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Supported Pathway: User Involvement

For YouTurn Futures

30 June 2022

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1. Background and approach

1.1 User involvement

YouTurn Futures has identified a need to look at its service user involvement at all levels of the organisation. YouTurn's service user group - young people involved in serious violence, knife crime, gangs or organised criminality – presents key challenges for conducting meaningful user involvement. After exploring a number of options, it was agreed that focusing on the Supported Pathway service would be a good place to start.

1.2 The Supported Pathway scheme

The Supported Pathway scheme is designed to: provide a more intensive approach for those young people who do not qualify for the support of the more acute services and, to identify where there are gaps in current service provision. Success is determined through: the identification of young people; assessment of their pathway needs; support on those pathways; and, diversion away from the lifestyle and influences causing vulnerability.

Supported Pathway is designed to be a user-led service. The professionals in this service begin with a conversation about what each young person would like to get out of the pathway, then agree personalised goals adapted to their individual needs. This gives them deep insight into the range of service user needs and keys to success/barriers to achieving change. It makes them a useful starting point for considering how well the service is working to meet service user needs, what user involvement looks like currently, and how it could be developed in the future. In addition, staff felt there were about five current service users who might be happy to engage in a conversation about how well the service was working for them.

1.3 Research objectives

Supported Pathway is reaching the end of its two year funding, and stakeholder consultation at this stage provides a good opportunity for gathering evidence for where the service is working well and to identify areas for improvement.

More specifically, the aims of this consultation were to explore:

- Experience and outcomes of the Supported Pathway service
- Keys to success
- Areas for improvement
- Lessons for developing service user involvement

1.4 Sample and methodology

In depth interviews were conducted with the two case workers over Zoom in May 2022. These interviews were used to build an understanding of the operational side of the service (including service user reach) and to explore opportunities for speaking to service users in depth, as well as to explore case worker views and experience of the service.

The two case workers were delivering the Supported Pathway service for different funders: one for Central Bedfordshire and one for Luton. The reach of these two services at the time of interview was as follows:

- Central Bedfordshire: eight 16-19 year olds (six boys and two girls) on the periphery of gangs and beginning to get involved in criminality and exploitation, mainly referred from Children's Services; six of these were engaging regularly with the case worker.
- Luton: eight 17 year old boys involved in gangs, mainly referred from the Youth Offending team; two of these had been engaging regularly for six months.

Both case workers felt that the number of young people taking up the support made up about 20-25% of those initially referred to them.

Following the interviews, the case workers reached out to the current service users (and, if appropriate, a parent) to see if they would be happy to speak to a researcher about their views and experience of the service. A couple of service users who the case workers had initially thought would be happy to participate were experiencing specific challenges at the time of the research and so the timing of the involvement opportunity did not quite work. In the end, two of the eight service users who were engaging regularly agreed to participate - both in Central Bedfordshire. In both cases, their mothers agreed to participate too.

A follow up interview with the Central Bedfordshire case worker has enabled us to develop two detailed case studies illustrating the keys to success and potential longer term outcomes for the Supported Pathway service. The in depth telephone interviews with service users and the follow up Zoom meeting with the case worker were held in June 2022.

2. Findings and recommendations

2.1 Experience and outcomes of the Supported Pathway service

Both the young people and their mothers said that the Supported Pathway service was 'really, really good'. They felt that it had provided them with opportunities that met their needs and that these opportunities had made significant change to their lives. See case studies below.

2.2 Keys to success

All the participants identified the approach of the case worker as key to success. They both said that they felt listened to and understood, and were being helped to do what they wanted to do. It was clear that they felt that they had an element of control over the timing, frequency and method of contact – and did not feel under pressure to engage if or when they were not feeling up to it.

2.3 Areas for improvement

Neither of the young people had any suggestions for improvement. Both said that they were 'a hundred percent' happy with the way the service was run.

"I don't think they can do anything better because the way they've helped me has been perfect really..."

"Whatever I've told her, she's helped me to achieve."

One said that he would like to continue with the one to one boxing sessions but *"It's about £30 a session and I don't have that sort of money."* The case worker later explained that he did have group boxing sessions open to him; it seems likely that his disability was holding him back from joining in with these, and it may be worth further conversations with Boxing Saves Lives about how he can be supported to continue to access this opportunity.

