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Participation work with young people to improve access to health services

Northumberland was selected to be one of 4 PCT areas in the country to act as a Teenage Health Demonstration Site (THDS). This selection was made in part on the evidence of local young people's participation in service development, delivery and evaluation. The medium term aim of the programme, which started in November 2006 was to demonstrate effective methods of improving the quality of health services for young people aged 11-19 years, ensuring reach to the most marginalised within this group.

Funding from the THDS supported the employment of a Youth Participation Worker who has been supporting the participation of young people in evaluating, developing and improving health services and education throughout Northumberland.

College User Group

The THDS Adolescent Nurse Practitioner, who runs a health drop-in in Northumberland FE College, wanted to set up a user group to look at ways to improve the service she delivers and wanted a questionnaire to go out to all students in the college to get their feedback. She identified a group of 15 young women aged 16 - 21 who were doing health and social care at the college who were prepared to form such a group.

She and the Participation Worker worked with the group to:

- Look at the current health services available at the college commenting on good and bad points

- Come up with ideas about what they would expect from a health drop in looking at every aspect of the service including. Location, times, staffing, type of service offered e.g. sexual health, drug, alcohol, counselling etc, ambiance of the room, confidentiality etc.

- Create a questionnaire to go out to students at the college

- The information derived from the questionnaire will be collated and the results presented to the college management

- It is intended that the Health Drop-in can be developed and changed based on the results of the questionnaire, so that the Health Drop-in will suit the needs and wishes of the young people who attend the college better and so increase the usage and effectiveness of the service

Effective Participation

It should be noted that in order to develop the questionnaire, the team met on four separate sessions each 2 hours long. Much of this time was spent developing the group and building up a working relationship. Effective participation work with young people is often slow and painstaking.

The Participation Worker for the THDS has been able to give the time to build up these relationships, that are essential to make participation more than a "ticking the box" consultation exercise. By working alongside health professionals, he has been able to mentor them in their work with young people to improve their participation skills.