

The Evaluation of a Summer Youth Scheme for Children with Disabilities

A brief report on the findings from an evaluation of the Special Needs Advisory
and Activities Project (SNAAP)

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Questionnaires were distributed to 7 parents who had children involved in the SNAAP summer youth scheme, along with 7 staff members. Interviews were also carried out with 11 children accessing the SNAAP service. All questionnaires and interviews were developed to provide a detailed evaluation of the SNAAP summer youth scheme. The questionnaires distributed to both parents and staff evaluated the progression of the children and their overall satisfaction with the scheme. The interviews carried out on the children focused on their overall perceptions and satisfaction with SNAAP's summer youth scheme. The overall aim of the study was to evaluate SNAAP's existing summer youth scheme and identify any needs or areas of development for the future.

Introduction

Firstly, we would like to thank SNAAP for allowing us to distribute our questionnaires and interview the children for the evaluation process. We understand that SNAAP is very busy ensuring that each of their schemes runs smoothly and so we appreciate the welcome you gave us! We found everyone at both the head office and the summer youth scheme to be very welcoming and accommodating, and it was a real delight to meet some of the children and staff members. As part of our dissemination process, we are very keen to present our findings to your board of directors and other interested parties. This report is part of that process and includes just some of our findings from the first stage of our research. The aim of this report is to provide a detailed evaluation from those individuals that are in the best position to recognise some of the wonderful work that SNAAP has done and also highlight some important issues that many aid in SNAAP's future summer youth scheme.

Our findings have systemically evaluated SNAAP's summer youth scheme and offer a solid understanding into both the benefits and issues of the scheme. We believe these findings could help in the future progression of not only the summer youth scheme, but also the various services provided by SNAAP. Therefore, by SNAAP taking part in this study you have added to the research in this field and helped further develop a more inclusive service for the children attending SNAAP.

We would like to thank you once again for being so co-operative in allowing us to distribute our questionnaires and interview the some of the children attending SNAAP. Without you, this valuable piece of research could not have been completed. We hope you find this research as interesting and helpful as we have. Please do get in touch at the address below if you have any further questions.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Spruin and Nicola Abbott

PLEASE NOTE:

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Contents

Background and aims of the research	4-5
Research questions	6
Summary of the main findings	9
What's next in the research?	12
Contact details	13

Background and aims of the research

Research into the impact and benefits of service schemes for children with disabilities remains scarce (McNally et al., 1999; Robertson et al., 2009). That being said, the limited research that has been carried out in the area has identified a number of potential benefits for parents and carers, such as; reduced levels of stress (Bose, 1991) and relaxation (McConkey et al., 2004), along with benefits for the disabled child, including; enjoyment of high levels of attention (Gerard, 1990), opportunities for new experiences (Davies et al., 2005; McConkey et al., 2000) and an increase in sociable skills (Tarleton & Macaulay, 2002; McConkey et al., 2004). Despite the positive outcomes from previous research, the vast majority of these studies rely on qualitative and explanatory evidence, thereby hindering an all-inclusive evaluation of services specifically designed for children with disabilities.

- The main aim of the current research was to investigate the impact and outcomes of services for children with disabilities and their families. In particular, we wanted to systematically evaluate SNAAP's summer youth scheme.
- The second aim was to identify whether there is a need for any new services that could be developed in the future.

Overall, the research project aimed to evaluate the entire SNAAP summer youth scheme. This was a 4 week scheme that ran from Monday the 28th of July to Friday the 22nd of August. The scheme catered for young people aged 11 years + (up to approximately 16 years) at Whitstable Youth and Community Centre. The scheme ran for 3 days per week for 4 hours each day. More

specifically, the evaluation measured the impact of the scheme on young people's educational, social, developmental and emotional needs from a number of perspectives. Included in this evaluation was the opportunity to provide specific feedback on the activities provided by SNAAP in the scheme (e.g. favourite and least favourite theme, and why) and also the opportunity to suggest any changes to the scheme in the future. Enabling all those individuals who engage with the summer youth scheme (e.g., children, parents and staff) to engage in the evaluation provides a greater understanding into the impact SNAAP has on the family network.

- Therefore, the final aim was to provide all these individuals with the opportunity to further benefit from the changes that maybe implemented from the evaluation.

The *ultimate* aim for the research is to provide parents and children of SNAAP with further benefits from the changes that maybe implemented from the evaluation.

- For the study children interviews were carried out to evaluate their overall perceptions of SNAAP's summer youth scheme, what they gained from the scheme and if there is anything else they would like SNAAP to offer.

