



EVALUATING RESOURCE  
TEAM COMMUNITY  
SUPPORT SERVICE: YOUNG  
PEOPLE AND THEIR  
GUARDIANS' VIEWS OF  
INVOLVEMENT

Briefing Paper August 2012

*Up-2-Us Resource Team*

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# Young Person and Guardian Views of the Community Support Services Provided by the Up-2-Us Resource Team

## Introduction

This paper documents the findings from a questionnaire, which was delivered to a sample of Up-2-Us community outreach service users, acquiring information about their experiences and views of the support they receive from the Resource Team. The service is provided to young people and their families and carers (the term guardian is used to represent this group throughout the report) who have been referred by various local authorities in the West of Scotland to receive home based support where young people are experiencing social, personal, emotional and/or familial/carer difficulties.

A snapshot of service users who were engaged with the Resource Team community support service was taken over a two week period in June 2012. From a potential 23 families, 15 guardians and 19 young people completed questionnaires. The paper highlights the primary findings from both samples, noting areas service users and their families believe could potentially be improved.

**The Up-2-Us Resource Team comprises not only of dedicated community support, but also offers a separate respite service, where integrated aftercare within the community can be provided upon referral.**

Please note that for ease of reference direct quotations from young people are contained within boxes with yellow borders and parent/carer quotes within

**November 2008 to December 2011 highlighted that the most common age of young people referred to this service were aged 14 and 15 years, but both older groups and younger groups to just under 12 were also represented across these years.**

boxes with green borders, throughout the paper. Please also note any identifying information has been anonymised to ensure service user and family confidentiality.

## Background

The Up-2-Us Resource Team offers respite accommodation and community support services to young people and their carers within the West of Scotland. Local authority social work departments refer young people to this service, in the referral they outline the basis on which they are requesting intervention and the specific issues that they want worked on. In accordance with Up-2-Us organisational values, the Resource Team operates from a needs based and person centred premise, providing individual and holistically tailored support packages which can be integrated into the components of a young person's wider social work care plan.

## Areas of Evaluation

In regards to this study, the young people and guardians completed separate questionnaires tailored to capture population specific information. However, the content of each questionnaire was similar in order to elicit comparable perceptions of the groups' experiences of community support. The principal areas addressed by both questionnaires were:

- Each groups' participation in the decision to refer to Up-2-Us

- Young people's expectations of Up-2-U's intervention
- Guardian awareness of concerns identified at point of referral or initial assessment
- Whether guardians were directly involved in the support plan provided
- Whether Resource Team workers maintained explanatory communication with guardians
- Both guardians and young people's views about whether or not the service has been of benefit so far
- Guardian beliefs regarding the ways in which Up-2-U's support has improved any relevant situations
- Guardian views concerning any areas of provision which could be enhanced, and young people's wishes for any further assistance

### Participation within Decision to Involve Up-2-U's

In order to access community support from the Resource Team, young people must be referred by their local social work services. Up-2-U's seeks to offer dedicated support within the young person's local community and guardian's environment. This takes heed of research which demonstrates that greater community investment and positive social role modelling in young people's locality can contribute to the development of pro-social behaviour, healthy relationships, and subsequently improve the likelihood of a positive transition from adolescence into adulthood (Bogenschneider, 1998; 1996,).

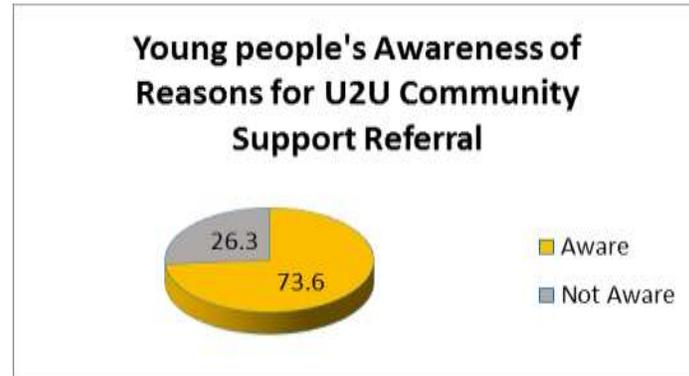
The sample of young people receiving community support were asked whether or not they had been consulted about working with Up-2-U's at

