

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Title:	Care4Us Council Annual Report Summary - April 2020 to March 2021
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Care4Us Council

The Care4Us Council is made up of a group of young people in care, care leavers and/or care experienced young people who regularly come together to voice their opinions and work to improve services for all children in care in Barnsley.

Barnsley Care4Us Council members meet with their Corporate Parents, key decision makers and service providers on a regular basis to discuss any issues and concerns that they may have as well as using the platform to voice their opinions and help shape local, regional and national service design and delivery. The Care4Us Council works closely with other youth voice forums in the Borough such as Barnsley Youth Council and the SEND Youth Forum.

Staff from the Targeted Youth Support Service coordinate and support the group and their peers and help facilitate opportunities for the members of the group to be able to work with their Corporate Parents and other key decision makers to influence services that they receive.

Work undertaken during this period

As with many things in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the delivery of the Care4Us Council's sessions and activities. Meetings have predominantly taken place virtually and through physical socially distanced one to one and group sessions. However, members have worked hard to ensure that the voice of children in care and care leavers were represented and taken on board and have continued to ensure that the voice of children in care and care leavers was represented at a number of events, projects and initiatives. Some of this work has included:

- Meeting virtually on a weekly basis using Microsoft Teams
- Completion of the 2019/2020 annual report video
- Sending messages of thanks and farewell to Barnsley's previous Children's Services Executive Director
- Redesigning the Barnsley Pledge to young people in care to including the top ten messages from the care experienced conference.
- Feedback on family time recovery during and post Covid-19
- Participation in the virtual Mayors Parade
- Contribution to the Covid-19 book of condolence
- Continued representation at Barnsley Youth Council meetings
- Q&A session with the four Barnsley MP's

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- Input into the revisions made to the 'Staying Put' agreement
- Socially distanced visits and group work with staff from the Targeted Youth Support Service
- Attendance and participation in a scrutiny meeting which focused on issues that affect young people we covered topics such as Covid-19 and its educational and social impact, bullying and mental health.
- Involvement and contributions to the Barnsley 2030 focus groups and consultation sessions
- Celebrating world youth day
- Returning to school and sharing our thoughts and feelings on this with our corporate parents and the Service Director.
- Meeting more of our corporate parents at virtual meetings
- Change in language video shown at the designated safeguarding leads forum and further work undertaken on this subject with the fostering team
- Working alongside the Youth Council and SEND Youth Forum to promote staying safe messages in videos and social media
- Continued use of the Care4Us Council Facebook page and frequent reviews of the children in care website and its information
- Contribution and support to the annual national Make Your Mark ballot
- Contribution to the regional youth voice networks where appropriate
- Contribution to the planning and participation in the 2020 Takeover Challenge
- Participation in the Annual Children in Care Celebration event scheduled in November 2020
- Work with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service to contribute to the revisions of the 'My Care Plan'
- Participation in Anti Bullying Week by sharing positive messages alongside other young people on social media
- Supported the development of the Young People and Police Information Advisory Group (IAG) and participated in the first ever IAG meeting
- Shared our thoughts and views on the Youth Council's community Safety Campaign in town centre
- Taken part in the 4T's Urban Tree Fund environmental project which saw young people plant over 450 trees
- Final amendments and sign off of the new 'Expectations' document for Barnsley's children in care which is to be promoted and publicised to all children in care

One of the biggest pieces of work that we have undertaken this year is the refresh of what was the Barnsley Pledge to children and young people in care. The revisions were made so that the top ten messages from the care experienced conference and the feedback from the previous pledge review survey could be included. We were keen to keep all the key bits of the old 'Pledge' whilst making it fresh and relevant to Barnsley's children in care. We worked hard to pull together a draft of the document and looked closely at the design

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and how it could be made Barnsley friendly. Overall, we think we've developed the document well so that young people can clearly see what they should expect from their care providers and we hope that this will help them to get the support that they are entitled to.

