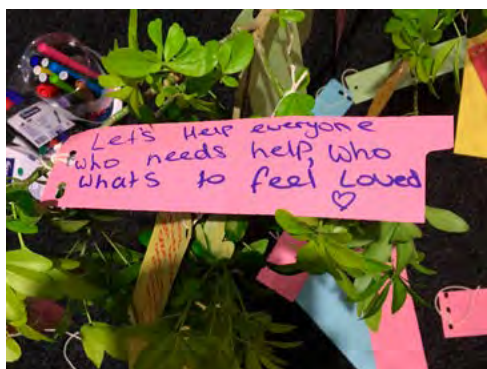
Many of the young people expressed a desire to be happy and for somewhere they could be happy, other young people talked about drugs and their understanding of some associated mental health issues;

"[People taking] Drugs, you know, should get some help or they could die, or feel depressed, you know, and that will make them commit suicide and that's really bad…" (Video).

Worrying about others

The concern that children had for others was evident in every activity. High levels of empathy were expressed showing concern for other members of their families and other members of their communities. Some young people had recorded their desire to help others, especially those in need of help and those that *'needed to feel love'*. In one example a child's name was used *'why can't [boy's name] be treated the same as everybody else?'* In addition they wanted to help remove worry from others' lives. One young person wished for their nanna to get better, another for her sister to be well and pain free while another worried about their mother who could only go out on crutches. A number of young people were aware of and concerned about homelessness. They expressed their concern that those without access to a home, should have somewhere to shower, for instance.
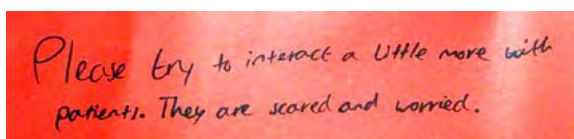

Another wished that *'no-one would be judged because of the way they were'* and wanted the government to do more.
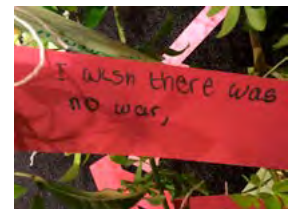
The young people also highlighted their wishes for world peace and their worries about war, conflict and violence. They expressed a desire for equality and for *'everyone to be treated the same…'*

## The good and not so good: experiences of hospital

A few of the young people highlighted the lack of care or attention in hospital. One young person had written how they hated that *'no-one ever asked how I felt or if I needed someone to talk too'*. Another young person that had to go to hospital every 3 months explained that they *'hate the smell'*. One young person highlighted that having games to play with his mother was appreciated, while another wished that hospitals could take *'good'* and *'equal'* care of everyone so that people could be better. In contrast, none of the adults raised any wishes or concerns related to hospital care.
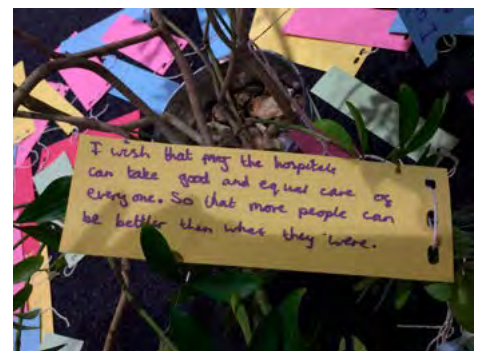
## Findings (3) What might an Advocacy House provide and what might it look like?
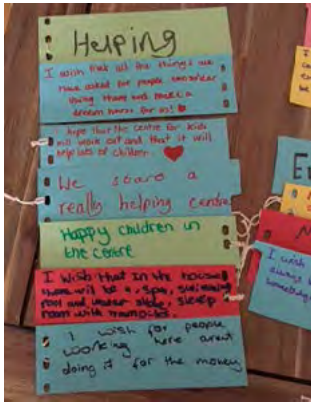
The young people conveyed sophisticated understanding of the need for any such service to be accessible to children where most children spend their time – in school, but also accessible at times of need, such as out-of-school hours and holidays. They wanted one *'near every child'*. They talked of an *'advocacy bus'* that could drive around. They envisioned the advocacy centre being somewhere children could call upon if they were *'being bullied from home or school'* or if *'they had problems were they'd been hurt'*. It would be somewhere for children to go, *'a nice place for children to go and calm down'*. However, the young people understood that *'your parents might not let you go, so, someone from the place could come to your house'*, (group work). Others suggested that the Advocacy House would be accessible if it had a phone line with a simple number that was prominent on any media advertising services there.

The young people envisioned a house that would be fun, full of happy children but they also a space to be quiet when the needed one. One young person dreamed of a house with *'a spa, a swimming pool and water slide and a sleeping room with hammocks'.* (Video).

