

Dragons Den Walkabout

Date: 25/10/21

Time 11:00 – 15:30pm

Location: Bourne Hill Hub, Salisbury

Summary overview

This activity was a chance for young people aged 16 to 24 who are either currently in foster care or are a care leaver to scrutinise Wiltshire's Care Leavers Local Offer.

The two Children in Care Teams were tasked with creatively pitching Wiltshire's Local Offer to a panel of young people who are currently accessing services, for the purpose of the session these young people were known as the dragons. The two teams were asked to inform the dragons about their entitlements as care leavers from Wiltshire, considering areas such as education, housing, jobs, health, and transport.

After the presentation's the dragons entered a discussion phase where they had a conversation about what they have heard and whether this reflects their lived experiences. The dragons then invited the members of the teams to re-join the discussion and fed back their thoughts about the local offer and asked questions to the presenters.

Members of the Child and Youth Voice Team acted as impartial intermediaries and offered advice and support to the dragons throughout.

The participants will have the chance to present their findings and recommendations to the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers Mark Riddell MBE, who will be visiting from the Department for Education on Tuesday 16 November 2021.

Preparation

Prior to the session we wanted to the Children in Care Teams to put forward care leaver participants that had not had previous experience of contributing to local offer related activities. We did this because we wanted to get the best possible feedback from people that are meant to receive the services.

The CIC Team Managers were briefed that the presentation needed to be aimed at participants of different academic abilities and not a PowerPoint presentation.

We agreed that the dragons would be reimbursed using the child and youth voice consultancy rate, which is £10 per hour worth of vouchers of their choice. We paid an hourly rate because the participants are acting as consultants and should be reimbursed in a meaningful way that reflected the time they put into the project.

The dragons agreed that the workshop can be filmed and shared within the local authority.

The Participants

We had 5 dragons take part in total. All of which has different life experiences and are accessing the local offer in a variety of ways. Some of the dragons have been to college and university. Some of the other participants had mentioned that they are trying to make positive changes in their lives and

are currently looking for work. Two dragons stated that they had previously not made good decisions and had been in trouble with the police. Having diverse life experiences helped the dragons look at the offer in different ways and enriched the feedback we received.

Session 1 – Icebreakers

The first session we did was an icebreaker about being stuck on a desert island. The dragons worked in two groups to think about what they would take if they were stranded on a desert island. The staff members from children’s services also took part in the activity. Everyone fed back to the group and gave a rationale behind their choices. This activity helped the group talk to each other and gave their first chance to speak in front of the group.

The second icebreaker was more relevant to the task of the day. Individually the dragons were given a piece of paper, with a table on it. Each box in the table had a part of the local offer written in it and the dragons were tasked with writing an explanation of what the offer was in the corresponding boxes. I have put a number in the below box to demonstrate how many participants knew of that scheme. Although some numbers were low at this point when these initiatives were described in better detail later in the day the dragons realised that they had heard of some of the them before. This activity helped us understand the current level of knowledge the participants had about the local offer.

Grandmentors 4	Rev's and Ben's Surgeries 0	Priority Banding 4
Rent Guarantee Scheme 2	Driving lessons 5	Health Passport 2
Building Bridges 1	FE Bursary 2	Supported Housing pilot 1

Session 2 Presentation from CIC Managers - What is the Local Offer?

This session started with a great visual representation scenario. The presenters had dressed up in several layers of clothing and props, which each represented something unique about themselves. The dragons had to guess what those items meant, for example one of the presenters wore a flag with the Wiltshire crest on it and the dragons guessed that he lived in Wiltshire. Once the dragons had guessed correctly a layer of clothing or accessory would be disregarded. The managers obviously did not take off every layer of clothing they had on but posed a thought-provoking question about what would happen if they had. The dragons stated that everybody would be the same. This showed that everyone is different and unique, but underneath everything we are all human including the dragons, their PA’s and the managers as well.