referral. Just under half of young people noted that they had been asked if they wanted to work with Up-2-Us, whilst 10 stated that they had not been told about the initial referral. Guardians were asked a similar question concerning any involvement in the decision making process of referring their child to the Resource Team. Out of 15 participating parents and carers, the majority (60%) stated that they had been involved in making this decision. This highlights that, rather expectedly, guardians' views were more likely to be sought by referrers than children or young people. It is concerning that slightly over 50% of young people and at least 33% of parents or carers reported that they were not involved in any way in making this decision.

Involvement in key decision making, such as making referrals, can play an important role in how well service users engage with said services (Crowther and Gowen 2011). As part of the Up-2-Us ethos, relationship based partnerships are promoted as the method of working with all service users and their guardians, as well as with other involved agencies. It is noted that allowing young people more involvement within the decision making process when they become involved with Up-2-Us could have a beneficial impact on their motivation to interact and subscribe to the service.

Additionally, young people were asked if they were made aware of the reasons for which they were referred. As the chart below highlights, the majority reported they were, but a significant number reported this not to be the case. This is an issue both for referrers and for Up-2-Us workers, who should ensure that young people understand the reasons behind their referral, and how this directly connects to the role of the community support project worker in their case.

Chart 1



## Guardian Recollection of Identifying Concerns

Guardians' were asked if they could identify the principal difficulties identified by the referrer at the point of referral, or by the Up-2-Us worker at the point of Up-2-Us initial assessment.

From a potential 15 guardian participants, 3 did not complete this section of the questionnaire. This part of the questionnaire permitted participants to list up to six areas of concern, most cited considerably less than six. The most common areas in which young people needed local community support, as noted by guardians are demonstrated below. It was most useful to organise these into categories and offer an example of each category's constitution (where possible) to more deeply understand the range of needs and potential risks faced by this group of young people.

### **Refusal to adhere to basic parental/guardian's authority/family rules**

- Going out late
- Poor time keeping/missing curfew
- Verbal Abuse
- Running Away and/or Disappearing
- Concerning attitude

- Non-compliance with set out boundaries
- **Young People's 'Risky' Behaviours**
  - Misuse of alcohol
  - Misuse of other illicit substances
  - Smoking
  - At risk of, or existing involvement within offending behaviour (including 1 instance where a knife offence is noted)
- **School**
  - To assist young people to cease truancy and attend school consistently
- **Relationships and Communication within the Family/Carer setting**
  - Parental need to ensure boundaries are present and maintained
  - Conflicting relationships between young people and their parents or carers and other relatives
  - Communication difficulties between young people and parents/carers
  - Dealing with familial split or separation
  - Coping with maternal illness
- **Emotional Difficulties (related to certain challenges above)**
  - Self-harming
  - Low self-esteem /self-worth
  - Lack of confidence
  - Offer parents' a break
  - Difficulties with integrating within local community
  - Anger and aggression

Due to the relatively small sample numbers, some of the answers noted above were only described by one guardian, and so cannot be said to represent the issues faced by a majority of young people. Regardless, it is important to recognise these points in order to demonstrate the range of challenging circumstances faced by young people who are likely to be referred to community support. Due to the design of the questionnaire, it should be noted that parents/carers reported their perceptions using one word answers. Information gleaned from other parts of the questionnaire have been taken into account in order to provide context where required.

In addition, in numerous instances, there may have been tacit assumptions or unintentionally skewed inferences made by parental participants when responding to various questions. This was potentially as a result of their perceiving the problematic behaviour of a young person as ‘pathological’, rather than as a result of wider familial, community and social forces, such as; familial breakdown, lack of assertive parenting, and lack of pro-social modelling.

