

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

9th March 2021

PARTICIPATION UPDATE

Reasons for the Report

1. This report has been prepared to provide the committee with an update on the Bright Sparks Club. Bright Sparks is the current primary participation mechanism for our Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This update will inform the committee about the Bright Sparks Awards, the Bright Sparks consultation event and plans to address the first of the five priorities identified after consulting with care experienced children and young people (CYP) in Cardiff.

Background

2. National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a UK charity offering information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to the most vulnerable children, young people and adults. The core work undertaken by NYAS is an advocacy service for care experienced children and young people. NYAS are commissioned by Cardiff Children's Services to deliver a participation service to children and young people aged 11-25 who are receiving care and support from them, with the principle objective of ensuring that Children and Young People are afforded a voice and are active participants in shaping policy and service provision within the council and within a wider external context.

3. Bright Sparks also acts as a peer support forum for care experienced children and young people, providing them with opportunities to take part in social activities, other participation opportunities and avenues of support. NYAS Cymru deliver fortnightly group sessions, previously meetings were held at children's services offices, with social activities taking place in the community at venues accessible to children and young people. Since the Covid 19 pandemic Bright Sparks has continued to meet virtually.

4. Previous Work Undertaken

- Trained young people in recruitment and selection, preparing and supporting them to take part in young people's interview panels to recruit staff for new residential service provision in Cardiff
- Supported facilitation of group work sessions on Corporate Parenting Strategy (face to face and digitally)
- Consultation session held on the 'Mind of My Own App'. This app assists young people to communicate their views in a way that they are comfortable with. It can be used for them to say how they are feeling, what is important to them and what support they require.
- Consultation session held with 'Children in Wales' on guides and resources for Care experienced CYP
- Consultation session held with 'Children Commissioner for Wales Office' on Ambassador scheme
- Employability workshop held, facilitated by NYAS Peer Development Worker
- Bright Sparks members took part in separate Poetry /creative writing workshops
- Report submitted highlighting young people views and experiences (gained via group consultation and advocacy casework) to inform Children's Services strategy.

Issues

The Bright Sparks Awards

5. The awards celebrate the numerous achievements of care experienced CYP in Cardiff, whilst also acknowledging the commitment and dedication of others such as foster carers and supported lodgings providers. The event is the annual highlight of the Bright Sparks Club, it is the planning and organising that enable young people to feel empowered and heard. The event has been an excellent example of good practice in Participation.

6. The planning of the 14th Awards in 2020 took place during Bright Sparks meetings with some young people being consulted separately when unable to attend. The Pandemic had a negative impact on the numbers attending meetings, in addition to resulting in a virtual event.
7. The event is usually held in October but following a suggestion by the Cabinet Member for Children and Families to move the event to December, the group were consulted and agreed to holding the ceremony on the 10th December 2020. This resulted in more time being available for the CYP to engage with the production company.
8. The awards provide entertainment as well as an opportunity for the young people to demonstrate their talents. The group unanimously felt that entertainment should be provided by a talented singer who is a member of Bright Sparks, as has become tradition. Entertainment has always been an important feature of the ceremony.
9. The young person agreed, and conversations were had about song choice and being mindful of the issue of Royalties due to the event being recorded. The theme was agreed to be "supporting the NHS" with a Christmas backdrop. To get the feel of an awards ceremony the young people were provided by the Participation Officer with "winner's envelopes" to open during filming. To end on a spectacular note, the young people were also provided with multiple balloons stuffed with sequins to pop at the end of the ceremony. Permissions were sought and received for the young people to be filmed and their images used.
10. The idea of making videos to thank NHS staff was later changed to each creating a piece of art as a tribute. The young people were each provided with art and craft materials and photographed their creation, this was sent to the production company.
11. Once nominations were received the Corporate Parenting Officer attending a meeting with the group to go through categories and decide on winners.

12. The pre-recording of the event involved the young people reading out the names of categories and winners which would be later edited by the production company. Unfortunately the group member decided not to perform and requested that they do so in 2021 when they hoped to perform live.

13. The recording was a lengthy process which took much longer than envisaged and proved to be a demanding task for the young people. They would benefit from relevant training and support in future. The young people did not use the provided envelopes and instead focussed on what they had to say on camera. One of the young people was also supported to prepare a speech which was to be used as an introduction to the awards.

14. Debrief of Awards

- There was disappointment that groups NHS tribute artwork was not included
- It was also suggested that all categories were revisited a head of the next awards.
- The ceremony was too short and appeared rushed on screen
- Sound quality needed improving
- Participants should all be muted by the person running the event

Consultation Event

15. Initial meetings related to planning the consultation event were attended by a cross section of officers from Children's services and the NYAS Participation Officer and Operational Manager. Children's services and NYAS jointly raised awareness of the event. HOW MANY CHILDREN INVOLVED and HOW MANY ATTENDED

16. This event was open to all children and young people aged 11 to 25 who are interested in joining the group or wanting to learn more. Age appropriate sessions took place – one for those aged 11-15 and another for those who are 16-25. Consent was sought from foster carers and risk information from Social Worker's prior to the CYP attending.

17. Those who attended and who now join will shape how the group will look in future and help to plan a relaunch. Those attending were made aware that future work would address the 5 priorities that were included in the Corporate Parenting Strategy and were identified from previous consultation with Bright Sparks members and other Children Looked after in Cardiff. We listened to what would encourage children and young people to attend future meetings and heard the type of fun activities they would like to do. Members will receive accredited training in Peer Mentoring, Peer Advocacy and other skill development to help them in their role.
18. Alternatives to the Bright Sparks name were discussed amongst the group and the overall decision was to stay with the current name. To promote the group and to recruit new members a new poster was created. This is in the process of being branded by the NYAS Communication and Marketing team.
19. The Participation Officer, a NYAS sessional Worker and a Youth Work student are facilitating each group. All those who attended the consultation event attend the regular fortnightly meeting except for one CYP.
20. 11 CYP attended and were referred by Social Services, a local school and from NYAS projects.

Priority 1 – Emotional Wellbeing

21. The following work has started on Improving Emotional Well-being, the first of the 5 priorities identified from consulting with Bright Sparks and other Children Looked After in Cardiff.
22. Bright Sparks members have been involved with a piece of work for The Fostering Network which will create a resource (videos) for professionals across Wales, including CAMHS, Education, Children's Services, Foster Carers and third sector groups. The aim is to explore the importance of good mental health and wellbeing for children and young people. They will explore

the lives of care experienced young people, what well-being means to them and how their dreams and aspirations have been shaped through their experiences over time.

23. Members of the group are also currently supporting a PHD research project at Cardiff University, through CASCADE: Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre. The research aims to study mental health services in Wales for care experienced young people, looking at what's working, where the gaps are and identifying ways in which the gaps can be closed. The young people have enjoyed being listened to and have received creative toolkits to express themselves.

Monitoring of service

24. NYAS Cymru and Children's Services have recognised the need to monitor and review the participation service separately from the advocacy provision, and these meetings have been taking place at regular intervals. We are in the process of agreeing a reporting template which will be completed on a quarterly basis. Key to monitoring of the service is eliciting children and young peoples' feedback and recent consultation work has been carried out to ascertain their ideas on their preferred methods of doing so.

Financial Implications

25. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report, with all activities referred to within the report being funded from within existing resources.

Legal Implications

26. There are no legal imps arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

27. The committee is recommended to note the Participation update and to make any observations or comments.

DEBORAH DRIFFIELD
Director of Childrens' Social Services
3rd March 2021