

Rights to Access Project

Interim Evaluation Summary Report

For Youth Access

Michael Bell Associates
January 2007



Michael Bell Associates *Research & Consultancy*

London Office: 11-12 Copper Row, Tower Bridge Piazza, London SE1 2LH. 020 7407 4010
Edinburgh Office: Room F2, Forth House, 28 Rutland Square, Edinburgh EH1 2BW. Tel: 0131 221 6535
www.mba4consultancy.co.uk

Youth Access' Rights to Access Project is

Supported by



1 INTRODUCTION

The Rights to Access Project (RAP) is a Youth Access project funded by the Big Lottery Fund, under its strategic grants programme, from February 2005 until January 2008. RAP aims 'to improve and extend young people's access to better quality legal rights-based advice services by building the capacity of practitioners and organisations to tackle the gaps in access to quality, young people-friendly legal advice services'¹.

The RAP programme of work aims to equip and support practitioners and organisations to become more effective and efficient in meeting young people's advice needs. Its main activities include the following:

- Developing an understanding of current models of legal advice delivery to young people.
- Establishing and providing ongoing support to a group of pilot agencies and sites of evidence-based practice (or 'good practice' agencies)
- Developing the evidence base for the effectiveness of legal advice services for young people and its contribution to achieving the 5 Every Child Matters Outcomes
- Developing the first ever national youth advice training programme
- Promoting good practice to the wider sector
- Contributing to policy development.

Much of the evidence supporting the need for the proposed project is provided in a Youth Access publication 'Rights to Access.'² This draws together a comprehensive picture of the available evidence of young people's advice needs. It demonstrates the current gaps and failings of existing policy and structures to recognise young people's need for rights-based advice and to have access to services equipped to meet those needs across the spectrum of generalist and specialist levels of help.

Michael Bell Associates was commissioned to undertake this evaluation by Youth Access. It will examine the changes that the RAP project facilitates in the individual pilot organisations; the key success criteria for the development of sustainable Youth Access Law Centres and the organisational aspects of the project. The evaluators will also work alongside Youth Access to measure the differences made by the Pilot and Good Practice agencies. This includes the development of the Advice Outcomes Toolkit, to enable agencies measure the impact of their interventions, and undertaking a Longitudinal Study, which will work with a small number of young people to assess the impact of advice on their legal problems and their quality of life.

¹ The Rights to Access Project Business Plan. Youth Access.

² *Rights To Access: meeting young people's needs for advice*, Kenrick, J. Youth Access 2002

The interim report is being completed after years one and two of RAP have taken place. A Final Report will be produced later in 2007 towards the end of the RAP project.

2 ACCESS, IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

(I) EMERGING FINDINGS OF LONGITUDINAL STUDY

The RAP evaluation includes a Longitudinal Study making use of qualitative methodology to assess the longer term impact of legal advice on young people's lives. The key question being tested in the study is: 'Does good legal advice produce sustainable benefits for young people?'. The Study commenced in 2006 and continues in 2007 with 25 young people interviewed on two occasions. Five young people's advice agencies³, members of Youth Access, volunteered to help identify and recruit young people willing to participate in these interviews⁴. The face to face interviews were conducted at the referring agencies by a specialist researcher who has extensive experience of working with 11-25 year olds. Part One interviews took place in autumn 2006 with 25 young people⁵ who had recently received in-depth rights-based advice on one or more social welfare issues in a youth advice setting. The following is a summary of the findings from the first interviews.

Most of the young people interviewed presented at the advice agency with more than one problem. This links to the Civil and Social Justice Survey⁶ that found young people, particularly in the 22-24 age group seem more prone to multiple problems than other age groups.

THE ADVICE WORKER

All those interviewed reported that the advice workers were polite and made them feel comfortable. They calmed them down if they got upset and treated them like adults. Many young people had expected to be judged by the agency, and were surprised that they had not been. They felt that the advisers really listened to them and were impressed that the advisers kept in touch with them. It was evident from all the interviews the advice workers had an impact on young people interviewed and had built a solid and trusting relationships.

".....they don't just give you advice and send you on your way; they help you to sort the situation out..."

