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# CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT

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Making Kent a county that works for all children



SEPTEMBER 2017-SEPTEMBER 2018

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL  
Corporate Parenting

## Ann Allen, MBE Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education



Welcome to our first Annual Report for Corporate Parenting which details the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and our services to children in care.

The contribution from our children in care council and our apprentices is invaluable and indeed I could not fulfil my role as a corporate parent or the chair of the panel without their guidance and support.

As parents we all want the best for our children. We are proud of their achievements and create opportunities to celebrate with them as families. As corporate parents it is our responsibility and duty to treat our children in care and care leavers as we would our own children.

I am proud of all our young people and their achievements and it is a privilege to work with them. As elected members in our role as a corporate parent we must take every opportunity to champion for them.

## Caroline Smith, Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, Children's Social Work Services



I am delighted to welcome you all to our first Annual Report for Corporate Parenting. The report will outline our key services that support our children in care and care leavers and a summary of the work presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel for September 2017- September 2018.

The support and encouragement from the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel is invaluable to our children and young people. I am very proud to be a Corporate Parent to over 1,500 children and over 1,500 care leavers and be able to share with you the work of my services.

Our annual report is also an opportunity to celebrate the success and achievements of our children and young people, as we strive to be the best possible corporate parents we can be.

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# Section 1

## An introduction to Corporate Parenting

The government have introduced clear corporate parenting principles that require all departments within a local authority including staff, elected members and partner agencies to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide. Kent County Council work to be the best corporate parents to our children and young people by following these key principles:

- To act in the best interest and promote the physical, mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those children and young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people;
- To ensure those children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education and/or work place;
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

## Corporate Parenting Panel and services

Our Corporate Parenting Services are overseen by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and comprise four key services: Fostering, Adoption, Virtual School Kent and Care Leavers 18+ Service. The services work closely with our children's Early Help and Social Work teams, health, education, youth offending and key partners including the Young Lives Foundation (YLF). The services report into the Corporate Parenting Panel who meet 6 times per year and alongside elected members, the panel has a wide range of independent members including foster carers, health, YLF and our participation apprentices.

Each Corporate Parenting Panel includes a Cabinet Member update and performance scorecard that enables the panel to monitor our key targets and statutory requirements. This year has seen significant improvement across children in care services achieving a GREEN rating across our key performance indicators. Wherever possible, children and young people attend panel to meet their corporate parents. The voice of our children and young people is represented at all panels by our VSK apprentices and participation workers. Members of the panel are invited to attend celebration events which this year included the VSK awards, talent showcase, activity days and the foster carers awards.

## Section 2

### Our Fostering Service



Kent Fostering Service consists of seven fostering support teams and four specialist teams who focus on assessment and recruitment, training, disabled children and the Sense of Belonging service. Kent Fostering is managed by the Head of Fostering, who has direct management responsibility for the centralised teams and joint responsibility for the staff within the support teams.

The aim of our Fostering Service is to provide a range of high-quality appropriate foster placements, that meet the National minimum Standards (2011), whilst ensuring the best possible outcomes for our children and young people and supporting them to develop to their full potential.

#### What our children and young people can expect from our Fostering Service

Our children and young people can expect our Fostering Service to provide a range of quality family placements within a child's local area, to enable them to maintain attendance at their existing school and continue contact with family and friends.

The service promotes permanency for our children through early care planning to make sure that children are in a placement that can offer them permanency through to Staying Put as they become adults. Children and young people should be supported to achieve a Sense of Belonging within their foster family.

#### What our Fostering Service achieved during 2017-18

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Safe Care for Children Living away from home;
- Prevent update following Parsons Green Attack including training implementation and Prevent Checklist implementation for foster carers;
- Fostering National Stocktake and Fostering Service Business plan 2018;
- Support by members for Foster Carer recruitment;

- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets.

Since the introduction of the Fostering Review Team in 2016, the Fostering Service have achieved an outstanding 98% completion of annual reviews within their allocated timescales. The clear and consistent process across the county has improved the quality of practice particularly in relation to safeguarding, risk assessments, voice of the child and compliancy alongside providing an opportunity for reflection.

### **Sense of belonging**

Implemented in September 2017, our Fostering Services' sense of belonging team support our foster carers and professionals at times of crisis and when the placement is at risk of disruption, to de-escalate the issue and thereby increase placement stability.

