

Children and Young People Engagement Report

We Listen, We advise, We speak up



Healthwatch County Durham
January 2015



Contents

About Healthwatch County Durham	3
Summary	4
Where and when we listened	5
How we listened	6
What we asked	7
What we heard.....	7-15
Reflecting on our listening	16-17
Next steps	18
Thank you.....	19



Healthwatch is the independent consumer champion for health and social care. Our job is to promote the consumer interest for everyone who uses health and social care services. We gather the views and experiences of local people through a multitude of methods including surveys, and by listening to the concerns, comments and compliments of people we meet at events, drop-in points, engagement events and workshops, and by monitoring calls to our office.

Healthwatch County Durham is keen to engage with children and young people; this is one of our priority areas for 2015-2017 (see 'Our Plan').¹ We want to hear how children and young people feel about accessing health services.

¹ http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/our_plan.pdf



This report focuses on the views and experiences of children and young people when they access health services across County Durham. During 2014 Healthwatch County Durham staff attended a number of events across the county with the main aim of engaging with children and young people. The young people we engaged with ranged from **4 to 17 years old**. In total we collected 268 comments from 5 events between March and October 2014.

Based on the comments collected we were able to identify a number of commonalities about each health service; however common themes also emerged across all health services:

- Friendliness of staff is pivotal in ensuring a positive experience for children and young people.
- Waiting times to both fix an appointment and on attending an appointment are often too long.
- Clear communication between patient and health professional is crucial in order for children and young people to have a positive experience when visiting a health service. This relates to terminology used by staff and explanations around waiting times.

Healthwatch County Durham intends to ‘speak up’ to service providers, commissioners, stakeholders and patient representatives based on the findings from this report.



Where and when we listened

- 20th March 2014: ‘Inspire Day’ organised by the Area Action 3 Towns Partnership for Year 10’s at Parkside School in Willington (secondary school). 56 comments collected.
- 13th August 2014: ‘Fun Day’ hosted by North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group and facilitated by Durham Community Action specifically for children and young people in Durham. The event was for Year 10 and 11 students but we also gathered comments from younger children. 36 comments collected.
- 14th August 2014: ‘Celebration Event’ organised by Woodhouse Close Community Centre at Auckland Youth and Community Centre in Bishop Auckland for children and young people of all ages. 36 comments collected.
- 28th August 2014: Healthwatch organised an event at the Auckland Youth and Community Children’s Day Centre in Bishop Auckland. We engaged with 10 young people aged from 7 to 13 and made badges with them, however no comments were received.
- October 2014: Community Safety Event throughout October with secondary schools from across County Durham. This event was held at The Work Place in Newton Aycliffe. We collected 140 comments.



How we listened

Over the five events we gathered over 250 comments, some of which could be tagged to a named health service (a specific GP/Hospital etc); other comments, especially those from younger children, were comments about the service area generally.

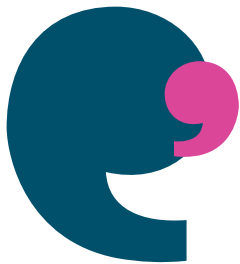
We used various creative methods of engagement attractive to children and young people such as a 'lucky dip' box whereby children and young people select a prize with a label attached of a name of a health service such as 'GP' or 'hospital'. The 'chosen' service is then used as the focus of face-to-face discussion between the participant and the Healthwatch member of staff.





What we asked

We asked the children and young people discussion prompts such as ‘when was the last time you went to the hospital?’ and ‘could you tell me a bit about what it was like?’ We noted down the responses, and asked the young person the name of the service they spoke to us about (although as can be seen from the findings in this report, many of the children and young people did not know the name of the health service they spoke about). We also asked the young people to provide the first part of their home postcode in order that we could identify where in County Durham we collected our responses.



What we heard

The 268 comments collected were then categorised based on the type of health service the children and young people commented on:

- Dentist
- Optician
- Hospital
- Pharmacist
- GP (‘doctor’)

Analysis of the children and young people’s responses revealed the following:

Dentist

The majority of children and young people commented that they are happy to go to their dentist, and that the staff there are usually friendly and welcoming. One nine-year-old commented:

“My dentist has a blue door but I don’t know the name of it. It’s very nice and I’m not scared to go.”

Another nine-year-old commented:

“I kind of like going to the dentist, they give me stickers.”

