

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

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To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 27 March 2019

Subject: Lifelong Links

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides members with an overview of the progress of the Lifelong Links project and service user feedback.

Recommendation: The members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the progress.

1. Introduction.

1.1 Lifelong Links has been running in Kent since May 2017. In this time the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service have worked with over 80 children and young people to help find and establish groups of people willing to commit to them during their time in care and into their adulthood. Lifelong Links officially launched in May 2018 with a multimedia event hosted by the Virtual School Kent (VSK) participation team and this has been well received nationally. Lifelong Links in Kent is highly regarded as a good example to other local authorities and we regularly deliver training at national Lifelong Links training events.

2. Background

2.1 There is now just over one year left of the Lifelong Links trial in the UK. This is the data from the progress so far:

- Family Group Conferences have involved over 130 network members made up of family, friends, former professionals and carers.
- Lifelong Links increased average known networks by 47 people – helping shape identity and enhancing life stories for Kent’s children in care.
- Agreed family plans are reviewed by young people, IROs, social workers and families to give them longevity and making them dynamic

3. Outcomes for Children

3.1 Social Worker Feedback – West Kent

“It is great to know that since the inception of Ben’s working with M, his contact with his mother has been positive, he has increased in self-confidence and we have since observed

that his communication skills have increased beyond expected measure. M now presents as happier, has matured and engages well in meetings.”

3.2 Social Worker Feedback – East Kent

It was really positive for L to have a separate, independent person for him to do this work with; you put a lot of time and work into this and it is much appreciated, by me and by L! Also, I think some families can become immediately resistant to being contacted by Social Workers in the first instance and having someone from FGC doing this was probably a less intimidating start for them.

4. Service users’ group – parents’ panel

4.1 The Parent’s Panel is a new FGC venture specifically for Lifelong Links. We have already engaged several parents who see the immense benefit of this project. We have met once and plan to meet again in April and hope to widen this from Lifelong Links and FGC to other KCC services. This will enable the voice of the parent to be a present part of the Kent planning for Children’s Social Services.

4.2 Comments from service user (parent)

“I truly believe that FGC will be a great asset to Lifelong Links as the tool they use, and every coordinator they already have, provide such a strong foundation to give Lifelong Links the dedication and passion to drive it forward and to give every child and family a much-needed voice and guidance to the best possible outcome.

As an ex service user of FGC who gave myself and my family much needed support all the way for a great outcome which saved my family. I know they would put the same passion and dedication to Lifelong Links and be able to more for all the other children and families out there that need them is for all the lovely people at FGC/LL. I know the future will be stronger and have a voice when times are dark and hard.

*If only there were more coordinators providing such a needed service to children and families, plus all the admin team, who always go above and beyond, this is why I believe Lifelong Links will only get stronger and stronger.” **Edited with permission from the author***

5. Evaluation

5.1 The Oxford University Rees Centre Research Team is currently putting together the mid-way findings to send to the Department for Education. We hope to have access to these findings after they are released in April. Additional skills have been gained during this process including Mobility Mapping and Family Finding using Genopro (Genealogy Software). Learning will be shared across children’s services, to enable this type of work to commence earlier for Kent Children in Care to enable restorative practice and maintain key social connections, with the aim to enable safer, stronger life chances post care.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Children in Care councils and the VSK participation teams have been supportive in the progression of the project. During the next financial year, we will work with a further 100 children across the county, offering them the opportunity to explore their networks safely and thoroughly. Work is progressing to plan for the sustainability of Life Long Links, following ending of the project, so that we can start to plan towards this for 2020. The 18+ Care Leavers Service wish to offer Lifelong Links to all care leavers and will work in collaboration with the FGC Service, to ensure an effective delivery plan that is safe for young people.

Recommendations

The members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the progress of the Life Long Links project.

3. Background documents

- Social Connections Toolkit

4. Contact details

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