

	Families and Children Commissioning		
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Youth Consultants Pilot Evaluation

SRO: Helen Jones, Director Commissioning

1. Executive summary

In 2019, Wiltshire Council commissioned Community First to develop a new role for children and young people in Wiltshire as part of a pilot project to enhance and strengthen the voice of young people. The value of the contract was £35,000 per year, and the consultants were employed for around 100 hours per month in addition to the management and co-ordination of the service. The Youth Consultant role was an important addition to the local youth voice and demonstrated a further commitment to co-production and youth engagement in Wiltshire. For many years Wiltshire Council has embedded youth voice in key decision making about services for children and young people. Whilst vulnerable children and young people had been represented amongst existing youth fora like the Children in Care Council, the Youth Consultant role represented an opportunity to extend this further, ensuring a wider range of youth voices were heard.

Co-production and youth engagement are important factors in decisions about services for children and young people. The Youth Consultant role aimed to ensure that young people in Wiltshire were actively involved in co-producing the services they use, and that resources are targeted appropriately. The Youth Consultant project also aimed to support young people to feel engaged in local democracy and decision making, as well as delivering on the Ofsted requirement for youth-led activities and services.

The expectation for youth consultants was to work closely with existing Wiltshire partners which includes, Schools, CAMHS User Participation group, Wiltshire Police, Healthwatch Wiltshire and Local Area boards. We also wanted youth consultants to contribute to local funding decisions for youth activities and bring knowledge and understanding to the relevant groups for discussion.

7 youth consultants were recruited and immediately became regular attendees of Wiltshire Council's Youth forum groups including Wiltshire Youth Union, Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum. The consultants ranged from 17 to 23 years old, and one of the Youth Consultants was a care experienced young person. They all completed a programme of training and skills development in key areas including listening, relational building and safeguarding. The youth consultants used their time at the various meetings to share updates on the work they had been doing and also to gather the views of the young people in attendance for their projects.

2. Background to Evaluation

The ambition for youth consultants was to increase the reach of youth voice participation and co-production opportunities. Various projects were commissioned by a range of services across the Council to inform policy, decision making and recruitment.

The evaluation will look at the two-year period from April 2019 to April 2021 to see how successful the project was at meeting the goals and key performance indicators that were set. The initial agreement with Community First was for a 12-month pilot, with regular contract management and review meetings. Wiltshire Council included an option in the contract that would allow a further 1-year extension beyond the initial term, which was triggered in 2020, meaning the Youth Consultant project continued to the end of March 2021 (2 years in total).

3. Youth Consultant Projects

During the 2-year period, 15 projects were commissioned which are summarised in the table below. As you can see there has been significant input from the Youth Consultants, who have worked with a range of partners and groups, influencing and informing a number of service decisions. Some projects were also suggested by the Youth Consultants themselves, who were encouraged and empowered to make suggestions for service reviews. Any engagement with individuals or groups of children and young people were called 'listenings', as they were an opportunity to listen to the views of others.

Project Summary	Requested by	What did the Youth Consultants Do?	What Difference did it make?
Wiltshire Council SEND Services & Commissioning	Nicolas Breakwell Head of Service SEND Wiltshire Council	Youth Consultants were asked to support the SEND & Commissioning teams in engaging children/ young people linked to the development of a new SEND strategy. As part of the redevelopment, Wiltshire Council wanted to consult with Children and Young People to understand what is important to them and support them to feel included within their school environment and community. Particularly for those students who have additional needs	A summary of the listening sessions with 21 children and young people was sent back to Head of Special Schools Transformation to inform their review of the SEND strategy.
Youth services	The Youth Consultants	<p>The youth consultants contacted youth clubs across the county. They wanted to listen to young people across the county after all the training that they had received and start to make a difference to young people.</p> <p>They emailed the clubs, explaining who they are and asking if they could go along to youth clubs to listen to young people, asking what it is like living in Wiltshire for a young person, but also including questions about Wiltshire council services, (eg, what services do they use/access and how/what are these services like). This would help to inform future service development.</p> <p>The consultants also promoted the Wiltshire Youth union, asking if young people would like to become a</p>	<p>The Youth consultants thoroughly enjoyed this piece of work and realised how rewarding listening to young people can be, also supporting them to open up and have a conversation about something that is important to them. The young people didn't think that their opinion mattered at the start of the meetings, but by the end of the listenings, all the young people were really keen to chat with the youth consultants, some really opening up, appreciating the opportunity for their voices to be heard.</p> <p>The team had some positive feedback from the leaders of the four different clubs that they attended. The consultants were praised for the way they engaged with the young people at</p>

