

Young People's 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

1.1 Total Respect Training Offer

To date we have delivered 4 sessions and continue to get positive feedback from the attendees. Our Director Colleen has reinforced with staff that this is mandatory training for all staff working with young people and we get a real good mix of people attending our training. For example we can get heads of service, directors and group managers sitting alongside social workers, foster carers and family support workers. This is unique within the world of training and brings such value and creative thinking.

In addition to the two young people that were originally trained with David and Sophia we have now delivered a train the trainer course where three new care leavers are now qualified to deliver Total Respect with us making a total of 5 care experienced young adults. They are doing such a great job and get great feedback during and after the course.

Here are just a few of the positives that come from this training:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem for our young adults
- Increased awareness for attendees on Childrens Rights and how to promote them
- Considerations for change in policy and process
- Additional financial support for care leavers
- Work experience which can be used for job applications
- Sharing best practice ideas across multi-agencies
- Time for reflection for staff and change in culture
- Unlocking new skills and developing care leavers

1.2 Language that cares:

We continue to spread the word and promote the use of more caring language within Walsall. We have presented at several meetings across children's services as well as attended Walsall College to speak to multi-agency partners and presented at many management meetings.

We now have a steering group which consists of 10 professionals spreading across 8 different areas within services for children which include:

- Practice and Partnership Development
- Corporate Parenting
- Police (Violence Reduction Unit)
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Black Country Women's Aid
- Early Help
- Youth Justice
- Special Educational needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Our first meeting will be held on the 29th June with all partners and young people. We will continue to be dedicated in changing language which will make a big difference to all young people accessing services within Walsall.

One of our more recent developments is a Poem which gets some key points across in a creative way.

1.3 Trip for the Council4Kids

On the 22nd of April we treated our group to a trip to the Lights Cinema in Walsall. We watched 'The Bad Guys'. The group loved the film and enjoyed sending time with each other out in the community.



1.4 Hot topics for Care Leavers

Through our conversations with care leavers we have started collating a list of some of the top things that our care leavers worry about so we thought we would bring this to the board. These things have been generated through one to one conversations, group work and via our WhatsApp group chat:

- Mental Health and wellbeing
- Living alone and isolation
- Budgeting and getting by; All these things have gone up - cost of living, household bills, food shopping, travel as well as other increases. How do we begin to cope and manage?

I have raised the above with our group manager and managers within the Transitional Leaving Care service and we are now working on addressing these concerns both on an individual basis as well as looking at our wider offer. Some really good work is underway to consider our full range of support to our care leavers to make them feel reassured and settled. The Personal Advisors do an awesome job of identifying schemes and sharing these with colleagues so that we ensure that all young people are able to access these benefits and entitlements. Further work and support will be added to our ongoing work within our independent workshops.

1.5 Welcome Pack

We are working closely with our Independent Reviewing Officers on the welcome pack. These are for all children when they come into care. There is lots of information in there about some of the processes and our rights which are all explained in a child friendly way. The intended purpose is for it to be used to provide us with information but also for us to use it a regular form of communication so our foster carers and staff from social care have more understanding on things about me, which are important to me. We also feel that this can follow us on our journey if we have to move from one home to another or have new social workers or foster carers so we don't have to keep repeating our story. We would like for these to both printed and electronic.

Here is a sneak peek on what the welcome pack looks like:



1.6 Life Skills Course for Care Leavers

Our life skills course is in its 3rd week and is jointly delivered with staff from TLC Service. So far it has been really successful. The group have really bonded and formed some good friendships that we hope will last increasing their social networks. The discussions have been really insightful from our

young people, they are teaching us and sharing the things with us that we should worry about. The group are learning from each other and sharing experiences as they are all at different stages in their own journey.

There is 1 young person in the group who all of the others look to for advice as she has been really honest about the pitfalls about living alone and the things that haven't gone so well for her. She will be a great mentor and we are really encouraging and supporting her to do this.

