

Appendix B

C2C, Suffolk's Children in Care and Care Leavers Council

Annual Report 2014-2015

Background

Suffolk's Children in Care & Care Leaver's Council first formed in December 2010 and soon after named themselves 'Chat to Change', or C2C.

Over the past 4+ years they have been meeting on a regular basis during school holidays and have grown in numbers and strength. Although some of the original members have moved on and left the group, many still keep in touch and come back to volunteer at our Awards day. New members have joined; normally either as a recommendation from their worker or by introduction from other young people. Although this at times has changed the dynamics of the Council, they have managed to maintain a cohesive group and are well established and recognised as such within Suffolk Children & Young People's Services.

Presently there are 30 members in total, although some are far more active than others. They are representative across Suffolk with members from the Lowestoft, Ipswich, Stowmarket and Bury St. Edmunds areas.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority are White British, with one who is mixed race and one who is from Afghanistan. Three of the current members have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, while a few others have some degree of learning and/or emotional difficulties and many experience mental health problems.

As a group they are very passionate about making a difference for other children & young people in care and care leavers. Consequently they campaign vigorously for change based on their own experiences of services as well as their consultations with other children & young people and they are committed to seeing these campaigns through to satisfactory outcomes.

To consult with other children, C2C members volunteer with the junior Children in Care Council, Brighter Futures which is a more informal council for looked after children in Suffolk aged 5 to 14 years. Brighter Futures was originally established, in 2008 by children in care, who felt they needed a space in which to give their views, have fun and meet other children in care in Suffolk. Brighter Futures currently has 164 members. Brighter Futures, creates its own discussions as well as taking part in consultations designed and led by C2C. Their views are then presented with recommendations for improvement to the Corporate Parenting Board and the relevant services. Each council meets every school holidays and they are self-governing groups, who set their own rules and agendas, supported by the Children's rights team.

C2C are keen to operate a 'You Said, We Did' policy to ensure that services respond to the consultations and tell the children what they have done as a result of their feedback. Sometimes this process is easier than others and often services take a long time to respond. This is frustrating for C2C and Brighter Futures and sometimes leads children to question the merit of giving their views, unless change is affected.

The Children's rights team who support C2C have developed a flowchart outlining the process for feedback in order to improve this and the network of Children's Rights Champions across CYP continue to strengthen how young people's views are acknowledged and actions taken as a result.

As part of the MEIC The Children's rights team are moving into the Engagement hub, who are championing a culture of co-producing services with CYP. Our CinCC's will be a key part of co-production within LAC services and we hope that this cultural shift will help strengthen the communication between services and children and young people. This will ensure children's voices are heard and responded to and that we are designing and delivering services that meet their needs.

Chairperson

Aaron was elected chairperson in April 2014 and has worked tirelessly throughout the year, representing C2C at Corporate Parent Board meetings and presenting feedback from consultations. He wrote and gave a presentation at the Corporate Parenting Conference in November 2014 which was an account based on his personal experiences of being in care and leaving care which outlined the important issues to consider when acting as a corporate parent to Looked After children.

Consultations

- **16+ Catch 22 Leaving Care Service**

Consultation took place with a group of care leavers in Lowestoft, which highlighted emotional support as being the most important assistance provided by the service. They also identified the skills, experience and knowledge that care leavers felt were the most important for workers to have and what the strengths and weaknesses of the service are. This was fed back to Catch 22, who in turn informed their workers. The 'What makes a good Social Worker' document produced by young people was laminated and displayed in team areas.

- **Education**

This consultation looked at factors which helped children achieve in education, those that could have improved their attainment, barriers which prevent achievement and views on Personal Education Plans (PEPs). These views formed ten key messages which influence looked after children's ability to fulfil their educational potential. These were presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and resulted with an action to ensure the Learning Improvement Service, operational social work teams and the

safeguarding and corporate parenting services provided a response to the CPB and C2C to the key messages.

- **Reviewing The Promise**

On 6th August 2014 a Brighter Futures Group of 5 to 13 year olds took part in a consultation on each of the individual promises. As a result and combined with their own views C2C concluded that the ten promises remain relevant to Looked After children and care leavers as they encompass the factors important to them, however the way that the Promises are delivered and implemented needs changing.

