

By: Sophia Dunstan – Apprentice Participation Worker – Virtual School Kent
Subject: Apprentice Participation – Virtual School Kent
To: County Council – 17th July 2014
Classification: Unrestricted

(1) I am Sophia Dunstan an Apprentice Participation Worker with the Virtual School Kent and have been asked to write a report on the behalf of the VSK Apprentice Team and the Children in Care Council (OCYPC.)

(2) As senior apprentice my main duties and responsibilities are:

- To act as a good role model to Children in Care (CiC), supporting their positive behaviour and to have a positive influence on VSK service delivery.
- Provide direct support to Children in Care on an individual or group basis to develop confidence in expressing their own views. To inform senior management, members and other professionals to improve the service delivered to Children in Care.
- Provide direct support to Children in Care at times of transition (such as change of placement or school) under the supervision of other professionals.
- To provide support and assist with training newly recruited apprentices.
- To encourage and promote Children in Care's participation & involvement in the completion of the young person's section of the ePep, by supporting them on a one to one or small group basis either in school or at their foster placement.
- To take a lead role in facilitating and supporting the Children in Care Council.
- To take a lead role in planning, and to participate actively on residential trips and participation days for Children in Care.
- Identify, and provide active support to Children in Care when they participate in interview panels. (i.e. to attend panels with the child.)
- Take a lead role in representing the county on a local, regional and national level and to attend professional regional groups to feed into the Government office agenda relating to all new Government initiatives regarding young people.
- To assist in the editing, design and administration of the VSK website.
- To prepare reports and presentations and flyers on behalf of the Children in Care Council.
- To fulfil the criteria of the required NVQ qualification. To attend all VSK service events and other training/workshops as required. To ensure that all records are kept up to date and are accurate
- To work cooperatively with VSK staff and in partnership with professionals from other areas and organisations.

(3) As Senior Apprentice and Chair of the 'Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC)' it's my duty to share the views and opinions of Children and Young People in care. As a care leaver myself I know some of the common challenges and problems most young people growing up in the care system face. As Chair of the OCYPC I also sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel which gives me the opportunity to represent all children and

young people's views on being in care and on the services they receive by the local authority. I really feel this is beneficial to all young people as well as the corporate parents as it bridges the gap of communication with young people and senior officers and members.

(4) This also helps enforce the 'You Said, We Did' policy which shows Children and Young People the outcome of their views and opinions and what you the corporate parents have done to change them for the better.

'Care to Listen' DVD

(5) In 2008 Kent County Council produced a DVD which featured Children and Young People to get their views on what it was like to be in care, and what their experiences of how they came into the Care System were. They also gave their opinions on what their experiences were of being a Child in Care.

(6) The main things that came out of the DVD that Children and Young People felt needed to be improved were:

- To be talked WITH and not ABOUT
- Not to be moved around from home to home too much
- A 'buddy' system to help them through everyday life in care
- More upfront information about the families they are going to be placed with

(7) At the beginning of 2014 we were asked to make a second edition of the 'Care to Listen' DVD to see what has changed in the last six years since the last one was made. We enlisted the help of our Children in Care Council and other Children in Care to feature on the DVD to give more up to date views on their experiences. We also went back to interview some of the original Children and Young People who were on the DVD now they are older and if they still have the same views as they did before.

(8) In the DVD it shows that some things have changed but there is still room for improvement.

Your Voice Matters Survey

(9) A survey of children in care in Kent, which had been co-designed and tested by the children themselves, was undertaken in the spring of 2014. The survey was responded to by 326 children across the age ranges of 7 to 16+. The Business Intelligence Unit have analysed the results.

(10) **These are the key findings of the Your Voice Matters survey:**

Positive feedback:

- Most children know who their social worker is and can talk to them about their problems, but some (particularly those aged 16+) do not feel able to contact them.
- The majority of children feel they can speak to a caring adult if they are unhappy or have a problem, usually this is a carer or parent, but teachers and social workers/case workers are also important.

- The majority of younger children reported that they get help from their teacher to learn and have friends to play with all or some of the time.

Areas of concern:

- Access to Children in Care nurses can be a problem, particularly for the 16+ age group, where 18% report not knowing how to speak to a nurse.
- There was a low awareness amongst the 11 to 15 year olds of the role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and also nearly one third of these children did not know how to speak to their IRO.
- Similarly, over a quarter of care leavers did not know how to contact their support worker.
- Over a quarter of care leavers did not have trust and confidence in their social worker.
- Around half of children did not have a copy of their care plan, and many felt they do not have a say in what goes into their care plan.
- Around 17% of care leavers did not feel safe or only sometimes felt safe where they live.
- A number of children told us that they do not like completing surveys and they feel that they are asked too many questions.

Leaving Care Charter

(11) The Department for Education created a charter which is a set of promises that help in decision making but do not replace laws. The principles in this charter have been developed by young people leaving care. By signing up to it, local authorities promise to provide a range of support for care leavers into their adult life.