		<p>member. The consultants listened to a total of 167 young people across four areas of the county. Two videos were produced, one being 'a safe place to play and the other was 'being smoke free'.</p>	<p>youth club. Two videos were produced by the young people attending the youth clubs which were shown to other young people to try and influence more positive behaviour in regard to safety and smoking.</p> <p>These listenings helped to raise awareness of issues facing young people across the county and built the confidence of the Youth Consultants and the young people involved, leading to improved engagement. It was evident how important transport, open spaces and leisure activities were for young people, and their desire to have more youth provision available for all age groups.</p>
Young Carers	Jen Salter & Gary Binstead Wiltshire Council	<p>Wiltshire Council wanted to understand better the experiences of young carers and their families in accessing Young Carers services</p>	<p>31 young carers were listened to. 70% of young carers said they felt no improvements were needed, the other 30% made suggestions to improve the young carers service. Awareness of the service has been raised across Council teams, schools and partners to try and identify and support more Young Carers.</p> <p>Unfortunately, referrals remain low, although this could be also as a result of the COVID pandemic where pupils have spent considerable time out of school, however Young Carers are now able to self-refer to the service as well.</p>
Victims of crime	Youth Consultants & Lynn Gibson (Community First)	<p>Following on from the review of Young Carers, the consultants reviewed services to young victims of crime through a new programme which supports victims through positive activities. This is funded through the Police and Crime Commissioner.</p> <p>Listening was carried out with young people, to understand their experiences of the programme. Also, what they value about it, and what can be improved.</p>	<p>The Youth Consultants were only able to listen to 3 victims of crime as the young people were not ready to talk about their experiences.</p> <p>No further work was carried out on this project due to the lack of engagement and willingness of young people to share their experiences.</p>

		<p>This could include a review for young people who have been bullied to understand what their view was about how it was dealt with by schools and support agencies, and what could have been done better</p>	
<p>Family Led Review Children in Care Independent Review NEET Services COVID 19</p>	<p>Sara James Service Manager Wiltshire Council</p>	<p>The Quality and Outcomes team in Wiltshire Council asked the consultants to set up consultations with children over the age of 10, for a family led review with young people in care, regarding their Looked After Children reports, and their participation in their review. Views were also sought regarding how the Independent Reviewing Officer writes the reports.</p>	<p>These consultations confirmed that children and young people prefer reports being written to them rather than about them and underlined the importance of using child-friendly language.</p> <p>As a result of these consultations we are changing the child's review consultation form, and children in care will have the option to have a letter from their IRO summarising their review as well as the full report.</p> <p>This consultation also underlined the importance of children being prepared for a child protection conference and having access to independent advocacy. Recommendations from this review include working with the social work teams and advocacy service to ensure children are more consistently prepared for these types of meetings and are referred to opt out of independent advocacy where requested.</p>
<p>Contextual Safeguarding</p>	<p>Lisa Colombi Team Leader Wiltshire Council</p>	<p>Youth consultants engaged with a range of young people including young carers, young people who access SEND support at school and young people who attend youth clubs. Youth consultants carried out 21 listening's with young people who accessed support for special education needs and/or disability in Wiltshire schools, 147 listening's with young people who engage in youth club provision and 31</p>	<p>New approach to contextual safeguarding is being designed as part of a pilot project with Bedfordshire University and the consultation with young people supported the restorative approach we plan to take as part of the family-led review of CP Conferences.</p> <p>This also helped to inform the implementation plan for improving safety of public spaces.</p>

		listening's with young people looking after a parent or family member	
Discussion with Community Engagement Team	Rhys Schell Specialist Manager Wiltshire Council	Youth consultants met with a Wiltshire council community engagement manager who wanted advice on the best way Wiltshire Council can reach out to young people and spread awareness about Covid-19	The feedback given by the youth consultants was incorporated into the implementation plan, so the voice of young people was part of the project moving forward
Reviewing report for Bath North East Somerset, Swindon & Wiltshire CCG	Myfi Champness CCG Commissioner & Elly Mills Operational Lead Wiltshire Council	CCG asked the youth consultants to review the Children and Young People annual report	The feedback from the youth consultant was well received and provided some valuable insight. The comms team were informed of the feedback and used it to change their approach to engaging with a younger audience
Review the all about me documents & review proformas	Bryony Gales Social Worker & Elly Mills Operational Lead Wiltshire Council	The youth consultants were asked to review the 'all about me' document and 'my review' proformas, four different documents	The consultants provided some very useful feedback in terms of making the documents more user friendly. The young people involved in the initial listening project have been informed that changes were being made to the forms as a result of their engagement.
Referral Order Reports/Document	Karen Golden Social Worker Wiltshire Council	Youth consultants were asked to review the referral order report document used by social workers to see if it was suitable for young people	Due to the feedback these forms were made more child friendly and accessible
Designing and Logo	Elly Mills Operational Lead Wiltshire Council	The youth consultants were asked to design a new logo for the children in care council	This work is ongoing
Review MASH forms & answer phone scripts for young people	Shan Searl Team Manager & Elly Mills Operational Lead Wiltshire Council	The youth consultants were asked to review some MASH procedures and processes	This work is ongoing

4. Feedback from Youth Consultants

The Youth Consultants have valued and thoroughly enjoyed their time listening to young people across Wiltshire and feel a great sense of pride that they have helped to promote the voices of children across the county. **Appendix 1** records the views of some of the Consultants in their own words.