### Young People’s Expectations of Community Support

From a potential 19 young people, 73% reported that they could recall what they understood to be the primary issues which the Resource Team workers intended to assist them with. Out of this group, there were ranges of expectations as to what kind of concerns workers were thought to be able to offer assistance with, as shown below in order of frequency of reporting:



**“Getting more confident in the area I live in”**

**“To help me get a flat”**

- For young people to develop more positive relationships with their mothers (*note, that apart from one instance where a male was named, only mothers were mentioned. This suggests a potentially high number of female-headed lone parent families. Research has consistently claimed that this group experiences increased levels of social inequalities, such as poverty and problematic housing within deprived and high crime communities*)
- Helping both young people and their families to better manage any challenging behaviour, for instance; aggression and non-compliance with curfews.
- To offer general support to the whole family unit and help to improve relationships within it, whilst also offering young people someone outwith the family to engage with.
- Assisting young people to address or cease their offending behaviour.
- Support in attending school consistently and dealing with underlying reasons for truancy.
- To obtain support whilst accommodated by the local authority with the objective of returning to familial care.

**Young People also stated other specific expectations:**

**“For a break and to talk to people”**

**“Give parents a break”**

### Direct Guardian Involvement with Community Support

Guardians were asked whether they also directly received support from the Resource Team’s community support services, rather than their child independently receiving support. All but one participant answered this

question. Of the 14 respondents, they all reported that they were directly involved in the service offered by the community support workers. This evidences that, alongside individual support to young people, Up-2-Us also provides support in a holistic family focused manner.

### Communicating with Guardians

Guardians were asked whether or not community support workers kept them up to date in respect to progress and, importantly, whether Resource Team workers explained the type of activities or approaches utilised and the basis for using certain practice approaches. Encouragingly, of those who responded all gave an affirmative response. Such positive results regarding ongoing communication with workers suggests that effective, positive working relationships exist between guardians and project workers. The benefit of good working relationships between workers and guardians is also identified within other more comprehensive evaluations of similar kinds of service provision (e.g. Crowther and Gowen 2011).

#### Parent/Carer's statements of benefits:

**“[Worker] understands ‘Tony’ more than anyone...he is the one adult ‘Tony’ trusts”**

**“[Worker] helped make ‘Rob’ accountable for his actions”**

### Benefits of Community Support: Guardian and Young People's Views of how Useful the Service has Been

13 of a possible 15 guardians, chose to answer this question and all provided a positive response, stating that community support had to date been of benefit to the young person and/or the wider family. Of the two who did not answer, they went on to offer favourable statements regarding the service and it's project workers within the second part of

the question, which asked in what ways they believed the service may have helped their family.

Young people were asked closed questions on this topic, one being whether or not they enjoyed working with Up-2-Us. 83.3% gave a positive response, leaving 3 negative responses and 1 person who did not respond at all. In addition, this sample group were also asked questions which queried whether their lives had improved or not since the introduction of community support. 73% young people, a significant majority, did state that their lives were “better” with the Up-2-Us support available to them. 5 young people stated their lives had not been enhanced by Up-2-Us intervention. However, in a further question which asked if their lives were any “worse” with Up-2-Us support, all young people reported that this was not the case. Therefore, whilst 26% of young people claimed their lives were no better with this involvement, no young people reported that their situations had deteriorated since support commenced.

### Reasons Given by Guardians as to Why Support has been Beneficial

Parents and carers were encouraged to make comment as to why they believed there had been positive change or developments within their family and/or specifically related to their child. All but one participant chose to provide at least a little information as to the primary change(s) they afford to Up-2-Us.

Common parental/carer responses as to the question of why the service has helped improve young people’s circumstances tended to be outcome

based, and these have been thematically categorised as shown below. Individual quotations from guardians are contained within the

**“My daughter is back home in every way”**

**“I feel it helps me as I can’t cope anymore”**

blue quotation boxes (above and below).

The main themes of the ways in which Up-2-Us community support has assisted families have been identified from parents/carers perspectives as:

- Improved attitude of young people
- Better behaviour amongst young people including adhering to parental and/or other types of authority such as school or the law
- Value of relationships - Resource Team project workers seem to have formed high quality working relationships with both young people and guardians which appear to be significantly valued by both groups.
- Holistic practice – individually focused one to one work with young people, which is also offered to guardians to a varying degree dependent upon need.

