

### Case study: Southill Youth Forum, Limerick

**Southill Youth Forum** was set up in 2003 to provide 'intensive, co-ordinated, multi-agency support packages to vulnerable young people in the Southill area' of Limerick city, recognised by the HSE at the time as a significantly socially and economically disadvantaged area of the city with a high level of need among children and young people. The *Forum* focuses especially on targeting the needs of young people whose needs are not met through existing services. Development of the Forum began when relevant leads from the HSE and proposed a meeting of child and youth services. From the meeting the need for more inter-agency and co-ordinated responses to meet the needs of children in the area was quickly recognised.

The Forum is chaired by Social Work leader and there are over 22 member agencies from across a range of sectors. At the beginning of its development the agencies welcomed this opportunity and made a firm commitment to the work of the Forum, including through pooling information and proposing and implementing joint action. Administration and communication supports were also available. The process was driven by the HSE.

Concerns were raised early on about sharing information and identifying specific individuals, resulting in an agreement to share information openly as well as putting in place confidentiality safeguards. The issue of information sharing was an aspect of the wider work to bring together different perspectives, ways of working and to create trust.

The *Forum* has evolved over time to promote active collaboration among the many agencies working in the area. Annual review days help the Forum to learn from experience, identify priorities for development and agree changes to its operation.

The Southill Youth Forum has a clear set of criteria to determine eligibility, so a child or young person can receive a service from the Forum. Any member of the Forum can refer a young person using two standardised forms. Completion of a standardised parental consent form is also required to place an individual on the list. Before consenting, the parent must be made aware of the work of the *Forum*, the process that might be undertaken and what it might mean for them and their family. The *Forum* then identifies and brings together organisations within a sub-group who are seen as most relevant to the needs of the individual. This group has responsibility for leading actions to support the young person. The agency with existing/previous connections to the person or with the relevant resources takes the lead; often it is the referral agency.

The *Forum* reviews every child on the list at every meeting and the group responsible provides an update on their progress, the support plan, emerging issues and future plans. Additional actions, resources or interventions required are identified, the next steps agreed, and the support plan updated. More detailed reviews of individual cases are undertaken by at agreed intervals.

No specific funding is provided to support the work of the forum, with the work of the Chair being undertaken alongside their full-time job (but with support of their management). Attendance at meetings can also vary. For most members the main cost of participation in the process is time and they consider the benefits to be real and important and to far outweigh the costs; but demands of working across disciplines and agencies are recognised as requiring additional effort.

| Challenges/Lessons   | Benefits  |
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| Effectiveness of the Forum is affected by frequency of turnover or absences from some agencies           | Positive emphasis on involving the young person and parents or other family members                       |
| The Chair is seen as crucial: need for succession planning and risks to the work from a change of Chair  | More outcomes focused – and possibility of improved outcomes through better integration and co-ordination |
| The requirement for equal sharing of input and delivery across agencies will be important                | Consistency between agencies in the message sent to young people  |
| Too much could become expected of the Forum and that it could lose its focus on what it is good at doing | Increased and more effective vigilance: a young person is less likely to 'get lost' in the system         |
| There are no dedicated resources allocated to the Forum and this is leading to delays or inconsistencies | Helps parents to be supported and to feel less isolated in coping with the challenges                     |
| Sensitivities around professional boundaries and issues of confidentiality                               | Agencies can tap into and avail of the resources of other agencies to support a family                    |
| How best to ensure an appropriately wide Forum membership while maintaining an effective grouping        | Professionals are more aware of services in the area  |