

Children in Care Council (CiCC) & Participation **Annual Report 2012-2013**

Current Numbers of Looked After Children

The following information has been taken from the current list of looked after children, participation activities and meeting are open to all looked after children above the age of 8. Where possible young people who are placed out of county but near enough to travel to meetings / activities are encouraged to do so. There will be a specific group to gain the views of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

Age Range	Total YP	Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	YP placed in area, able to travel to meetings / activities	YP engaged in CiCC / Activities
16yr - 18yr	44	9	20	10
13yr - 15yr	47	1	34	18
8yr - 12yr	35	0	26	16
Care Leavers				
18yr - 21yr	98	39		15
Over 21				2

Children in Care Council Meetings

During the last year the number of young people showing an interest in being a part of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) has increased, this has lead to the development of different CiCC meetings for specific age groups. The groups are for 8 – 12 year olds, 13 – 15 year olds, 16 -18 year olds and the 18 – 25 year old group. There are currently around 22 young people engaged with the CiCC meetings, with another 10 young people who have shown interest in attending the meetings.

The meetings for the older age groups take place monthly and focus on the priorities set out in the CiCC work plan for 2012-2013. The younger groups meet during the school holidays and focus on consultation activities. Peer mentors attend the younger CiCC meetings and offer support to the young people. The peer mentors are then able to represent the views of the younger children in care at the monthly CiCC meetings.

One of the new members of the CiCC stated:

'What I want to get out of being a part of the CiCC: Build confidence, make new friends, learn more about what it was/is like being in care to other people, and most of all MAKE A DIFFERENCE... I want to be able to help young people, by using my own experience to show them that it was/ isn't so bad and things always get better, I want to be able to try and improve the way some things are done, so young people in care have a better chance to be happy, even in care.'

Peer mentors continue to support on activity based participation and consultation groups, including the recent Fostering Ofsted inspection and promote the work of the CiCC, acting as a positive role model and supporting young people during group discussions.

Links to Corporate Parenting Panel

Members of the CiCC continue to attend Corporate Parenting Panel three times per year as agreed in the CiCC Priorities. Members of the CiCC present updates on their work plan and during one of the meetings organise an activity with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Due the times and dates the meetings take place there are only a small number of young people who can attend due to other commitments.

Members of the CiCC will be meeting with Richard Carr and Edwina Grant in February 2013 and will present information on the work of the CiCC over the last year. During the fostering inspection a member of the CiCC spoke highly about the meetings with Richard and Edwina informing the inspector of the value of these and told the inspector that their wishes and feelings are listened to.

Members of the CiCC met regularly with the previous Assistant Director and developed a good working relationship with her. These meetings will be arranged with the new Assistant Director as well as the Head of Service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Consultation Events

Members of the CiCC have attended a number of regional and national CiCC events where they have represented the views of Central Bedfordshire's looked after children and care leavers. The regional meetings are organised by 'A National Voice' and take place three times per year. At one of the meetings Tim Loughton attended the meeting and heard positive feedback from Central Bedfordshire's CiCC members.

Members have also attended a regional Corporate Parenting Panel event to give their views on welfare reform and raising the participation age.

Members of the CiCC also attended a national event in London where young people from different CiCCs met together to share examples of good practice. The CiCC members left the event with ideas of how to improve Central Bedfordshire's CiCC.

Surveys were completed for the Ofsted Inspection during the half term events and completed surveys were then sent direct to the Children's Rights Team. Members of the CiCC met with the Ofsted inspector and talked positively about the work of the CiCC and showed him one of the DVDs which are promoted the LAC pack.

A group of younger looked after children met with an Ofsted inspector during Fostering's Ofsted inspection along with a CiCC member; they talked about what was good about their foster home and created 'houses' to represent this.

The inspectors gave the young people good feedback and were pleased with the houses that they had created.

The Conference and Review Service developed a survey to look at the experience of children and young people at their Looked After Review Meeting. A number of young people were identified by the service and the surveys were conducted by the Participation Officer and Support Worker. The results of the survey were shared with the Head of Service for the Conference and Review Service.

