

Investing in Children Membership Award™

Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire



Introduction

For the purpose of this evaluation I met with Daisy, Safa, Laibah, Kirsty, Ben, Emily, Abby, Atharva, Valentina and Keira.

Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is associated with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, providing many opportunities for young people to come together and engage in dialogue with other young people and adults to discuss issues surrounding health and social care. There has been a series of campaigns, activities and projects that are led and developed by a dynamic group of young volunteers, all under the age of twenty-five, who have directed the impressive achievements Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have made in the last year.

They explained that these achievements have taken shape through various meetings, campaigns and projects and are based on ideas put forward by young people throughout the year. There is also a strong commitment by staff to work with young people individually, which some young people spoke to me about during our video conference at the end of April of this year. These young people also expressed a desire to involve more young people in their future plans and told me about some of the improvements they have already made, which included better provision of information and resources which can impact on many issues, such as period poverty and increasing the availability of first aid courses for young people.

This report will identify how Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire involved young people in dialogue and decision making regarding the work they undertake. It will also identify the changes that have taken place as a result of their involvement.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change

Essential First Aid

All of the volunteers told me about how they get to decide what campaigning projects they want to do, what topics to focus on and how they plan and evaluate these campaigns.

I was told: ***“Every project we do is based on our own experiences and what we think as young people needs to change within the health and social care sector”***, she added: ***“For example, we felt there was a lack of understanding and knowledge about first aid, which is why we put on an event to change this”***.



Another young person expressed how the essential first aid course took shape because of her own experiences of observing a stroke in her family.

She also told me about wanting to develop a campaign to get more young people equipped with knowledge about essential first aid skills, she explained: ***“The First Aid project was held through an amazing event, as we managed to get funding from the council to hold the event free of charge for the public, and St Johns Ambulance provided the training”***.

She added: ***“We shared the event using social media and it sold out quickly and I think first aid is so important to the younger generations as they require knowledge to prevent injuries or death”***.



The plans for the Young Healthwatch volunteers are to develop this project further and bring more schools and colleges on board. A report has also been jointly written by young people and staff to expand this project further.

Service Reviews

There is also a commitment to support young people to engage in reviews of health and social care services young people use.

One of the Young Healthwatch volunteers involved in, explaining: ***“I have been part of a review of Luton sexual health clinic, where I had the opportunity to put forward ideas for ways that they could improve”***. As a result of this work the clinic is reshaping its digital approach to connect with young people better and the Healthwatch volunteers will be working with the clinic staff and other young people to achieve this.



ThinkNinja

Another dedicated volunteer told me all about the work she had led on for Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and what this brings to her community, she explained: ***“Recently I wrote a 14-day review on the app ThinkNinja by Healios, a company which develops apps based on helping and improving mental health. My review reached a lot of influential people in my community and some very influential people at Healios”***.

This young person decided to do this as she believed an appropriate wellbeing APP was required for young people to access, which needed to be based on the view of a young person with experience of emotional wellbeing challenges.



The plan now is to introduce the APP to people locally and for this young person to continue to work with Healios, Bedfordshire Children Service’s and the local clinical commissioning groups to monitor its uptake. This happened after she gave a comprehensive review regarding its benefits.

‘It’s not a Phase’ Project

Young Healthwatch volunteers regularly meet with young people throughout Central Bedfordshire, who may not want to volunteer, but have ideas for campaigns or things they may want to try and change.

'It's not a Phase' is one such project, which a group of young people from Ground Work East LGBTQ youth club and Healthwatch volunteers led on.

One of the volunteers involved told me: "***It was all about a campaign to get important messages out to teachers and staff in schools about how the LGBTQ community want to be treated***".

A booklet has been developed with ideas and approaches young people think will help improve schools for LGBTQ young people, which can be viewed below.

15 Steps Program

This project supported several volunteers to engage with Bedford Hospital, where they focused on reviewing the paediatric unit, as many young people had accessed the service previously.

One of the volunteers involved explained: "***We suggested that the lunch boxes they provided were targeted at younger people and asked if it was possible to have a different design for older people***".

Another volunteer expressed: "***We also noticed that there was not an area for teenagers to socialise***". The changes are now being implemented after two of the volunteers presented their findings to the hospital board.



Period Poverty Project

I was informed by one of the young people about the developments of another Young Healthwatch led campaign.

She explained: ***“We want to do more about this as it is an issue and we got more places like schools to do more. So we did a big survey and got my school on board and connected with the Red Box campaign”.***



Other comments made by the young people, which endorsed their positive experiences emailed to me separately, were:-

“Being part of these important projects is very important to me as they make me really feel as if my opinions as a young person are important and that I’m being able to truly make a difference in my community which means an immense amount to me”

“Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire feels like another family where we can express our views and concerns and really feel like we are making a difference”

There were no recommendations put forward by the young people.

Conclusions

Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire does what it’s supposed do, supporting and advocating some young people’s views, helping them to shape the support young people’s health and wellbeing needs. This is achieved by respecting the rights of all young people they work with and allowing young people to be heard, either individually or collectively, so that the project is directed by young people.

The young people spoke very positively about how the Young Healthwatch does this, explaining about what the workers do for young people and how workers give many young people a lot of opportunities to discuss ideas, which are linked with experiences of health and social care services that these and other young people access. This has

led to some changes throughout Central Bedfordshire. Consequently, the next steps for this Young Healthwatch group should be for these young people to review the positive progress they have made and reach out further to even more young people. Further connecting with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and having representatives on clinical commissioning groups would be a natural step for this amazing group, who really want children and young people's views to be heard on important matters.

I would, therefore, like to recommend that Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire gains Investing in Children Membership based on the involvement of young people deciding what campaigns they choose to work on and the changes that take place as a result, and the positive impact this project has on the lives of the young people and communities it supports.



This report has been endorsed by the following young people: Daisy, Safa, Laibah, Kirsty, Ben, Emily, Abby, Atharva, Valentina and Keira.

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Investing in Children
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