



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

Annual Report 2015-2016

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 for short.

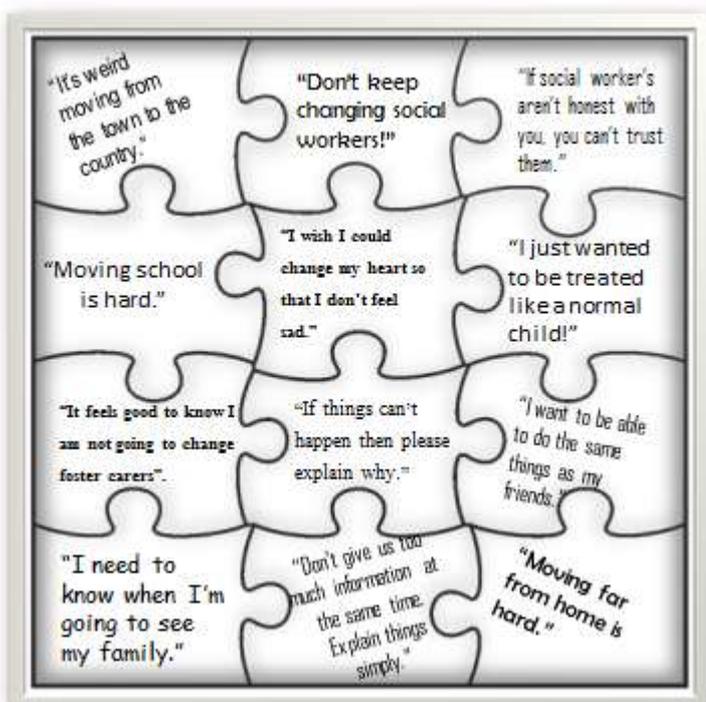
Current members describe themselves as "a passionate group of young people." They are aged 14 – 24 years and either in care or care leavers in Suffolk. They meet in the school holidays to share their experiences, discuss issues and decide on areas that they would like to help improve. At quarterly meetings with the Corporate Parenting Board, C2C present feedback from their discussions and consultations. The Corporate Parenting Board acts as champions for the voice of children in care and care leavers and holds services to account for listening to and taking into account their views on an individual level and when planning and reviewing services.

At this time there are 20 young people signed up as C2C members with an average of around 8 – 12 young people attending each meeting. They are a very diverse group with 4 young people having a learning disability, 5 young people with mental health issues, a teenage mum who's child also has a learning disability and young man who **was** an unaccompanied asylum seeker but who, over the last year, has now been granted leave to stay in this country, *The group celebrated this wonderful news with a cake!*

However, despite their very obvious differences, the one thing they have in common is their experiences of being a child in care in Suffolk and their passion and commitment to change things for the better. As a group they work tirelessly to this end. Their strap line is "We are like a dog with a bone!"

C2C members also offer each other invaluable support. One young person described this in a letter that she sent to the Ofsted Inspectors as follows; *"As a 15 year old in foster care, I have often felt alone, as if no one understood me and what I have been/going through. Since being part of C2C, I now know other young people in the care system and can freely talk to them and feel that they understand me and aren't simply a listening ear, though they are that as well. C2C isn't just a Children in Care Council to me; we're a community, a family."* **(Please see Appendix A attached for the full version of her letter)**

Brighter Futures is the junior Children in Care Council for 5-13 year olds. C2C members volunteer with this group to support them in getting their views and voices heard. Here are some of the things that Brighter Futures' members said in a recent consultation about what is important to them.



Roles within C2C

Aaron Williams has been the Chairperson of C2C for the past 2 years and does an incredible job, as indicated by the fact that members re-elected him for a second term. Aaron is still holding the fort as Chair for this year at the moment because no other members currently feel able to take up the position. This is due to the fact that many of the young people are studying for their GCSEs or going off to University, so therefore do not feel able to commit. At the last meeting members agreed that the older young people would act as mentors for the younger ones and in that way could help develop them into taking on more responsibilities and hopefully, eventually the position of Chair.

Aaron sums up his own views of C2C and their achievements in the attached document which he prepared as part of a preface to the Corporate Parenting Strategy. **(Please see attached Appendix B)**

Vanessa Shepherd is a care leaver who has successfully gained an Apprenticeship within the Council as Young Commissioner. Also a member of C2C, Vanessa now helps to organise and run the meetings. As part of her Apprenticeship, Vanessa is studying for an NVQ in Youth Work, so she uses the C2C meetings to complete some of her practical assignments and assessments.

C2C's Achievements



Suffolk's Promise

As Aaron states in his report, a large part of the work undertaken by C2C over the past year has been to continue the process of renewing Suffolk's Promise. This is a set of promises made by the Local Authority to the children its care. C2C wanted a Promise that really made a difference to the lives of children and young people. Something that was embedded in practice, that workers upheld and children and young people could use to ensure they received the best possible service and support.

C2C members consulted with children and young people in care across Suffolk to find out what was most important to them and what they thought should be promised. C2C then presented at Practitioner Workshops across the County to talk to Social Workers about what they thought they could promise based on what the children had said was most important.

C2C were really conscious about getting the balance right bearing in mind that workers did not want to make promises to children they couldn't keep.

