

## **CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT**

### **Promoting the Voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers: Activity April 2019 – March 2020**

Further to the submission of the full Voice Gloucestershire Annual Report, this briefing highlights the key areas and provides a summary of the report.

#### **Summary – a note from one of our Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People:**

*'Ambassadors have participated in a wide range of events and meetings that support the work of Voice Gloucestershire. Our amazing team is made up from people who have been part of the care system, birth children of the families that foster and also people who have been supported by Children's Services in some way. An example of a project is the 11-15's group where we put on activities and give them a space where they can share their views in a place where they feel comfortable. We then take these views to the corporate parents which we recently did in the form of a rap song with a music video and for me personally, seeing these children write a song about their experiences was very inspiring and brave of them and it went really well! I have also been involved in language that cares which is a project where we look into the words that we use in social services and look how certain words can be changed to be more child friendly.'*

*Having the Ambassador Team in my opinion is a perfect way of hearing first hand from the people who experience care on a day to day basis and we are always up for a healthy challenge! The most important thing we do is give feedback in a way where we talk about the things that could be improved followed by how important workers are and remind them of the passion they have for helping others.'*

#### **1 Since our last report we have been busy working on the priority areas:**

- The launch of 11-15's Adventure Activities Group has proved really successful. A small core group of young people meet monthly to take part in activities. With the support of Ambassadors who have built up relationships with the young people this has enabled them to open up and share what life is like living in care. The majority of the group are new into care and are living in a variety of homes including a Specialist Children's Home.
- Young people mentoring Directors and Senior Managers. This scheme has grown from 2 Directors to 6 Directors and Senior Managers now benefitting from meeting with an Ambassador on a regular basis. They are the DCS, Operations Director for YST, Director of Partnerships and Strategy, Director of Children's Safeguarding, Assistant Director for Integrated Children and Families Commissioning and Early Help Senior Management Team.

- Ambassadors are excited about Language that Cares and the buzz around their workshops with frontline staff from Children's Social Care and multi-agency partners. Embedding the 'think before you write' campaign will be a major project for the Participation Team next year. Ambassadors are creating film clips, posters and leaflets to promote the campaign.

A range of consultation events, forums, focus groups and interactive workshops take place throughout the year in order to ensure the mechanisms are in place to integrate the voice of our children and young people in all aspects of our work. As a result of this there is:

- Increased awareness by the Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) of children's day-to-day experience regarding issues they face. Joint events give elected members and senior managers the opportunity to meet, listen to and work alongside children in care and care leavers.
- Increased awareness by County Councillors of what it means to be a good corporate parent following a session delivered by two care experienced Ambassadors who shared 5 young people's journey into and through care (the good and not so good), talked about what difference being in care has made to them and presented statistics in an interactive quiz.

In addition:

- The Corporate Parenting Pledge was shaped by members of Voice Gloucestershire.
- The development of Trevone House has been shaped at every stage by the involvement of Ambassadors ensuring that the needs of children and young people are at the very heart of the project.
- Ambassadors are members of the CPG. They attend meetings to raise questions, share their experiences and challenge when they think it's needed.
- Custody Suite project: A question was added to the Custody Suite Procedure for over 18's to find out if they are a Care Leaver, and if so if they would like additional support. Ambassadors are creating a young person's leaflet so that they know what they can access- for example outdoor spaces, books and support. Ambassadors have been asked to be involved in future training of Custody Suite staff.
- High Risk Planning Meetings: Following feedback from 2 Ambassadors to the manager, Ambassadors are in the process of creating a fact sheet for young people so that they know what to expect when they attend i.e. duration of the meeting, who they can invite and how they can share their views.
- Access to Records: Representatives from Children's Social Care and the Information Management Service are working with Ambassadors to create a leaflet for young

people informing them of their right to access their records and explaining the process.

- The Language that Cares campaign was launched by Ambassadors in November. They have hosted 3 workshops with 50-60 professionals from partner organisations as well as workers from all levels of children's social care who will champion the guide and materials when they are developed.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Team invited Ambassadors to their away day to lead an interactive session on the key ingredients of a good meeting before sharing their views on the qualities of a good IRO.
- Ambassadors who are birth children from families who foster have continued to co-deliver 'Skills to Foster' for birth children of new foster carers, sharing their own experiences and exploring what they need to know about fostering.
- A Fostering Service Mock Inspection included feedback from two families who were visited by Ambassadors to gain the views of the children in care and the carers own children. An Ambassador also observed a Fostering Panel. All their feedback formed part of the inspection team's findings which was presented to the Fostering Team.
- GCC employs 9 Ambassadors who are in or have been in care giving them valuable experience of the world of work as well as training and development opportunities to spring board them into their chosen career.
- The Care Leavers Partnership Event in February benefitted from hearing about the day-to-day experiences of 6 care leavers who shaped discussion and added challenge when needed. Several of them addressed the whole audience sharing what they think is going well with the Care Leavers Offer, where they think we can improve and the closing remarks of the day.

## **2 Challenges**

- To build on the success of the new 11-15's Forum and increase the number of 7-11 Activity Based Forums held during the year to ensure Voice Gloucestershire is more diverse and representative.
- To encourage wider engagement from children and young people who do not wish to attend a forum or group. This could include creative solutions like polls, surveys and blogs.
- To enable County Councillors to fulfil their commitments outlined in the Corporate Parenting Pledge e.g. to attend corporate parenting training delivered by Ambassadors and wider attendance at Foster Carers celebration events and support groups.

### **3 Commitments to strengthen Voice Gloucestershire 2020/21**

#### **As a Corporate Parenting Group, amongst other things we will:**

- Attend meetings and events organised by Voice Gloucestershire and Ambassadors and encourage colleagues to do the same
- Work on the Care Leavers Local Offer and encourage those that attended the Care Leavers Partnership Conference to deliver on their promises
- Encourage children in care and care leavers' voices to be heard louder in Children & Family Overview Scrutiny Committee
- Support the Access to Records project and ensure that ALL children and young people who apply to see their records go through a smooth and child centred process
- Create an annual calendar of events for 7-11's and 11-15's to enable workers and foster carers to promote the opportunities to the children and young people and encourage them to attend

### **4 Conclusion**

The challenge for Gloucestershire County Council is to keep up the positive work, aspire to constantly improve in how we engage with our children and young people as Corporate Parents and continue making a difference for them as if they were our own.

One of the ways we can encourage engagement is by creating a one page profile to share with children and young people in your ward. Look out for the template that will help you create one for yourself.

**Cllr Richard Boyles**  
**Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**