

**Consultation on DHSSPS Standards for Young Adults' Supported
Accommodation Projects**

Response from the NSPCC Northern Ireland

September 2010

The NSPCC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Standards for Young Adults Supported Accommodation Projects.

The NSPCC is the lead voluntary child protection agency in Northern Ireland and is unique among charities in having statutory powers by virtue of its Royal Charter and the Children (NI) Order, 1995. The NSPCC's authorised status is recognised in the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 in relation to public protection arrangements. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, public affairs, campaigning and education. The NSPCC employs approximately 150 staff in Northern Ireland providing a range of services. These include therapeutic work, family support, assessment, support for young people with sexually harmful behaviour, young witness support, counselling services in schools, Independent Visiting Services for young people in the care system, Child Protection in Sport and ChildLine. In addition, the NSPCC operates a 24 hour national Child Protection Helpline.

In our response we have confined our comments to particular standards which are of particular relevance to NSPCC's remit.

Theme 1, Standard 1

This standard could be made more explicit by itemising some of the media which could be used for this purpose such as social networking sites, mail-shots etc

Also it would be useful to refer to the importance of considering issues related to disability, in particular visual disability and learning disability.

Theme 1, Standard 2

We suggest including the need to assess the young person's expectations of the project in addition to explaining the accommodation's rules and expectations of the young person

1.2.4 It is the experience of NSPCC practitioners that there may be safeguarding information young people may not want shared and this is particularly the case once they have reached the age of 18 and no longer children. This standard could usefully be rephrased to refer to varying levels of information sharing as the current wording could possibly give the residential unit a free rein in sharing information without engaging young people in more contentious situations.

Theme 1, Standard 3

1.32 and 1.3.3 It may be worth considering including more explicit reference to Sexually Harmful Behaviour and Domestic Abuse Treatment/ Relapse/Prevention Plans

Theme 1, Standard 6

We suggest Appendix 5 within this standard should make reference to young people's sexuality, sexual development and identity. These are sensitive but very relevant issues for young people and in our experience these are particularly relevant to young people who are looked after.

Theme 1, Standard 7

It would be useful to include here some reference to the risk of sexual exploitation from dangerous adults for young people in residential units. We suggest including also references to potential risks associated with the use of new technology.

Theme 1, Standard 8

1.8.1 We suggest rewording this standard to proactively seeking the views and opinions of young people rather than merely providing them with an opportunity

Theme 3, Standard 1

On Page three of the standards document it is stated that dealing with the issues presented to staff working with young people aged 16 and 17 living outside of regulated care placement arrangements are "challenging and complex... testing out behaviours which are beyond the management and capacity of mainstream residential/foster care." In such circumstances it would seem reasonable to expect that in order for staff to have the appropriate level of skills and experience to work effectively in this environment would require higher minimum qualifications than those stipulated in this standard (NVQ Level 2). We suggest this is changed to higher qualifications

We suggest including a reference to the "Choosing with Care" principles for assessing attitudes and motives. NSPCC has developed the "value based interview" to address this issue but commentators have indicated that this is not a widespread practice (Marion Stewart et al 2004). As a safeguarding measure this can have particular benefits

Theme 4, Standard 1

4.1.3 This makes reference to the need for an information guide for young people which advises them on how to access an advocate if required. This could be strengthened to take a more proactive and robust approach to Complaints and Representation. As currently framed this reads like something the unit must do rather than presenting it as an opportunity to positively address concerns before they become complaints and representations. We would suggest including training for staff and young people on "making Children's Voices Heard" and including training for young people also.

The views of children and young people on mechanisms for making complaints has been well documented. Young people say making complaints should be easy, confidentiality is important, the process should be quick, their concerns should be taken seriously, they should be able to make a complaint to someone they know, the process should lead to an outcome and young people recognised they may need someone independent to help them. Such inclusive approaches need to be more fully integrated into practice, it is not enough to simply hand a young person a leaflet.

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