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**Participation update**

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**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 second 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 2 – Better Connections – Improved Relationships - The following work has taken place in relation to this priority.
5. The young people are putting together their stories for “What’s your story?” NYAS would like to hear directly from children and young people about their experiences of living in care. The concept is to challenge what the media often shows- stereotypes of children and young people in care as lost causes. These stories will address the stigma that can affect people with care experience in all areas of life. Bright Sparks are using this opportunity to tell their story in their own way. Bright Sparks members were involved in the development of the promotional materials that are being used to promote “What’s your story?”, sharing their thoughts on poster design and content.
6. Bright Sparks assisted in a review of the recruitment of volunteers to the Independent Visitor Project. An Independent Visitor (IV) is an adult volunteer who befriends and develops a long-term friendship with a young person in care. They provide CYP with continuity, which is something not always possible with changing carers and social workers.
7. This relationship can also involve helping young people develop new interests, skills and hobbies or going on outings such as to the cinema, bowling or a park walk. Bright Sparks members have reviewed and revised the interview questions to assist in ensuring that those who undertake the role have a good understanding of care experience and are able to be effectively matched with a child or young person in their local area who shares similar interests.
8. The young people expressed the importance of their peers being involved in the recruitment process at the point of interview. IV Co-ordinators had queried whether a question asking the candidates thoughts on the life experiences of CYP in care was pitched correctly and suggested alternative wording. They also suggested other changes to wording which would elicit more in-depth responses

and provide a sense of the applicant's personality. The feedback from this meeting was shared with Co-ordinators throughout NYAS and changes have been made in relation to CYP now sitting on the interview panel with staff. The changes to interview questions are awaiting consideration by national IV Co-ordinator Manager

9. Bright Sparks members have been involved in new developments regarding Advocacy work in Cardiff and ensuring that NYAS complies with RISCA (The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016). Work undertaken in relation to this has involved:

- Ensuring the feedback on the Advocacy service is able to be given in a child and young person-centred way.
- Looking at the content, style and format of the Advocacy Service Guide
- Writing up a case study to go in the RISCA service guide.
- Redesigning the content and design of the Advocacy Plan

10. Young People involved in Bright Sparks have continued to sit on multiple interview panels for the Advocacy service in NYAS. This is an integral part of the recruitment process at NYAS.

11. Bright Sparks has provided feedback to the Child Friendly Cardiff Team on the draft Cardiff Anti-Bullying Guidance. The Participation Officer has also provided information on Bright Sparks and Advocacy which will be added to the Anti-Bullying guidance document.

12. The Anti Bullying guidance was well received with the group finding the language to be relatable and the wording clear. The group felt that the content of these documents was particularly important/relevant to care experienced pupils who have another "label" to be bullied about in addition to those described.

- The definition of bullying is considered to be clear and the Children and Young People could relate to the description, expressing surprise that there was not a legal British or Welsh definition in place already.
- The group felt that the forms and motivation of bullying were very clear and relatable.

- The group were pleased to see the emphasis put on schools having the power “to discipline learners for incidents taking place off the premises and powers to search or confiscate mobiles as a disciplinary penalty where learners have contravened the school behavioural policy and/or anti-bullying policy.” This had not been a reality for them and incidents taking place off school premises were not taken seriously.
- The information related to Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents was described as particularly important and that these categories were very well illustrated.
- The form to report Hate Crime was considered very accessible and easy to use.

13. The young people also shared their experiences of bullying to be shared with you. They described pupils taunting by pupils, with a common theme being that they were told that their parents did not want them. They also described incidents such as pupils at school listening outside doors whilst they were having meetings with Social Services about their care. Also, incidents were described where teachers made assumptions about their background and intelligence based on their care experience.

14. The young people attended a workshop on Digital Friendships & Relationships that was facilitated by Brook. Brook are specialists in educating and empowering young people to make informed decisions about their sexual health and wellbeing and this session enabled to young people to consider the safety of all relationships that they form online.

15. For many of the group it was an opportunity to consider how to deal with different scenarios and to share information. The feedback was very positive and the group shared their thoughts on activities that Brook should incorporate into their plans for the next few years. The Participation is awaiting receipt of this plan to share with the group.