These comments suggest that young people’s experience of visiting the dentist is shaped by positive, but environmental, rather than clinical or care-related, factors such as a ‘blue door’ that is bright and memorable, or a sticker scheme which rewards young people for having their teeth checked and encourages them to return.

One young person (fourteen years old) highlighted how the dentist explained what they would do in the check-up:

“The dentist is okay, she explains things and I’m happy go on my own.”

When children and young people go to the dentist for the first time, they may be unaware of what to expect before a check-up and an explanation and reassurance by staff might be appropriate.

From the seven negative comments we collected, the word ‘scary’ was used four times. A twelve-year-old said:

“I don’t go to the dentist, it’s scary.”

Generally in our society there is a certain stigma attached to ‘going to the dentist’ and indeed many adults are in fear of having their routine check-up. Maybe any fear children and young people have about visiting the dentist is learned from parents, or maybe the young person has had a negative experience, or heard of someone else’s bad experience. However, on the whole, the feedback collected was very positive. Two comments described how a dentist had made the young person feel better by ‘reassuring’ them and how they ‘talk you through

everything'. A reward system, such as stickers, seems to be an effective way of encouraging young people to return to the dentist.

Based on the feedback Healthwatch County Durham has gathered about dental practices across County Durham, staff should be praised for their good customer service and attitude towards young people in acknowledging the 'fear' that some have about the visit.

Optician

Many of the children and young people we spoke to had never been to an optician or had their eyes tested. One six-year-old commented:

"I don't know what an optician is."

A seven-year-old made a similar comment:

"I've never had my eyes tested and would not know where to go."

Parents who were with these children when we asked about their experience at the optician said they had never thought about taking their child to an independent optician as they assumed eye tests took place at school, although many were not confident that this actually happened. Some parents commented that our discussions had made them think about eye care and they would seek further clarification on whether eye tests were carried out at school. The 'high street' optician 'Vision Express' states on its website that only 60% of primary schools provide eye tests. The Association of Optometrists has brought out a campaign to include eye tests in the 'back to school routine', rather than parents just focusing on material factors when preparing their child for school; they encourage parents to also think about health factors such as an eye test and dental check-up.

Of those participants who had been to an optician, we received a fairly even split of positive and negative statements. An eight-year-old commented:

"I didn't like it; I had to answer lots of questions and it wasn't very fun."

An older child, of twelve, said:

“I go to the opticians but get scared about it.”

Similar to dental check-ups, children and young people get anxious over what to expect from their eye test.

Many older children (those over 11 years old), made positive comments about their optician. One child who wore glasses commented:

“I love going as there are lots of glasses to choose from.”

The NHS recommends that young people should have their eyes checked every two years. Eye tests are free for children under 16 and for those aged 16, 17 and 18 who are in full-time education. They may (subject to certain eligibility criteria) also be entitled to an NHS optical voucher of a certain value (at the least £38.30) to help towards the cost of glasses. In many ‘high street’ opticians there are always various deals such as ‘buy-one-get-one-free’ and as the young person quoted above said, a range of glasses to choose from. These factors make eye tests more appealing, which is important as the earlier and more often people have their eyes tested, the better the chances are of picking up any eye health conditions (not just vision tests).

Hospital

Of those children we asked about hospital services, many could not name their local hospital or even state where it was in relation to their home. This was not age-specific; one five-year-old stated that he did not know the name of his local hospital, as did a fifteen-year-old. Many parents prompted the children by asking if they remembered visiting an elderly relative for example, which then helped the young person to recall the visit. From those children who had visited someone or been a patient themselves, the comments collected were generally positive:

“The children’s ward was very good, the play room was good. The nurses were friendly and I had a good time.”

“The doctors are kind and help you the best they can.”

Most of the comments collected from children and young people mentioned the words 'kind' and 'friendly' to describe the staff. The nature of the service received from staff seems to be a common aspect that young people reflect on after visiting a health service. Therefore ensuring staff maintain a positive attitude for both young people *and* adults is pivotal to maintaining consumer satisfaction and positive attitudes towards health services.

The few negative comments we received included a statement from an eleven-year-old who commented about her stay in hospital:

“It’s strange, there are loads of different rooms and you could catch a bug.”

A nine-year-old said that her local hospital was:

“Scary, smelly and full of sick people.”

Another common response was based around appointment waiting times - both in getting an appointment and also after arriving at the hospital. One young person commented:

“The service was slow! I was meant to receive an injection at 8:30 and I didn’t get it until 11:30.”

