Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the third Involved by Right project newsletter and hope you are enjoying the Summer wherever you are!

This week is the formal opening of the Olympics and, as I write this, there are project members and colleagues on stand-by to provide a response service for children and families visiting Kensington and Chelsea during the Games.

As ever, we are planning ahead and there are a series of events that will be hosted by the project team in England. First off the ground is the Youth Residential workshop in Surrey which will bring together young people from Italy, England and Sweden. The second event is the trans-national project meeting in London to discuss research findings and best practice material. Third, and finally the dissemination conference which is hosted jointly by the National Children’s Bureau and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It will be arranged to share project results and launch the Involved by Right best practice toolkit and international guidance on advocacy in the child protection process.

Over the next few pages, you will find a range of project news updates and links to information to find out more about the project. The regular feature of the spotlight turns to Italy this time and features an interview with Salvatore Me, who is the Manager for Care and Protection Services in Bassano del Grappa.

Since the last issue we have said goodbye to Mandy Douglas, Director Partnership and Involvement, NCB and we are welcoming Fergus Crow, Programme Director Education and Learning who has taken
over the role of the Project Lead for NCB. I am also pleased to welcome Radmir Selmani who is providing lead agency project administration support.

I hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter and your continued support is much valued to help us achieve the children’s rights aspirations of the Involved by Right project.

Camilla Webster
Involved by Right Lead Project Manager
About the Project

The “Daphne III” programme was established by the European Parliament and the Council for the period 2007-2013 as part of the General Programme ‘Fundamental Rights and Justice’. The Daphne programme aims to contribute to the protection of children, young people and women and to attain high level of health protection, well-being and social cohesion. It supports the prevention of, and the fight against, all forms of violence against children, young people and women.

The Involved by Right project is grant funded by the EU Daphne III programme for the two year period of 1 March 2011 to 2013 to deliver the following priority:

‘Field work at grass-roots level with involvement of children and young people to empower them to protect themselves and their peers against violence.’

The project was initiated because it was not always clear how children’s views were taken into account in child protection planning in Kensington and Chelsea. It was felt that children needed additional support to have a voice in child protection planning as only a low proportion of children attended or were represented in the child protection conference.

In the last nine months, independent advocacy support has been piloted in Family Services in Kensington and Chelsea in close partnership with Barnardo’s:

• To involve children in an active way in child protection processes, so that they have an understanding of, input into, and investment in the process

• As a result of this, we have started to review evidence of improved safety outcomes for young people in the child protection process and find ways to embed achievements beyond the end of the project

The EU partners in Bassano del Grappa, Italy and Helsingborg, Sweden are piloting participation models for children in care with a view to strengthening the child’s voice in matters that are important to them. In Italy, children are brought together with other children in care across the Veneto region to explore their experiences and provide messages for organisational development. In Sweden, there is a similar focus but the work is undertaken with young people in contact with a residential care unit who are supported to take on the role of ‘Young Consultants’ to influence social services quality assurance processes.
Each Youth Advisory Board (YAB) had nominated 3 young people to take part, forming a group of 9 young people aged 12 to 20 years. On the first day, young people and adults worked together to develop the format of the best practice tool kit. On the second day, young people worked with youth workers who then met up with the Steering Committee to discuss next steps. The workshop topics and discussions were:

- To develop young people friendly headings for the best practice toolkit and discuss content for further development.
- A young person's story called ‘Locked Out’, which was read out. Discussion of messages that can be included in stories. Some felt that if more people shared their experiences, young people would feel they are not alone as there are other people with similar experiences. Feeling less isolated might be the prompt to seek help or advice when they need it.
• A young person talked about his work to make a film about how young people view, understand and respect each other; access to media resources are a great way to reach a wider audience.

• About being treated as an equal and adult power and authority; whilst progress has been made young people’s issues are not dealt with as well as they could. For example, young people want to be asked what help they need, rather than just being given what is available. It was concluded that:

  ‣ Adults can provide good role models by talking and engaging with young people, and share their own experiences
  ‣ Powerful speeches (like Obama’s) to adults would be good; “if we have the power to make people cry, then they will listen and start caring and working more actively to improve things”
  ‣ Some young people find it hard to express to others what they have experienced and there are other ways than speeches to make adults listen

The workshop ended by recognising that this was only the beginning of an important discussion between young people in different countries to strengthen and improve participation for children and young people in care. The next steps are to prepare for the youth workshop in England and find ways for young people’s experiences to be covered in the best practice toolkit.
Young people’s account of the Brussels trip

A couple of weeks after our stay in Brussels, this is what the three Italian young people (2 boys and a girl) told their friends about their trip (recorded by their youth worker Sarah Sandri). They are memories of a very ‘normal’ experience of travelling abroad, and enjoying a sense of freedom that often is ‘closed’ to children and young people in care.