From January 2018 to June 2018, there have been 37 new referrals, and a total of 62 open cases in the Fostering Placement Stability Service. Of the 62 referrals, 35 cases have been closed and 27 cases are ongoing.

More than two thirds (71%) of referred cases are due to a placement being at risk of an immediate breakdown. The service has a dedicated clinical psychologist to support children and their foster carers and is having a significant impact on placement stability.

### **Making my mark 2017-2018**

For our disabled children in care, their thoughts and feelings about their lives and experiences can often go unnoticed or unheard so we invited these children and young people, as well as their foster carers and Short Break families, to make their mark on a plain white canvas.

The result was an exhibition of very different and contrasting images that captured their voices in a variety of different ways. It sought to remind us that they are all individuals and when they come together they shine with a shared sense of belonging and positive self-worth.

The pictures were displayed throughout Kent including Sessions House Gallery, libraries and art galleries over the period of a year.



### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

The recruitment of new foster carers remains a challenge in the current competitive market in Kent. We have recruited 30 experienced foster carer ambassadors to support in both recruitment and retention who now assist at all our recruitment events. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are sent details of Fostering events in their area and asked to support us in our work to promote Kent Fostering and the recruitment of foster carers for the local authority. In the period September 2017-September 2018 KCC approved 80 new foster carers.

## Section 3

### Our Adoption Service



The work of Kent County Council's Adoption Service is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

Kent County Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people can remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child or young person within the birth family, our Adoption Service work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child or young person within a family setting and these include adoption.

#### What our children and young people can expect from our Adoption Service

The purpose of our Adoption Service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of our children and young people who have been or may become adopted, birth families, and adoptive parents.

This will include services in relation to those children and young people in our care with an adoption plan, and in relation to the non-agency adoption service. To achieve it aims our Adoption Service will ensure that the needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

We will welcome those people, who are interested in becoming adoptive parents without prejudice, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval.

## What our Adoption Service achieved during 2017-18

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Proposal to develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)
- The Adoption Annual Report 2018
- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets

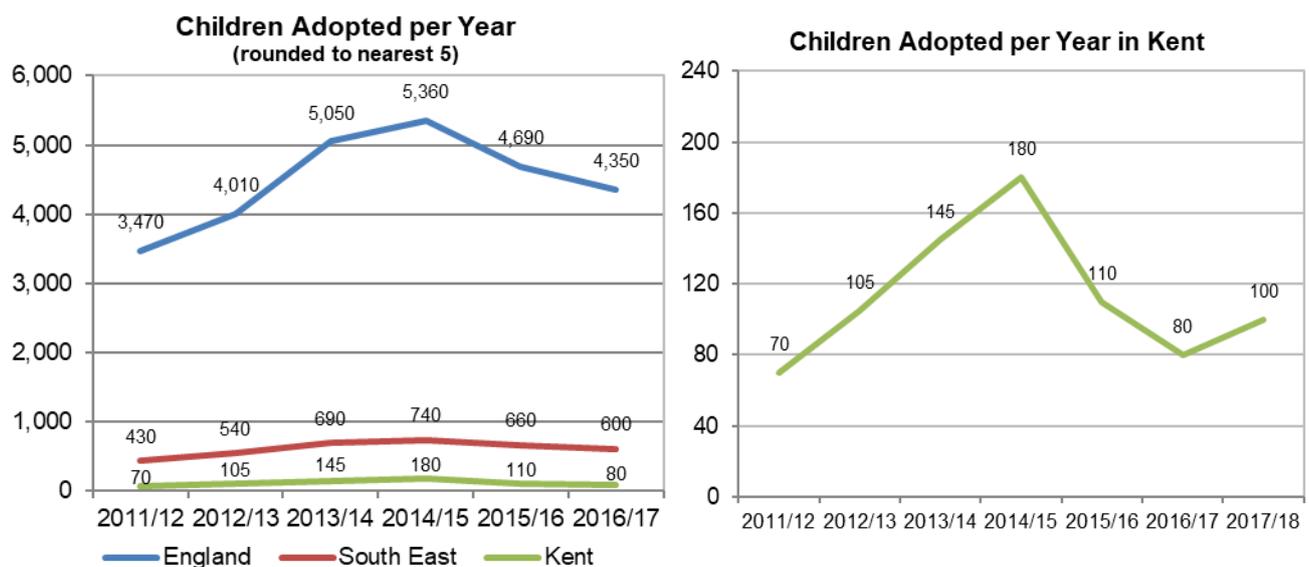
In 2017-18 our Kent Adoption Service was the second largest Local Authority in England in terms of the number of adoptions made, with the average time from the children and young people being placed into its care to the adoption order being granted being 215 days; this is a 13.6% reduction from the previous year.