³ The participating agencies were Mancroft Advice Project (Norwich), Stockton & District Advice & Information Service, Streetwise Community Law Centre (South London), Archway (Leeds) and Streetlegal (North London).

⁴ It should be noted that agencies were asked to identify young people who were not 'off the edge' as it was important that they could be traced for second stage interviews. Thus, although the interviewees had complex problems, they were not the most chaotic service users.

⁵ Twenty seven young people participated in the study. 11 (40%) were between the ages of 16 and 18; 12 (44%) were 18-21 years of age; 3 (11%) aged 22 to 25 and 1 was over 25.

Respondents Ethnicity: 4% Asian; 26% Black Caribbean; 7% Black African; 4% Dual Heritage; 59% White British.

⁶ The Experience of Younger Respondents in the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey (CSJS). N.Balmer, T.Tam & P.Pleasence. Legal Services Research Centre.

“.....they went out of their way to help you and give you peace of mind...they go the extra bit to help young people.”

All the young people interviewed were very positive about the services they had received. A significant number of those interviewed liked the holistic approach that the agencies offered and were pleased that they didn't have to go to different places to get help and support.

GETTING ADVICE

- All the young people interviewed felt that receiving information face to face was the best method of getting advice.
- Only three young people identified the telephone as one of the best methods for providing advice to young people.
- Only one person suggested obtaining information from the internet but many expressed concerns that you may not fully understand what you are reading and a number of young people did not have access to a computer.
- A number of negative comments were made about Government Agencies and local authorities. Young people reported some staff can be very rude to young people, often just pass young people around, promise to contact them and don't and generally treat them like children.
- Many of the respondents said they would prefer to go to a voluntary organisation. They have found the staff to be more approachable and the advice is provided in one building and they are not sent around to different organisations.
- Most respondents (71%) said they would prefer to get legal advice in a youth setting, such as a Youth Information Advice & Counselling Service, a Connexions centre or a youth centre. A minority (19%) expressed a preference for a Citizens Advice Bureau, Law Centre or solicitor's office.
- Respondents overwhelmingly rejected the idea of getting advice from an adviser or lawyer who doesn't specialise in young people. None chose this option. Twelve (50%) favoured a youth worker with good legal knowledge and 10 (42%) an adviser or lawyer specialising in young people.

IMPACT OF THE ADVICE

- 75% reported their housing situation was now better as result of the advice.
- 65% said they now lived in better standard accommodation.
- 72% feel safer where they are now living.
- 90% feel better able to manage their money.
- 80% said their standard of living had improved.
- 96% better understand their rights/responsibilities as a result of the advice received.

- 92% had a better idea of where to seek advice from.
- 92% felt more confident about dealing with the problem themselves because they felt they had been taught how to do this.

It is evident from the interviews that for many young people the advice they have received has changed their attitudes. For example, many now recognise that rent, food and utility bills are the most important things to spend your money on. Others have set up repayment plans to pay off debts.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECM OUTCOMES⁷

Being Healthy

- Many reported that their physical health had improved because they were eating more regularly and healthier food. Others highlighted that they could now afford food.
- Others had managed to reduce the amount of cigarettes they were smoking.
- Two had reduced the amount of drugs they use.
- A small number had managed to kick their drug dependency entirely.
- Two young people said they were attending the Doctors more regularly because they were now able to talk to them.
- Some reported feeling less stressed and depressed.

Economic well being

- Many young people felt better able to organise their finances.
- Some who have been in debt were determined not to let that happen again.
- Many were either thinking about returning to College or had a place from September 06.
- A number were looking for employment and some have signed up for training courses

Making a Positive Contribution

- Many had begun to develop skills which enable them to talk more openly to their partners or their families.
- Some felt they had developed a better relationship with their children/families.
- Three young people reported that they no longer get into trouble.

Enjoying and Achieving

- Many of the young people felt more confident.
- Many identified that their lives were better.
- Nearly all of the young people reported that their confidence and self esteem had improved.

