



Children Select Committee Update March 2024

Report Completed 21/2/24

Joe Sutton – Participation Manager

Child and Youth Voice

Children in Care Council

In the recent quarter, the team have continued to build the engagement with our Children in Care Council via activities.

Participants have had the opportunity to engage with a number of activities to increase their confidence and give them the platform to share their valuable experiences:

- In February, 13 Children in Care aged 8 to 12, embarked on an adventure to Cornwall with residential provider Go Beyond. This gave them an 'experience of a lifetime', and an opportunity to meet other Children in Care.

"We thought it was great and organised, Jay felt nervous until he got on the bus which Cameron recognised and once he got on bus, he was fine - he absolutely loved it still talking about it and desperate to go again. It just lit up his confidence can't thank you all enough." *Foster Carer*

"I know that KC had a great time - please thank everyone involved for making it such a fun week and helping her form fabulous new friendships!" *Foster Carer*

- CiCC Committee: The team consistently organises monthly sessions providing young people with valuable opportunities to engage with key professionals. These sessions serve as a platform for mutual feedback, fostering a two-way exchange of insights. Professionals benefit by refining their practices based on the feedback received from young individuals, while the children and young people gain insights into the supportive services offered by these professionals. The discussions from these sessions are skilfully recorded and shared as a podcast, aiming to enlighten broader audiences about the unique experiences of Children in Care and Care Experienced young people and adults.
- Meet Your Leaders – during the recent Meet Your Leaders session on 10/01/24 discussions focused on the theme of 'Staying Safe.' Several key initiatives and actions were highlighted. The Children in Care Council raised concerns about ensuring the safety and security of young people in placements. Leaders shared schemes that are in motion including the introduction of three new residential properties in Wiltshire. The Mockingbird programme, launched in May, aims to provide additional support through Satellite Carers, forming essential support networks. Involvement in the DfE-funded South-West Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub, with Wiltshire and Cornwall as leads, further emphasises the commitment to improving fostering. Furthermore the establishment of the Care Experienced Hub, designed as a safe

space for care experienced young adults. . Prejudice against care experienced young people and adults , particularly in new parents was discussed. Various actions were outlined, including efforts to reduce stigma and involving young parents in training to health professionals. Leaders reiterated support for the implementation of welcome boxes for young people entering care, with information about staying safe and items to make them feel safe. The importance of feeling safe in different contexts, such as foster care, schools, and during the transition to independence, was emphasised. Ongoing projects like the Staying Close Project and the 18-25 Moving On Service aim to provide support and security for vulnerable service users in transition. Specific attention was given to the safety of young people with SEND, stressing the importance of addressing communication challenges with adult social workers. The next leaders session will focus on the mental health of service users during statutory assessment processes.

Youth Voice Ambassadors

We are proud to announce the recruitment of 10 dedicated sessional Voice Ambassadors, comprising a diverse mix of care-experienced young individuals and those with SEND backgrounds. These Ambassadors are now officially employed by Wiltshire Council. Their role is integral to ensuring that the youth voice remains central to the initiatives undertaken by the Voice and Participation service. Over the past three months, our Ambassadors have actively contributed to various significant events:

On December 5th, they co-delivered a workshop at the Virtual School Conference.

They took the lead in hosting Young Persons Panels during the interview process for key staff positions, such as the Head of SEND and Inclusion, and the Conference and Reviewing Operational Lead.

Additionally, our Ambassadors facilitated interview panels for prospective Foster Carers, and their valuable insights were incorporated into a concise 'mini report' presented to decision-makers at the Placement Services Panel.

Mind of My Own

Mind of My Own is an app that enables young people to share their thoughts and feelings directly with their workers. Since January 1st 2024 - 26 Young Person Accounts have been created.

Numbers of statements sent to workers.

Number of One Statements sent	86
Number of Express Statements sent	28
Total statements sent to Wiltshire Children's Services (One and Express)	114

One app Usage			
STATEMENT TYPE	SENT BY YOUNG PEOPLE	SENT BY PRACTITIONERS	TOTAL
Totals	45	41	86
Conference	1	3	4
Foster Care Review	8	2	10
My Life	9	20	29
My Wellbeing	4	4	8
Preparation	3	0	3
Problem	2	0	2
Share Good News	7	1	8
This Is Me	3	6	9
Worker Visit	8	5	13

Wiltshire Youth Council

Wiltshire Youth Council elections were held on the week Monday 29th to Friday 2nd February 2024. All schools in Wiltshire were offered an opportunity to have 2 Youth Councillors and a Deputy represent their school. Community Seats were also offered to ensure the Youth Council is inclusive to all, including those who are part of the home education community. As part of the election process pupils were asked to select the most important issue to them.