5. Summary

The Youth Consultants have delivered a wide range of projects and been involved in many interviews over the last 2 years, helping to inform service design and delivery as detailed in the table above. This has helped to improve the outcomes of children across the county, including those in receipt of statutory services. Through co-production with children and young people, making sure that their voice is heard, the Council has been able to better respond to the needs of children and young people across Wiltshire.

This work informed a move within the new Youth Voice team to deliver new projects in a similar way which is detailed within their plan, but through Youth Ambassadors who will be recruited directly by the Youth Voice team instead of commissioning the service externally. This will ensure that the voice of children and young people continues to inform service design and delivery, and that we continue to co-produce and co-design services together.

After the initial pilot phase of this project, it was agreed that there would be additional benefits to Wiltshire Council if the service was delivered through an in-house model. These were to increase and maximise the engagement of children and young people across Wiltshire in the Youth Union, Children In Care Council (CICC) and Care Leavers Forum through direct involvement with operational social care teams, Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) teams and other colleagues.

A strategy and operational plan were developed by the new Youth Voice team to support Wiltshire Council to further develop a culture of participation by ensuring children and young people are listened to and their voice is at the heart of all services delivered to them. A small team has been recruited who are themselves experts by experience and we are developing the role of youth consultant so that young people who use services can help scrutinise these and help shape the way in which they are delivered.

6. Recommendations

It is critical that engagement with children and young people continues to inform service design and delivery, which will be used to improve services for them.

It is recommended that :

- a) Children and Young People continue to be engaged and consulted regarding service design and delivery within the Council
- b) Children and Young People are involved in interviews for staff and leadership appointments within the Council where possible
- c) Children and Young People continue to help to co-design and co-produce services in the Council
- d) The Youth Voice team ensure that sufficient Youth Ambassadors, children and young people are recruited to deliver these projects

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Appendix 1

Feedback from the Youth Consultants

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The Youth Consultants Projects have allowed myself and others to be the advocate for young people within Wiltshire. This has been a great privilege, and something which I am proud to see continuing within Wiltshire Council. This thereby promotes anti-discriminatory and empowerment practice within this statutory setting. As a result, the project has propelled the local community into the 21st century, keeping the voices of young people at the forefront of any service.

I am greatly honoured to have been a part of this starting block and to have listened to a variety of young people with different needs and issues. This project has allowed young people to feel listened to once again, and that in itself is the greatest power anyone could have, the power to listen. Each project has benefited the young people within the Wiltshire area immensely, as I shall demonstrate below.

Through feedback on all about me forms, we have been able to make them more accessible to young people with a variety of needs, and hereby make the process of referral a much simpler and easier one. Hopefully this shall reduce some of the anxieties that they may have and create an easier transition.

Through improving the missing forms, it has allowed the process to be less traumatic and heightened with emotions, by editing the wording of questions and the style in which they are asked. Much similar to all about me forms, our main goal here was to make these more accessible to a variety of young people.

The creation of logos has injected youth back into the CIC and made sure that young people are represented by their issues first and foremost. The logos have enabled young people to understand more on what the CIC is about and how it can help them, as well as recruiting new members to the Council.

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Working as a Youth Consultant has been really amazing. It has given me clear insight on what it is like to work with young people and has made my future career goal so much more accessible through all the experience that I have gained. It has helped me to be more suited to working with children both by, the training that we have completed and the interaction we have had between children. Despite there being some challenges with COVID and working online, the Youth Consultants persevered and were able to listen to so many more young people.

I like to think that the youth consultants have helped young people in Wiltshire Council by giving them a new and different person for them to talk to. This has allowed for more people to open up and speak more freely about issues that they have gone through and how Wiltshire Council can change this for the better. Getting young people to talk to young people has been such a mind opening experience for the people involved because it shows just how many more people we can reach when a child feels more comfortable to the person that they are talking to.

To summarise, the Youth Consultant project has made Wiltshire better for young people by, giving them someone who can relate to talk to, making services offered by Wiltshire council more 'child friendly' for more ages up to 18 and, have informed young people of all the services that are available to them. This has allowed young people to have confidence in Wiltshire council that they are doing all they can, to make young people feel secure, happy and protected.

MAG

Over the course of the Youth Consultant Project, we've listened to 300+ young people from over 12 Wiltshire towns and villages, representing 18 local schools. We have spoken with children and teens at an array of youth clubs spanning across the county and relayed their feedback about council services to Wiltshire Council. Other major projects completed include Contextual Safeguarding consulting young people across Wiltshire on the safety of their local environments – as well as working with children in care, and young people on child protection plans to identify how services they've experienced could be improved. We've also worked with young carers and victims of crime, similarly, gathering feedback about the support they've received.

I'm also really proud of the work we've completed for external parties that have come to us for advice, including Wiltshire Police, NHS, Community Engagement Team, Wiltshire Youth Offending Team, Missing Children Coordinating Team, and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. We've provided each with youth perspectives and helped them make their services and documents more accessible for young people.

Overall, I think our work as Youth Consultants has been successful in championing young voices seldom heard, so that positive changes to youth life in Wiltshire can be made. Youth Consultancy has produced meaningful outcomes for many young people, and has been an informative, enriching, and rewarding experience throughout.