⁷ Outcomes based on five key outcomes from *Every Child Matters*

- A number of young people were now accessing support from Connexions, Mental Health Services, Doctors, Social Services and Voluntary Organisations as a result of holistic support and referrals from the advice service.

Staying Safe

- Many young people's housing circumstances improved
- A majority of young people felt safer in their homes

IMPACT OF NOT RECEIVING ADVICE

The young people interviewed were asked what they thought would have happened to them if they hadn't obtained the advice when they did. They tended to answer this question very frankly. The vast majority thought they probably would have suffered a very serious adverse consequence of one type or another:

- 5 of them felt that they would probably be dead now.
- Many recognised that they would be homeless.
- A number of the respondents also admitted that they would still be self harming and feeling suicidal.
- One respondent felt they would probably have been sectioned.
- Many admitted they would be feeling very depressed and possibly might have suffered breakdowns.

Some felt that their debts were significant enough for them to now be in prison. One young man recognised that he may have turned to crime to survive. One young mother felt that her daughter would probably have been taken into care and another recognises that she would have lost contact with her children who were in the care of Social Services. Another young mother felt her pregnancy would have been really stressful. One respondent felt they would have had to take a year out of University to clear their debts.

(II) EARLY FINDINGS FROM OUTCOMES TOOLKIT

To provide additional evidence for the evaluation and for participating agencies' own use a RAP Advice Outcomes Toolkit was developed in 2006 by Youth Access and Michael Bell Associates. The development process involved a national consultation workshop with agencies, local consultation by agencies with staff and users, and a phase of testing by advisers with users. The toolkit is currently being used by a number of youth advice agencies and will produce data throughout 2007. The toolkit is unique in that it draws together outcome measures developed by the advice sector as well as the outcomes identified within the Government's cross departmental strategy "*Every Child Matters*" (Sept. 2003).

Initial analysis of early data received in December 2006 from Streetwise Community Law Centre is reported below. Thirteen clients between the age of 16 and 25 years completed the Advice Outcomes Toolkit **Young Persons Self Assessment Forms**⁸. The Toolkit data provides strong evidence that dealing with advice and legal problems has a major impact on young people's health and well being and on their ability to work and study. This confirms many of the findings from the Civil and Social Justice Survey⁹ and the RAP Longitudinal Study.

IMPACT OF PROBLEMS

- At the start of the advice process, all the young people surveyed reported some type of significant impact on their lives as a result of the problems they were experiencing.
- The most commonly reported adverse consequence of legal problems was difficulties with enjoying and achieving in life. This was followed by problems with health and well being, barriers to studying or working, managing money, the absence of a safe and comfortable place to live, and difficulties feeling involved and respected in society.

IMPACT OF ADVICE

- Overall, advice significantly improved young people's perceptions of their situation in all of these areas, although not in every area for every young person. The most commonly reported change attributed to advice was feeling less stressed, whilst the biggest improvement in how young people felt between the beginning and end of the advice process was feeling as if they were a part of their community.

OVERALL FINDINGS

- In addition, almost all the young people felt that getting advice had made them feel better able to deal with other problems in the future.
- At the outset of the advice process, 92% of young people reported that they often felt stressed. At the end of the advice process, 54% still reported that they often felt stressed, but 92% said that the support the adviser had given had helped them feel less stressed.
- 69% also reported that the support the adviser had given had made it easier for them to do the things they enjoyed.
- 69% of young people reported that their problems were getting in the way of them studying or working. 62% said that being supported by the adviser had made it easier for them to take part in education or training.
- Only 31% agreed that they felt involved in their community. At the end of the advice process this figure had risen very substantially to 77%.

⁸ This involves a two-stage process, whereby the client completes a stage one self-assessment form at the outset of the advice process and a stage two self-assessment form at the closure of their case or after three months, whichever comes first.

⁹ See 4 above.

- Almost all of the young people surveyed (92%) reported at the end of the advice process that getting support from the adviser had made them feel they could deal with other problems.
- 46% reported that the support the adviser had given had helped them feel physically healthier.