The consultation documents for looked after children's reviews are being updated and members of the CiCC have given their views on how the questions should be worded and on the design of the documents.

Young people who attended the awards evening completed a survey which focused on contact with social workers and the social work teams as well as how young people would like to give their views and if they would like to join the CiCC.

Annual Awards Evening

There were over 180 nominations for the awards evening which took place on Friday 28th October. The event was attended by over 200 people with 100 children and young people expected to receive their award on the night. Councillor Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services presented the awards; CiCC members opened the evening and presented their DVD which showed the work of the CiCC over the last year. All young people who were nominated received a voucher and a certificate.

The Council Chambers were decorated to promote the work of the CiCC, there was also a space for children and young people to write and display what they were most proud of on the Achievement wall.

Some of the comments on the forms included –

'Being awarded and voted by my peers cadet of the year at air cadets'

'I learnt to swim, made a new friend, I achieved up to 333 merits, how to make a flower with a compass, learnt to say hello in Spanish, Japanese, French, Thai, German, Chinese. I am the class representative.'

A newly recruited member of the CiCC performed at the awards evening and entertainment was also provided by a 'close up' magician, stilt walker, DJ, a paper plane contest organised by a social worker from the Look After Children's Team and young people were also able to take part in a circus skills workshop.

Feedback from the awards has been very positive from young people and professionals.

'My young person was very emotional and humbled about being nominated for an award and his feedback was that he was going to treasure his award forever as it was the nicest thing that had ever happened to him in his whole life. He was so so pleased and will look back on that evening for a long time to come with a huge amount of pride.' Personal Adviser from Leaving Care Team.

'A huge thank you for organising this fantastic event. It was obvious that everyone had a great evening. I was particularly impressed that there were so many very small children receiving awards - and walking up confidently to receive them - as well as older young people, some of whom had succeeded in getting jobs or were progressing well towards independence.' Yolanda Corden, Interim Assistant Director.

Website

Work is being done with regards to the dedicated web site.

Activity Based Participation and Summer Activities Programme

There has been a number of activity days organised during the school holidays, the British Horse Society organised three pony days where young people had the opportunity to learn and care for the ponies and then have time learning the basis of riding. There have also been opportunities for young people to attend ice skating and a cinema trip.

During the summer holidays there were six days of activities during the summer holidays which included a trip to see Shrek at the theatre, trips to Gulliver's, Ice Skating and an outdoor activities day. There were around 35 young people who attended at least one activity day and members of the CiCC also came along to support the young children and act as peer mentors.

One young person said 'I've never been able to the theatre before and attending activities like these means I can get out of the house and meet with other young people who are in care.'

A foster carer said 'A very big thank you to you and your team and the young people that worked so hard to put these special days out for looked after children. I feel that younger children really benefit from them and it also lets them see that even older children can not always live at home and that they are ok and happy.'

The University of Bedfordshire organised a day for looked after children between the ages of 7 and 13. The day was aimed at raising aspirations of young people going onto further and higher education. Young people who attended learnt about university life and toured the campus. Young people enjoyed the day with one young person attending a PEP meeting informing her school that she would like to attend university when she was older.

A festive meal was organised over the recent holiday period for over 16 year olds. There were 17 young people and 6 members of staff from the leaving care team who came to the meal.

Residential Trips

There have been two residential trip opportunities for looked after children and care leavers. The University of Bedfordshire organised a two night three day trip for young people in year 11. The places were also available to young people from our neighbouring local authorities. There were five Central Bedfordshire looked after children who attended with support from the Participation Officer, the focus of this residential was revision techniques, exam preparation, along with raising aspirations of further and higher education.

The Youth Support team worked alongside the Participation Support Worker and Deputy Manager from the LAC team to organise a number of days looking at independent living skills. This was followed by a residential trip where young people had the opportunity to take part in fun activities. There were eight young people who attended the trip along with the Participation Support Worker and members of staff from the Youth Support Team.

Training of Social Workers

Members of the CiCC have been working with the University of Bedfordshire to provide workshops to undergraduate and post graduate students. The CiCC have developed the workshops to help students to understand 'What makes a good social worker?' from a young persons point of view.