Make Your Mark Survey- what really matters to our young people.

Please Tell us What Issue is Most Important to You	Sum of Person
Health and Wellbeing	1108
Education and Learning	490
Rights, Equalities, and Democracy	401

Crime and Safety	354
Jobs, the Economy and Benefits	298
Climate Change and the Environment	285
Culture, Media, Sport	264
Transport	134
Youth Work and Young People's Services	94
International Relations	69

Grand Total	3497
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- A large majority, 1108 of 3497 votes were for Health and Wellbeing, which tells us that this is an important topic for Young People in Wiltshire.

The Make Your Mark Results will be combined with all LA's results who submit them across the country the winning topic will then be the key focus of the British Youth Parliament agenda

Special Advisors:

We are also offering Special Advisor roles to young people between the ages of 11-17 years old who speak for an underrepresented group in the community. These groups may include Young Carers, LGBTQ+ young people, BAME young people, military families, and children in care. The Special Advisors will be nominated from various community youth voice forums and will link in with those groups to ensure that their views are being fairly represented on Wiltshire's Youth Council.

Members of Youth Parliament:

On 2nd March the elected youth councillors will have the opportunity to stand in an internal election to become a Member of Youth Parliament (MYP), Wiltshire has three seats on the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). The MYP will take on the following additional responsibilities:

- be a champion for young people's issues locally and nationally
- work with their locally elected councillors and MPs to promote youth voice
- attend regional conventions of the UKYP (three Saturdays per year)
- attend the annual conference of UKYP (a residential weekend away)
- attend an annual debate in the House of Commons
- deliver the Make Your Mark youth voice campaign and other UKYP campaigns

Activities going forward:

Each full youth council meeting will have a guest invited who will seek the youth councillors' views on important topics such as environmental issues, transport, or mental health and the members of youth council will have a say in how policy at the council is shaped. With support from Wiltshire's Voice and Participation Service, the Youth Council will take part in activities such as youth inspections, advising on how money is spent for young people and advocating for young people where they live.

Feedback from departing Wiltshire Youth Councillors

“H.A loved working with you and being a Youth Councillor - she is at the University at UCL studying Politics now, so it was great inspiration to her!” *Parent*

“I just wanted to say a massive thank you to you for always being so supportive throughout my time with the Youth Council... the continued kindness and support from you and Joe has made the Youth Council such a welcoming and supportive place to be! Thank you for everything” *Youth Councillor*

Family Voice

The Family Voice Worker has been actively engaged in various activities aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration within the Family Voice group. This report outlines key contributions and initiatives undertaken by the Family Voice Worker.

- 1. Family Advisory Board Meetings:** The Family Voice Worker has diligently attended four FAB meetings, demonstrating commitment to fostering positive communication. These meetings, held both in hybrid and in-person formats, included guest speakers such as the Service Manager for Quality Outcomes and the Director for Families and Children. During the last meeting chaired by the Family Voice Worker, new members were successfully integrated into the group, contributing to its growth and diversity.
- 2. Training Professionals:** A primary focus of the Family Voice Worker's efforts within the FAB is the development of robust training packages for professionals. This aims to empower members by actively involving them in training for Social Workers in Domestic Abuse (DA) and Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) practices. The goal is to ensure that the voice and experiences of members are integral to shaping and influencing social work practices.
- 3. Care Leavers Parents Group:** The Family Voice Worker has played a key role in facilitating the Care Leavers Parents group. This involvement includes successfully engaging the first advocacy client and actively participating in their Child Protection (CP) review. Prior to the conference, the Family Voice Worker liaised with Social Workers and the Chair to ensure that parents received relevant reports in a timely manner and that no new information emerged during the conference.
- 4. Engagement with CICC and Interview Panels:** Beyond the Family Voice group, the Family Voice Worker has contributed to other meetings, including those with the Children in Care Council (CICC). Additionally, the Family Voice Worker has been a member of interview panels for the recruitment of new Voice Ambassador roles, showcasing a commitment to broader initiatives within the organisation.
- 5. Advocacy:** The Family Voice Worker has played a pivotal role in advocacy. The successful engagement of the first advocacy client demonstrates a commitment to amplifying the concerns and needs of individuals within the system. Attending the Child Protection (CP) review of the advocacy client, the Family Voice Worker actively linked with Social Workers and the Chair before the conference to ensure that parents received relevant reports in advance. This proactive approach aimed to guarantee that no new information emerged during the conference, fostering transparency and empowering parents.

