

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

18 January 2022

**CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY – PRIORITY 4: EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT, EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING
PARTICIPATION – BRIGHT SPARKS**

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 fourth of the 5 Priorities outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy – Educational achievement, Employment and Training. It will also include 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

Priority 4 – Educational achievement, Employment and Training. The following work has taken place in relation to this priority.

4. Bright Sparks members had been exploring and sharing their future career ambitions which culminated in an event where they had the opportunity to hear short talks and have a Question & Answer session with the identified professionals. The professionals in attendance were a Youth Worker, an Advocate and a self-employed business owner. Two care experienced students – one undertaking a Masters Degree in Child Psychology and the other a Masters Degree in Social Work they provided insights into their course of study and answered questions about their journey to achieving their career goal.
5. Bright Sparks members including a welsh care experienced digital expert have been instrumental in the planning and development of an event called We Care that took place in the school holidays. The main theme of the event was employability and it included health and wellbeing, experiences of being in care and resources produced by Media Academy Cymru were demonstrated.
6. Roles and responsibilities were developed to plan the event and young people contributed to the agenda, planning and content on the day. Numerous meetings took place with the young people being keen to demonstrate successes of well known care experienced people. The group were also involved in the invitation list, the choice of entertainment and songs that were performed. The four hour event successfully provided an opportunity and safe space for all young people across Wales to "Drop-In" online and hear some incredible stories from inspirational speakers – including the care experienced digital expert, Children's Commissioner for Wales and the activist Chris Wild.

7. A support worker with Cardiff Bright Start attended Bright Sparks to describe the employment related support that the team provides for up to three months. Information was provided on when and how it can affect Universal Credit, available placements, the potential for apprenticeships and the referral criteria.
8. A care experienced Youth Mentor from Bright Futures also attended to share information about how Mentors work one to one with young people to get them back into education, employment or training. Support is available to complete job applications and to address financial barriers to employment.

Other Work Undertaken

9. Trained Bright Sparks members continue to sit on interview panels for Advocacy and IV positions. A member also sat on the panel to recruit the new NYAS Service Manager for Cardiff.
10. Trained Bright Sparks members continue to sit on Young Person's interview Panels for Residential Childrens 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.
11. Bright Sparks members attended a meeting facilitated by the Participation Officer and attended by the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan. Group members had the opportunity to put forward questions to ask the Deputy Minister in relation to the What Matters to You report that they had contributed to and the Welsh programme for Government.
12. NYAS Cymru have been successful in their application to be a Partner Organisation for the Welsh Youth Parliament. NYAS will be represented by a 17 year old member of Bright Sparks, an A-Level student who is "honoured and excited to be representing NYAS and other care experienced children and young

people.” She goes on to say “I would be a strong advocate to represent children and young people who are unable to find their own voice. I believe in the power of democracy as a force of good in a civilised society. I believe I would be able to represent the most vulnerable in our society being young children and people in care. I will make myself regularly available to hear from other young people and children in care their concerns and worries so that I can be their voice and represent them in the youth parliament. I am proud to represent them.”

13. Albert Heaney, the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales (CSCO) approached NYAS Cymru to organise and facilitate an event where he could meet with representatives from organisations who work with care experienced children and young people across Wales. NYAS Cymru approached TGP Cymru and Voices From Care Cymru to bring together young people to attend a listening session where the CSCO will listen to the concerns of care experienced young people. This session was chaired by the Participation Officer and it included a Bright Sparks member who assisted in successfully provided the CSCO with an insight into care experience

14. Bright Sparks members were consulted on the creation of a resource that will be viewed in schools in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. This work was part of an initiative for National Safeguarding week in Nov 2021 to promote better wellbeing and mental health. Group members shared their wellbeing/coping strategies which included “online groups like Bright Sparks”, exercise and mindful colouring. The Presentation was added to a file to be shared in schools that can be accessed within their own time.

15. The presentation was narrated by a young person for inclusion and accessibility and to ensure the voice of young people ran throughout and was heard. To reflect that the resource is for Cardiff and the Vale the narrator was a young person from The Vale.

16. Bright Sparks provided feedback on the Safeguarding Framework that was developed by Children and Young People - “The Voice of Young People on Safeguarding - A multi-agency approach to keep adolescents safe in the city”. This work was an action of the Education and Young People’s sub-group. The group are awaiting feedback and confirmation of any actions that will be taken

forward. These are some of the feedback and suggestions provided in relation to these described goals:

Goal 1 – Young People Feel Safe:

- Professionals to notice changes and when things are going wrong and to use their initiative
- Increased training for professionals

Goal 2 - Young People have good health physical and mental) and wellbeing

- Look at different ways to look at mental health and make it individualised
- CYP should be supported to do activities that they enjoy and that can be relaxing

Goal 3 – Both young people and families are educated about risk, the signs to spot and how to resolve them

- Education for parents – Parenting Workshops

Goal 4 – All young people will have access to education and activities that will help them prepare for their future

- People in senior management should encourage those working directly with young people to pass on positive messages about their ability to achieve goals.
- Teachers can give messages to children that those in care for example will not have high achievements in education. This leads to CYP feeling that it is inevitable and they may stop trying

Goal 5 – A stable home for all young people and support from a community

- Do not put young people into Hostels where they can be in environments where they are at risk – better provision for the Homeless and increased support in Hostels
- Young people should pay less rent if they are working and living in a hostel – as rents are very high

Goal 6 – Young people have positive transitions, they will receive guidance to overcome their struggles and help to adapt to changes

- More mental health support during this time

- Peer support from young people from others who have recently been through similar experiences

Financial Implications

17. There are no direct financial implications of this report and the activities that have been undertaken have been found from within budgetary resources where required

Legal Implications

18. There are no legal implications arising from this report

RECOMMENDATION

19. The Committee are recommended to note the Participation update and to make any suggestions of how they would like to engage with the Bright Sparks Club in the future.

DEBORAH DRIFFIELD
DIRECTOR OF CHILDRENS SERVICES
20th December 2021