

Young Peoples Engagement

Executive Summary:

The Council4Kids, 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 on 8th September 2021.

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 strategic management as corporate parents for looked after children.

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 Director of Children's Services and 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

The following items are some of the highlights that have happened since the last Corporate Parenting Board in November 2021.

1.1 Interview Panels

The CICC have been involved with some very important interview panels:

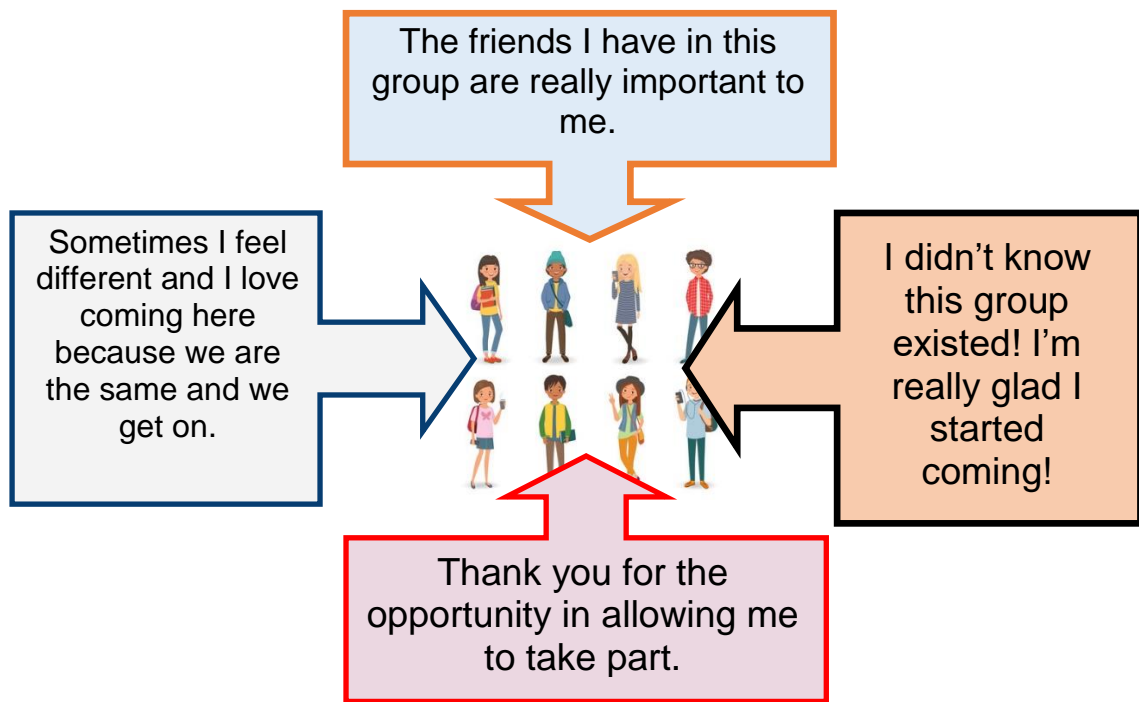
On the 15th of December our Care Leaver Ambassador Sophia and one of our care leavers Catherine interviewed a candidate applying for a residential home manager. As always the questions were pulled together by our care leavers and delivered with the upmost professionalism. We would just like to thank our residential services manager Jason for asking for the panel of young people as well as the kind gesture of the gift vouchers.

At the end of January we have also been approached to put another panel together to interview people for the Directors of Early Help WR4C and Partnerships position. We hope to see more managers across our services asking for young people to be involved in recruitment to help give them a voice.

1.2 CICC meetings

We continue to meet every other week on a Thursday at the Transition Leaving Care hub. These sessions start at 16:30 and finish at 18:30. The number of children attending is steadily increasing as are the referrals which we get for new young people. During these sessions we have a focus where we get the views of our young people on different topics and themes. For example we have looked at the language which is used within social services. We try to create a fun and interactive session where our young people can relax, play board games, pool, air hockey, do some arts and crafts, do group work and build up positive relationships with their peers. We always provide them with food and drinks which we find is a great way to bring people together.

Being part of this bespoke group is one of the main benefits for our young people. They often say things such as....