6. Family Voice Ambassador

The team's Family Voice Ambassador has attended 4 FAB meetings and participated in meetings with service managers. He has welcomed new members and is keen on developing his training skills in becoming a peer advocate to other parents with lived experience. We are just starting networking

with a group of parents and professionals and aim to collaborate together to participate in policy research and practice to promote a voice for parents and families.

SEND Voice

The team has recruited a SEND Voice and Participation Lead, Jo Edington. Jo has initiated efforts to streamline the SEND Service by engaging with various stakeholders, creating networking opportunities, and collecting valuable insights.

- 1. Stakeholder Engagement:** A comprehensive list of contacts has been compiled, distinguishing between those already met and individuals mentioned in relevant meetings. The next step involves the SEND Voice Worker chairing initial meetings with service heads and stakeholders to assess current projects and future plans. An update and action tracker will be implemented to monitor progress.
- 2. Safety Valve:** One of the primary focuses identified in discussions with the High Needs Block Sustainability Strategy Lead is the necessity to establish effective communication channels among services and stakeholders. This involves facilitating dialogues to exchange information about ongoing initiatives, available participation opportunities, and project plans. The aim is to foster collaboration, prevent duplication of efforts, and ensure efficient resource utilisation.
 - The SEND Voice and Participation Lead is currently coordinating schedules to identify a suitable date for a meeting with service heads and stakeholders.
 - Once the meeting is scheduled, further communication with High Needs Block Sustainability Strategy Lead will ensure that the agenda comprehensively captures all relevant information needed for future endeavours.
- 3. SENDIAP:** As part of the commitment to co-produce with stakeholders and contribute to the development of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Inclusion, and Alternative Provision strategy for 2024-2029, the SEND Voice and Participation Lead will actively participate in a series of focused online discussion groups scheduled for March and April.
 - These sessions, conducted in collaboration with the WPCC, will address specific themes identified as priorities by parent/carers.
 - The themes have been derived from a thorough analysis of survey data, insights from live events, and interactive discussions.
 - The first focus is on the voice of the child and their family, emphasising the centrality of children in planning, listening to their views and aspirations, and considering parents as true partners.
- 4. National Networking:** To foster collaboration and share best practices, the SEND Voice Worker has established a LinkedIn page inviting councils across England to join. This platform aims to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences related to SEND voice and participation.
- 5. Children in Care:** Attending the Children in Care Council Meeting, the SEND Voice Worker gathered feedback on the new emotional wellbeing service. Insights from this meeting contribute to shaping and improving the support provided to children in care. The Send Voice Worker will also support children and young people with more complex needs to attend sessions and coproduce services. During a visit to the Go Beyond initiative, the SEND

Voice Worker interacted with 13 young people and gathered their perspectives on the Mind of My Own app. This direct engagement with service users provides valuable insights for enhancing the SEND Service.

6. **Training Packages:** In the early stages of developing a training package, the SEND Voice Worker is collating information on best practices in SEND voice and participation. This initiative aims to equip stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance service delivery.

Families and Children's Volunteering

The team has facilitated its first training of new volunteers since the formation the new Families and Children Volunteer Team in October 2023. The training consists of 6 hours induction, 3 hours safeguarding (plus some online training for CSE and CCE) and this is followed by role specific training. The Mentors and Independent Visitors have a further 6 hours training. The Appropriate Adults have 3.5 hours plus a custody tour and shadowing experienced volunteers and the Panel Members have 6 hours training. The role specific training is also supported by existing volunteers. Feedback from the training included:

- *"It was interesting to get a deeper perspective of the Council's culture and values."*
- *"It was a supportive learning environment."*
- *"The overall facility is great." (the training was held in the new Hub.)*
- *"The objectives were clear to me; the team understood its audience."*
- *"I think the non-judgemental approach, whereby I suspend my personal biases, be empathetic and open minded was reinforced for me."*
- *"The content was really interesting and thought provoking, the topics stirred up some excellent group chat and examples."*
- *"The team and the positive feel about the service was contagious."*