**“Every way possible for Paul and myself”**

**“Helped her be safe”**

**“My daughter has changed for the better so much, [her] worker has helped Anna see life clearer with a whole different and more positive attitude”**

**“[Worker] has been here for my son and I 24-7 and has calmed what was a very dysfunctional family”**

- Availability of support to young people and guardians, for instance; when unforeseen difficulties arise

## Guardian and Young People's Views on Any Potential Improvement in Service Provision

The guardian sample were asked directly what changes did they believe may enhance existing packages of community support care. Young people were asked what more could Up-2-Us do to support them further. In both instances questions were open ended seeking a narrative response. All but 2 young people and 9 guardians made some kind of comment. For the most part those guardians who commented tended to offer favourable comments.

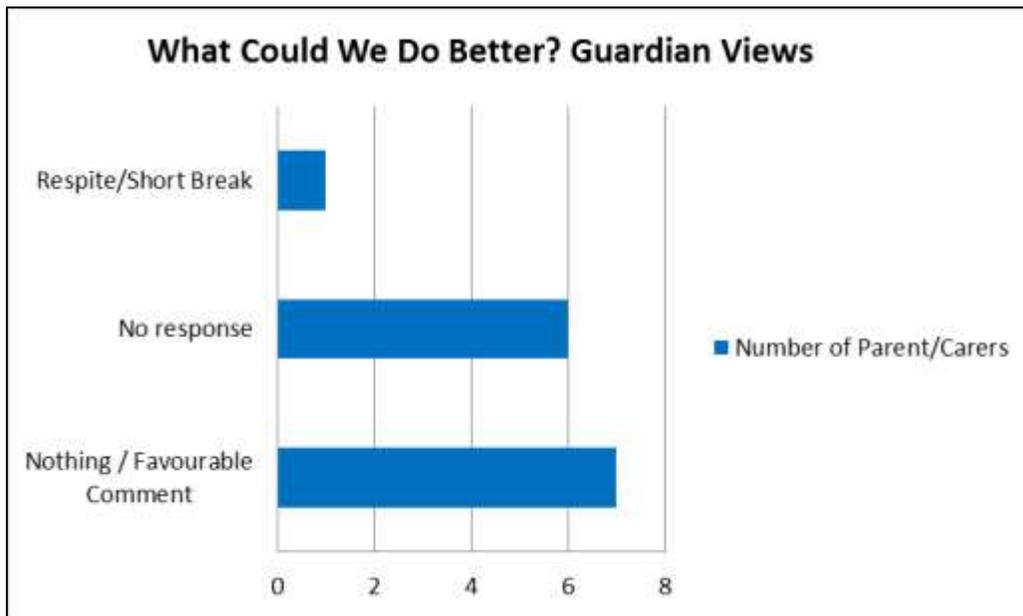
As Chart 2 below demonstrates there was only one participant who offered any comments regarding possible issues to consider in either provision or practice. This will be further discussed in the last section of the paper. There were positive remarks made concerning support provided to young people and their families, as highlighted within the quotation box.