One young person expressed the view that an advocacy centre could help children to be happy, **"Make then happier, more joyful about life, not worried or scared…"**

The adults tended to focus on the urgent need for such a house to deal with unmet need, *'we can't do this quick enough'*. Other adults doubted that the money for such a centre could be found from public sources but wished that it *'could happen soon and be accessible to all children'*, while others worried that without action, the event, focused on listening to young people, would turn into little more *'than a tick box exercise'.*
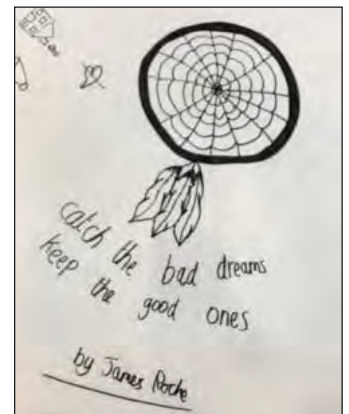
It is about "catching bad dreams, keeping good ones and raising spirits."

Joe

Natalie:
You speak, we listen, everyone cares.

Harry:
"Have confidence in yourself."

Forget the bad things and look forward to the good things.

Josh

Findings (4) The Values of the Advocacy House

Many young people expressed the view that they needed someone to talk to and someone who would listen to them. They wanted friends and friendship but they also wanted adults that were child friendly, kind, caring, considerate, non-judgemental, respectful, and simply nice. They wanted these adults to be responsible and there was a strong indication that confidentiality and the ability to *'keep a secret'* was key in them trusting such adults. They wanted *'someone who cares'* and they wanted *'love'*. One young person had written that they wanted the adults to understand that it would have taken them some time to seek help and that they did not want to be rushed into disclosing their concerns too quickly. Another, that young people need *'somewhere private so you can express yourself'*.

The need for space was a common theme, the young people wanted the space created to help them feel comfortable. For it to be bright, look and feel welcoming and be a place for everyone. Overall, it was understood to be helping house, but there was recognition that such a space and place would need to be zoned such that the need for quiet space was accommodated alongside the need for being with friends, watching films, playing electronic and physical games and having access to Wi-Fi. Some young people *'wanted a place to sleep'*. Another wanted access to *'beds and comfy sofas'*, others wanted *'comforting furniture'* and a *'place to rest'*. A number of young people wanted to feel loved and be comforted by someone; they wanted to belong in this space.

However, one young person was concerned that the adults, employed at the centre might be *'doing it for the money'*. They explained how;

"Sometimes with some adults, all they're bothered about is the money, so if you get volunteers it guarantees why they're there…"

Other young people had suggested that volunteers should be recruited as they had greater trust in the motivations that volunteers brought to their work.

Safety emerged as a key concern. Some young people expressed their view that any such place must *'feel secure'*, another wanted **CCTV** and another *'locked doors'*, and their *'own space'*. One suggestion was that the staff employed at the Advocacy House would complete a full assessment before allowing any parent to collect a child that had sought help from them. Others had identified the need for more food. Noticeably, a plea for food to be available was expressed across activities. This gave a strong indication that this, as with the comments on bullying, could be a plea for help with unmet needs.

However, many young people wanted the space to be full of laughter, be a place where they could enjoy *'banter'* and jokes with their friends. Many were optimistic about being part of this initiative. They were hopeful that it could help them achieve their potential and raise their spirits.
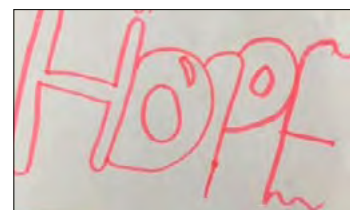
"Can't you find a charity or someone rich to pay for it…?"
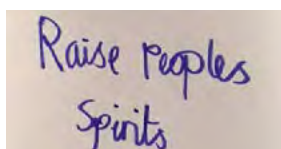
They also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the financial constraints and the possible need to look elsewhere than public finances to fund the Advocacy House. They wanted to know how much it would cost and if was feasible for a charity to fund it.

Findings (5) Adult Perspectives

The adults present at the event made similar comments about children and young people, wishing that children could *'feel safe and [be] able to recognise when they needed help'*. Others hoped that in the future all children would able to find an appropriate person to talk to about their worries and that they could all access the support they needed. Many hoped that young people would achieve the futures they wished for themselves and that no child would ever '*feel alone'*. However, some adults raised concerns and worry related to social media, something the young people had not identified in the same way. Some worried there was *'too much pressure to always be connected and that mistakes made on social media were very public and could haunt children'*.

Another expressed concern that technology '*is overruling everything and being overdone in children's lives'*, another that *'art of conversation was dying'*. Another adult expressed concern regarding *'children's inability to express themselves, talk or know where to get help'*. This corresponded with the wish that all children could identify when they needed help and know where to access help, and that such help would be available and accessible. One teacher noted that *'sometimes children would go home to circumstances that were completely unknown to the adults and organisations working with them'*, while another expressed concern that children could not engage with support services if out of school hours. Another teacher wished that the '*children's wellbeing came before results'*.

The adults present also expressed concern related to children's mental health. The comments listed included '*too many pressures on them'*, and '*increasing pressure and stress'*. They also noted that many children and young people were '*very troubled, lonely and hurting but that there was too often no-one for them to talk to about their concerns'*. One adult wished they *'did not see so many distressed, suicidal and unhappy children and young people coming for care'*. This acknowledgement of increasing distress and growing mental health concerns was raised alongside concerns regarding cuts in budgets leading to the loss of '*the support of vital agencies'*, and that financial cuts were having a '*direct impact on children's mental and physical health'*.

