

Report to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee January 22nd 2024

Voices From Care Cymru

Introduction

Voices From Care Cymru is an independent Welsh voluntary organisation that has been supporting care experienced children and young people for thirty-five years. We support individual care experienced children and young people through our wellbeing services, helping them develop resilience, and independent living skills, enabling them to support each other through peer support, formal and informal. We organise enjoyable activities, enabling care experienced children and young people to relax and have fun with others who share their experiences. And, crucially, we enable young people to work together to influence the decisions that affect their lives. This report focuses mainly on our influencing work, but first a brief overview of our wellbeing work.

Wellbeing

We offer individual wellbeing support to young people, enabling them to address barriers they face to living independently successfully. Each programme is tailored to the individual young person's needs and may include learning practical skills like budgeting, addressing the need to develop health supportive relationships and friendships, and understanding how past trauma may be affecting their lives now and developing strategies to help address this. We have recently been able to expand this service to include professional counselling.

Our peer support cafes enable care experienced young people who share particular experiences or characteristics to come together to support each other. Currently these are the Care Experienced Parents Support Café, the Care Experienced Student Support Café and the LGBT Care Experienced Support Café.

Our new Sky's the Limit project works with younger care experienced children aged 8 to 14. It helps them overcome barriers to taking part in activities, such as sport and the arts, and build links in the community.

The Bibliotherapy Project enables care experienced young people to use supported journaling to help them manage their feelings, address negative

thoughts and strengthen positivity. The key tool for this work is a journal designed by young people themselves.

We have just begun work on our Success Clubs, a new initiative working with care experienced children and young people to overcome barriers to success in education.

Our fun activities vary according to what young people are interested in doing. This year they have included theatre trips, meals out, bowling, and outdoor activities. Our care experienced choir rehearses weekly, and is open to children and young people, foster carers and other professionals. It is a great celebration of our care experienced community.

Influencing

Campaigning to improve the lives and futures of care experienced children and young people has always been at the heart of our work.

Before the 2021 Senedd Election young people worked together to develop a manifesto setting out some key goals that they asked political parties to commit to.

After the election the new Programme of Government set out some specific commitments to the care experienced community, and we have been enabling young people to work with Welsh Government in delivering on these, ensuring that the voices of care experienced young people are at the heart of the processes.

We facilitated a group of young people to work with Welsh Government to develop the Basic Income Pilot, and have convened practitioner forums to identify issues through the role out. We are now supporting young people's involvement in the evaluations.

We have enabled young people to participate in the development of the new Corporate Parenting Charter. Young people sit with professionals on the national Board overseeing the role out, and young people will be involved in monitoring delivery in those public bodies that sign up.

In addition to the specific commitments the Programme for Government also committed to "explore radical reform of services for children looked after and care leavers". We discussed with Welsh Government how this exploration would take place, and this led to the First Minister and the Deputy Minister for Social Services commissioning us to organise what they called a Summit

Meeting between Welsh Ministers and care experienced children and young people. We recruited a team of 40 Young Ambassadors from the care experienced community across Wales. Their ages ranged from 14 to 25, and they included young people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse characteristics, including LGBT young people and young asylum seekers. They worked with care experienced children and young people to develop a series of asks that formed a draft Declaration to be discussed with Welsh Ministers at the Summit.

The Summit took place at the National Museum in Cardiff last December. It was attended by the 40 Young Ambassadors, the Ministers for Education and Social Justice and the Deputy Ministers for Mental Health and Social Services. Working in four Workshops, the Young Ambassadors explained the thinking behind the clauses in the draft Declaration to Ministers and agreed amendments. Ministers and Young Ambassadors then fed back to the wider group and to the First Minister in a Plenary session, and the draft Declaration, with amendments, was agreed.

The Declaration (copy attached) was signed by the First Minister and representatives of Young Ambassadors at a ceremony in May.

The Declaration sets out what radically reformed services will look and feel like to children and young people and their families. It builds on what young people have told Ministers works well and addresses those things they have said need to change. The Welsh Government has developed a process to deliver this radical agenda.

We are supporting young people who sit on the Transformation Delivery Group which oversees the delivery of transformation in children's services. We also support them to participate in subgroups below that.

We organised a further Summit in the north in October to ensure that a wider range of voices of young people from the north and from rural communities were heard in the process and we will continue to work with Welsh Government to deliver the Radical Reform they have promised.

A national follow up Summit is planned for March next year, where Young Ambassadors will meet with Ministers to assess progress.

In addition to supporting young people to work with Welsh Government on the Radical Reform agenda we have supported young people to give evidence to

the Senedd Children, Education and Young People Committee during the Committee's enquiry into Radical Reform.

To help strengthen the evidence base around what works in supporting care experienced children and young people we have developed a partnership with Cascade, the specialist unit at Cardiff University that focuses on this area of work. This includes training young people to work as peer researchers.

We also support young people to participate in a range of consultation processes, nationally and locally.

Next Steps

Voices From Care Cymru already has a positive working relationship with Cardiff City Council. For example, some of the Summit Young Ambassadors are from Cardiff, and our Success Clubs are being piloted in a Cardiff school.

We are always keen to strengthen and deepen our relationship, to ensure that our services and opportunities are available to as many care experienced children and young people in Cardiff as possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee as part of that process.