The presenters then showed the dragons flashcards that represent the journey that children in care go through to get to the point that they are ready to leave care. They talked about adverse childhood experiences, why children come into care and what happens to prepare them to leave care. They said that it is okay not to know what you want to do as a career at the age of 15 and they began to talk about the pathway plan document. This activity helped set the scene about why a local offer is needed.

Session 3 The Virtual School

One of Wiltshire's Virtual School Officers then stepped in to present the role of the virtual school in supporting care leavers. The dragons were taken through an exercise where they were tasked with putting a Malteser in a bag if they could answer correctly to the questions that were asked. This activity was designed to find out the dragon's prior knowledge of the virtual school.

The dragons were then asked to think about who the most important person/organisation was for the virtual school to liaise with about their educations. These included their PA's, universities, jobs, colleges and more. The overall impression was that it was important for them to be in contact with lots of organisations.

Session 4 entitlements discussion

The CIC Team managers then came back to present and handed out leaflets about the local offer to the dragons, the initial feedback was that the leaflets were wordy. One dragon looked at a leaflet for a fraction of a second and threw it back down again. When asked about his response he said he preferred it if someone could have a conversation with him. This response was powerful, as this is probably how lots of people react when they receive these kinds of leaflets to read. The dragons were then told about the care leavers mobile phone application 'WiltsApp'. It was explained that all of the information that is on the leaflets would be on the WiltsApp and it will regularly be updated. Only one out of the five dragons had heard of the Wilts App and had it downloaded on his phone.

The presenters then spoke about the local offer section by section and discussed this through with the dragons. During these discussions the two main areas that the dragons had not been aware of was their entitlement to have an advocate and the Building Bridges scheme. The dragons shared some of the benefits they have received through the local offer, these included being helped to pay for WIFI costs, support to get a new fridge, local leisure centre membership, driving lessons and the cost of the driving tests covered, the care leavers grant and access to a grandmentor.

Section 5 dragons' group conversation

The presenters were asked to leave the room while the dragons had a conversation about what they had heard. The group carried out a mini-SWOT analysis to help them formulate their response to the presenters.

Strengths-

- It was great to hear about all the opportunities available to care leavers in Wiltshire.
- The group said that the bursaries and grants have been the most beneficial to them.
- The grandmentor scheme was talked about in a positive way and was really benefitting one of the participants.
- One dragon said "it is great to receive this stuff as we would not get it from anyone else in our family".

Weaknesses

- The local offer focusses primarily on items that care leavers can receive, or practical advice to help them achieve in adulthood. Unfortunately, it is limited on what emotional support is available to care leavers post 18. It does not look at how care leavers can nurture past relationships and stay connected to important people in their lives such as foster carers and other children in care that they have lived with. Furthermore, many of the dragons said that they felt isolated and lonely, and this was the biggest issue for them. The dragons felt that they lacked belonging, they said that they did not feel part of a community and felt disconnected from their cultural heritage.
- The group said that often they are not ready to deal with mental health problems until they are older and have left care, they wanted to see more support from mental health services post 18.
- One dragon said that often to get help for a health condition you need to have a diagnosis, but the support from health services changes to the standard provision after you turn 18 and this presents a challenge if the GP surgery is not accommodating.
- The care leavers who live out of county do not get priority council tax banding.
- The dragons would like information about how they can access their social care files and what support would be available to them to digest what they have read.

Opportunities

- The dragons would like to know more about what job opportunities there are and would like employers to be accommodating and not write them off.
- The dragons said that they would like care experienced people to get together more as a group, they stated that being around other people that understand you and know what it's like to have lived through care is important. This would help them feel part of a community and help curb the loneliness that many care leavers feel.
- The dragons came up with the idea of being able to submit local offer requests through the WiltsApp. They wanted these requests tracked so they can see the progress of their requests. For example a request pathway could look like this: *request received – request allocated – request progressed to manager – request agreed – request complete*. The dragons really liked this idea, because the current process relies on PA's to keep them updated and they do not know what's going on with it until the PA tells them. The proposed system would also help them hold the local authority to account as they can evidence what they have requested.