Both mothers were very happy with the support too.

"What they're doing is all I can ask for at the moment. They're pulling out all the stops that they can."

2.4 Lessons for developing service user involvement

Length of support

It is worth noting that the two young people participating in the interviews were those who had been supported for the longest – at the time of the research, it had been nearly 18 months since the case worker's first contact with them in October 2020. Engagement with their mothers had started a few months in, once an initial trusting relationship had been developed and the young people felt comfortable with the case worker speaking to their parent. The fact that both were willing to engage in the research at all illustrated the trust that had built up over the period of the support. One of the mothers expressed surprise that

her son had agreed to give his feedback, commenting that *'He's got up early to speak to you!'*

The length of the support is indicative of how long it takes to get service users into a position where they feel confident enough to share their stories – both on the issues they have faced in their everyday lives, and the way in which a service has helped them. Taking service user involvement to the next level – ie. where they feel they can make recommendations for improvement – requires some emotional distance too. It is very difficult for current service users to play the role of 'critical friend' and advise on what should change when their primary emotion is still one of gratitude for receiving the support in the first place (and they are feeling keen for it to continue).

Questionnaire development

We understand that a wellbeing survey with a simple 1-5 scale is working reasonably well. One option for gathering feedback from a wider sample of service users would be to design a simple survey about the extent to which they feel involved in the development of their personal pathway of support – and ultimately whether they feel that their views are listened to and their circumstances and needs understood. See draft questionnaire appended.

Developing opportunities for deeper service user involvement

It would be very interesting to revisit both young people in six months or a year's time. One of the participants seemed likely to secure an apprenticeship as a mechanic, and he seemed to be a good example of someone who – with continued support - could be more actively involved with You Turn in the future.

Whilst none of the service users in Luton wanted to engage at this stage, the case worker felt that it was a realistic aim in the longer term. He said that some of his other work involved supporting a couple of young men on probation who had asked: *'How'd you get into that sort of thing?'*

"I do think working with the Support Pathway, especially if you can get one of these lads that is involved in gang culture, or organised crime culture, get them away from that, they've got masses of value and masses of valuable information and advice they can give young people that were in their position... If I can get one of my 17 year old lads, once they have completely shed the whole gang culture and moved away from it, getting them back into either to do a couple of events in schools or even work alongside me some time... Where they can actually say: 'I was exactly where you were'. I think that sort of thing would be ideal and I think it would be a great way to move forward."

3. Case Studies

3.1 Overview

The names used in the case studies below are pseudonyms to protect the young people's identity. Callum has been supported fairly consistently during the 18 month period. Leo has had periods of more and less support – with the case worker focusing on support to his mother when Leo was less keen to engage directly. At the time of the interviews, the case worker was visiting or phoning both Callum and Leo once a week.

3.2 Leo, 17 years old

Emma started working with Leo when he was 16. He had been referred by social services after a number of exclusions from school. His mum explained that he was getting into fights at school and one fight ended up in him being permanently excluded. She didn't think that the school dealt with his situation properly or took into account his extenuating circumstances. (She lives with a disability and has recently been diagnosed as having ADHD. Leo is waiting to be tested because the suspicion is that he has ADHD too.) They made a successful appeal against the first exclusion (on the basis of his mental health) and he returned to school. Unfortunately, he got into fights again and got irrevocably permanently excluded. Social services had wanted him to go to the local PRU but '*We just didn't think it was right for Leo*' and they managed to get him transferred to another mainstream school.

Emma met Leo in October 2020 when he was in his GCSE year and at risk of permanent exclusion from this second school. Whilst not being excluded, he finished school without any qualifications, partly because of continued conflicts at school, the disruption to his education, and the added complications of Covid.

At the time of the interview, Leo was working at a fast food outlet, had completed a traineeship, secured his CSCS card, passed his English and was studying to retake his Maths. He'd also had the opportunity to shadow an electrician – the career path he was keen to follow – and was learning to drive. He was motivated to retake and pass his Maths because he planned to start looking for apprenticeships '*and I don't want to be working at (name of fast food outlet) for much longer to be honest*'. Leo said that he felt like everything was coming together and he was feeling '*a lot – like massively better*'.