In November as a part of **Takeover Day** C2C ran consultations with staff at Landmark House, Endeavour House and West Suffolk House via a short questionnaire designed to assess their knowledge and understanding of the Promise and their views of its strengths and weaknesses. 47 questionnaires were completed and of these 39 people were aware of the Promise. The one Promise that was found to be the most difficult to keep was 'to find a home to meet your needs'. In addition C2C representatives presented at practitioner's workshops across the region, gaining practitioner's views on how the Promise should work in practice and issues effecting the implementation of the Promise.

Through the Eastern Region Participation Network C2C also obtained information about how other authorities have promoted and embedded their Promises/Pledges and selected some of these methods which they feel will contribute to the Promise being successfully embedded into CYP. They then presented their proposals to the Corporate Parenting Board in October 2014. As a result the Head of Safeguarding was appointed to lead on this, with Head of Specialist Services assisting C2C to embed the renewed Promise into the practice of the CIN and LAC teams. C2C will revamp the design of the documentation relating to the Promise, to include separate formats for older and younger children. All this information is supporting C2C to rewrite the Promise, and identify strategies for senior management to put in place to ensure its implementation once it is re-launched.

Brighter Futures, junior Children in Care Council

On the 17th April 2014 a consultation was held with a Brighter Futures group of children aged under 13 who gave their views of what life is like living 'in care'. The key messages from this were the importance of: honesty, being able to stay with carers until 18, staying in touch with friends, not being moved too far away from family, matters being explained simply and social workers not changing frequently.

We also did a consultation about the 'all about me' booklets. The key messages from this were that some young people found it boring and that the questions never change, this is especially annoying if you are in a settled permanent foster family. Some young people didn't think it was very child friendly and a lot of them said they

didn't like to write down personal things. They also said it would be nice to have more pictures and they had experience where although they had completed the booklet it then wasn't mentioned at the review. We plan to work with young people to look at co-producing a new all about me booklet and to work with the IRO team to link it to the Promise.

In the summer of 2014 we did a big consultation on Suffolk's Promise the results of which are forming part of the rewrite and relaunch of the Promise.

We set up a mock medical centre at a BF event in order to consult children about their health assessments. We fed back the results to the LAC health task and finish group

In April 2015 BF took part in an OFSTED fostering consultation.

Ban Bed & Breakfast Campaign

Following the successful campaign during 2013/14 it was confirmed that in December 2014 that there were no young people under the age of 18 currently placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. This is a tremendous achievement for C2C after making this their focus the previous year in order to ensure that the establishments which they consider a significant safeguarding risk are not used as accommodation for any care leavers. The clear message has been given to the Leaving Care Service and the Central Resource Team that unless it is an absolute emergency situation no young people are to be accommodated in B&Bs and that in emergencies it should only be for one night.

Partly due to C2Cs campaign further investment has been made into alternative housing provision for over 16s and this has seen expansion of the services provided by the YMCA in Ipswich and Stowmarket.

However, as care leavers over 18 continue to be placed into B&Bs, C2C will make influencing these placement decisions one of their next areas of focus.

Care Leavers App

Aaron is currently working on developing this and members of the Engagement Hub are supporting him to explore sources of technical support.

Website

Aaron is also leading on making improvements to the information on, and format of, The Source website and is working with staff to ensure that the content of the site is relevant to and for looked after children and care leavers to increase the likelihood that it will be used by them.

Making Every Intervention Count (MEIC)

C2C saw the proposed new structure of the Engagement Hub and expressed their concern that there is no children's rights element within it. They also expressed that the job titles don't make sense to them. This was fed back to the MEIC consultation and on the 27th January 2015 it was confirmed by Head of the Engagement Hub that 'we have not yet confirmed the vision and purpose of the hub. The concepts of Co Design, Co Production and Co monitoring will underpin the work but we need to explore what these words mean in practice and how we will work to ensure that Children's Rights are embedded across the organisation.'

As a result of this the Co-Production Lead and Co-Production Advisor have retained Children's Rights in their job titles and will continue to have a role to monitor and promote Children's Rights throughout CYPS.

Achievement Awards

The annual Looked After Children (LAC) Achievement Awards was held on the 25th October 2014 at Thorpe Woodlands, which 87 young people attended and enjoyed a range of activities, culminating in an awards ceremony during which they were presented with certificates by Cllr Gordon Jones to celebrate their individual achievements of the year. The feedback from this event was positive, with lots of comments from foster carers and support staff highlighting how much the young people enjoyed the day.