There were concerns highlighted by adults regarding the financial burden and debt from higher education. Others thought that children had insufficient time to be children, certainly less time than they deserved. However, there was a consensus of hope; that children would use their voices to create better futures and '*that these voices would be heard and acted on at strategic level'* and that '*children would grow up knowing their worth'*, '*how wonderful they are and acknowledged in the country as an asset'*. These attitudes and opinions are in-line with the central tenets of co-production.

Conclusion

The young people were able to envision a Advocacy House that would help children and young people in need. As one expressed;

"If people are lonely and distressed this should be a place you can go to, to solve problems. Make them happy and forget…" (Postcard to the Mayor).

Overall the young participants and adults present at the consultation were enthusiastic and convinced of the need for a children's Advocacy House. The young people demonstrated considerable clarity of thought regarding what an Advocacy House might provide, how it might work and how it might be accessed. It is certainly possible that such a service could be designed, with children and young people at the centre, to develop a strong, flexible and highly valued community resource. Such a resource could go some way to meet current unmet needs that, if left unmet, may have enduring consequences for adulthood and the future of
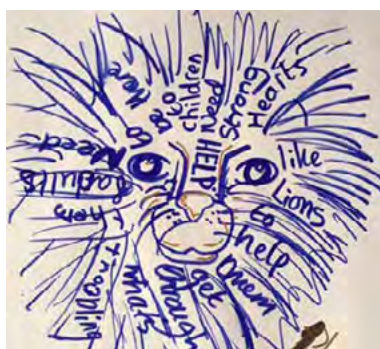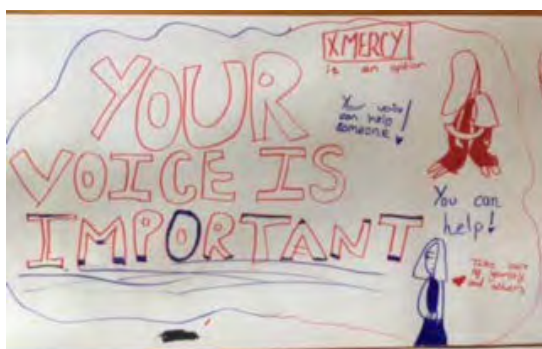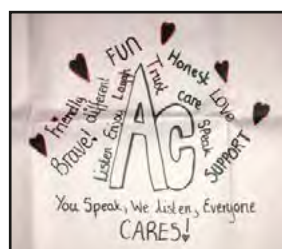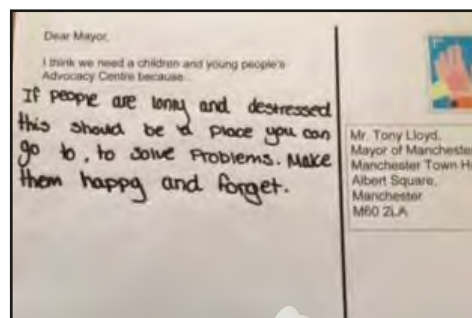
the community.

Many of the young people want to be involved in any such development. They have faith in their ability to make meaningful contributions and come together to help on and other. This was perhaps, conveyed best through the artwork of the young people.

Feeding back to the young people

As promised, staff from CYP@Salford discussed the initial findings and recommendations with the young participants. These meetings lasted for an hour. One took place with the first school at MediaCity:UK, Salford; the second on the other school's premises.

No new insights were gleaned, but the young participants were keen to know what would be in the report and reiterated their desire to be kept informed and involved in any future developments.

These meetings were also used to convey any safeguarding concerns to the school staff. For instance, it was not possible for the research team to know if the young people were describing wants and needs from their current lives (more food, feeling unsafe at home) or talking on behalf of others. All concerns were followed up by email communication. The school staff committed to follow-up the concerns with their safeguarding teams.

Recommendations

1. Given the level of unmet need identified by the young people, the concept of an **Advocacy House should be examined** as a matter of urgency through collaborative efforts between health, education, law enforcement and social care providers as well as community groups, the third sector and (most importantly) the children and young people themselves.

2. The creation of an Advocacy House should be considered as a **national initiative**; piloting in one region should be part of the national plan.

3. Consideration should be given to the Advocacy House initiative **based on a public health approach to safeguarding** with a ChildSafe UK model of empowering and mobilising communities as the central strategy.

4. Sustained efforts must be made in developing the Advocacy House initiative further to **achieve and maintain engagement** with hard-to-reach, marginalised, or service-resistant groups of children and young people.

5. A community-inclusive partnership underpinned by the principles of **co-production and co-design** should be integral to further development of the Advocacy House, with children and young people brought together with other members of their community and those who are educated and skilled to help them.

6. Implementation of the Advocacy House must be **subject to robust academic evaluation** which includes traditional scientific methods but also focuses on the **desired and actual outcomes for children and young people**.

Illustrations from the Children's Advocacy House consultation event: with grateful thanks to Beci Ward.

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ADVOCACY HOUSE NORTH WEST CONSULTATION EVENT

This report can be referenced as