

Voice and Participation Service, Children's Select Committee Update

October 2023

Joe Sutton Voice and Participation Manager

Children in Care and Care Experienced Adults

Go Beyond Residential

13 children in Care aged between 8 and 13 attended an October half-term 5-day Cornwall excursion with Go Beyond enabling the participants to build on their friendships, develop their self-confidence and experience a holiday adventure.

Christmas Activity

The Children in Care Council will also attend a Christmas get together with the activity being laser tag. This will provide an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on their contribution together.

Podcast sessions

The team has recorded three new podcast episodes, which will be edited and released shortly.

1. How young people feel in their statutory meetings.
2. How we can support them to feel safe.
3. Lived experience of what it's like to be in prison as a care leaver.

A future session of the podcast will focus on health. The Podcasts enable young people and professionals to become more informed about the support able and share best practice in working with young people.

Parent Group

The most recent parent group for care experienced people had 4 families attend, the feedback was positive. The group celebrated the fact that one of the mums was about to give birth and done games such as guess the baby weight. There are 2 more potential parents joining the next session on 13th November. This innovative work enables parents to develop and maintain peer support network where they feel included and their experiences understood.

Sessional Voice Ambassadors

The Voice and Participation Service is having the interviews for Sessional Voice Ambassadors on Wednesday 25th October. We have had 15 applicants which include care leavers, parents that have been supported by social care and young people with SEND.

The Voice Ambassadors will use their lived experiences to help with training staff members, interviewing foster carers and professionals, speaking at conferences, and attending committee's and panels meetings.

The Parent Voice Ambassadors will also work with our Family Voice Worker to support families that are currently on Child Protection, these Ambassadors will act as advocates and help to bridge the worlds of Family and Children's Services and service users readdressing barriers to engagement.

The Care Leaver Voice Ambassadors are also forming a subgroup of the Corporate Parenting Panel. They will discuss the CPP priorities and hold Dragon's Den style events where the lead officers and elected members will pitch to the group how they have met the CPP priorities, this will give the Ambassadors a chance to scrutinise and make positive suggestions for improvement.

This approach aims to Empower service users to fully engage and drives service delivery, improvement, and leadership.

Kinship and Fostering Mini Conference

3 members of the team and another care experienced adult spoke at Wiltshire's Foster Carer Mini Conference on September 25. The speakers spoke about the importance of writing their daily notes in a trauma informed way and how this helps them to reflect on ongoing issues. We also talked about how foster carers can support their foster children, both past and present if they become a pregnant. The team also delivered an interactive workshop named the "rucksack exercise" which offered a unique perspective on values held by families and their interpretation in the context of children in care.

These conferences have strengthened and built awareness around issues for young people to inform the care provided to them by their carers having a direct impact on the quality of care they experience within these relationships.

Ofsted

The team supported 2 groups of children and care experienced adults to speak with Ofsted during the recent inspection. The conversations helped bring to life the work that is being carried out in Wiltshire and the positive impact it has for service users who are the ones being supported. This engagement enabled OFSTED to have an honest and open reflection of what young people's experiences of Social Care are.

Mind of My Own App

The team continues to lead on the Mind of My Own app, which allows children and young people to communicate directly to their workers by sending in statements and have their views heard, enabling them to participate in their own care planning.

Since the last CSC update the following number of statements have been sent.

- Number of One Statements sent (by Practitioners and young people) 86
- Number of Express Statements sent (by Practitioners and young people) 26
- Total statements sent to Wiltshire Children's Services (One and Express) 112

Below is a table of the types of statements beings sent through the one app

One app Usage			
STATEMENT TYPE	SENT DIRECTLY BY YOUNG PEOPLE	COMPLETED WITH PRACTITIONERS	TOTAL
Totals	33	53	86
Prepare for Conference	1	0	1
Foster Care Review	8	0	8
My Life	7	19	26
My Wellbeing	0	3	3
Preparation	3	4	7
Sort a Problem	4	4	8
Share Good News	6	1	7
This Is Me	1	9	10
Worker Visit	3	13	16

We also took the time to hold a praise the impact of the app by hosting a Celebration Event for Practitioners. This app gives Young people's view in a timely, friendly and age-appropriate manner, which can inform the quality of working relationship, assessment quality and planning.