Members of the CiCC developed their own training day for Central Bedfordshire's Newly Qualified Social Workers, the training involved a number of 'ice breakers' and young people talking about what is participation, The Pledge, communication, young people's involvement in meetings and participation events.

Training of Foster Carers

Members of the CiCC have worked with the Fostering team to develop a workshop which is part of the Skills to Foster Training. Young people work with foster carers to create kites which present 'What makes a good foster carer?' and 'How can foster carers ensure the wishes and feelings of young people are listened to?'

Members of the CiCC also attended the information evening for foster carers and presented information to people who were interested in becoming a foster carer.

Training for new Members of the CiCC

Members of the CiCC have created a training programme to support new members. The training will focus on communication skills, interviewing skills, professionalism, equality, confidentiality and peer mentoring. Training has been designed to prepare members for events they may be involved with. For example, interviewing, foster carer training and peer mentoring.

Interviews

There have been a number of interviews for Central Bedfordshire social workers where members of CiCC have been part of the interview process. The young people have developed their own assessment workshop where they ask candidates 'How will you ensure wishes and feelings are represented in care plans and pathway plans?' and 'what is the importance of participation and how will you promote participation to the children you work with?'

One of the interviewees stated *'I found all the young people to be very professional..... They were very clear in giving instructions of what they wanted us to do and were able to start us off. The tasks were fun and they made us interact with both the young people and the other interviewees. The tasks they wanted us to do gave us an opportunity to talk to them, ask them questions, which enabled us to see 'Social Work' through their eyes.'*

Members of the CiCC have worked with National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and have been part of the interview process for new Independent Visitors.

Newsletters & Who Cares Magazines

Members of the CiCC have worked to develop a Newsletter which has been sent to all looked after children along with Who Cares? Magazine. The newsletter contained information about the CiCC and their work with an update on the summer activities, Awards Evening and other activities.

We have subscribed to Who Cares? Magazine for the next year, these are quarterly and there are two magazines for different age groups. The magazines contain information about being in care as well as fun activities and some interviews with celebrities.

Members of the CiCC will be taking part in a Young Editors Workshop which will take place at the Who Cares? Trust head office in London. The Young Editors group will give their views, ideas and comments and will be looking at how best to develop the magazine.

Consultation / Fun Day

The consultation / fun day is being developed by members of the CiCC. The young people have discussed having a day where fun activities take place and where children and young people have the opportunity to give their feedback on the services they receive.

Participation Work Plan

The Participation Officer has continued to work towards the work plan that was agreed in February 2012 and support the priorities agreed by the CiCC.

In September 2012 a secondment opportunity for an additional Full Time Participation Officer was agreed and appointed. This contract will end in March 2013.

Participation Officers continue to promote participation to the social work teams, attending team meetings to promote the work of the CiCC and wider participation.

The LAC information packs have been distributed to all of the social work teams to ensure young people coming into care have access to this comprehensive information. Feedback from social workers has been that these are a useful resource for them to promote discussion with a newly looked after child. Young people's feedback has been that they like the packs and these help to answer some of the questions they have during a confusing and scary time for them.

A survey has been developed and will be sent out to parents of Looked After Children identified by social workers to ensure the views of parents are used within Service development.

Forward Plan

To further develop and increase the number of looked after children and young people and care leavers engaged in the CiCC meetings and activities.

To support members of the CiCC with their priorities for the next year and to help and guide them to achieve these priorities.

Participation Groups - for the following groups need to be developed:

- Children in Need
- Children Subject to Child Protection Plans
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Children with Disabilities
- Parents of Looked After Children

To work with members of the CiCC to further develop relationships with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Young people would like to share their work with Members on a more regular basis. They have suggested that an event could be organised where young people can display their work that has been done over the past year, with an opportunity to share information. This would also allow members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to meet with members from all of the CiCC groups. This could be called the CiCC Conference which could happen on a yearly basis and could also be open to Members who are not part of the Corporate Parenting Panel as well as senior managers within the local authority.