

Voice of the Child in West Sussex

This is a digest of current work that the Voice & Participation Team (V&P) is undertaking across West Sussex.

The work contributes to and informs the Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy, The Promise, the Corporate Parenting Plan, and the Bright Spots Action Plan.

It is regularly monitored in the annual V&P Team Business Plan, with quantitative and qualitative data available to evidence outcomes and impact.

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1. Mind of My Own

Mind of My Own is a digital App for young people to communicate with social care practitioners, and offers them a safe environment in which to express their feelings. Current activity includes roll-out of communication and engagement plan, with visits to support teams in understanding how to use the app and encouraging young people to use it. Usage data is consistently rising and the range of staff using it steadily increasing. Now we are tracking outcomes and making sure young people are getting results from using the app. This in turn is used as case study snapshots to help professionals understand the app's potential as a tool for Voice.

2. Children in Care Council (CiCC) – Fortnightly groups and workplan

As a group, CiCC meet every fortnight, currently meeting online and in person. The CiCC is made up of young people aged 10-16 who are looked after by West Sussex and gives them a chance to have their voice heard about the services that affect them. There are currently 20 members of the group, including those who are SEND and live out of the county.

3. Children we Care for and Care Leaver Informal Activities

A regular programme of activities is offered to children we care for and care leavers. These take place on a monthly basis and allow those attending to meet with other people in a similar situation to themselves and gain new skills.

4. Interviews

Young people are trained in interview skills and have taken part in interviews for key posts including Assistant Directors and Independent Reviewing Officers. Young people are recognised for their contribution through payment by vouchers. This is open to all young people in West Sussex including Care Leavers and Children we care for.

5. Promises, Pledges and Charters

The Promise was developed in a series of workshops with CiCC, Care Leavers and Corporate Parenting Panel and launched in August 2020. Young people from the Children First Board are also working on a charter of what they expect from services, from both voluntary sector and councils. In addition, young people who have a West Sussex professional assigned to them, such as Children in Need, Youth Justice Service etc, will be working on creating a Charter in Early 2022.

6. EPIC (Exceptional People in Care) Awards

This annual event is supported by West Sussex County Council, to celebrate the achievement of Children and Young People Looked After in West Sussex. The recent EPIC awards ceremony took place at the K2 leisure centre in Crawley on 7th November. Over 300 young people, carers, volunteers and staff took part in person to hear the amazing things our children and young people have achieved. The event was organised by a range of services and groups including the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leaver's Forum; the event highlights Young People's development and success.

7. West Sussex Youth Cabinet and Youth MPs

This democratically elected group of young people received a larger percentage of votes from young people than in the national elections. The Youth Cabinet and UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) members are aged 11 to 18, elected to represent the views of young people in West Sussex.

UKYP members also represent views nationally, attending an annual debate in the House of Commons in London.

Members attend events informing them about important social and political issues. They gather the views of other young people using online surveys, and campaign for changes by producing films, blogs, and other media.

8. Care Leaver Executive Group and Care Leaver Advisory Board

The Care Leaver Executive Group membership has recently been refreshed. It is an online group of Care Leavers who meet for set tasks and agendas.

A national event (Care Leavers National Benchmarking Forum) is attended by some members of the Board.

The Care Leaver Advisory Board was established with the support of a WSCC Care Leaver to enable change led by a group of young people who are care experienced. They sit on the Journey to Independence Board and are supporting the development of the Care Leavers Local offer.

9. Care Leaver Training

1. Total Respect – Training facilitated by Care Leavers 4 times a year for professionals, to help them understand the voice of children who are in care and Care Leavers and embed their learning in best practice. On average there are 60 participants per year, via the Learning Gateway.

2. Skills to Foster – Training facilitated by 3 Care Leavers, also 4 times a year specifically for new foster carers to help them understand how to treat young people when they first come into their care, including transitions and Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC). On average there are 80 participants per year, via the Learning Gateway.

10. Care Leaver Representation at national events

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) - termly, on a range of topics with on average 6 West Sussex Care Leaver participants per year.

National Care Leavers Benchmarking Forum – twice a year, on a range of topics with approximately 4 West Sussex Care Leaver participants attending per year.

11. Engagement HQ

A dedicated area where young people can have their voice heard on consultations, as well as allowing resources to be hosted.

12. Children First Board

A group of children and professionals involved in making sure young people are heard and influence services provided for them. The group sets out to improve outcomes for children and young people who live in West Sussex, or who are cared for by West Sussex's Children's Services. It also aims to listen and respond to the views of children, young people, and their families all the time, particularly when decisions are being made about how services are run and funded. This is achieved through the Voice and Participation team supporting the young person Vice Chair of the group. The team also co-ordinate the Youth Voice Network allowing all young people from across West Sussex to have their voice heard.