Our Adoption Services' performance in relation to progressing children's plans of adoption is good and exceeds government targets.

There are various stages involved in the adoption process for a child and these are outlined below:

Indicator	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
ADM best interest decisions	179	93	111	118	112
Placement orders	164	79	90	92	86
Matches approved	172	145	84	89	107
Children placed	170	143	89	84	107
Adoption orders granted	145	182	108	80	104

### Number of adoption orders granted



### Our adopters' journey, using our adoption data

Our Adoption Service's performance in relation to completing assessments of people wishing to become adoptive parents is outlined below.

There are two stages involved in the adoption process:

- Stage 1 – Which is adopter led;
- Stage 2 – Which includes the actual assessment.

The progression of adopter assessments is good and exceeds government targets.

Adopter activity	Number of families in 2016/17	Number of families in 2017/18
Enquiries in year (attended Information event)	261	275
Stage 1 starts in year	90	82
Stage 2 starts in year	74	86
Stage 2 ends in year	50	88
Adoptive families matched in year	54	77
Adoptive families with placements in year	53	77
Adoptive families with adoption orders in year	68	70



Robert Goodwill (Children's Minister, October 2017) meets members of the Post Adoption Support Team, Coram and adoptive parents

### Our Adoption Services' approval timescales

Currently, our Adoption Service have 38 more adoptive households that were approved during 2017-2018 than the previous year.

### Our Adoption Services' post-adoption support activities

Our post-adoption support team (PAST) provides a range of services including individualised support packages and group work to our adopted children and their families.

The interventions provided can help to bring a deeper understanding of our children and young people's state of mind, mental health and wellbeing; and to support our adoptive parents in parenting their children to bring about their social and emotional development.

During 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, 294 families requested post-adoption support. Following an assessment, 178 of these requests resulted in the provision of support and 7 assessments were still being carried out at 31st March. The remainder were signposted to other more appropriate sources of support or their request was resolved within the initial consultation.

PAST provided post-adoption support to 325 families during the year, 92 of which were funded by Kent and 233 funded by another route (such as the Adoption Support Fund). During national adoption week, October 2017, the PAST won a national award for Excellence in adoption practice.

## Section 4

### Our Virtual School Kent

Our Virtual School Kent acts as Kent County Council's champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of its children and care leavers, with its main objective being to support the children and young people to achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers.

Our Virtual School for Kent ensures our children and young people receive high-quality education, as we believe that it is the foundation for improving life-opportunities and fulfilling career aspirations.

Our Virtual School for Kent ensures that our children and young people that it educates have their voice heard in all the school does whilst in return, providing their listening skills and producing positive service development and responses.

Our Virtual School for Kent has been successful since its development in 2011; this has been recognised in their successive Ofsted inspections.



#### Virtual School Kent Apprentices

Our Virtual School for Kent offers its young people apprenticeship opportunities, should they wish to work within the service. Care experienced young people are employed as Apprentice Participation Workers, whilst studying for a Level 2 or 3 qualification. One day each week is set aside to allow the apprentices to study and complete coursework in a supportive environment. This programme allows VSK to ensure that the apprentices gain a good qualification and have a better chance at finding employment in the future.

The apprentices' role is to raise the profile of the importance of hearing the voice of Children in Care and Young Care Leavers. They work to ensure that information and policies are communicated to young people in an accessible way; this can be by face to face meetings, creating young person friendly newsletters and leaflets, and being involved in the 'Kent Cares Town' website, a newly updated information portal for all age ranges.

Our VSK apprentices support participation training events for KCC staff and partner agencies. During 2018, they have been involved in Co-production Workshops for the senior management group, joint training for health, Life Long Links launch, awards ceremonies for children, young people and foster carers and a variety of conferences. They have also produced a film on "Stigma" which was viewed by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Our apprentices, alongside other young people, are trained to undertake interviewing of KCC staff. The participation team are currently working on supporting other KCC departments to offer apprenticeships for our Care Leavers. Corporate Parenting are very proud of the work and achievements of our apprentices and their representation at the Corporate Parenting Panel.