"This is probably the best I've felt since I started working with Emma... I just think everything's kind of falling together, everything's kind of working and I'm happy about it."

He was clearly very grateful to Emma for supporting him along a pathway to becoming an electrician – and helping him believe he could achieve this goal.

"Before I worked with Emma I'd just been kicked out of school. I'd just had a massive dispute with all of my friends. So I'd lost speaking to them and when I stopped speaking to them that's when Emma came in and she started helping out with the way that I felt and what I wanted to do as well... At the time I thought there wasn't

much anyone could do but when Emma came along, she changed the way I thought a little bit... Like with the traineeship thing she kept wanting me to do it and kept asking me to do it. And I don't think I would have done it unless she was kind of there helping me on to go and do it."

He said she had helped him along this journey through offering him opportunities, helping him understand how these opportunities could help him get to where he wanted to be, and always being there for him/not giving up.

"Offering opportunities – not only to try new things, but to better myself as well. Like to go to the traineeship and things like that. Like coming round and just speaking to me about things and trying to like help me find solutions and help me feel better. Like she doesn't stop, she's always trying to help us out and I really appreciate it... I always know she's there."

Leo's mum also attributed Leo's success to his work with Emma – and in particular, to Emma's persistence and belief in him. She said that Emma had 'kept on at him' about the importance of doing a traineeship. 'She just wouldn't give up!' . 'His CV now is fantastic.'

(What difference has it made to you and Leo working with her?)

"Leo wouldn't have got his English. He wouldn't have had the support he needs. He wouldn't have anything on his CV. He wouldn't have turned his life around. He wouldn't have someone to talk to when he needed someone to talk to and no-one else wanted to speak to him."

"Emma wouldn't stop going on about it... I said: 'Look Emma, he's not interested, he's earning money'. She said: 'But he can get is CSCS card, he can get his Maths and English, he can put it on his CV'. She just wouldn't give up... She said, look, there's an open day, let's get him there... We got him there, and he done it! And that was all down to her."

His mum was happy that he was continuing to get support on his Maths through the traineeship and from Emma 'who is always on the end of the phone'. She also felt that Emma had really helped her, too.

"I actually spoke to her for advice on doing things. She put me in contact with other places for Leo to get help. She was just amazing. She was always at the end of the phone. She come round if I needed her to get her advice."

Leo's mum attributed Emma's keys to success to being non-judgemental and a good listener, taking into account her and Leo's views about things, and ultimately always believing in him.

"I can say anything to her and she wouldn't judge me... She's just amazing at her job... She's so approachable. She doesn't judge. Because when your child gets... you do think people judge the family, blame the family and whatever but she never

did do that. She speaks to you as an individual and as a person and she just wants to help you.”

“She completely did (believe in him), even when, to be honest, we didn’t because he was being quite bad. So we were thinking: ‘Oh God, we tried our best’ and whatever. But she always did.”

Both Leo and his mum said that Emma’s approach was different to that of other professionals they had encountered – particularly, his teachers at school.

“It’s a lot better than anyone else I’ve dealt with. I think Emma has just shown she really cares. It’s not just about her job it’s just really helping people. And I think she’s really committed to that.”

“Well, the school was horrendous. They wouldn’t actually speak to us at all. They just wanted to see Leo as a problem child and just wanted him just out of the school. But Emma could see something else in Leo and knew he had a bit of potential which has worked out that he has.”

Both Leo and his mum seemed optimistic about the future – and keen to have Emma’s continued support to get through his Maths and to secure his apprenticeship.

(What are you hoping for in a year’s time?)

“I’m hoping that he will have passed his Maths and have started an apprenticeship. And started driving, so we don’t have to be his taxi anymore!... In a year’s time, he’s going to be in an apprenticeship, and he’s going to be training to be an electrician.”

“I don’t know what we’d do without her... We say that she’s Leo’s mentor... So when he was going through a really, really, really difficult time in his life - she was just there for him at the end of the phone.”

