

APPENDIX 1

Overview of Bright Sparks Presentation Update

The Bright Sparks is a participation group for children and young people who Looked After or Care Experienced. On 1st December 2023, County Hall hosted the Bright Sparks Annual Awards ceremony to celebrate the achievements of these children and young people who have accomplished so much, despite the challenges they have faced.

The Bright Sparks group was created by 2 young people who had a vision to ensure that care experienced children and young people received the recognition they deserve for all their achievements and accomplishments. Their aim was that these achievements were shared and celebrated and in doing so, some of the stereotypes associated with being looked after would be removed. I

It is one of the highlights of the entire year and an opportunity for us to come together and take part in the celebration of these wonderful young people. The awards have always been young person led with young people at the heart of the process; their voices leading change and making a difference to the services that affect them.

18th Annual Bright Sparks Awards saw successful collaboration across service. The event was sponsored by Into Work Service and Partners across the city- Over 200 people attended.

Jamie's Farm

In October 2023 6 Young people attended Jamies Farm, Monmouthshire Working farm- working with the animals, exploring the outdoors and cooking from scratch

Award Categories

There were 14 different awards categories, including those for sport, music and performing arts achievements.



Nominee Stories

Whilst in their mother's care N lost 163 learning days over a period of 2.5 years. N was also suffering significant neglect, impacting on their emotional wellbeing. N's learning was extremely compromised, and their verbal, reading and written communication was very poor. N was removed from their mother's care, placed into foster care and had to change schools twice. This was very traumatic and challenging for such a young child, yet this brave young person has made tremendous improvements. N is now being taught in a main stream school and since being placed in foster care has been attending school everyday and on time. N has become a fluid reader, has progressed to reading Roald Dahl books at home and is now working to the expected educational levels for their age. N is described by their teacher as demonstrating a strong eagerness to learn and desire to improve, as well as being a kind and thoughtful friend.

R was one of many children that auditioned for a Christmas production in large county theatre. R was adamant that they would not get a part in the production due to not attending any performing arts, dance, drama etc groups, and had never done anything like this before - R just simply had a love of dancing and performing! R's audition was successful and was offered a place in the 'sold out Christmas show'! R was so committed to the lead up of the show, spending most evenings after school and weekends in the theatre practising for the show. R then performed in the show for 2 weeks straight and was truly amazing!

F had a traumatised childhood and experienced significant neglect in their family of origin. They also have complex medical issues causing difficulties with speech and movement. F was placed with a kinship carer several years ago and has recently attended Music therapy. Music therapy has offered F a sense of achievement, building confidence in writing, narrating, and co-producing their own personal songs. F will perform their song at the Bright Sparks Awards, a group that continues to promote confidence, self esteem and resilience.

Lyrics written by a young person who won the music category

You're the sunshine on my cloudy day

With you by my side everything's ok

I'm grateful for your love in every single way

I promise to cherish you each and every day

CHORUS: Cause Darling you, you stole my heart away
And every single day I thank my lucky stars
That I found you, my one and only love
I never knew what true love was until first sight of you

When I first saw you my heart skipped a beat

I never knew true love until our eyes did meet,

You smiled at me and I felt so complete

From that moment on my heart was yours to keep

CHORUS You're the melody to my song, With you I know where I belong I'll love you now and forever long Cause darling, you're where my heart belongs

Nominee Stories Cont'd

I am nominating Stacey Primary School for the support that they gave when a very large sibling group had to be accommodated into foster care. Stacey Primary School have always been brilliant at communicating, sharing worries and offering support to this family throughout our involvement. When the decision was being made to accommodate the children, Stacey Primary School supported us and the children by looking after them after school hours whilst decisions were made, ensuring the children were with familiar individuals. They then supported the children whilst they were being informed of the decision. This was a lovely example of multi-agency working where everyone had the best interests of the children in mind and made the difficult experience of accommodating so many children that little bit more manageable.

T is a single carer for, B who is 2 years old. B was born with complex medical issues and required medical intervention and support. T was approved as a kinship carer and has engaged with all health professionals and undertaken medical training at the hospital and within their own home. At a recent CLAR all professionals commended T for their love and commitment toward their care of B. The love and bond between them is evident and B is thriving since being placed within T's care. IRO said ' T's persistence is unbelievable, I have never seen anything like it' and that 'T really is an amazing human being'. The transformation in B is incredible, they no longer require medical intervention or medication and are meeting all their milestones.

Superstar Support

Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee Members Cllr Sarah Merry and Cllr Ash Lister attended the event, as well as a number of senior members from Children's Services and Education. Children and young people were supported by children's services staff, as well as and those from the wider authority. We also received several good luck messages from Wales and British & Irish Lions Rugby stars.

Update from a Bright Sparks Member

' I have been a bright sparks member for 2 years It has boosted confidence and helped me open up to talk about things. I feel comfortable when I'm at Bright Sparks because everyone is so welcoming. My goal is to make a difference in the care system and I feel like Bright Sparks is helping me to do that. I have made friends with other like minded people- Young people who are care experienced don't know where we stand or where we belong and often struggle to be proud of ourselves. Being nominated for a Bright Sparks Award boosts other young people's confidence-

everyone looks really happy. Its just nice to be around people who understand me- nobody in my friendship group is care experienced, being a part of bright sparks, the people just get it- it's like we are our own community.'

What Next?

NYAS participation contract has now come to an end and therefore there is an opportunity to grow the Bright Sparks group from within CS Already an existing CLA group being facilitated by Youth Service Discussions have taken place for a 3 month pilot for CS/YS to collaborate and deliver a CLA participation group Superb opportunity to ensure services are working as closely together as possible, and aligning ourselves to meet our CPAC objectives.