Bright Spots Survey

Collaborating with Coram Voice and the University of Oxford, our involvement in the Bright Spots program signifies our ongoing dedication to enhancing well-being for children in care. We have launched 2 surveys', "Your Life, Your Care" and "Your Life After Care," these will run until mid-November and will look at the children's and young people's subjective wellbeing enabling us to glean valuable insights into their perceptions, needs, and experiences. The collected information will inform service improvements and better support.

This approach will provide an opportunity to hear from a wider voice of young people across Social Care. Fuller reputation will give us better representation of the experience of young people and therefore inform future policy and practice direction.

Wiltshire Youth Council

Preparations for the next elections are underway which will take place in February 2024, the team hopes to build on the success of the first cohort and learn from the past experiences. The team hopes to recruit a Youth Democracy Officer to coordinate the efforts which will allow for better outcomes and more joined up work with other areas of the local authority embedding youth voice throughout the whole council.

The Members of Youth Parliament are preparing to attend the annual House of Commons Sitting. To debate their proposed universal free school meals bill.

This provides us with a universal experience of children of Wiltshire.

New Workstreams

Strengthening Family Engagement

As our new Family Voice Worker has joined the team and exciting plans are in motion. The Family Voice Worker and the parent Voice Ambassadors will support families that are open on CP Plans to

- Understand their rights.
- Prepare for meetings.
- Improve self-advocacy skills of the parent and their wider support network.

After a trusting relationship has been made parents will be supported to access the Family Advisory Board helping Wiltshire by holding it to account and ensure the local authority is truly embedding relationship-based work. The FAB will be involved in developing training and having open honest and frank conversations about what is working and what can be improved.

Showcasing Success at Community Care Live

The team spoke at a fully booked Community Care Live conference event. The workshop amplified the voices of our youth, parents, and supported adults, showcasing firsthand the positive impact of our work. By sharing their transformative stories, we aim to inspire and attract skilled individuals to join our workforce. Many leads were taken at the event and these are now being followed up by our recruitment team.

SEND Voice Lead Worker

The team will be recruiting a new member of staff to coordinate SEND voice activity in Wiltshire. they will also train organisations on how to engage with children and young people with communication difficulties, reduce duplication and create opportunities for organisations to work together and evidence SEND Voice Work and lead on this at a strategic level. The role will work across multi-disciplinary teams to ensure a joined up collaborative approach that will drive forward the SEND voice agenda in Wiltshire.

Families and Children's Volunteering Team

An integration of the Independent Visitor Scheme and Community involvement Scheme is taking place to create a Families and Children's Volunteering Team. The volunteering opportunities that will come over from Community Involvement, include.

- Community Mentors
- Primary School Mentors

- Referral Order Panel Members
- Appropriate Adults
- Parent Mentors
- Transitional Mentors

We will be producing a strategy which will outline what each scheme is, its KPI's and how we will recruit, assess, and train volunteers. We will be for the first-time allowing volunteers to cross train in multiple roles which will enable us to support more children and young people.

The Independent Visitor (IV) Scheme is still growing from strength to strength.

Current Status

- 72 young people successfully matched with IVs. Which will increase to 89 before Christmas

National Context

- Our matched population: 17.3% of the looked after cohort.
- National average: 3.3% (last FOI report).
- Previously the highest percentage recorded in England and Wales: 16%.

Waiting List

- There has been a reduction of the waiting list of children wanting an IV. It is projected to decrease to 22, the lowest on record.

Our growth, high matching percentage, and reduced waiting list highlight our commitment to care-experienced individuals.