3.3 Callum, 19 years old

When Callum first met Emma, he had just turned 18. He is the youngest of four children – although his two older sisters went to live with their grandparents when they were 11 and 13 because his mum had struggled to cope. His dad died when he was just 4 months old and his mum subsequently ended up in a ‘volatile’ marriage with a partner who was a heavy drinker – who then died a few years later. As a result, Callum experienced a great deal of loss – and domestic violence - from a young age. Callum also lives with a disability and has had to have a number of operations.

When Callum met Emma he was having a lot of ‘anger issues’. During the interview, he talked with a great deal of self awareness about the root causes of this anger and its effect on those around him – particularly his mum.

“My dad was hitting my mum and I went through a lot. And the way I would come back from it was obviously violence, that’s all... My mum asked for some help with me because I was getting too out of control... Mum was too scared to do anything around me cos it was like walking on egg shells. If I snapped, I just went out of it, I didn’t care who was in my way.”

This was echoed by his mum – who touched on just how difficult living with Callum had become.

“We used to have constant fights with him every day... We had the police involved quite a lot because we were having knife issues where he was making out that he was carrying knives. And getting quite physical and volatile.”

Callum’s issues had results in a severely disrupted education – being excluded from his mainstream school and subsequently moving educational settings a number of times (including spending a year in a special needs school and some time in a pupil referral unit). He left education with no qualifications and low reading ability.

Callum said that he now felt ‘in a lot better place’. He had found strategies for coping better with his anger, cut down on his drinking, and felt his relationship with his mum had improved. Emma had introduced him to a work coach and he was very pleased to have a couple of interviews lined up to help fix cars. He was very positive about the support he was getting from the work coach – and, in the lead up to the interviews, said she was giving him ‘*little tips like keeping calm because I get really nervous sometimes.*’ He had also been on an anger management course which he found ‘*really really good*’. “*She said I keep following an anger path and it opened up my eyes.*”

Callum’s mum said that Emma’s support had made a significant difference to Callum’s anger and was helping him to be more independent.

“He’s only just realising now that he doesn’t want to be angry all of the time. And that’s taken us a long long long time to get him to this stage... Callum’s anger has calmed down a lot. I would say 50% of it has calmed down a lot. And he’s actually realised it himself...It’s almost like he’s realised, ‘I can’t be Jack the lad, I’ve got to start growing up’.”

“Emma has made a massive, massive contribution. She’s been absolutely fantastic with him. She’s been like an outsider, and if he wants to sound off to somebody, he can tell her whatever he likes and he knows that it’s not going to get repeated back to me unless it was a major concern... She’s trying to teach him how to be independent... how he’s got to get up and do stuff he can’t just lay in bed and expect everybody to do everything for him.”

Callum said that the support he received from Emma was different from the support he’d received from professionals in the past. Above all, she had stuck with him, and her persistence had demonstrated that ‘she actually did care’.

“Teachers at school just didn’t really get me cos in school I wasn’t really that good, But she does. So if I get frustrated, I kick off, and teachers at school just thought that was me being a bad kid. Emma got what I meant by kicking off and that. She understands what I’ve been through because she’s talked to my mum about all this stuff I’ve seen and witnessed growing up. Because it’s not a pretty sight.”

“At first, I just thought it was like – you know, how normal people just talk to you and they leave it at that. They don’t do nothing about it. So the first couple of meetings, I didn’t really open up... But then later when she was putting things in place to try and help me, I opened up more to her... She called me nearly every day¹ asking if I was okay. Just making sure I was okay and staying out of trouble – just little things... that she actually did care. And I just opened up.”

His mum, too, commented that Emma had been able to reach Callum in a way that other professionals had not. It was clear that, over time, Emma had built up a very trusting relationship with both Callum and with his mum.

(Why do you think he’s prepared to listen to her?)

“I think because he’s been with her for quite a while, they’ve got such a good understanding and she supports him and she doesn’t judge him... She’s almost like another guardian but out of the family if you know what I mean. She’s been absolutely amazing... If we didn’t have Emma, we would be lost...”