‘S’ (one of the two boys) begins by recounting the experience in a very detailed and intimate way, without leaving anything out. He lists schedules and programs, the fear of the flight felt by someone, the simple but delicious lunch at a fast food place near the bus station (what most impressed young people was to be able to re-fill their glass of coca cola without paying anything).

He talks about the arrival at the hotel and the experience of sharing the room with a friend, a new dimension of autonomy that the young people give as a good reason to participate in this project. ‘S’ recalls the free time to tour the city and to buy souvenirs, to spend time with other Italian young people and start forming the group. He talks about the first meeting in the hotel lobby with the English young people (in some ways “embarrassing” because of the language barriers).
On the last day the intense morning passed quickly as they all worked in the group with others, including making preparations for the next meeting in London. The young people were keen to feed back their thoughts on their experiences of the meeting:

- the need to devote more time to discussion about participation
- their willingness to know and compare different systems of care within Europe,
- a request to adults that take care of them to listen more to children and young people (and not only working to help them)
- the capacity to express emotions (linked to personal experiences) and move other people with their personal stories is not the same for everyone. For this reason it should not be considered the main indicator of success of this project. Some young people cry on the inside and find it difficult to express to others what they have experienced.
- the ‘lived experience’ and the opportunity to grasp the international objectives of the project (and not only their local project) is important to help widen young people’s horizons
The ‘scrapbook’ of memories closed with the story of the last sandwich consumed in the airport before returning to a more intimate and personal life. The young people in Italy want to pass on their affectionate greetings to the many people they know, hoping to hear from them soon; and to express their joy and satisfaction to have been chosen by their peers as their representatives from the Italian project.
The Swedish pilot field work project also comprises a ‘culture’ strand to find ways for young people to express their personal experiences. A young person has worked with an author to write a book, and people with filmmaking skills are working with young people in contact with Villan (residential care unit).

The project is influencing priority strategies to improve educational outcomes for children in high risk residential areas in several schools. The progress in this area is attributed to the Involved by Right experiences of active participation of young people – to give them a voice that impact on service development work.

Sweden:

In Sweden, the pilot project is focused on providing opportunities for young people in care to influence and participate in decision making in matters that are important to them. Young people in contact with the residential care unit Villan have been interviewed by the Save the Children psychologist to find out about their experiences of social services. Alongside this, is the important development of a group of ‘Young Consultants’ who bring expertise to service development work through their care experiences. Young people have played a central role in the pilot project by developing interview questions, assisting with the analysis of the results, and proposals for practice developments in social services.

The findings have already started to influence service development work in Helsingborg social services e.g. to strengthen children’s voices in the assessment process in social services.
Italy:
In Italy, the pilot project is delivered in three areas (Local Health & Social Authorities) corresponding to different provinces: Health Authority n. 3, Health Authority n. 8, Health Authority n. 15. The project is targeting children aged 11 to 16 years.

Children in foster care and in residential/day care have been brought together in different groups, supported by two facilitators to share their experiences with each other, to discuss and reflect among their peers about important life experiences, and to explain their opinion about the decisions that the social services have made for them. The outcomes of the discussion of the children will be important to obtain feedback on social services practices in the Veneto region. The progress so far is that:

- 102 children in foster care, day care units and residential care have participated in territorial meetings in the three regions.
- Each territorial group of children and young people have chosen about 8-10 delegates (25-30 delegates in total) who will meet together in an inter-territorial meeting planned for October/November 2012.
- In June, children and young people met adults (operators of social service, educators, practitioners and institutional representatives) to share the initial results of the project and progress so far. Three of these nine young people delegates participated in the Brussels meeting.

- All three territories have completed the third out of four phases (children and young people meet firstly in groups – foster care and residential and day communities- and then together, selecting their delegates).
RBKC and Barnardos:

In Kensington and Chelsea, the project is beginning to make a real difference to strengthening children’s voices in child protection processes, in the last nine months:

• 63 children have been provided with independent advocacy support to have a voice in the child protection conference planning and decision making process
• 50 children have completed a Viewpoint consultation questionnaire to express their views and feelings to improve safety outcomes in child protection planning
• Children’s views and wishes are fed into the child protection plan as a direct result of the advocacy service
• Children have spoken to the advocate about what makes them feel unsafe at home, and as a result, the plan has more fully reflected the safeguarding needs of the child
• Children have raised new safeguarding issues with the advocate who has fed them back to FCS
• Youth Advisory Board members will take part in a summer holiday project work experience to learn about project management and prepare the international youth workshop.

