

# include YOUTH

## **Response to DHSSPS Consultation on Draft Standards for Supported Lodgings for Young Adults (16-21)**

**January 2015**

*“If I was picking someone to live with I would want someone with the same goals and for them to bond with me and not mess me about.”*

*“Matching would be vital and built up over time.”*

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Include Youth welcomes the DHSSPS consultation on the draft standards for Supported Lodgings for Young Adults and the opportunity provided to comment on these standards. As an organisation that works with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including those living in children's homes, we know that for those young people, living in a homely, caring, supportive and nurturing environment can make all the difference to them in terms of self-esteem and confidence, happiness, achievement in school or training, gaining employment and managing a successful transition to adulthood. We also recognise the potential an effective Supported Lodgings scheme could have in contributing to this.

Having a set of agreed and consistently applied and measured standards will help ensure that all supported lodgings will offer young people suitable accommodation and tailored support to enable them to develop the skills needed for a successful transition to independence and adulthood.

We recognise the level of work that has gone into the drafting of these standards to date and in particular pay tribute to the work done by our colleagues in VOYPIC in ensuring that the views and experiences of children and young people living in care have been fed into the drafting process.

### **Include Youth**

Include Youth delivers a range of employability programmes to young people aged 16-21 years of age across the five Health and Social Care Trusts, a number of these in partnership with other organisations. Programmes include the Give & Take scheme, Youth Works, Start and, on behalf of the Belfast and Western Health and Social Care Trusts an employability service for care experienced young people. Approximately half of the young people on the Give & Take scheme at any point in time are in residential care; in 2013/14 80% were care experienced. In addition a significant percentage of these young people will have had experience of the youth justice system. Include Youth delivers a youth participation project, Young Voices, for young people with experience of the youth justice system. This project operates both within the Juvenile Justice Centre and outside of it.

Include Youth is supportive of the concept of supported lodgings and the values and principles outlined within the draft standards. As with any initiative, implementation will be the key and more importantly learning and adapting to experiences to ensure continued progress and an evolving and improving service with young people at the centre.

In formulating a response to this consultation we ran a series of consultations with young people as well as getting feedback from Include Youth staff and practitioners. The young people we spoke to had experience of the criminal justice system, many were care experienced with some living in care homes or foster care and others lived sporadically in their family home. None of the young people we spoke to identified as willing to use the service instead preferring a children home, hostel or more independent living options. They voiced fears about security and feeling uncomfortable in someone else's home and the potential for strict regimes and rules as major deterrents. They did recognise that some young people depending on circumstances would find the service useful and indeed in practice many of those we spoke to may have benefitted, their reluctance and queries are worth considering when preparing information packs for young people about the service.

Many of the standards and associated comments include Youth are supportive of, we will however provide brief feedback below and will highlight some issues of note specifically those raised by the young people themselves.

### **Provision of Information**

Include Youth welcomes Standard 1 and the commitment to provide “a clear statement of core aims, purpose and function of the service” and that this will be reviewed on an annual basis. Learning from implementation and ensuring this is represented within the statement of aims, purpose and function is essential. It is important it is communicated to both young people and hosts what the aim of the service is, what they should expect and what the ethos of the service is. Alongside a clear statement, the proposed information guides for both young people and potential hosts written in suitable and accessible language will go a long way to making sure everyone is in a position to make an informed decision on participating in the service. It is essential young people and hosts have all of the information necessary to decide if this type of placement is right for them.

### **Service Referral Assessment and Placement of Young People**

It is important the referral process is clear and communicated effectively to young people and that all decisions made are open and transparent with means for appeal and explanation. The active participation of young people in this process is vital and will greatly assist the matching of young people to hosts.

The appointment of a lead worker within this model is good idea, we would however recommend young people should have a say in who this lead worker is. The lead worker will be a key role in the support structure around the young person and should be someone the young person is comfortable with and trusts. The young people we spoke to talked at length about the uncertainty they would feel entering someone else’s home and personal space and getting to know them, having a lead worker unfamiliar to them or with whom they find it difficult to work would be another unnecessary uncertainty.

The young people also raised the importance of hosts and young people choosing each other and even more important to them was having the time to get to know the host in advance.

*“I’d never just walk into someone else’s house; you would need to get to know each other well first, make sure you like the same things and have the same goals. It would take me months before I decided to live with someone.”*

*“If I was picking someone to live with I would want someone with the same goals and for them to bond with me and not mess me about.”*

Several of the young people placed great emphasis on the need for shared interests with host families, likening it to experiences they had of mentoring.

*“I had a mentor, he was really nice and tried a lot but we didn’t like the same things and so it didn’t really work.”*

There was a suggestion that where suitable and possible the parents of the young people should have a role in finding a suitable match.

*“Get parents to meet with host families, not the social worker, see if the parents can help find a match as they know you best.”*

Interestingly they advocated the need for more than good intentions and effort and the need for genuine commonality in such a relationship. Having background information including likes and dislikes as well as idea of what life is currently like for each person would go some way to highlighting potential matches. The amount and type of direct interaction during the matching process and time spent with the host family in advance of placement would be of great importance.