One foster carer said; *"The children look forward to the Awards every year, it's a fantastic day. The children look so proud of their achievements whatever they are and love getting their certificates."*

Notably one young person's feedback was; *"it was so good to be with other children in the same situation as me. It gave me the confidence to participate as I didn't feel different."*

However, it was disappointing that few CYP staff and social workers were present and this was commented on by some of the CYP staff who did attend.

Advocacy

Anglia Care Trust (ACT) continues to hold the contract to provide one to one advocacy support for children and young people who are in Care, subject to child in need or child protection plans and care leavers up to the age of 24. As part of the 74 children and young people who have referred themselves or been referred to ACT, the Children's Rights Team have referred 20 young people to have the support of an independent advocate. Eight of these were care leavers, four of whom were enabled to gain advocacy support via their link with C2C.

Chairs Report - 17.03.15

Developing an App for Care Leavers

I have continued to look into an App for Care leavers which is called 'Care Leavers Information Outlet' (C.L.I.O). Myself and Julia met with the Information Support & Development Manager for CYP and her colleague about developing the App using the existing mainframe which the council had. After Marisa had spoken to Communications section about this, she found that the platform was no longer being used and therefore we wouldn't be able to use the platform to develop an App. Myself and Julia also had a meeting with Catch 22 about The Source and how we could update the information on it. We have suggested how we would like the page to look on the site and what relevant information be on it, including the newly printed Entitlements for care leavers booklet, which when is made available as an electronic copy, we hope will also be available on the App when this is up and running.

As the App platform wouldn't allow me to edit the existing application I had made, I used the same information from the existing one and started from scratch, editing the information on it and leaving it ready for the members of C2C to look at and review in our meeting which took place on the 18th February. The Feedback of which was very positive, there was some conversation on what else could be included into the app, all of which is simple enough to add in, this included linking in the Facebook page for Catch 22 & the information for benefits, such as Job Centre Contacts, etc.

The Promise

The Promise is still something we are very keen to get enforced back into the systems of work. While we acknowledge that it will be a long and strenuous task to pull off, we believe that it can be done. We just hope that there isn't resistance from staff on the subject when it comes to bringing it into the systems of work properly. This is something that we will be working closely with Tina and Linda on to ensure a clean and positive transition between the current system and the updated system with The Promise embedded into it.

The Progress for this is going well and we have laid down the basis for the groups of young people that different versions of the Promise will be aimed at, these will be; Under 10's, 11- 16 & 16+, this will also be taking into account the abilities of the young person on what material will be used. For the younger children & children with limited understanding it will be statements that they will be able to understand with pictures/symbols. For 11-16, it will be a little more detailed and for the 16+ it will have in depth descriptions.

Based on staff feedback from the survey that we have conducted we have changed some of the promises slightly but children & young people are very keen to keep the detail rather than produce 'woolly' statements.

The Deputy Director & Head of Specialist Services came in to review what we had come up with. They seemed to understand and agree with what we want to put in place. They listened to the staff feedback that we had gained around difficulties in keeping the Promises & agreed that with the renewed Promise there would be staff

guidance around how to escalate these issues. Allan & David fully supported our desire to keep it detailed & the strengths of having a challenging Promise. The next step is to take out proposals to the Practitioner workshops to share with staff & gain their feedback.

An Easter launch seems unlikely now as we want to make sure we get it right this time around & we have a Promise that makes a difference.

Virtual School Board

This is something that alongside the Head of the Virtual School and a group of other professionals from their relevant positions, I be taking part in. The first meeting will be taking place on the 2nd of March.

Notes from Myself

I'm glad to see the direction in which C2C is going, it's looking to a positive future and the progress we have made is brilliant. I'm glad to be part and leading such a great group of enthusiastic young people who want to make a positive change to the way the system works, making the future better for other Young People and Care Leavers. I hope that the positives continue to outweigh the negatives and that whatever obstacles come between us and the goals that we wish to achieve that we can overcome them. I also want to say thank you to Julia, for without whom the group wouldn't have got as far as we have to date.

Aaron
Chairman of C2C on behalf of the Members