3 MODELS OF ADVICE

WHY SPECIALIST YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

There is substantial evidence that young people do not seek advice from mainstream agencies or solicitors and there are many barriers that prevent young people accessing the services they need. The Youth Access report 'Rights to Access' outlined some of the barriers as follows:

- Low level of awareness of their rights
- Insufficient knowledge of sources of advice
- Low self confidence/ self-esteem
- Lack of trust in adult professionals to treat them with respect
- Concerns about confidentiality
- A preference for seeking advice from organisations that were specifically for young people
- A need for a holistic approach to deal with many problems both emotional as well as legal.

A Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report (2005)¹⁰ on the needs of 16-25 years olds with severe or multiple problems offered clear evidence of the value of a holistic approach to meeting complex needs of young people and the 'under one roof' model as promoted by Youth Information Advice & Counselling and Youth Access Law Centre models.

This is supported by the findings of the Longitudinal Study where 68% of young people indicated that they believed advice services for young people should be provided through youth centres rather than centres for people of all ages and 92% preferred the adviser to be either a youth worker with good legal knowledge or an adviser or lawyer specialising in young people.

YOUTH ACCESS LAW CENTRE MODEL

Youth Access and The Law Centres Federation¹¹ have developed the 'Youth Access Law Centres' (YALCs) model for improving young people's access to justice. The aim is to establish a nationwide network of YALCs. These would be developed by Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation through supporting existing youth advice agencies, Law Centres, local

¹⁰ The Social Exclusion Unit (2005) *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs*. ODPM.

¹¹ The Law Centres Federation is the national network membership organization for Law Centres.

communities and local young people to improve young people's access to legal casework and specialist help. They would combine the most effective elements and skills of youth advice agencies and Law Centres to provide expert young people-centred legal services integrated into accessible youth provision.

YALCs would have the following key features

- They would involve young people in the design, management and delivery of the services.
- They would be established in areas where the need has been clearly identified by, for example local advice and youth service, the Connexions Partnership or local authority.
- They would provide front line service to young people but use their expertise to provide second tier support to other front line agencies working with young people.

Front line services may include

- Information, advice and casework and representation services on wide range of legal issues including housing, benefits, debt, employment, education, discrimination, immigration and human rights.
- Information and advice on other issues affecting young people including health, drugs, alcohol, relationships, employment and training.

Second tier services which may include

- Training, for example to enable youth workers to identify legal problems;
- Casework consultancy to support youth workers to undertake casework on behalf of young people.

RIGHTS TO ACCESS PROJECT PILOT AGENCIES

In November 2005, six¹² agencies were chosen as pilot agencies for RAP. Each had demonstrated a commitment to developing Youth Access Law Centre model services for young people in their region. In response, the RAP project would provide capacity building development support to assist them to develop the model from within their services.

Agencies selected were:

- Off the Record, Bath
- Stockton & District Advice and Information Service
- The Bridge, Loughborough
- City Centre Project, Manchester
- Embrace Young Refugees Project, Sheffield

¹² One agency declined to participate as a Pilot after 12 months.

After selection, each of the agencies was provided with a comprehensive 'Health Check'. Following this the RAP Development Worker assisted each agency to formulate an Action Plan which detailed the capacity building work necessary to develop young people's advice services within their agency. Following this, RAP has provided support to each Pilot Agency to help them implement agreed parts of the Action Plan. This help has ranged from support in developing and implementing quality standards, assistance undertaking local needs assessments to help with funding applications and facilitating local partnership working.

INTERIM EVALUATION

Each of the Pilot Agencies was asked to participate in telephone interviews with the evaluators. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain the changes the RAP Project had facilitated to each of the Pilot Agencies and the identification of key success criteria for the development of sustainable YALCs. Agencies were asked to provide comments on the quality of the intervention from RAP to date, what difference, if any, this had made, what part of the development support worked well and what did not work so well.

SUMMARY OF RAP INTERVENTION

RAP's work with the pilot agencies has been introduced through two stages and none of the agreed development support has been completed at the time of this interim evaluation.