Threats

- If the information about the local offer is not shared with care leavers in the way that they prefer, then they may miss out on their entitlements. The local authority cannot take a one size fits all approach about notifying people about their entitlements. The dragons said ask care leavers how they like to be communicated with and adapt the information to suit their style.

Section 6 questions and feedback

When the presenters re-entered the room the SWOT Analysis was fed back to them and they were asked the following questions.

- 1) Could we be supported to have laptops for our studies?
- 2) What support will adult care leavers get with getting a diagnosis for a mental health condition or disability?

- 3) How are you going to help care leavers connect to a community after they leave care? This is to help stop loneliness.
- 4) How can I access my social care records, and will I get support reading them?
- 5) Can I get priority banding in other local authority areas?
- 6) Is there another way of making local offer requests? I would like to track these requests on some sort of app?

Responses from the managers

- 1) This is something that has happened previously, the managers said that they recommend using one of the pre-existing care leaver grants to fund laptops for studies. The managers also said that there are charities that offer laptops to care leavers. There was a pledge to explore the laptops situation further and get back to the young people.
- 2) The managers talked about how the teams work hard with young people to have any mental health issues, disabilities and additional needs diagnosed before they turn 18. The managers recognised that there isn't much specific support offered to care leavers after they turn 18 and that generally they are signpost to their GP's. The idea that the contract with the current health provider for children in care could potentially be extended to cover care leavers was posed, however this would need to be explored further.
- 3) One manager said before the global covid pandemic there was a Christmas provision put on so those care leavers that were alone at this time of year could have somewhere to go. The managers recognised that one of the biggest things that care leavers tell them is that they are lonely, not just at Christmas but all year around. It was agreed that the idea of meet up groups would be investigated to help care leavers connect with each other and feel a sense of community.
- 4) The managers felt that the Children in Care Teams are good at life story work and writing letters that explain that person's journey through the care system. It was recognised that there was not any commitments on the local offer to support care leavers to access their records or understand them and this could potentially be included.
- 5) The answer to this question was a no at this point but the managers said that they are glad the issue has been raised. It was mentioned that a new regional networking group had been set up to work better to support care leavers. One of the actions to take away is whether an agreement can be struck between the different local authorities to honour the priority banding for the care leavers that live out of county.
- 6) The managers liked the idea of care leavers making local offer requests digitally. They said that they would be happy to explore the capabilities of the Wilts App to see if this could do this, if not other technologies could be explored.

You said, we did together

Changes to be Made	Who is the Responsible Leader?	RAG Rating	Completion date and Evidence of Change	What was the impact of the change?

<p>To confirm that all care leavers care leavers that need a laptop have one to assist them with their studies.</p> <p>All children up to age of 16 will be given a digital device through the virtual school. Digital device scheme from DFE- number TBC by Michelle</p>	Neil Adlam / Sam Heathcote	Amber	12 November 2021	confirmation that all YP who need a laptop have one
To explore transition planning and process and whether the current health contract that supports children in care can be extended so that care leavers can also still have access to support.	Llewellyn, Michele	Red	January 2022	YP will have smooth transition to support from adult and health services
The idea of meet up groups for care leavers to be explored e.g. a regular drop-in where YP can get people get support, food, and emotional / social support	Llewellyn, Michele	Red	January 2022	YP will have a space where they can meet up and have a hot meal, social contact / support.
The app currently tells YP how to access their records and how they will be supported. All care leaver to be advised they can access their files and how they would be supported through this.	Neil Adlam, Sam Heathcote	Amber	January 2022	All YP know how to access their files should they wish to and are reminded of this at their final CLA review
To speak with regional neighbours to explore the possibility that priority banding for Wiltshire care leavers is offered to them, even if they live out of county.	Llewellyn, Michele liaising with Bristol City Council who are leading on a regional project - a regional care leaver promise	Red	Update in January 2022	Regional care leaver/promise – e.g. to ensure YP OOC have priority banding for housing
To speak to Wilts app designers about a request pathway being built into the app. If they are not able to explore other options.	Llewellyn, Michele	Amber	January 2022	CP can put in requests for support via the app