(12) The key principles in this Charter will remain constant through any changes in Legislation, Regulation and Guidance. Care leavers urge local authorities to use these principles when they make decisions about young people's lives. The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

(13) The government asked that all local authorities' sign up to the Care Leavers Charter and Kent County Council were keen to do so. This resulted in the Corporate Parenting Panel asking for Kent to have their own Care Leavers Charter for Children and Care Leavers in Kent.

(14) The government's Charter was taken to the 16+ forum and had input from other focus groups which were attended by Care Leavers to tailor it and make it more young people friendly for the Care Leavers in Kent.

The screen shot below shows what Kent's Care Leavers Charter looks like:

As you are a Kent Care Leaver we specifically promise to:

- If you are eligible, make sure you are able to get a passport, and arrange for your National Insurance number to be issued
- Help and support your progress in education, both in further education and at university
- Find you somewhere safe to live and provide the necessary support you need to live independently. Up until you are 21, help you with council tax and make sure you don't lose out on housing benefit if you are in education, training or low-paid employment
- If you are at uni, support you with a financial package that includes the government bursary
- If you have a disability, make sure that you have your own 'communication passport' that tells others how you communicate and how they can communicate with you
- If you need to move to Adult Services, make sure the move is as smooth as possible

You can obtain a list of what you are entitled to from your Social Worker or Personal Advisor

Help us to celebrate your achievements by keeping in touch, and tell us when you need help, sooner, rather than later



Things not going right?

What should you do if you don't think these promises are being met:

You can always speak to your Social Worker
Or
You can ask for an advocate (this is a person who is independent of Kent County Council who can speak on your behalf and help make sure your voice is heard).

You Can Contact:

Voice Telephone: **0808 800 5792**
Email: help@voiceyp.org

NYAS Telephone **0300 330 3131**
Email: help@nyas.net

Our Children and Young People's Council is a group of young people in care or leaving care who meet up with Participation Worker Apprentices from the Virtual School Kent.

The meetings give young people the chance to have their say on what they feel needs to be improved and what they want changed about the care system.

To find out more: Telephone **01227 284490**
Email: VSK_participation@kent.gov.uk





Our promise to you

Kent's Charter for Care Leavers



Leaving care can be a difficult time

Kent County Council as your 'Corporate Parent' can be there to guide and support you through it.

This Charter is Kent County Council's promise to you to help support you when you leave care. It follows on from the KCC Pledge made to Children and Young People in the Care of Kent. We are committed to ensuring that you, as a Care Leaver have access to the best possible chances in life when making the transition from being in care to independence.

Some of you will be going through the immigration process, we will ensure you are supported with this. You will also be able to contact us after the service to you closes for any advice and support you may need.



Let us support you to achieve your ambitions and aspirations in education, training and employment.

Here is Kent's charter to you as you leave care. We promise to listen, support and guide you to grow into healthy, happy and successful young adults. We can do this by working together.

We will respect you and honour your identity as an individual, taking into consideration **your own values, beliefs and personal needs**

We will make sure we ask you about important decisions that need to be made

We will value and support, where appropriate, relationships that are important to you

We will give you support throughout your education, training and employment to give you the chance to **succeed**

We will work with other services for any changes in the law that affect the lives of young people

We will try to minimise any changes to placements or workers

If we don't agree with you, we will fully explain why, and we will be honest with you

We will believe in you. We will support your future plans and help you to achieve them

We want to help you to be where you want to be. We will make sure we give you the information that you need at every stage in your move to adulthood

We will point you in the right direction and help you move along at your own pace

We will keep you safe and well by making sure where you live is safe and the right place for you. We will give you the right guidance to live a healthy life

We will listen and work alongside you with a pathway plan to ensure your readiness for independent living

We will take the time to listen to you and do our best to give the right advice if things aren't going well for you

We will help and support you to keep in touch with family and friends as much as possible whilst considering your safety and well-being. We will help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other important life events

We will continue to be there for you, so get in touch with us if you need to

The Kent Pledge

(15) There has been some confusion amongst Children in Care and Young People about what the Kent Pledge actually is. We have decided that we should re-launch the pledge and re-design the flyers to make it more appealing for young people to read so therefore it would be more of an interest for them to look at.

(16) We haven't changed any of the commitments that the Council have already signed up to but the OCYPC have reviewed and revised the leaflet so the Pledge is conveyed to young people in a more appealing, user friendly way.

(17) We have also been running workshops around Kent with Children in Care to create a DVD on what the Kent Pledge is and what it means for them. There is also a Kent Pledge rap on our radio station on the Kent Cares Town Website to help get the message out there.

(18) I ask that as you all are Corporate Parents that you sign up to the Care Leavers Charter and Kent Pledge. There are boards outside the chamber for you to sign up.

We need your support.

Sophia Dunstan – 03/07/2014

Apprentice Participation Worker – Virtual School Kent