One of the key roles of our apprentices involves supporting a range of participation activities and events as detailed below:



The voice of our children and young people being heard is important to all the Corporate Parenting Services; as a result of this shared passion, our Virtual School for Kent has the responsibility for developing and supporting Kent County Council's children in care councils. Kent County Council's children and young people councils consist of 3 groups of children and young people: our young adult council (ages 16-21), children and young people council (ages 11-16) and the super council (ages 7-11).



The children and young people councils provide a forum for all our children and young people to allow their voice to be heard and be a part of the most essential changes within Kent County Council's care system.

Critical work within Kent County Council's Corporate Parenting Services has been undertaken to provide our children and young people who are placed out of Kent with an opportunity to be represented by our children and young people councils with priority being given to this cohort of our children and young people during 2018 and 2019.

Our Virtual School for Kent run activity days during the school holidays to promote a safe and fun environment for children and young people to meet other children in care and care leavers, establish friendships and hear about the children and young people councils and the process of getting their voice and experiences 'heard'.

## What our children and young people can expect from our Virtual School for Kent

Children and young people can expect our Virtual School for Kent to provide them with:

- A service that has the highest aspirations for the children and young people that it educates and listens to their voice, to enact positive change.
- A service that prioritises participation and academic progress;
- A service that provides additional support and aid to the children and young people's progress;
- A service that works effectively with the network of professionals around the children and young people.

## What our Virtual School for Kent achieved during 2017-18

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Verbal update from Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) on our events for children, including activity days, the talent show and awards ceremonies;

- Virtual School Kent Overview Report 2015-2016 (validated results) and 2016-2017 (un-validated results);
- Challenge cards from our children and young people on:
  - The prevention of using black sacks to move children’s belongings;
  - KCC acting as Rent Guarantors for care leavers;
  - Life Long Links being accessible for all children in care.

Our Virtual School for Kent have assisted our children and young people with their individual educational needs, leading to exceptional exam results, as laid out below:

Key stage/year	Exam results 2017
KS1	Above national average for all indicators except mathematics and science, which were broadly in line with the national average.
KS2	35.1% of our children and young people achieved their predicted grade combined at the end of KS2. Our children and young people outperformed the South Eastern average for children and young people in care in all indicators except mathematics, which was broadly in line with the national average.
KS4	20% of our children and young people achieved a 4 or above in their English GCSE with 16% achieving a 4 or above in their mathematics GCSE. 1 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person achieved 5 A*-C GCSE qualifications despite being in the United Kingdom for approximately 2-years.
KS5	We currently have 20 young people who are currently attending university with young people who are not in education, training or employment reducing by 64% over the past 4 years.

### Challenge cards

The development of a challenge card has been successful. The objective of challenge cards is to allow children and young people to *challenge* their corporate parents on various issues that they face whilst in or leaving care. The challenge cards provide a formal way to make sure that all children and young people feel that they have a voice and that their experiences can impact the changes in Children’s Social Work Services’ delivery in a positive manner.

The three challenge cards this year have created significant change, with the most significant change being Kent County Council agreeing to act of a guarantor for our Kent Care Leavers. The pilot scheme for this was implemented in July 2018. The other two challenge cards were KCC ensuring black bin bags are not used to transport children’s belongings and requesting that the Life Long Links project is available for all children in care in Kent.

## Focus groups

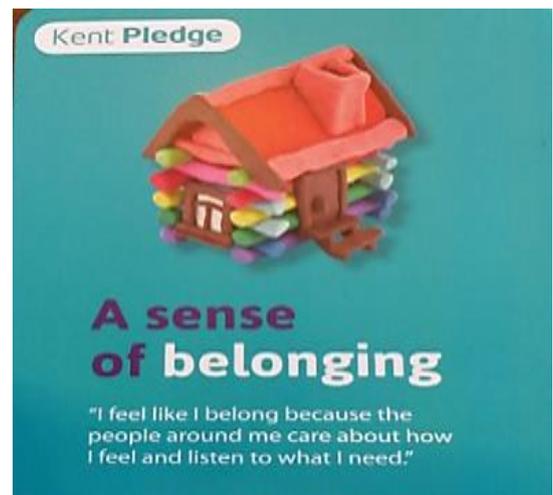
During 2017 and 2018, our Virtual School for Kent's participation team implemented a programme of focus groups which take place once each academic term in different locations around Kent.