NCB research

The NCB Research Centre is conducting a qualitative study of the piloting of the advocacy model in England. The study will analyse the records of 30 children and include interviews with a small cohort of children, parents, advocate, social worker and chair of the child protection conference to explore their views of the advocacy pilot programme. These children and their families are very vulnerable and are at the point in their lives where they are heavily involved with child protection and family support services in Kensington and Chelsea. The draft research findings will be available by the end of October, and the full report will be published in February 2013 NCB’s brief summary of the literature review on advocacy ‘The voice of the child in the child protection system’, is published online and can be accessed on this link.
The Swedish ‘Villan’ and the project

We wanted to find out more about Villan (in English ‘the Villa’) which plays a central role in the participation pilot field work in Helsingborg, and their experience of Involved by Right. The views and experiences of Villan residents have been gathered in interviews undertaken by the Save the Children’s psychologist, at two different points in time, to identify success factors and development areas. The findings are essential for developing and improving social care services. Our local reporter, Maria Rosendahl (project co-ordinator) interviewed Ann-Sofie Johansson, Residential Care Manager, who kindly took time out to tell us about Villan and the part it plays in the Swedish pilot project.

Q1 Tell us about Villan!

Villan is social services local residential unit for young people aged 13 to 20 years who, for different reasons, can not remain at home. It is often about parenting capacity issues but also because of the young person’s behaviour. Of course, the two are often inter-linked.

Q 2 What is it like living at Villan?

Villan is a large house with nine beds for young people, and they all have their own bed room. The house is located near both green areas and the city centre. We also have eleven ‘training flats’ spread across the city where young people are supported by staff from Villan.

Q 3 How long do young people stay at Villan?

Villan is a temporary solution and a proportion of residents move back home again, some move to independent living and others to a family placement. Whilst we are in contact with the young people we set up goals for young people which often also involves their parents. We want young people active involvement in setting objectives and, with the support of staff, work out what needs to change during their time at Villan to achieve their goals.
Q 4 In which way do you involve young people in the service today?

We try to involve young people in as much as possible through objective setting and implementation plans. We also work a lot with letting young people decide about activities and what food to eat. We try to work both at an individual and group level. We see this as a development area which can be improved upon all the time.

Q 5 What has Involved by Right meant for Villan?

It has meant a lot to us. We are thinking more about young people’s participation, both in small and bigger ways. We have opened up ourselves a lot more to initiatives that come from young people.

We have also received feedback from the interviews carried out by Save the Children, providing new perspectives that we can apply in practice and day-to-day work. It is really important to gather information about young people’s experiences – it is a different way of thinking!

Our participation in the project has meant that we are more engaged in how to develop ways for young people to exercise influence, and how we can make use of young people’s expertise in issues that we need to address - in ways that attract young people’s interest in getting involved.
Calendar

21-23 September International Youth residential in Surrey
29-31 October Trans-national meeting in London
25 February 2013 Dissemination conference in London

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**Spotlight On**

This time the spotlight turns to Italy and Salvatore Me who is the Manager for Care and Protection Services in the Social Health Unit nr 3 of Bassano del Grappa.

**Q.1 As a child what did you want to do when you grew up?**

I remember that I wanted to be an airplane pilot but then I decided to attend technical school. It was going to the University that made me decide to realise my wish to be a social worker.

**Q.2 How did you get into the work you do now?**

When I was 20 and I had to do military service (it was mandatory in Italy at that time) I decided to become a conscientious objector to the use of weapons and instead undertake civil service. I had a wonderful experience of community services in a community for children with criminal problems and it was there I decided to become a social worker. When I finished studying I decided together with some friends to establish a residential community for children. A few years later I moved on to work in public social services.

**Q.3 What has been the highlight of the project so far?**

As the Manager of the Care and Protection Service I am involved 100% in the project. The project activities are helping us to change our relationship with young people who are in need of protection and care. So far we have often used the words “listen” and “participation” but always in rhetoric ways or in the care and protection relationship. The project is helping us to understand that giving power back to children and their families can be a big push for change.

**Q.4 Tell us about the impact of the project in Italy!**

Even if the situations are different across Italian regions, generally the processes to protect and care for young people in different situations are changing in Italy. In working with families and children we are reflecting deeply on the capacity for change and those actions that they are capable of to achieve the change required. All these actions focus on the option of giving power to the families and children and giving them the opportunity (and capability) to express their opinion in respect of the decisions that affect them.

In particular, we realise that during the experience of working with the family, there are very few instances in which we put the child at the centre. The project experience is so valuable because it makes it visible what until recently seemed not possible. It almost breaks a taboo: it is not just the professionals who ‘hold the truth’ and could speak but, at the same time, also young people have interesting and correct things to say.
Q.5 Will you be watching the Olympics? If yes, what will you watch?

I think so. I am particularly interested in following the athletes from my country. I also really like swimming, volleyball and basketball, which are my favourite sports and I think I will look especially these sports.