

# STRENGTHENING THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS A CORPORATE PARENT – WRITTEN SUBMISSION

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## SERVICE THAT IS PROVIDED TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / CARE LEAVERS

We provide the Children's Rights Service. Our role is to ensure the active and meaningful participation of LAC and care leavers. The service helps enable and empower children and young people's direct participation in planning and delivery of services, as well as ensuring young people in care have an awareness of their rights. We do this through the delivery of a variety of projects:

- *Step UP* the children in care council, (13+) who meet fortnightly and have a direct link into the Corporate Parenting Board;
- *Talkers* a monthly group, similar to the principle of Step Up, but for younger children (7+);
- *Young Trainers* project (16+) care experienced young people who are trained to deliver participation training to staff;
- *Interview panels*, we train and support young people to participate in the interviewing process and selection of social care staff (16+);
- Champions for *Viewpoint*, the online questionnaire for young people to input and voice their views, wishes and feelings into their statutory reviews (5+) The Children's Rights Service and Step Up will also be able to use these collectively to campaign for change based on young people's responses;
- Monthly *Children's Rights drop-in's* to children's homes. Informs young people of the Children's Rights Services, and enables young people to express concerns or issues to somebody independent of the home itself;
- We run *conferences* and *consultations* to support and encourage communication between Social Services and young people, and to provide opportunities for children and young people to voice their opinions of the service they receive in a child friendly forum. Most recently we ran the care leavers conference. We also involve our young people in national consultations.
- In May, the pilot *peer mentoring* scheme began. We trained 7 care leavers to become peer mentors.
- We offer two *work placement opportunities* to care leavers within our service a year;
- Assist in running KICA.
- Projects in the planning stages: *Owning your Review*, to support young people to have stronger voice in their reviews; consultation at Merrifield house respite unit; working with children at Meadow High school to include young people with learning difficulties in our work; plans for a care leavers parents group to ensure they have a voice.

## **CHALLENGES AND GAPS IN SERVICE**

- It is always a challenge to ensure we reach and include the voice of such a diverse range of young people, especially those placed out of the Borough.
- We feel young people are listened to and consulted, but they need to be involved in the earlier stages of service reviews and planning to ensure they have a voice in how services are delivered.
- There is a need to have the principles of participation embedded into every aspect of Social Services teams work. This could initially be improved by: more uptake of young people's interview panels, particularly for front line social services staff. A broader spectrum of staff participating in the Young Trainers training. A mandatory induction for new staff to the Children's Rights Service.
- A more cohesive Social Services/Council structure is needed for monitoring and reviewing how young people's participation and input results in positive change and action. Greater measurements of how effective these changes are, and the impact young people have experienced are also needed.
- Robust means of feedback needs to be developed and valued to demonstrate to young people how and where their expressed opinions have been listened to, and if appropriate, how this has influenced the Council's actions. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on collaboration with young people, rather than simply consulting.
- Need to improve the methods we have to communicate with young people. Such as website/email/social networking sites.
- We would like to offer paid work placements to care leavers to support our work and offer greater opportunities for young people

## **OUTCOMES ACHIEVED**

- Since September 2012 over 150 children and young people have accessed the Participation Service.
- 70 young people attended our care leavers' conference in May.
- Step Up now have 15 dedicated core members. They have a strong voice and issues they raise are taken to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Leaflets have been made for Step Up, Viewpoint, Care Leavers Charter, and a generic Participation Leaflet enabling us to promote our work to young people.

## **Talkers Feedback for the Policy and Overview Committee**

Josephine Mee, Children's Participation Worker

The Talkers are the younger Children in Care Council. There are currently eight members aged between seven and fourteen. The group meet once a month for two hours.

They work on a range of activity-based projects related to being in care with a strong focus on building self-confidence and social skills. It is a positive place for young children to meet, make friends and meet others who are in similar situations; developing a better understanding and awareness of being in care.

Below is an overview of the findings and the feedback members gave in preparation for the POC meeting. Members worked on this through interactive activities and supported discussions.

The session was based around three questions.

### **What do you like about being in Care?**

Answers that were given concentrated on the positive experiences of foster placements and foster carers.

These included:

"Having someone to take care of me"

"Having a foster carer because they look after me and take me on holiday in the summer"

"Having a foster carer, they take care of me when I get bullied"

"You get to go on holiday and have new clothes"

"Getting a comfy bed"

### **What do you not like so much about being in care?**

Answers were varied; here is what the children stated:

"I do not like going to contact because it is not fun. There are a lot of games at contact, but some of the toys are broken"

"I would like to see my family more, I feel like no-one tells me anything"

"What I don't like is when people talk about my mum, it makes me very angry"

"I don't like going shopping"

### **What one thing would you change to help make it better for other children in care?**

Again, children gave varied feedback and suggestions. Further exploration elicited the following:

Predominantly the children raised concerns about the amount of "big people" in their lives and that they felt there are just too many. The changing of Social Workers was also raised by many of the children, stating that this made them feel confused and scared to talk to them.

Children also stated that it would have helped them if they had more information of who their foster carers were before they moved into their placements:

“You can help people because it is scary talking to Social Workers, children can feel scared when with their Social Worker”

“Help them by telling them what carer they might have”

“More information given to children before moving into care, I should’ve been told when I was leaving my family.”

“To know more who a Social Worker is and why she is there. There are too many different Social Workers and people”.