1.7 **Good news stories! Proud of our Care Leavers and our Transition Leaving Care Team**

<p>We have another 11 young people going to university this September. We currently have 14 young people who remain at University. 6 of them complete their degrees this summer.</p>
<p>1 of our young people has secured a work visa and will shortly be leaving to go to Australia, she is excited and nervous and has asked her Personal Advisor to stay in touch with her. Her Personal Advisor is offering to visit her.</p>
<p>1 of our care leavers in the army has just got back from Canada where he has been training with the Canadian Army. He is very motivated and ambitious and whilst he loved the experience he does like to come home to his carers who alongside his personal advisor are his champions.</p>
<p>After a lengthy difficult process 1 of our young people has got his leave to remain. He says that this is the best news and is grateful to all the people who have, and continue to support him.</p>
<p>1 of our care leavers who got their 1st class honours degree in 2020 in film studies has gone on to secure a job with the BBC! This was following a very competitive interview and her beating 140 candidates! She will be working at the studios in London, her long term goal is to become a script/screen play write and what better place to start her career.</p>
<p>2 of our young males have started apprenticeships in nurseries pursuing a career working with children.</p>
<p>1 of our young people will be dancing at the Common Wealth Games, she studies drama & dance and is really excited about this opportunity.</p>
<p>1 of our young people has been successful in obtaining an administration apprenticeship for Walsall with our Member of Parliament Eddie Hughes – she has a keen interest in politics and feels this will be her start in this field.</p>
<p>1 of our former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker care leavers has completed an electrician course; English is not his first language but he has excelled and is on his way to achieving a great career.</p>

<p>Another of our former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker care leavers who has not been granted leave to remain has been given the right to work in the UK. He has already started 2 jobs and will be supported now to have his own tenancy without the worry of us potentially ending our financial support at 21 and having to access Home Office support.</p>
<p>Week commencing the 6th of June we had 2 of our young people move into their first home's both have settled well and started decorating making it home!</p>
<p>1 of our young people has started a business customising trainers – on the advice of her Personal Advisor she approached the Princes Trust who have helped her with a business plan and provided her a mentor. She has approached rapper 'Central C' to ask him to wear her trainers as a way of advertising and endorsement. She's awaiting his reply!</p>
<p>2 of our young people in custody are doing brilliantly. They both have jobs and are working towards qualifications that will help them upon release. 1 of these young people has received a national award for the work he has been doing whilst in custody. We have a young person who left custody last week – he left with a folder of certificates & qualifications and is determined that he wants to be employed and not return to custody.</p>
<p>5 of our young people have formed a football team to take part in the homeless world cup in August.... training starts now!</p>
<p>All our Personal Advisors are making sure care leavers are accessing their entitlements, from the council tax exemption to wider offers such as South Staffs Water discount. They are always keeping a listening ear for any offers care leavers can access and in helping them apply. They are currently looking out for the TalkTalk offer that is being piloted in Liverpool currently.</p>

1.8 The Children's Champion and Care Leaver Ambassador will shortly be moving into the Safeguarding and Review service area, it is hoped that they will benefit from aligning with the work of our Independent Reviewing officers in understanding and promoting the voice of the child and also build strong links with our practice development team. The new group manager for Quality and Practice, Jenny Cockcroft has a specific remit to drive forward the participation agenda for our children and young people. A participation action plan is in development and will be ready for presentation at the next Corporate Parenting Board for your consideration.

It is also proposed that if members are in agreement we review the efficacy of the current approach taken by the Corporate Parenting board in engaging the children in care council and care leavers' forum and make proposals for what this may look like moving forward.

As part of this we would want to meet with Councillor Wilson and any other member of the board who would like to be part of this review, seek to learn from national best practice and hear from the children and young people

about how they would like it to be structured moving forward; the proposals from this would then be presented to the Board for their consideration.

1.9 Dates for the diary

Council 4 Kids group dates:

This group continues to be held once every other week. The members of our group welcome guest speaker and are happy for managers or elected members to pop along and say hello if they wish.

Care Leavers Group:

Our care leavers group continues to meet twice per month. We run one face to face session per month and one virtual session. Our care leavers are happy to see guest speakers at their meetings and would be happy for any managers or elected members to pop into their meetings if they wish.

David Hughes
Children's Champion