SEND Reforms and Local Offer Consultation

Young people and staff from The Chatterbox Project delivered interactive workshops in schools, colleges and youth settings to gather feedback from young people with disabilities on the SEND Reforms and Bournemouth’s Local Offer.

84 young people with disabilities were involved
Male: 55
Female: 25
Transgender: 4

Time frame: February - April 2016

Workshops were delivered in:
- Linwood School & Youth Club, The Chatterbox Project
- Bishop of Winchester
- Tregonwell Academy
- Poole College

A further 20 schools/youth settings were contacted but were unable to take part due to timetable restrictions / commitments.

Age range of participants:
- 12-13: 5
- 14-15: 11%
- 16-17: 28%
- 18-19: 25%
- 20-21: 19%
- 22-23: 4%
- 24-25: 8%  

Disabilities of young people involved:
- 32% had Autism
- 7% were unsure of their disability
- 13% had a learning disability
- 6% had Asperger Syndrome
- 5% had a hearing impairment
- 4% were wheelchair users
- 4% had ADHD

Other Disabilities included: Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Tourettes, Bipolar, Visual Impairments, Spina Bifida, Schizoaffective Disorders, Multiple Personality Disorders and Dyspraxia.

Participants were asked which area of Bournemouth they live in.

2 people chose not to share these details.
Understanding of SEND Reforms and The Local Offer

Young people were asked a series of questions about their understanding of SEND Reforms and The Local Offer. This was done using interactive workshops and an online survey.

Have you heard of SEND Reforms?

- Yes: 5%
- No: 90%
- Maybe: 5%

They were then asked what they thought SEND Reforms meant:

65 young people did not know what it meant

Comments included:
- Changes in the postal service
- Social Education Never Dies
- They are reform sent post
- Stuff to do with education and money
- REFORMS FOR A THING

Have you heard of The Local Offer?

- Yes: 14%
- No: 81%
- Maybe: 5%

They were then asked what they thought The Local Offer meant:

72 young people did not know what it meant

Comments included:
- Give free food
- Good offers for local people
- Means you get offers but they are local
- They are going to offer us a small loan
- Information about courses and jobs

Young people were asked if they felt the council will listen to their views to help improve The Local Offer.

- Yes: 23%
- Maybe: 36%
- No: 41%

Comments included:
- I would talk to my youth worker to help me get my message to them.
- I wouldn’t because they are not interested in young people’s views.
- Through my teacher at school.
- I wouldn’t cause nothing would change.
Bournemouth’s Local Offer Website

We asked young people to navigate Bournemouth’s Local Offer Website. They were asked to find personal budgets, Educational, Health and Care Plans and other information located on the site.

77% could find Bournemouth’s Local Offer Website
81% could find information about Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP’s)
56% could find the information about personal budgets
8% could find information about a specific activity club

44% of young people said they would not use the website again

Young people were shown a selection of web pages from Bournemouth’s Local Offer website and asked to comment on them.

“I would have to spend an eternity reading it”

“It is too generic and bland”

“It was good and has all the information I need to know”

“I will die of boredom”

“Not search friendly and very wordy”

“I liked the website and all the information. It could do with more pictures”

“Too many words”

“My eyes are burning”

“Kill me now!”

“If I saw it, I would close it straight down”

When asked what they would change about the website, feedback included:

- More colour
- More relevant pictures
- Bigger font
- Less writing
- A way that’s easy to find information
- Not too much colour or pictures
- Lots of events and sections
- Split into sections
- It would be easier with pictures

Young people were also shown a variety of website pages by national organisations. The majority of participants asked preferred the Vinspired website because the colours were themed, the background was plain and the use of pictures related to the links.
Conclusion
Throughout this consultation it was identified when delivering workshops that there was a culture of the young people trying to "please" staff by stating that they could locate topics on the website when in fact, by talking with them in more detail, it transpired that they really struggled to navigate the website.

Positive aspects of the website were raised. For example, the white background and the fact that there was a place where information could be accessed relating to support and activities. However, there were a lot of discussions about the website not being youth friendly, easy to read and difficulties with navigation.

The consultation has also highlighted the lack of knowledge and understanding of The SEND Reforms and The Local Offer by both young people and professionals who support them. The SEND Reforms and related legislation stipulate the importance of young people being consulted personally about their Education, Health and Care Plans and having involvement in shaping the Local Offer. The consultation has shown that a large amount of young people involved were unclear how to do this.

Recommendations:

1. A reoccurring theme in the workshops was that the majority of staff in the various settings had no knowledge of the SEND Reforms or the Local Offer. We would recommend that appropriate professionals are provided with training about The SEND Reforms and The Local Offer so that they can sign post/support young people correctly.

2. It was identified that the current Local Offer web pages for Bournemouth are far too complex, difficult to navigate and not youth friendly. Professionals also fed back their difficulties finding information. We would recommend that the current Local Offer webpages are simplified, use more images and an easy read format. Additionally we will be creating a youth friendly webpage on B-Town Youth website to explain the reforms.

3. It was recognised that the majority of young people involved in this consultation felt disengaged with Bournemouth Council with many communicating it was a case of a "us and them" mentality. We would recommend regular consultation and awareness building exercises between the Council and young people through school and youth club visits to build positive relations.

For more information about The Chatterbox Project visit: www.ymcabournemouth.org.uk or find us on: 

Facebook: chatterboxes  Twitter: @Chat_boxes