1.3 Care leavers group

The Care Leavers group continues to meet once per month face-to-face. This proves very popular as sometimes moving into early adulthood when leaving care can feel very isolating. This group provides care leavers with the opportunity to make new friends, to get out and socialise with other young adults that may have some shared experiences. Some good attachments to friends and staff have taken shape and we also keep in touch via WhatsApp. This is good for staff to be able to share upcoming events and is good for our care leavers to connect with each other in a safe space that can be monitored. This communication via smart phones has a significant benefit to people's mental and emotional health, as they often talk positively about connecting with others. Several of our care leavers have spoken up about anxiety and depression through this forum and the peer support they can offer and receive from each other is really significant. I believe it would be a good idea to arrange for some other professionals to join our sessions throughout the year. This will give our care leavers the opportunity to build relationships and break down barriers in an informal fashion meaning they may be more likely to seek support and self-help.



1.4 **Christmas celebrations**

On the 9th of December our two groups (CICC and Care Leavers) came together to meet up at the transition leaving care hub. We hid some selection boxes in the building and went on the hunt to go and find some yummy treats. This was a fabulous session and it was really good to get some of our care leavers talking to and offering support to our younger group members. Lots of Pizza and chocolate was consumed which put a big smile on people's face.



1.5 **Independent Visitor Service (IV)**

During this sessions we welcomed a guest speaker Kaiya from the Independent Volunteer service (IV). She spoke to the group about who they are and the service they offer and told them it was their right to have and IV. This was a successful introduction to this service as 7 of our young people wanted to access an IV for themselves.

The Independent Visitor's role is to contribute to the welfare of the child and promote the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and

cultural needs. A visitor may encourage the child to exercise their rights and to take part in decisions that will affect them. As far as possible, the Independent Visitor aims to complement the activities of carers and support the child's care plan.

The Independent Visitor visits, advises and befriends the child according to their needs and wishes. The Independent Visitor is expected to be child-focused, but is not a substitute for either a parent or a carer.

The Independent Visitor will have a duty to make regular visits to the child and maintain other contact, by telephone and letter as appropriate.

The main purpose of the visits and contacts will be to befriend the child and give advice and assistance as appropriate.

1.6 Christmas hampers:

Personal Advisors (pa's) have worked hard to make Christmas a special occasion for all our care leavers. A range of activities were arranged for them to attend. The team worked hard leading up to Christmas shopping and sifting through the donations we received to make sure gifts were handpicked and right for the young adult. Alongside the gift, the young people were provided with a handmade hamper, which were filled with lots of nice goodies for them to enjoy.

During the week leading up to Christmas, all care leavers will have a visit from their pa's. The team will visit young people across the country so they are all reminded that they are cared for and in our thoughts during the festive period. In total 210 have been delivered and very well received.



1.7 **Christmas Quiz Time:**


On the 21st of December the Care Leaver Ambassador Sophia put together a quiz for our CICC and one for our Care Leavers. This was all about having fun and coming together during the week of Christmas. Unfortunately it was not very well attended due to our young people having other plans and not being able to participate. The young people that did attend had a fabulous time and won a few gifts in time for Christmas which were delivered to their door.

1.8 **Total Respect Training:**

We have started to put some provisional dates in the diary for this training but are still awaiting confirmation for bookings at the EDC (Education Development Centre). If this proves too challenging to book the large hall then we may have to consider another venue such as Manorfarm Community Association which means we will incur a cost for room hire of around £96 per day.

Our ambition for this training is that we can train any professional in Walsall that works with children and young people. We may have to have a phased approach as the service is vast. This training will benefit young people with lived experiences of the social care system by boosting confidence and self-esteem and we also ensure they get paid for the hours which they dedicate. It is a very powerful way to train professionals and can have a significant positive impact on their practice.

1.9 **Celebrations and Achievements**

- All of the care leavers which joined our newly formed group this September have all successfully got through their first term at college. They have worked really hard in their studies and we are very proud of them all.
- Our care leavers at university have worked extremely hard this term in completing assignments and exams. Well done for meeting your deadlines! Onwards and upwards as they say! 

1.10 **Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings**

Meetings will continue to be held every other week in person at Transition Leaving Care Hub for our CICC group and once per month for our care leavers group. We will keep this under review to ensure that we remain compliant with the Council's guidelines. We are meeting regularly with public health and taking advice into account to ensure our young people and staff are safe.

13th Jan – CICC meeting at TLC hub. 16:30 – 18:30
20th Jan – Care Leavers Group (Activity/ venue TBC) 5pm
27th Jan – CICC meeting at TLC hub. 16:30 – 18:30
10th Feb - CICC meeting at TLC hub. 16:30 – 18:30
29th Feb - Care Leavers Group (Activity/ venue TBC) 5pm

1.11 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 course and be a priority for all in shaping the support and services in which we provide.

David Hughes
Children's Champion