Through this extensive consultation process, a set of 10 promises were eventually decided upon and C2C set about carefully wording each one. They also asked children and young people to put them in order of priority and here they are;

- 1. We will find a home for you where you are safe, well cared for and can be happy**
- 2. We will help you see your family, friends and other people who are important to you**
- 3. You will have a Social Worker and you will know their name and how to contact them**
- 4. We will listen to you and talk to you about all the important things in your life**
- 5. We will make a plan with you about how best to look after you**
- 6. We will help you to do the things that you like and be the best you can be**
- 7. If you have any problems or worries we will work hard to sort them out with you**
- 8. We will help you to do your very best at school**
- 9. We will help you to be as healthy, well and happy as you can be.**
- 10. We will only tell people things about you if they need to know them to look after you properly**

An 11th promise was also added for older young people and care leavers;

- 11. We will work with you to give you all the help and support you need to make a success of moving on from care to adult life**

C2C then worked with the younger Brighter Futures members to design a set of booklets for different age groups. They ran a drawing competition for younger children and conveyed all the children's ideas and images to the designers to produce the final copies. **(Please find attached)**

C2C met with the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and many Senior Managers to ensure that the Promise would be properly embedded in practice and into policy. As a result the Promise is now at the centre of the reviewing process for each individual child and young person in care and care leaver in Suffolk. All reports are written to the Promise using the Promise headlines and at every child and young person's 6 monthly review their IRO uses a Promise checklist to ensure that that the promises are being kept for that individual child or young person.

C2C also wanted to ensure that there was a continuous monitoring and evaluation process against the Promise that they could be involved in. Thus, the IRO's and operational service leads are asked to provide 6 monthly reports back to C2C and the Corporate Parenting Board on how the Promise is being implemented and how it is being met for children and young people.

This has been an exhaustive piece of work for C2C, but their 'dog with a bone' attitude has definitely paid off and as a result Suffolk now has a Promise to be proud of that was particularly highlighted as an example of good practice during the recent Ofsted inspection.



Sue Cook, Corporate Director of Children & Adults & Aaron Williams, Chair of C2C

C2C's priorities for the coming year.

Contributing to service development and review

- Continue to monitor how Suffolk's Promise is embedded into service delivery to ensure that it makes a difference to children and young people.
- Continue to publicise & promote their work by providing updates and information to *The Source* website for children in care and care leavers, and make sure children, young people, parents, carers and professionals know about it.
- Develop an App for children in care and care leavers so that they can give their views directly to their social worker and IRO in readiness for their review.
- To monitor the *Staying Put* policy and how it is affecting young people.
- To monitor PEPs (Personal Education Plans) for children in care and care leavers in Suffolk to make sure that children and young people are fully involved in them.
- To work with the Virtual School to reduce instances of bullying against children in care

Promoting the voice of children in care and care leavers locally and nationally

- To link with other youth groups in Suffolk through SAY, Suffolk Assembly of Youth, to establish a strong and influential voice for young people in the County.
- Continue to work with Corporate Parenting Board to enable them to understand the challenges faced by children in care and care leavers.
- To work with Foster Carers through Suffolk Foster Carers' Association to publicise the work of the Children in Care Council and plan a joint annual conference.
- To plan and organise the annual Celebration of Achievement Awards for children in care in Suffolk.
- Contribute to debates at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children in Care & Care Leavers (APPG) by attending future meetings in the House of Commons.
- To participate in a regional conference for children in care councils attended by the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield.

Appendix A

Chat to Change - Suffolk's Children in Care and Care Leavers' Council

I have been a part of Chat to Change (informally known as C2C) since April 2015. I feel that it has been a big, positive part of my life and I am part of the group with pride. I am one of the youngest members of the group, so I feel that we have a wide range of views from younger and older young people who are looked after and a range of care leavers from different backgrounds.

THE EFFECTS OF CHAT TO CHANGE ON OTHER LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE

I have not been a part of the group for very long, however I have been included long enough to be present for the re-modelling of Suffolk's Promise at the Looked After Children's Awards. I have also been included in numerous joint-Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting Board meetings which have covered changes made in the past, such as the Ban the Bin Bag policy and lowering the use of B&Bs as accommodation for Care Leavers. I feel that C2C have been a HUGE success during the time that they have been running, and I think that they will carry on the way they have.

THE EFFECTS OF CHAT TO CHANGE ON MYSELF

In the short time that I have been part of C2C, I feel as if I have made a sort of family as I feel that many of us have developed a very close friendship over time. As a 15 year old in foster care, I have often felt alone, as if no one understood me and what I have been/going through. Since being part of C2C, I now know other young people in the care system and can freely talk to them and feel that they understand me and aren't simply a listening ear, though they are that as well. C2C isn't just a Children in Care Council to me; we're a community, a family. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Appendix B

Chair's report from the Children in Care Council, C2C

As Chair of the Children in Care Council, I have seen changes in the way the system works over the past two and a half years. This is something we have been a big part of, which has involved a lot of consultation work with young people about what they want. We have advocated these opinions to make sure that Young People's voices are heard. This is the single most important thing when it comes to Young People's Services. If we aren't listening to what young people want, then we won't be providing a good service to our young people and making a difference.

C2C have spent about a year and a half reworking Suffolk's Promise to children and young people, making sure that it's something that we can succeed at providing achievable and straight forward targets in relation to the young person's progression into adult life. Over the two years and a half years I have been chair, not only has our relationship with the Corporate Parenting Board grown, but also the young people who have been involved with the Children in Care Council have grown, becoming more confident and making sure that they can make a difference to other young people's lives. I'm proud of them and I'm proud of the difference we are making and being a part of it.

The decisions that we make are important and impact massively on the service we deliver to the young people that we look after. It's important that we make sure the decisions are the right ones and it's good that the Promise is central to this Strategy. There is always progress to be made and things that will need changing to make sure that the service is running smoothly, and this is something we will continue to work with the Corporate Parenting Board on. I look forward to see the continued progression of the service, as aiming for a better tomorrow for our young people is what we are passionate about. The proof will be how well the words in this strategy are experienced by young people as making a difference to their lives.

Aaron Williams

Chairman of the Children in Care Council