One of the opportunities that Emma had secured for Callum - boxing lessons through the charity Boxing Saves Lives – appeared to have been particularly successful. Callum had clearly enjoyed the one to one sessions, got on really well with the coach, and felt that these sessions had helped him ‘calm down a lot’. Even when the first coach didn’t work out, Emma had persevered and found him a new coach who he got on with much better. He recognised boxing as a really good opportunity for trying to ‘channel his anger in a different way’. Although the one to one sessions had finished, he was still in touch with the coach by text and felt he could contact him if he was really really angry ‘just to let it all out’. He said that having had a door opened into boxing was ‘the best thing that’s happened’.

“I’m pretty good at fighting so she said if I wanted to put that into something good instead of something that’s fighting other people. And instead of taking my anger out on hitting other people she said why don’t you just go and hit a bag? So I was like – I’ll give it a shot.”

His mum, too, felt that the boxing lessons had been key in helping him manage his anger. *“It’s completely turned him around. We haven’t been in trouble with the police for a good five/six months now.”*

Callum’s mum felt that Emma had also been supporting her. She said that she was learning to let go/trust Callum to be independent a bit more - for example, allowing him to travel to

¹ It is worth noting here that the case worker said that she had spoken to Callum once a week at the most; if someone didn’t answer the phone, she would try another day. In this context, this comment reflects Callum’s feeling that Emma didn’t give up on him if he didn’t answer – rather than the actual level of the engagement.

London by himself to stay with his girlfriend and let his girlfriend come to stay. *“She’s like, actually it’s alright to let him go and do that, let him do that.”* She acknowledged that because Callum had a hard time as a baby, she had, perhaps, had a tendency ‘to molly coddle him’.

“Emma’s also good for me because if I need to talk to somebody that’s not involved in the family - she’s like my soundboard... She’ll give me support or she’ll give me advice on how to approach something. For example, with the college situation, she’ll give me support and advice on what road to go down next. How to support him and how to make him more independent and not rely on mum.”

When Emma first met Callum, she had worked hard to advocate for him and support him to secure some alternative college provision. He had secured a horticultural level 1 and 2 and had made some progress in English - although still short of his GCSE level 4 (and his mum was concerned that his low reading skills could make it difficult for him to live independently). Emma had also encouraged him to take up, and stick with, a placement with a garage offered through college – so he had some work experience on his CV (his ultimate ambition was to become a mechanic). Both he and his mum hoped that in six months/a year’s time, he would have a bit of money of his own and be in a position to live more independently.

“I would hope that we’ve got him in a job, and he’s happy, and hopefully he’s learning to do things more for himself.”

At the time of the interviews, Callum had decided to focus on trying to secure a job rather than to continue his education. He acknowledged that securing a job still felt hard, but that with the help he was getting through Supported Pathway, he felt more optimistic about achieving it. He was keen to continue working with Emma *“Until I am comfortable and can finance my own stuff and that.”* He would also like continued help with his anger.

“I’ve got better control of it but I still lose my temper and lash out. I think if I could get a little bit more grip on that.”

His mum acknowledged that there were no quick, easy wins and that Callum’s progress to date was part of a long journey. However, she was optimistic that, with Emma’s support, he would get there.

“I think we still need her support for quite a bit longer... I need help to make life stable for Callum so I can get him into a job and into independent living... I think we’re half way there, we’re not fully there. It’s still going to take time.”

(Where do you think you would be without her support?)

“Callum would probably be in a police cell or in jail or somebody would be seriously hurt in the family. Or I probably wouldn’t be here. Emma is literally my right arm... She’s a big part of our family bless her. We would be lost without her. And Callum would be lost without her...”

Appendix

Draft user involvement/feedback questionnaire for Supported Pathway

1. Below are some statements about your experience of the Supported Pathway service
Please state how much you agree
(agree strongly, agree slightly, neither agree nor disagree, disagree slightly ,
disagree strongly, not applicable)
 - I feel confident and safe to tell my case worker what I would like to do
 - I feel that my case worker listens to me
 - I feel that my case worker understands my situation
 - I feel that my case worker is helping me do things that I want to do

2. Please complete the following statements
 - The best thing about the Supported Pathway service is.....
 - The one thing that would make the Supported Pathway service better is.....