

BRIGHT SPARKS/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 primary participation mechanism for Cardiff Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This update will inform the committee of the activities that Bright Sparks has undertaken in relation to the first of the 5 Priorities outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy – Emotional Wellbeing, in addition to other activities in which the group has participated.

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 (CYP) are afforded a voice and are active participants in shaping policy and service provision within the council and within a wider external context.
3. In addition, Bright Sparks is 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. The NYAS Cymru Participation Officer facilitates fortnightly group sessions which have been online since the Covid 19 pandemic. 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.

Issues

4. Priority 1 – Emotional Wellbeing - The following work has taken place in relation to this priority.
5. Bright Sparks have been creating resources for The Fostering Network which will be the youth participation element of its wellbeing masterclasses. These classes are to be delivered to professionals across Wales, including CAMHS, Education, Children's Services, Foster Carers and third sector groups. The online event which encompasses a series of five masterclasses will explore the importance of good mental health and wellbeing for children and young people and will consider how a shared learning approach and framework between service providers can be encouraged to create better outcomes for those who are looked after. Members of the group have created videos and contributed to a PowerPoint presentation that explores the lives of care experienced young people, what wellbeing means to them; how their dreams and aspirations have been shaped through their experiences over time.
6. Other work in conjunction with the Fostering Network was Bright Sparks representation at a Young Peoples Care Forum meeting, which the network facilitated. The young people shared their views to help support a piece of research on mental health and wellbeing support for CYP in care. The group were also consulted on potential themes that the Fostering Network should focus on this year.
7. Bright Sparks has supported a PHD research project at Cardiff University, through CASCADE: Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre. The research is examining 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 used

creative toolkits to express themselves and it was an excellent opportunity for them to have their voices heard.

8. Participated in a Welsh Government and DECIPHer, Cardiff University funded consultation on young peoples' views and thoughts on statutory school and community counselling services.
9. Bright Sparks members have been attending a series of NYAS In-House mental health and wellbeing workshops on Resilience which are being delivered by a multi-award winning training consultant. This has been an opportunity for the young people to address their individual needs in a safe environment.
10. Bright Sparks members have been instrumental in the development of two resources being created by specialist IT students from Cardiff University. The first being a guide to being in care for CYP and the second a digital resource/document wallet to store important information and memories from before and during their care experience. Before work was started the students consulted the group on what information, guidance and advice they would like to see in the guide. In relation to storing memories they shared what documents and memories they would like to keep safe and are important to them from before and during their time in care.
11. The students met with the group again for feedback on their progress where the young people made suggestions of additional information that could be added and gave suggestions about design. They have now finished all stages of research and design and are in the process of implementation. The document wallet (including memory storage and a journal) are complete and the next stage is to get the existing version hosted as well as creating some new content from the discussions had with the groups. The guide to being in care application has a lot of the structure finished and it is ready for the addition of finished content and design work. By the end of April the students will test and give feedback before any final amends are made.

Other Work Undertaken

12. Alongside the Cardiff Advocacy Project Co-ordinator, the Participation Officer has co-hosted virtual monthly Drop-In sessions for Children's services staff. This has provided staff with an opportunity to learn more about Bright Sparks and to have questions answered directly which it is hoped will generate referrals to the project.

13. The YPAG with support from the NYAS Policy and Research Department compiled a report from the results of the 'What matters to you?' survey. This report contained a five point plan which called on candidates in this year's Senedd/Welsh Parliament elections to take action for care experienced children/young people when they create their policies/manifesto's. The launch of the report was followed by NYAS hosting a Hustings event for care experienced young people which gave them the opportunity to ask politicians from all main political parties in Wales questions relating to care experience. The event was attended by CYP throughout Wales.

14. In relation to Votes@16, young people have been provided with information on how to register to vote, what the Senedd is and the work it does. Discussions also took place on why it's important to vote in the Senedd elections.

15. Members took part in a Hustings on Youth Work organised by CWVYS (Council for Wales of Voluntary Services). They put forward questions which were answered at the event to ensure that issues relating to care experienced CYP were on the agenda and acknowledged by the politicians that were present.

Young Person Interview Panels

16. Bright Sparks members have received training and support to sit on Young Person's interview Panels for a new and an established Residential Childrens Homes in Cardiff. These roles being recruited for have ranged from senior roles to night staff and the panel provides a young care experienced persons perspective on applicants who reach interview stage.

17. The panel is facilitated by the NYAS Participation Officer and contains two or three young people, they take place after each candidate has been interviewed by the staff panel. Both panels then meet to share feedback on the suitability of candidates. The young people have enhanced their own interview skills whilst undertaking this role and in 2021 they have spent four full days and three half days interviewing.

Peer Advocacy Training

18. To effectively represent care experienced CYP the group have received this training which also gives them the opportunity to receive an OCN qualification. The areas covered within the training includes communication skills, confidentiality and representing views, wishes and feelings.

Future Work: Priority 2 – Better Connections – Improved Relationships

19. The group have been looking towards this second outcome and have produced a shortlist of areas which they would like to explore. This list is as follows:

- Advocacy and its role in improving relationships
- Relationships with Children's Services staff and Foster carers
- Relationships with other professionals e.g. Healthcare staff
- Increasing Social Networks
- Social Media
- Communication skills-understanding the individuals and others behaviour
- Maintaining relationships
- Promoting understanding of the issues that affect care experienced CYP
- Healthy Relationships with friends, families and partners
- Resilience
- Independent Volunteers

Financial Implications

20. 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

21. There are no legal implications arising from this report

RECOMMENDATION

22. The Committee is recommended to note the Participation update and to make any observations or comments.

DEBORAH DRIFFIELD
DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES
11 May 2021