Where we could have done better:

- *"Time constraints for each enjoyable module."*
- *"I would have liked to have known before I joined the scheme, how much training there would be and where it is held."*
- *"Legislation and Guidance: I appreciate that both need to be reviewed, however dry a subject it may be. Maybe the main differences between legislation and guidance could be discussed so the audience clearly understand the legal nature, authority, or enforceability of each?"*
- *"The safeguarding case studies had the potential to be very powerful and indeed could have lasted a full training day."*

The feedback has been very useful in us now being able to use it to tweak some of the content for our next training programme.

Holly Harward (Support Worker) went on secondment to another team on 1st January for 18 months, we are currently in the process of recruiting for Holly's replacement who will have more of a voice focus within the Youth Justice Service.

Primary Mentoring (8-11 year olds)

The Primary Mentoring funding has been extended beyond the 31st of March 2024 for another 6 months. The scheme was initially set up for children who do not have any other services involved. It is for children to help build their confidence, self-esteem and resilience and enabling them to cope with life's challenges and reduce the need for higher tier services in the future. We have a target number of matches per year of 30, which we achieved in the first quarter of the academic year. 86% of the children matched were in Year 6, which reflects the difficulties that children experience when transitioning to secondary school. Feedback that we received included:

Child- "it has helped me go home happier."

Mentor- "the child is making better choices and when to get involved or not."

School- "she displayed greater sense of self-esteem and resilience when facing a challenge."

Parent- "she has become more confident; she has always found it difficult to make positive relationships with adults due to the nature of her past experiences and the mentor became a well-trusted and familiar adult and mentor to her"

Community Mentoring (8–17-year-olds)

Community Mentoring is changing going forward and will be scaled back in terms of referrals. We will be concentrating of referrals from The Youth Justice Service and the Emerald Team. We are currently in the process of closing matches and will collate the feedback and stats at the end of March.

Transitional Safeguarding Mentoring (16–25-year-olds)

The Transitional Mentoring project will be coming to an end on 31st March due to the end of funding. The team are in the process of closing matches and will be writing a report about our experiences and findings. We have 2 vulnerable young people who are known to both YJS and the Emerald Team, we will be transferring them to the Community Mentoring in order to continue providing support. One of these young people spoke at the YJS Executive Board meeting about his experience of being mentored.

Parent Mentoring

The Parent Mentoring is also coming to an end on 31st March due to funding. We are in the process of closing the last 2 matches and will collate the feedback and stats at the end of March. The Support worker will be returning to their substantive post.

Appropriate Adults (AAs)

The AA scheme as faced challenges since Melksham Custody Suite closed for a revamp in February 2023. The Custody Suite was due to reopen in October 2023 however, this is now likely to be May 2024. The Scheme has been using the Swindon Custody Suite and been able to cover the rota for most of the time. We have lost some AAs who were not able to travel to Swindon who hope to return to the role once we are back in Melksham.

One of our AAs has successfully completed the Appropriate Adult qualification, which is a partnership between the National Appropriate Adult Network and Gateway Qualifications which is great achievement. The AA feels that she is now better able to carry out the role and she has gained

more understanding of the AA's place and importance within the justice system. The AA is now offering to support and encourage other AAs to complete the qualification.

Referral Order Panel Members

This service struggled with not having enough panel members last year however, following training that was held in September, November and January, we now have more panel members onboard. It has also helped that some of our existing Independent Visitors were interested in training to be panel members too. Many of our volunteers undertake more than one volunteering role.

Independent Visitors (IVs)

The service now has 82 children in care who are matched with an Independent Visitor. It can be a challenge when either a child or an IV moves away however, where this has happened, the IVs have continued having contact with the child once every 3-4 months thus maintaining having consistent adult in their lives.

With the incumbent YJS inspection, the team have been busy preparing information and have a cohort of volunteers doing the different roles who are going to meet with the inspectors.

Volunteer Recruitment

The team has set up a monthly meeting to look at our marketing and publicity material and events going forward. We have a rolling recruitment programme and are receiving enquiries every week. As part of this, the team have been busy chasing up enquiries from people who have expressed an interest in volunteering who have not returned their registration forms. Our next training for new volunteers is in April.

