

# The Route to Health Improvement

## Notable Practice Case Study

This practice relates to one (or more) of the below key features :				
Corporate Culture	Policy Development ✓	Collaboration	Capacity Building	Governance

### Background & Context:

Children and Young people in our public care systems are amongst the most socially excluded groups in the UK. Looked After Children do markedly less well than their peers along a range of indicators that include, emotional and developmental delay, poor educational outcomes, sexual health difficulties, criminal activity, substance misuse and inequity of access to health services.

Addressing the health inequalities experienced by Looked After Children is a priority for the Department of Health and health professionals in the field. Health agencies, Education and social services are encouraged by a variety of guidance documents to more effectively promote the health and well being of children and young people looked after.

Promoting health for Looked After Children and Young People facilitates opportunities for creative and innovative practice. Looked After Children deserve the same opportunities and life chances as other children – we must ensure they reach their potential for healthy and satisfying lives.

### Description & Characteristics:

Following consultation with colleagues from Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Health Board, regarding health promotion issues **Promoting Health for Looked After Children** arranged a health and activity residential weekend with a targeted audience of looked after children aged between eleven and twelve years from Rhondda Cynon Taf. It was proposed that professionals with differing expertise could provide specific health promotion workshops over the weekend period as well as utilising the Centre's outdoor pursuit experiences. It was anticipated that the messages about health could be offered to a larger audience of young people of an age early enough to influence their future choices. Young people of this age group looked after by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council were not disadvantaged by being placed geographically outside RCT and were also invited to attend.

The aim of the weekend was to develop their knowledge of relevant health promotion issues, give them an opportunity to participate in challenging activities and help us understand how we can improve health service delivery to young people in similar circumstances. In addition the children had an opportunity to interact with their peers who share a cultural identity as well as an experience of being 'looked after'.

#### Clarification of Aims

The overall aims of the Health & Activity weekend were to:

- Explore and address the specific health promotion needs of Looked After Children in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Identify the need and type of services to meet the health promotion needs of Looked After Children in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

#### Health Promotion Issues:

Based on analysis of the statutory health assessment of looked after children in Rhondda Cynon Taf the following health promotion activities were proposed:

- Sexual Health & Relationships
- Growing Up & Puberty
- Emotional & Mental Well-being
- Nutrition & Healthy Eating
- Managing Bullying
- Substance Misuse

### **Methods**

The following approaches were used to achieve the aims:

- Workshops Sessions
- Informal discussion
- Indoor/Outdoor Activities
- Suggestion Box
- Supplementary Information (Children's Resource Packs)

### **Evaluation**

- Feedback Questionnaires.
- Suggestion Box.
- Foster Carer's Conference.
- Future Follow Up session with participants`

## **Why was/is this initiative/approach successful?**

Since its formation in 2002, *Promoting Health for Looked After Children* in Rhondda Cynon Taf has endeavoured to create and develop ways of improving its service provision for looked after children. An important function of the service are health promotion activities that utilise information gathered from the statutory health assessment process and messages from research to inform and guide work with young people. Giving children and young people opportunities to explore directly relevant health issues in this meaningful way will help focus their capacity to make informed choices about their own health.

## **Measures of Success:**

The weekend was an extremely constructive event, positively evaluated by the children and subsequent feedback from the children via their social workers and foster carers has been that it was enjoyed enormously. Some carers have remarked how the self-esteem and confidence of the child in their care has improved.

On the whole, the workshop facilitators were of the opinion that the majority of the young people had a good level of knowledge regarding the health promotion issues identified and were prepared to discuss these openly with one another. What was clear however was that the young people lacked the ability to transfer and apply the knowledge to everyday situations in which they would be required to make a choice. The majority of the young people did not yet possess the life skills or reflective capacity to operationalise their knowledge. For example, the children were aware of what constitutes a healthy diet and the impact of diet upon their health both in the short and long term. Despite this, their preferred food choices were at odds with their stated knowledge.

The inference made from this disparity was that future health promotion work might benefit from activities, which allow the children to experience situations where a choice has to be made, feelings explored or an action carried out within a safe environment. Creative activities such as role play, dressing up, using the mediums of

art, dance, poetry or music may be beneficial in helping the children to develop confidence and 'test out' the skills required to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

In addition, a method of following up the children to monitor and evaluate whether their choices have been positively influenced by the health promotion activities in the longer term.

Children's comments:

*"I really enjoyed this weekend because it's been good fun and also we had a good laugh. It would have been better if the weather was warmer"*

*"It was great"*

*"It was wicked"*

*"Brilliant"*

*"I learned so much about how to be healthy. I really enjoyed the teachers and the activities"*

*"It was really fun"*

*"I enjoyed nearly everything in Red Ridge Centre"*

*"I would like to come again"*

*"It was brill!!!!!"*

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