**“Nothing” They do what is needed. Social work never about after 5pm”**

**“I could not have asked for anything better. Thank you”**

**“Nothing, Karen loves working with Up-2-Us and I have noticed a change in her attitude and behaviour towards people!**

Chart 2

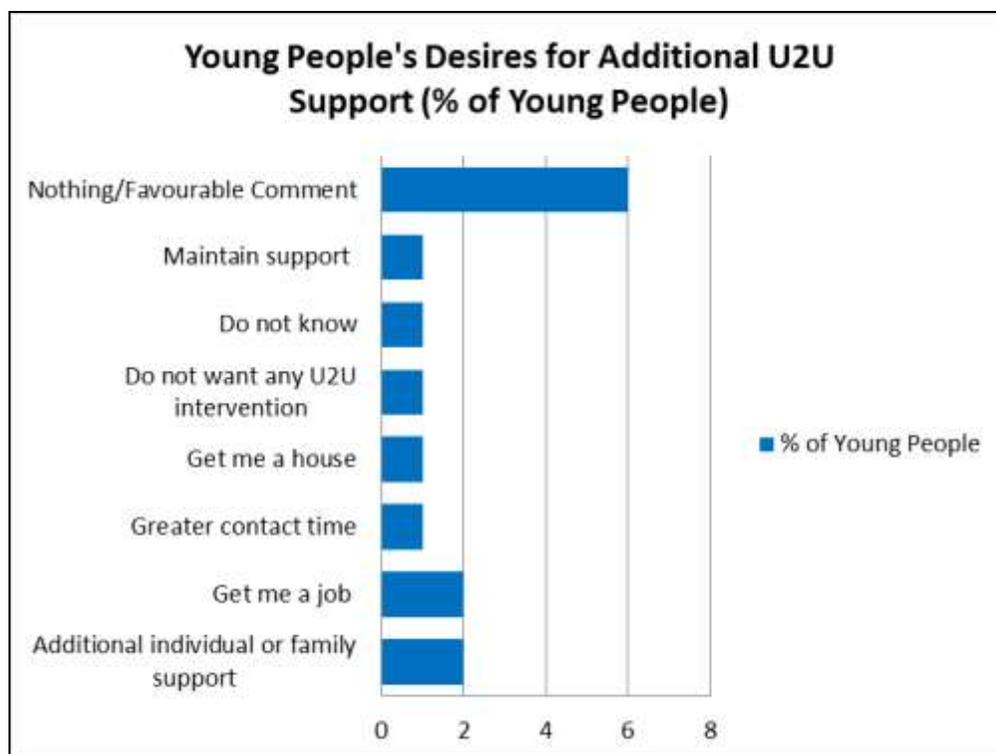


**“I’d like to see more of [Worker]...two contacts a week isn’t enough”**

**“...they’re doing a fabulous job”**

**“Could have taken Connor away for...respite and away from the environment he hangs out with”**

Young People’s responses were more mixed and they appear to be more demanding as a sample group, see **Chart 3** below:



Young people appear to have greater demands than parents or carers. However, it is most important to recognise the small numbers involved, with only two young people requesting additional support of some kind as shown above in Chart 3. The majority of the respondents stated favourable comments and/or that no further kind of help was required. This strongly suggests that, within the constraints of the local authority resources who purchase these locally based

**“Help me and my family become a family again and stop my anger by getting help”**

**“Nothing, they do their very best”**

**“I don’t want to have Up-2-Us”**

**“Get me a job and a house”**

community provisions, individual need is being met effectively.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall both sample groups have conveyed positive views and experiences of community support provided by the Resource Team. Guardians have reported that they are kept informed of progress, as well as a number being directly supported or involved in the work with their child. In addition, all parents feel able to bring up worries or queries with project workers and the organisation, with a fair number of young people also showing that they know who they could discuss any issues with should they be unhappy with support offered. However, a significant number of young people failed to answer this question suggesting additional work may need done to ensure they are fully aware of who they can approach about being unhappy with any aspects of service provision, should they feel unable to discuss this with Up-2-Us workers. It would appear that a few issues could be further explored, either via interviews with service users about their needs, or through use of additional evaluation methods such as focus groups, where young people could be grouped carefully together to create a safe space to share their views, desires, ideals and for the organisation. From data from both sample's and overall analysis of community provision, the following issues could be reviewed;

- Ongoing engagement with a small group of young people who report that the service is not enhancing their lives. Identify the potential reasons for this, and reassess the support being given, bearing in mind that it can take a while for the benefits of relationship based work to be effective
- To explore exit strategies and Up-2-Us' level of decision making within that, ensuring that service users do not need any further support on retracting from the service

- From an evaluation and good practice perspective, gaining additional specific information in respect to the exact nature of the various guises that this community support consists of would be extremely useful. This is in order to enhance the knowledge base of best practice across West of Scotland authorities, with the aim of raising awareness of high quality practice, and to potentially expand this aspect of provision.
- Ensuring that community support workers receive feedback from service users so that they can evaluate and review the support they provide

## References

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