If people are waiting a long time for an appointment, it may be helpful to patients to be kept informed if there is likely to be a delay with their allocated appointment time. Prior to appointments it is common for people to feel anxious, and if they are required to wait longer than they anticipate it only increases this anxiety further. If hospital staff were to explain to patients why they are waiting longer than expected for their appointment and do this in a friendly manner, it might help to maintain a positive experience for patients, despite the prolonged wait.

Pharmacist

Many of the children and young people we spoke to did not know where their local pharmacist was or what happened at a pharmacy. These comments were not age-specific - older children in their teens were not aware that a pharmacy dispensed medicines etc. A common thread was:

“I don’t know what a chemist/pharmacy is or where it’s at.”

Another young person commented:

“I don’t know what other services they provide.”

Most pharmacies offer a private and confidential area in which a customer can speak to a pharmacist, and some pharmacies offer a range of health checks. In response to the various demand pressures on the whole of the NHS system, through public information campaigns and through the 111 service people are now encouraged to consider seeing a pharmacist rather than booking an appointment with a GP if this is appropriate. It is therefore important for young people to know about the role of pharmacists and of the services that are offered within their local pharmacy.

Of those who were familiar with pharmacy services, many children and young people stated that they went with their parents and identified that it is where *“tablets are given out”*. Other young people also identified that it was ‘next to’ their GP practice. Negative comments related to how long they had to wait for their prescription. One pharmacy received two negative comments about the waiting time:

“I had quite a long wait. I put in the prescription, went back later and then still had to wait 15 minutes.”

“I waited a long time - half an hour. I had to go and ask for the prescription after leaving and going back later.”

This echoes the comments received around hospital waiting times in that communication from staff is important so that customers understand why they wait a long time for their prescription.

However, there were many young people who commented on the good service they had received from their pharmacist:

“I picked up Mam’s prescription; excellent staff; it’s always a good service.”

As previously mentioned, it is important for people to feel comfortable with staff within the health service as they are confiding in them with a health problem that may be worrying or embarrassing to them. It is therefore important for staff to be helpful, approachable and empathetic towards patients, whatever their age.

GP/doctor

Most of the comments collected from children and young people through this engagement period were about their local GP surgery, and most comments were positive. Although many of the children and young people could not name their GP surgery, they reported a good experience. One twelve-year-old commented:

“I don’t really go to the doctor’s much but last time I went I was really nervous but I came out laughing because the doctor was nice.”

A six-year-old commented:

“I always know that the doctor is going to make me feel better.”

Another young person said:

“I didn’t wait long for an appointment and I see the same GP as he’s awesome.”

Highlighted here is the importance of a positive relationship between doctor and patient. Comments from these children and young people reveal that they feel better about going to their GP surgery if they have had a positive experience. One young person comments that they like to see the same GP as ‘he’s awesome’. This is a really positive attitude to have towards a GP, especially as people confide in them for personal matters and therefore feeling comfortable with your GP is important - both to young people and adults.

Although the name of the practice/surgery was unknown to many of the young people in this survey, they were able to identify the location or what other building it was next to. One young person commented:

“I don’t know what the surgery is called but know where it is, I haven’t been lately.”

Whether it is important for children and young people to know the name of their GP surgery or practice is a matter for debate; if it’s considered not to be important, then when does it become necessary for young people to know about the **services** on offer (as distinct from the name of the premises or the personnel)? The majority of young people Healthwatch spoke to attend their GP surgery with one of their parents, although some older ones stated they would be happy to visit on their own.

There were a number of negative experiences noted in relation to GPs; most comments were based on the following themes:

- Lack of things to do in the waiting area
- No available appointments
- Wouldn’t go on their own
- Only one doctor on duty
- Long waiting time
- Language barrier
- Unappealing
- Slow service
- Embarrassment
- Put on the spot answering questions
- Seeing a different doctor on every visit

One negative comment received was from a twelve-year-old who stated:

“I feel nervous about going to the doctor. I feel they don’t really talk in a language I understand.”

Another young person also commented on the problem with language:

“Has to write things clearer, there can be a language barrier.”

A lack of clear communication and the overuse of medical jargon is a common problem throughout the health service. On leaflets, letters and in consultations, language can be a barrier for people who access the health service. Healthwatch County Durham is looking into creating a ‘Jargon Buster’ (as one of our priority areas in Our Plan)² to overcome the barriers around communication between patients and health professionals.

Another common problem for people who had visited their local GP practice was around long waiting times to fix an appointment:

“It took 3 days to get an appointment...I then waited four months for the results. There was no help over the concerns I had while waiting.”