Advocacy

We are setting up an in-house Advocacy Service within the Voice and Participation Service in Wiltshire Council. The objective is to transition from a contracted external provider to an in-house model, aligning our efforts with the needs of the community and enhancing service quality, cost-efficiency, and control.

Benefits:

1. *Improved Customisation:* Aligning advocacy efforts with the Voice & Participation Service ensures a more tailored approach to meet the diverse needs of service users. We can also have another avenue of capturing young peoples and Families views to help implement council wide improvements.
2. *Cost-Effectiveness:* Shifting to an in-house model, utilising trained volunteers, minimises external service fees, administrative costs, and reliance on third-party providers.
3. *Improved Quality Outcomes:* Rigorous quality control measures can be implemented, ensuring consistent and high-quality impactful advocacy services, enhancing the overall effectiveness.
4. *Long term relational approach:* By being matched with long term advocates, children and families can build trust over a period of time.

Implementation Plan:

1. *Recruitment and Training of Volunteers:* Establish a Families and Children's Volunteering Team, including Independent Visitors, to serve as advocates. Existing trusted relationships within children's learning communities will be leveraged.
2. *Training:* Provide e-learning training for schools, extended family members, and stakeholders involved in the child's life, enhancing advocacy support skills.
3. *Provision of Advocates:* Introduce an advocacy tracker to monitor progress and impact, offering volunteer or trained advocates based on the young person's preferences.

Plan for Families:

1. *Family Voice Worker:* Act as an advocate for families on Child Protection Plans, supporting them in developing self-advocacy skills and providing training to their support networks.
2. *Peer Parental Advocacy:* Establish a support group for families on Child Protection Plans, led by Voice Ambassadors with lived experience. Train them as advocates and extend this initiative to other volunteering parents.

Conclusion: The proposed in-house Advocacy Service aims to create a more personalised, cost-effective, and impactful approach, aligning with Wiltshire Council's commitment to enhancing the well-being of children and families in the community. This strategic shift is essential for achieving ongoing outstanding results in Children's Services.

Young Carers

In the upcoming year, the Voice and Participation Service in Wiltshire is poised to implement three roles aimed at elevating outcomes for young carers.

The Young Carers Voice Worker is anticipated to be a linchpin in empowering young carers actively involving them in the development of youth-led services. This includes the establishment of the Young Carers Council, driving innovative changes, producing comprehensive reports based on invaluable feedback, and implementing action plans derived from the insights of young carers. Moreover, efforts will be directed towards promoting youth-friendly consultation materials, and disseminating positive stories through strategic social media campaigns, thereby establishing a robust platform for impactful youth-led services.

Looking ahead, the role of the Young Carers School Worker is projected to play a pivotal part in supporting schools to attain the Young Carers in Schools Award, with a specific emphasis on secondary school provision. Responsibilities will encompass collaborative efforts with school staff to identify young carers, provision of training sessions for staff, and facilitation of workshops for students. The focus will also extend to the development of personalised support plans, advocacy for young carer-friendly policies, organisation of activities promoting wellbeing, and vigilant monitoring of the impact of support initiatives.

Simultaneously, we are looking to recruit a Young Carers Advocacy Worker to champion the rights and needs of young carers on an individual basis. Responsibilities will include guiding young carers through complex systems, advocating for seamless access to services, and empowering them through educational sessions. The role will also involve effective communication with professionals in schools, healthcare, and social services, along with the mediation of conflicts and the recruitment and training of volunteer advocates. Rigorous supervision and guidance for volunteers, coupled with coordinated oversight of their efforts, are envisioned to ensure alignment with organisational goals and ethical standards. The upcoming year holds the promise of a comprehensive and impactful

approach towards positively influencing the lives of young carers in Wiltshire, as reflected through the strategic implementation of these innovative roles within the Voice and Participation Service.

Conclusion

The Voice and Participation Service continues to promote the voices of children and young people through diverse and wide-ranging initiatives highlighted in this report. The service continues to empower Children in Care through transformative adventures to fostering youth-led advocacy with the Mind of My Own app. The engagement of Youth Voice Ambassadors, the establishment of a robust in-house Advocacy Service, and the strategic focus on young carers continues to support all our young people empowering them and valuing their experiences.