All the agencies reported much slower progress developing their legal and advice services on the YALC model than they had envisaged at the start of the process. Two of the agencies reported they were forced to revise their resources for development work because staffing issues forced them to use their resources to maintain current services. One agency had to move premises. For one agency the initial development work had been used to prepare an application for the Legal Services Commission Specialist Quality Mark only to find that no further Quality Mark audits or contracts were to be awarded. None of the delay in progress was attributable to the RAP Project.

All the agencies reported they need (financial) resources to increase the development capacity of their agency to progress plans to develop a YALC. This funding was not available to any of the projects except Embrace, a new Big Lottery funded project supported by the Children's Society.

The evaluation identified the following **benefits of the RAP intervention**:

- Knowledge and expertise on developing legal and advice services for young people that was not available from any other agency. This has helped agencies articulate their vision for developing such services for their users.

- It provided a framework on how to develop and provide legal and advice services within a youth service and how such services ‘fit’ alongside other advice services such as health and personal relationships.
- The support was tailored and focused on each agency’s local needs and those of its users – there was not a ‘one size fits all’ approach which one might expect from a national agency.
- Support to the pilot agencies enabled them to engage with their own staff and trustees and helped overcome some of the resistance to service development.
- It helped the agencies map and collate evidence of need for specialist services for young people in their region.
- It provided input on how services help meet local, regional and national government strategic targets for children and young people’s services.
- The Advice Outcomes Toolkit has enabled pilot agencies to provide unique outcome evidence for funders and policy makers.
- It helped facilitate the local partnership work, introducing potential partners, attending meetings and providing input.

“Their information on the legal needs of young people and legal services developments was invaluable”.

“This support is enabling our agency to establish a robust new advice service set on a good foundation with confident staff.”

“RAP helped us crystallise and articulate our vision for our advice service. “

SUMMARY OF KEY SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR YALCS

In discussion with the Pilot Agencies and two Good Practice agencies, Streetwise Community Law Centre, Bromley and Streetlegal, Enfield the evaluation identified common features the practitioners in the agencies believe are central to the success of the YALC model.

- Having a clear vision and business plan for a service with a lead person to initiate developments.
- A client centred non-judgemental approach that is flexible with services delivered by expert staff that have both the technical legal skills and the ability to engage young people.
- Services are located where young people’s services are traditionally delivered in buildings they knew, for example through a local youth service.
- Simple access to services, for example drop-in sessions rather than fixed appointments.

- Casework with young people is more time consuming than for adults. Young people are less likely to have the relevant documents, they often do not understand what is happening to them and research has shown case times are on average longer. Additional resources are needed to allow for this.
- The provision of training and support to youth services and mainstream advice services to promote legal rights of young people and enable effective and seamless referrals between agencies.
- Young people should be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.
- Funding from a diverse range of providers is necessary to provide a sustainable young people's advice organisation. A combination of funding from both youth and advice budgets is imperative to enable advice to be provided at both generalist and specialist levels. As youth services and Connexions become subsumed into Children's Trusts, it is imperative that social welfare advice needs are recognised in Children's Trusts' commissioning processes, whilst a Legal Services Commission contract is essential to enable free legal help to be provided.
- Having an effective partnership with local youth services and advice providers including private practice.

SUMMARY OF BARRIERS TO YALC DEVELOPMENT

Despite a strong evidence base for investing in legal advice services for young people, the current policy and funding climate is a significant hindrance to the development of services. There are very few sources of funds currently available and competition for those funds is fierce.

At the current stage of development of Children's Trusts, it is proving very difficult for the concept of funding legal advice to gain a foothold.

Meanwhile, there is significant uncertainty about the proposed development to the Community Legal Service. The Legal Services Commission strategy *'Making Legal Rights a Reality'* and proposals to introduce Fixed Fee Systems, Preferred Suppliers and Community Legal Advice Centres and Community Legal Advice Networks has left advice providers and advice funders such as local authorities struggling to best prepare and plan for legal services. Within these proposals there is little or no mention of specialist legal services for young people.

There is an absence of joint commissioning of youth advice services. There appears to be scope for the local authority, e.g. through Children's Trusts, and the Legal Services Commission, to pool current resources, e.g. via Local Area Agreements, and identify other relevant funding initiatives such as Safer Communities.