### **Placement Agreement and Support Planning**

Include Youth is supportive of individual placement plans and the young people's active involvement in their creation, development and evolution. It is important placement plans outline the roles and responsibilities of the host, young person and lead worker as well as providing clear information on actions which can be taken when things do not go to plan and on what support is in place for such an eventuality. It is important that the skills the young person needs and would like to learn or receive support with are included within the placement agreement. The young people we spoke to said this would vary substantially from person to person dependent on their experiences and levels of independence however could include things like: budgeting, cooking and support with maintaining placements, work or education.

Placement agreements should be realistic and achievable with only necessary and appropriate rules and boundaries. It is important that both hosts and young people accept and have respect for each other's needs and boundaries while maintaining personal freedom and choice. This may at times be a difficult balance; however creating the agreement together will go a long way to navigating through that.

The young people we spoke to were concerned about overly regimented regimes or rules which would set them up to fail. They were also keen to point out that this would be for older young people and so should be age appropriate.

*“I don't want to be told what to do all the time; I have had enough of that!”*

### **Ending or leaving placement**

Any transition is a point of uncertainty and potential stress and so it is important that where possible these are carefully planned for well in advance. In this case it is also important that options for continued support are clear and in place before the end of the placement to assist with a successful transition to independence.

Where a move on is unplanned, we see merit in the recommendation of an independent advocate as suggested by VOYPIC in their own submission to this consultation. Alongside the lead worker, an independent advocate would be invaluable in supporting the young person and in planning next steps particularly in a more crisis situation. At a time of uncertainty and stress such as this,

communication with and participation of the young person is vital and an independent advocate would be of great benefit.

End of placement interviews will be an opportunity to both check plans are in place for a smooth transition and to capture learning from the experiences of the host and young person which can then be used to improve the programme.

The proposal that move ons will be tracked is a welcome one and allows for future improvement and more accurate measurement of success. Having accurate data is the only way to see what is working, what is not and respond accordingly.

### **Safeguarding Young People**

The safeguarding and protection of young people, particularly those who are already vulnerable is rightfully a central consideration. Include Youth therefore welcomes the range of standards presented in relation to ensuring the safety of young people who accept a supported lodging placement. The safety or more accurately the vulnerability of someone placed in an unfamiliar family home was an issue raised repeatedly by the young people we spoke with. They sought assurances that families would be carefully vetted and supported and that an independent advocate would be available who could be contacted in the event of any problems arising. The methodology for reporting any issues should be clearly communicated to young people and reiterated throughout their time in supported lodgings.

### **Engagement, Participation and Involvement**

The young people we engaged with were clear that they should be involved in all decisions made about them and be given the information required to make decisions for themselves. This is in line with their rights as laid out within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. With that in mind, we are extremely supportive of the establishment of a Participation Strategy, the commitment to develop a culture of participation and the proposal that evidence for this will be the voices of young people themselves. It is also important that opinions of young people are used to both evaluate and improve the supported lodgings service.

Cultivating a culture of participation and putting this into practice will require substantial staff training and for some a significant culture change. Having implemented a participation model, Include Youth are happy to provide advice on the development of the Participation Strategy.

While welcoming the creation of a Participation Strategy for Supported Lodgings, Include Youth believe a more comprehensive Participation Strategy should be in place across DHSSPS. We would recommend this initiative around Supported Lodgings be viewed as the first stage in the development of a whole system approach to participation which would allow young people to be engaged and participate in all aspects of health and social care.

### **Accommodation**

As well as being of a suitable and safe standard, location was raised as an important issue by the young people. Accommodation should be near where they live or where their training or employment placements are. They also raised the issue of geography based bail conditions as well as potentially fraught relationships with

family and friends and that these issues should be considered when searching for suitable placements.

### **Hosts**

The major concerns raised by young people were on the need for placement with a suitable host. They repeatedly referenced feeling uncomfortable in someone else's home and the necessity to build relationships and time being made for this in advance of permanent placement. The relationship and potential for upset for any young people already living with the host family was highlighted as a potential point of friction. Specific work and support for young people who are children of host families or living there already may be necessary.

Having shared interests and ideals was raised as necessary for a successful matching with a host. The young people also raised concerns about the amount of information hosts would receive about them, their history and background. It was recognised that hosts would require some information about them and would need to be knowledgeable about the issues facing vulnerable children and young people in general but that only useful and necessary information should be shared with the rest up to the young people to share with hosts themselves at their discretion.

### **Staffing**

Include Youth welcomes the focus on staff and the recognition of the importance of employing suitably qualified and skilled staff. The induction, training and ongoing assessment of these staff is of central importance.

### **Management and Governance Arrangements**

Include youth recognises the focus on good governance, accountability and review as the cornerstones of ensuring a successful and improving service. We are happy to provide further comment and discussion as the service develops and more of our young people have direct experience of it.

### **Conclusion**

Include Youth has welcomed this opportunity to contribute to the development of the Standards. We hope that you find our comments and analysis useful. We look forward to being kept informed as to progress with the development of these important standards.