

## **Young Peoples Engagement**

### **Executive Summary:**

The “Children in Care Council” (CICC), is the forum where Walsall’s looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive.

This report describes some of the highlights of the CICC since the last Corporate Parenting Board held on 1 July 2021.

The young people have continued to meet virtually every two weeks due to Covid-19. The CICC have worked on many things which include; Interview panels, increasing referrals, discussing a new care leavers group, attended a trip too Woodlands, looking over a draft participation strategy and supporting with the recruitment of a care leaver ambassador (apprentice).

### **Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:**

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board an update on the activities of the CICC which will allow the Board to offer any support to the children, in partnership with senior managers as corporate parents for children in care and care leavers.

We are keen to ensure that the CICC is encouraged to share highlights and raise any issues and concerns they may have on behalf of care experienced young people in Walsall with a view to improving services and outcome for children in the care of Walsall Council.

The Shadow Board has been put in place to ensure that the young people are fully involved in the Corporate Parenting Board and that their views are considered as part of this process.

### **Recommendations:**

The Board notes the activity and events of the Children in Care Council.

### **Background papers:**

Previous Young People Engagement reports.

### **Corporate Parenting Pledges**

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

### **Resource and legal considerations:**

Walsall is committed to ensuring that children and young people are involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives through.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven Corporate Parenting Principles and 2 of the principles focus on the involvement and participation of children and young people.:

- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child says that children and young people have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously and taken seriously.

### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities.

### **Citizen impact:**

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

### **Environmental impact:**

None.

### **Performance management:**

The Children's Champion works with children in care and our care experienced young people to ensure that our CICC is a rich and engaging forum. Regular reports are provided to the Corporate Parenting Board.

### **Reducing inequalities:**


The children in care council seeks to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

### **Consultation:**

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

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## **Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council**

### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Interview Panels**

The CICC have been involved with some very important interviews this July and August.

The first interview panel took place in July where two of our care leavers interviewed four candidates applying for an Assistant Manager positions in our Residential Homes.

The second interview panel which took place on the 4th of August, two of our care leavers put the pressure on three candidates applying for Head of Service positions within Children's Social Care.

All questions were created by the young person's panel and they also had the opportunity to use the Council's scoring sheet and then following the interviews met with our Director Colleen Male to provide valuable feedback.

We would just like to thank Newell Phillip-Hamilton for stepping in to offer support in the absence of David Hughes.

#### **1.2 Increase in referrals**

Following the continued promotion of the CICC we have seen an increase in more young people being introduced to the Children in Care Council over the last two months which shows that what we are doing to promote must be working.

We welcome all of our new young people and care leavers to the group with open arms. As a group we continue to work on new and creative ways in spreading the news of the wonderful work the CICC does and this seems to have a positive effect.

The CICC wanted to say thanks to staff that have promoted the CICC with young people and to mention that without the staff and teams doing their job in promoting, we wouldn't be able to do our job.

#### **1.2 Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN )**

ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation which provides curriculum programmes and qualifications to help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life.

Our mission is promote and offer our children and young people involved in the CICC the opportunity to have a go at starting an ASDAN award of their choice. There are many to choose from such as: Mentoring, Personal Development, Creative Arts, Community Projects and Sport (to name a few).

This initiative can help give something new for young people to work towards which they can own, do in their own time at their own pace. Once the short course is completed they will get 1 - 2 credits and will be given the opportunity to continue to work towards more credits within that chosen awards or could choose another

subject area if they wish. These credits are recognised nationally and can highlight the commitment of each individual which can help when moving into further education or employment.

### **1.3 Face-to-face meetings**

We now have the 'Green light' to go ahead with our CICC meetings to take place in person as a group. We will do this in a phased and responsible way and will trial a blended style incorporating both the use of virtual and physical attendance. We want to include as many attendees as possible so we may mix up the days, times and ways in which the meetings are run.

The Children's Champion will continue to work with Public Health to ensure that we are complying with current guidance.

### **1.5 Trip to Woodlands Outdoor Adventure**

On Wednesday 11 August we took part in a fantastic outdoor pursuit's full day of activities. We took part in Archery, Assault Course, Zip wire and Rock Climbing. This helped us all gain new skills, made us more confident, helped in building stronger relationships as a group and made us work together as a team.

The CICC and the Children's Champion wanted to say a special thanks to Newell Phillip-Hamilton and Lashone Richards for helping out on the day.

We had amazing feedback from all that attended and some good friendships were built showing real good connections with opportunities for some of our older influencers to mentor younger care experienced people. Please see the additional slides at the end of this report for more details.