These focus groups allow members, Kent County Council and other organisations working in the care sector, to gather the views of our children and young people about changes and developments which will affect them or others. Recent meetings have focused on the re-development of the Kent Cares Town website. The implementation of these focus groups will allow even more of our children and young people to participate and have their say on decisions that are important to them and other people.

## Our pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

In 2018 our Virtual School for Kent's participation team have worked to design an 'easy-read' version of our Kent pledge, to help ensure all our children and young people have easy access to this document in a way that meets their needs. As corporate parents, we made a pledge to all our children in care based on the following themes:

- A sense of belonging;
- Getting ready for being an adult;
- Championing your needs and interests;
- An adult who is always there for you while you are in care;
- A good education;
- Good memories for the future.



## Section 5

### Our Care Leavers 18+ Service



Our Care Leavers 18+ Service is based in West Malling and Dover and is part of Kent County Council's Children's Social Work Corporate Parenting Service.

Our Care Leavers 18+ Service work closely with young people who are aged 18-25 years' old; the team is made up with Personal Advisers who will support care leavers with their journey to living independently and have a legal obligation to support all children and

young people in our care until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

There are currently 1,529 care leavers being supported by our Care Leavers 18+ Service; 884 of these care leavers are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 645 are United Kingdom citizens.<sup>1</sup>

#### What our young people can expect from our Care Leavers 18+ Service

Our Care Leavers 18+ Service can assist Kent County Council's young people in accessing housing, education, training, work experience and health services; whilst being there to support them to make the most of leaving our care to continue their journey on to independence and adulthood. Our Care Leavers 18+ Service are also there to assist our young people by providing advice, encouragement and financial advice to help our young people in making the most of their journey through our care system.

#### What our Care Leavers 18+ Service achieved during 2017-18

Corporate Parenting Panel received reports on:

- Corporate Parenting pilot scheme: Kent County Council acting as a guarantor for our care leavers;
- Report on the types of accommodation for our children in care and care leavers;
- Performance scorecard evidencing achievement across our key targets;
- Review of the Care Leavers Service September 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> This data is from the care leavers 18+ services' records as of 17/08/2018.

	Action	Target	Achieving
1	Personal Adviser to have contact with all their allocated young people a minimum of once every 6-weeks.	85%	87.4%
2	Care leavers in suitable accommodation.	90%	94%
3	Young people in education, training or employment.	65%	66%
4	Pathway plans to be updated and reviewed every 6-months.	90%	97%
5	Number of young people receiving health history at aged 18.	100%	100%

## Key new developments and initiatives

### Transition

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, the service has extended its statutory duty to support young people up until the age of 25 years (formerly 21 years), following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act (2017). The service is working on the KCC Local Offer, which is due for publication in December 2018, which will set out our services and entitlements for Care Leavers.

The review of the service identified a gap in our provision during the transition period for young people aged 17-18 years, who are transitioning to the Care Leavers service. The service is now allocating a Personal Advisor earlier, to young people aged 17-years and 6-months old to actively support them through their transition to adulthood.

### Lifelong Links

Our Care Leavers 18+ Service has recently started planning to identify 5 of our young people over the age of 18 who may be suitable for our upcoming pilot that follows the principle of Lifelong Links. This would allow our young people to develop a wider and more secure network of support as they transition into independence and adulthood. Lifelong Links has previously only worked with children and young people under the age of 18 years.

### Drop-in service

Kent County Council's Corporate Parenting Service(s) are aware that young people may only want to meet with our Care Leavers 18+ Service on their terms. Considering this, we have structured a drop-in service where it is recognised that for some, disassociation from societal norms have been a factor in their care history and enforced activity could result in further alienation.

The main purpose of the care leavers drop-in service are:

- To offer networking opportunities for young people;
- To provide access to advice for education and careers for those who are not in education, training or employment;
- To maintain constructive contact with our isolated and vulnerable care leavers;
- To promote re-engagement with care services.

## Section 6

### Additional work, compliments and feedback

This year, the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel has also included attendance and reports covering the following:

- Young People Missing from Placement;
- Review and update of the Sufficiency, Placements and Commissioning Strategy;
- Safeguarding for young people in custody;
- Video's from our children and young people's councils on "Stigma for children in care" and the Talent Showcase June 2018;
- Adoption Conference March 2018;
- Initial Health Assessment Data Overview;
- Life Long Links Conference May 2018;
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Conference June 2018;
- Meeting children and young people attending panel to hear their experiences of being in care June 2018;
- Revision of rates payable and charges levied for Children's Services in 2018-2019;
- Children's Celebration Events August and September 2018.