Example questions:

Questions

- 1) What are your favourite things about SNAAP?
- 2) Do you like having a theme each day (e.g. Mexican, Water, Chocolate)?
- 3) What things would you like more of?
- 4) What things would you like less of?
- 5) What have you learned to do/gained since coming to SNAAP?
- 7) Would you like something to go to after the youth scheme?

Summary of the main findings

Skills developed by young people

- All staff and parents noted that the social skills of the children vastly improved over the course of the summer. These social skills included; greater communication, appropriate interaction, building and maintaining new friendships. The improvement in overall social skills was also emphasized directly by some of the children (81%), for example, one young person stated; *...well, instead of sitting at home on my xbox, which I normally do, it's good to get out a bit and see more friends. So, it's better that I am being more social ...' (P1).*

Future skills to develop in young people

- In regards to the skills that the children could develop in the future, the majority of parents (71%) and staff (67%) noted that life skills and practical skills applied to daily life would be something they would encourage the youth scheme to develop in the future.

Young adult scheme

- All parents responded positively to the idea of a young adult program (18+) developing from the youth scheme. More specifically, parents indicated that introducing a program in which young people learnt skills needed for independent living would be beneficial. These thoughts were further echoed by the young people at the scheme, with the majority (90%) indicating that a young adult scheme would be advantageous. For instance, one individual expressed; *'... I think for the older people, for the people like that. I think once they are eighteen or over they should have a... ERM, a 'age and beyond' one...'* (P2). The young people further emphasized the real need for a young adult scheme, as one individual explained, *'...there are some older people here but after about the age of... twenty-one... SNAAP sort of goes off, there is absolutely nothing they can offer'* (P10).

Summary of the main findings

Overall satisfaction/recommendations

- All individuals who took part in the project (parents, staff and children) expressed great satisfaction with the activities and overall service of the summer youth scheme. Some of the young people's favorite aspects of the scheme included; the days out (81%) and the people at the scheme (72%), such as, staff and other young people.
- There were however a few recommendations for the scheme in the future. The majority of parents (57%) and staff (71%) emphasized more day trips, with importance placed on outdoor activities to enrich the children's experience of different environments. These responses were also reflected within the young people's interviews, with 81% of the them stating that their favorite features of the scheme were the day's out, as one individual explained; *'... Err.. the days out they do, the youth clubs... loads of stuff like going to the beach, going, like out to the seaside ...'* (P4).
- With that, the majority of staff (71%) highlighted the need for improved resources, such as the building being used for the scheme, overall staffing and resources for additional activities. Some of the young people further emphasized these concerns raised, with one particular young person indicating:

'...what I would like them to do is just like demolish the whole building and then, like, re-build it up, so it's more improved and more stylish.. it's not all been done properly. It's a really old; it's a really old building. So like the more re-build could be bigger, better and more modern' (P3).

Summary of the main findings

Summer youth scheme daily themes

- The young people (71%) also emphasised that in general they enjoyed the themes of each day because *'... it's better to have something different each time so instead of doing like the same thing, it's more fun. So we get a try and different things'* (P1). However, there was some dissatisfaction with how the themes were implemented. For example, as one young person conveyed:

'Well, the first day I came here this summer it as a space day. So I expected to, usually with a space day they're doing something "spacey" in the hall or something, which is usually quite enjoyable. They took us for a walk on the beach. That's not very "Spacey"...' (P10).

What's next in the research?

This report highlights the main findings from a grant funded Knowledge Exchange project between Canterbury Christ Church Universities School of Psychology and SNAAP. We hope to continue working with SNAAP to help not only evaluate some of their other schemes, but also implement some of the recommendations found within the current research. In particular, we would like to focus on evaluating the schemes which runs throughout the year to explore the more longitudinal benefits of SNAAP. Most importantly, we hope to gain funding in the future to help in trying to implement and evaluate some of the suggestions highlighted by participants, including; additional resources, further activities, and most importantly a scheme for young adults.

The entire focus of SNAAP is situated around the child's needs, both from a personal and family perspective. Whilst SNAAP provides a number of services to meet the educational, social, developmental and emotional needs of children with disabilities. There is a real need for expansion of services, especially in the local area, to young adults with disabilities. Whilst this project highlighted a number of beneficial outcomes of SNAAP's summer youth scheme, the most prevalent was the children and parents reliance on SNAAP. The charity offers children the opportunity to meet their fullest potential in a safe, secure and encouraging environment. In order to ensure that the children continue to meet their fullest potential, further programs need to be develop for those children who need further assistance within their young adulthood. In particular, a scheme that offers relevant life skills to young adults through community based resources. These types of activities are designed to increase independence and expand an individual's life.

This will be an exciting and challenging area to pursue and one that we hope to work with SNAAP to follow in the future. If this is something that you would like to get involved with, please do not hesitate to contact us (contact details on the next page).

Many thanks,

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