### **1.6 Contributing to the development of Participation Strategy**

During the CICC meeting on 12 August our young people gave feedback on the proposed Participation Strategy. This is still in its infancy and our 'Influencers' were deciding on what should be included within the strategy, how it should look in terms of the colours and graphics.

The CICC will continue to be consulted and will get to work with other young people that come into contact with professionals in Walsall to help change and encourage the way we listen to the voices of young people.

### **1.7 Care Leavers Ambassador**

We have now advertised for one full time care leaver ambassador. This is a ring fenced position for care leavers in Walsall where they will be given the opportunity to work towards a Level 2 Customer Services qualification. The successful ambassador will work alongside and be managed by the Children's Champion.

We will be getting them involved with all projects and areas of the role and we really hope this will help to further develop the opportunities for children in care in Walsall. The main areas of work will be:

- Supporting the children's champion to develop and maintain the Children in Care Council and the Care Leaver's Group
- Help organise and support social and leisure activities
- Support the workshops established by TLC and Black Country impact staff to promote ETE opportunities
- Help to organise interview panels for staff recruitment
- Ensure that information is circulated to young people
- Help to co-ordinate feedback to proposed service development
- Act as a mentor and role model to young people

## **2. Other news**

### **2.1 Care leavers group**

Some of us at the CICC feel we are out growing the current group as we are getting older and as we mature our priorities and needs change. We have highlighted the need to set up a care leavers group which the Children's Champion is progressing.

The Children's Champion has now met with the managers in TLC (Transition Leaving Care) as well as some other local authorities and in September we should trial our first meeting to help plan the role out of this new initiative in Walsall. The Care Leavers Group will be designed and developed by care leavers and will be fully supported by the Children's Champion and Care Ambassador to help promote, facilitate and ensure the smooth running of it.

### **2.2 Care Leavers App and Walsall Website**

We have met with an app provider to discuss the effectiveness of viability of introducing this in Walsall. We have found that some local authorities have withdrawn from introducing an app due to the patchy use of it by young people and the resources required to maintain it. For some, it has not given value for money. We are still exploring the viability of options with other local authorities.

We are also working with colleagues to introduce a page on our website dedicated to care leavers which will contain many of the features of a basic app, such as the local offer, events and important communications. We believe that this will all be in place before the end of the calendar year.

### **2.3 Litter Pick**

At the time this report has been submitted we have not yet managed to do the litter pick which we discussed during the last Board. The Children's Champion is working in partnership with Clean and Green and with Maria's Foster Carer to see this take place before the school summer holidays are over. We hope to provide an update at the Board meeting in September.

## **3. Celebrations and Achievements**

- One of our care leavers has gained employment and continues to work within the hospitality industry.
- One of our care leavers is entering into her second year at University studying Psychology.

- One of our care leavers was successful in her application to two Universities and has chosen to attend Plymouth to study medicine.
- One of our care leavers is off to study at Walsall College to pursue his career of one day becoming a social worker.

**4. Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings.**

<b>24<sup>th</sup> August (Event)</b> Possible Foot/ Disk Golf 11 – 2
<b>26<sup>th</sup> August</b> CICC meeting
<b>WC 6<sup>th</sup> September</b> Pending interviews for Care Leaver Ambassador
<b>9<sup>th</sup> September</b> CICC meeting
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> September</b> CICC meeting
<b>30<sup>th</sup> September</b> Possible first Care Leavers Group meeting
<b>October/ November</b> Care leavers week

Meetings will continue to be held every other week with new blended approach both virtually and in person at Transition Leaving Care Hub.

Finally I would like to remind everyone and anyone working with children in Walsall that Participation and Engagement should be at the forefront of everyone's agenda.

Working 'With' Children, capturing 'Their' voice and being 'Proactive' in every engagement opportunity should not be an add on to the work we do with young people but should be seen as a matter of cause and be a priority for all in shaping the support and services in which we provide. Sometimes we get too wrapped up in our processes and need to be more focused on some basic things like getting to know our children well, spending time with them and listening with the intent to understand their perspective not always to respond with solutions.

**David Hughes**  
**Children's Champion**

This week we took 14 care experienced young people to Woodlands Outdoor Adventure in Aldridge. They really enjoyed taking part in challenging and adventurous activities such as archery, zip wire, rock climbing and completing the assault course.

They gained confidence, developed resilience and had some quality time to get to know other young people with care experience and share their views. If you are working with any care experienced young people and care leavers and want to know more about getting involved then please get in touch with the Children's Champion.

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Persevering

## Trying out new things



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