“Large time to wait for non-emergency appointments.”

As previously highlighted in this report, communication is key between patients and GP staff. If patients are told why they have to wait a long time to get an appointment to see their GP, and why there is a long waiting time when they arrive for their appointment, such as understaffing, then patients would perhaps be more understanding.

It is clear that, on the whole, children and young people were happy to talk about their GP surgery and did not show any hesitation or fear when discussing their experiences.

² http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk/sites/default/files/our_plan.pdf



Reflecting on our Listening

There are a number of points to highlight based on what children and young people told us in this engagement:

- Perhaps surprisingly, the most unexpected comments were those regarding dentists. The majority of children and young people we spoke to were happy to visit their dentist. Most of the children also mentioned, without any prompting from parents, the fact that they go for a routine check-up every six months. This shows that education surrounding oral hygiene has had a positive effect. Interestingly, it was the only health service mentioned where an incentive for the child/young person was also mentioned (a number of children and young people commented that they received ‘stickers’ following their appointment). Another possible incentive (for parents!) is that regular dental check-ups are free of charge for children under the age of 16.
- It was interesting to hear that many children did not know the name of the hospital or even where it was in relation to where they live. In some cases, the child/young person would know where the hospital was but not what it was called. Many children recalled, when prompted, that they had visited a relative in hospital and did not seem daunted or put off by this experience. The few people we spoke to who had received hospital care themselves reported receiving a positive service.
- Similarly, comments regarding accessing a GP were of the same vein. Many respondents could not name their GP, but on the whole did not find the process unsettling when they did attend. Lack of knowledge surrounding hospital and GP names and locations could simply be because children and young people do not often need to access these services alone and so therefore have no need to know their location or how to reference them. Further enquiry could address whether it is important for children and young people to know the name of their GP practice. Healthwatch County Durham is also planning to create a ‘Jargon Buster’ to help break down the communication barrier between patients and health professionals

and the needs of children and young people will be borne in mind when this is created.

- There was a lack of knowledge surrounding pharmacies and the role of a pharmacist. Although the children and young people knew exactly what happened at a hospital and at a doctor's surgery, they did not know what a chemist or pharmacist did or where their closest one was located. Is this because medicines etc are readily available in local shops and supermarkets therefore reducing the need for parents to use the specialist pharmacy? Is it because information about pharmacies is not shared at school?
- The process of Healthwatch gathering comments regarding opticians made parents think more about their child's healthcare. There seemed to be some confusion as to whether it was the responsibility of the school or parent to get their child's eyes tested. Comments from those who had attended an optician were mixed, with some saying they were happy to go and others saying the experience was quite 'scary'.

Common themes which emerged across all health services:

- Children and young people place great importance on the friendliness of staff in health services, and this helps to ensure a positive experience for them.
- Long waiting times - both to fix an appointment and in waiting to be seen at the appointment itself - are frustrating and lead to a negative experience.
- Good, clear communication between patients and health professionals is of paramount importance and can help to create a positive experience.



Next Steps

- Healthwatch County Durham will inform the Local Pharmaceutical Network that our engagement work has highlighted how little children and young people know about the services a pharmacist provides and will ask whether information can be shared through schools.
- Clarity will be sought on the local practices for children and young people having their eyes tested. Does every school bring in professionals to perform this function (and if so, at what age, and how frequently?) or is it the responsibility of the parent to make sure their child's eyes are regularly tested? Healthwatch County Durham will promote the Association of Optometrists' campaign for eye tests to be included in the 'back to school' routine.
- Healthwatch County Durham will inform the Local Dental Network that, on the whole, children seem happy to have their teeth looked at. We will also make a suggestion that the distribution of stickers, or a similar 'incentive' scheme, is rolled out throughout all dental surgeries in County Durham (for the younger children).
- Healthwatch County Durham is planning to create a 'Jargon Buster' to break down the communication barrier between health service consumers and health professionals.
- Healthwatch County Durham will notify service providers about the information collected in this report and in particular highlight the importance of clear communication between patients and health services (for example around appointment waiting times).



Thank you

Thank you to all the children and young people who told us about their experiences of local health services in County Durham. We will ‘speak up’ to service providers and recommend changes based on the comments we have received so far from children and young people.

Healthwatch County Durham will continue to listen to children and young people; collecting their views and experiences on local health services and supporting them to find their voice and realise that they have choices about their health needs.