16. Bright Sparks members have been working with PhotoVoice on their Care Leavers in Focus project. The project develops advocacy materials with care experienced young people to inform and improve services and support for young people leaving care. To ensure the voices of care-experienced young people are

central in championing change, participants shared their views of what is working and what could be improved in their support by engaging in photography and storytelling workshops.

17. These findings from the Workshops are being used to directly influence new resources, based on the insights and information provided. The workshops produced the thematic areas below which are directly influencing resources that are being developed:

- **Identity**-care leavers should have a mix of opportunities which are not always related to their care-experience. There should be more acknowledgement of their other identities.
- **Belonging**-there should be consistency in support, regular contact with family and friends and a range of support networks should be available.
- **Ongoing support**-Earlier intervention for young people as soon as they enter care and tailored individual support for as long as is needed.
- **Being Prepared**-There should be clear information within local offers and pathway planning and there should be emotional preparation as well as support with the practical elements of living independently.
- **Voice**-young people should be supported to develop values based on what they really need, they should be heard and have their views responded to with actions.
- **Looking forward**-Professionals and wider society to look beyond negative stereotypes and support provisions should be ambitious and not see limits to achievement.

18. PhotoVoice are consulting with young people to test the resources ahead of them being launched later in 2021. Bright Sparks members are awaiting a date to do the testing and have become Ambassadors for the project.

19. Bright Sparks members have completed the course of “Resilient Me” workshops, which in addition to giving an understanding of the individuals emotional health, provided strategies for resilience that enable young people to then help others. All of those who attended have received a Toolkit which captures the information provided in the workshop for them to refer to and reflect on.

20. Bright Sparks will shortly be launching a group on Facebook. In addition to providing an opportunity for care experienced peers to connect, the Facebook page could be an opportunity for CYP who are interested in joining to find out more about the group with a view to joining. Alternatively, they may wish to keep up to date with developments with the group and future topics that interest them and decide not to meet physically or virtually.

21. The group would also be a way to communicate information and share resources. Posts would include the agenda for future meetings, relevant information and details of previous work completed by the group.

22. Instagram and Twitter are also being used to raise awareness of Bright Sparks and to promote work being undertaken.

### **Other Work Undertaken**

23. Bright Sparks have been updated on the Welsh Youth Parliament and advised on how members can register to vote. The role and responsibilities of members of the Youth Parliament has been shared and children and young people will be supported to apply for the role.

24. 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.

25. Trained Bright Sparks members continue to sit on Young Person's interview Panels for Residential Children's Homes in Cardiff. The roles being recruited for have ranged from senior roles to night staff and the panel provides a young care experienced persons perspective on interviewees. 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.

## **Future Work: Priority 3 – A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after**

26. The group have been looking towards this third outcome and have produced a shortlist of areas which they would like to explore.

This list is as follows:

- Life Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Feeling unsafe at home
- Support after Leaving Care services end
- Transitioning out of care
- Understanding different forms of care e.g. kinship, foster care, residential homes and special guardianship
- Homelessness
- Complaints about unsafe environments

### **Bright Sparks Participation with the Committee**

27. Bright Sparks members concluded that rather than attending a Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee meeting they would prefer to meet members of the Committee in a less formal environment. Venues are currently being explored that are easily accessible. An “in person” meeting would be dependent on Covid regulations as the safety of all in attendance is paramount. It would be preferable to wait until this is possible rather than to meet virtually but outside venue options are also being explored.

28. The meeting would last approximately two hours and would begin with a fun icebreaker exercise and would include a quiz. This will be an opportunity for Bright Sparks to update on the work that they have been doing on the 5 Priorities which helped inform the Corporate Parenting Strategy. An additional plan is that Committee members and Bright Sparks will together create a shield describing what Corporate Parenting means to each individual, this will be combined to create one piece of art which will be a lasting reminder of Corporate Parenting

responsibilities. They would like to share food with the Committee members during the gathering.

### **Financial Implications**

29. The financial resources used to contribute to this participation work are found from within the overall existing budgetary allocation of the Directorate. In the event of any additional work being required then funding needs to be secured prior to implementation from within the existing overall budgetary allocation of the directorate

### **Legal Implications**

30. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

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

**DEBORAH DRIFFIELD**  
**DIRECTOR OF CHILDRENS SERVICES**

**14 JULY 2021**