The Corporate Parenting Panel welcomes feedback from our service users. Corporate Parenting will be undertaking a Foster Carers Satisfaction Survey and Care Leavers Survey in 2018, to use this feedback to further improve and develop our services to children and young people.

### Kent Fostering Services

"Absolutely fantastic! The best advice I have had since beginning my fostering journey has come from the psychologist. She saved me from going mad!" ***Sense of Belonging team***

"Thank you so much for your invaluable input over the last months. You have provided us with support and very helpful direction in some difficult times."

"My child's behaviour improved from being with a new peer group and from having male staff as positive role models."

"Our young person talked nonstop about the fun he had and asked when he could go again."

"He is still talking about the friends he made on the activity day and can't wait until the next one." ***Residential weekends at our KCC activity centres.***

## Kent Adoption Services

“An invaluable experience with lots of new learning and reminder of the needs of children that we work with.”

“Excellent variety in speakers and appreciated the grounding in medical research, not just practice wisdom or social work practice.”

“Good balance of science, clinical practice, education and personal experiences. Nice balance (parent & young person’s voice represented too).”

***Training events including the Adoption Conference.***

## Kent’s Virtual School

“My child had just come into care. It was so wonderful for her to meet others in the same position and talk! She made friends and just loved the day.”

“It gives the children the opportunity to make friends in similar situations as themselves, gives them a sense of feeling important in a non-judgemental way in a safe confidential way. They have fun and learn new skills.”

“Both children often refuse to TRY! when we are present, so leaving them with other children with the same worry of new things gave them reassurance that feeling was normal. They tried everything and they both said how proud they were of themselves.”

“She attended her first one. She was delighted. She is the only child in her school in care and has no one to talk to of her age. We support at a home but it’s not the same. She was so bouncy afterwards and feels she’s not the only one!”

***Participation events including activity days.***

## Kent’s Care Leavers 18+ Service

“Thanks so much for your hard work. Hope one day I make you proud. It feels so good to not worry about the rent for few months. I feel so much better. I just wanted to let you know how happy you guys made me. Just wanted to share this with you and say thank you to you and to your team.”

“‘A’ has many attributes as a PA, the biggest one of which is her ability to relate to and communicate with our young people while remaining professional and respectful and always being realistic and reliable. ‘A’ is informative and never makes a promise she cannot keep. It is a pleasure to watch her work with young people who often need much more than

a typical person of their age. We would like to thank 'A' for everything she has done and is still doing for our teenagers." **Feedback from our care leavers.**

"C has been an absolute pleasure to work with the last few months, she shows a real genuine care for Care Leavers and the young men in our care, she is extremely meticulous and will try her hardest to help and support the men wherever she can, from sitting and having an informal chat with them when they have previously before been dubious about the service to bringing them clothes to support their basic needs.

C organised a Focus Group here at Elmley with all Care Leavers in Custody from the Kent area, although they did not originally seem keen to attend, once C explained who she was and why she was there, they were immediately at ease and comfortable discussing their past, issues they had and it instantly they felt comfortable and we had a successful meeting.

When I see the Men, they are always asking how C is and if they will be seeing her again, having someone so involved who is not their direct Personal Advisor is such a great support and something that we hope continues. C recently attended one of our Music Performances as one of the Care Leavers is on the course.

This is something that is completely unexpected of her role, but she was extremely keen to attend and show her support. This was pivotal to the Care Leaver as C was his only visitor to attend and he was extremely grateful." **Feedback from HMP Elmley.**

### How can our elected members get involved?

All our Corporate Parenting services welcome visits from members and ask for their ongoing support for our children and young people. Whether this is through sharing in the children's achievements at our celebration events such as the VSK award ceremonies or through more formal training events such as our yearly conferences.

The children and young people welcome meeting their corporate parents at activity days, this helps them to understand the role of a corporate parent and be able to speak openly about their experiences.

Members are essential in being champions for our children and young people in care, to ensure their voice is heard. We also ask our elected members to promote the recruitment of foster carers for the Kent Fostering service and assist our vision to have more Kent families, to care for our Kent children and care leavers.