We're really pleased that our 'Change in Language' video has been shared far and wide and we've had lots of positive feedback about the message that it delivers. We were asked by the Service Manager if the National Conference for the Fostering Network could use our video and members involved in its production received a gift voucher for allowing them to use the film as a resource. We have worked with the fostering team and shared our thoughts on the use of language various sessions over the year. As well as this we were involved in reviewing some of the paperwork that the IRO team use for young people's meetings and used some of the language from the video to support how the 'My Care Plan' documents replicated these suggested changes in terminology and therefore made them more relevant and friendly for the young people using them.

Throughout 2020 we have really enjoyed the sessions which have allowed us to have discussions with some of our Corporate Parents and other key decision makers and it's been nice to see them – albeit mainly on screen. We've had guests at lots of our meetings this year and have encouraged new and familiar people to come along.

At our meeting, in November 2020, we had a great turn out with nearly a full house of members in attendance. We shared our mid-year update of work from April to October 2020 so that our Corporate Parents could hear about how busy we had been and so that they could go away and champion the work that we'd been doing. We've had discussions about how Covid-19 impacted our return to education and how we'd adapted to the new normal. We've also talked about how we as young people engage with the Police and how we can work with them and the Youth Council to improve relationship between the two.

When we met with our corporate parents in February 2021, we celebrated all things Barnsley by watching a short historical video and discussing the things we like, dislike and want to keep about Barnsley. This helped us focus with our contributions to the Barnsley 2030 plan and priority themes discussions and it also made a nice change from thinking about Covid-19 the topic of being in care.

We have worked together with the Youth Council and SEND Youth Forum as part of a new project with the Police looking to improve the relationships between young people and the community police officers. Members of the forums have been part of a focus group where we voiced our opinions and gave our ideas about how things could improve. This session was the first of many on the development and set up of the Police and Youth IAG which will continue to work together in the future.

The Care4Us Council has also supported the Youth Council on the 4T's Urban Tree Fund project which is the result of a successful funding application to the forestry commission. We were keen to get on board with helping to plant over 450 trees in the identified location and the project allowed us to see some of our peers outdoors in a safe and socially

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distanced environment. The aim of this project is to create a space for the whole community which will benefit the environment and people of all ages. We believe it will also help towards improving people's emotional wellbeing by providing a space for people to relax and enjoy the outdoors. The project has also since gone on to be a feature in the Barnsley Chronicle and the Sun Newspapers and has also won the Green Hero award and work continues to get local people on board in further developing the site.

What's next for 2021/2022

The Care4Us Council is keen to expand its membership and recruit new members by working alongside schools and other service providers to identify interest, raise awareness and encourage participation. As a group and in support of the wider youth voice framework we intend to;

- Re-launch the 'Expectations' document by publicising via the BMBC Children in care website, launching internally with the support of BMBC's Communications team via staff bulletins and social media posts, distribute paper copies to young people via relevant teams, social workers and foster carers, share a printable PDF version via mailshots and online, table at the social work forum in May 2021
- Support the review the 'Expectations' information at least annually (Feb/March each year) alongside the Children in Care Team to ensure that information and content remains accurate and relevant
- Regularly update the Care4Us Council information and events section of the CIC website
- Review, update and promote the Care4Us Council Facebook Page
- Identify issues that are of interest to the Care4Us Council members and their peers building these themes and ideas into the work programme of the group
- Support Covid-19 recovery by ensuring that the voice of young people in care is included and heard and that support is offered when relevant and appropriate
- Support the launch of the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Partnership's (BSCB) Anti Bullying Strategy and Anti Bullying Commitment
- Continue to work alongside other forums locally, Regionally and nationally on the issues important to young people in Barnsley and focus on how young people in care can get their voices included in these campaigns
- Take part in relevant youth consultations and focus groups including the Covid-19 recovery offer and Make Your Mark ballot 2021/2022.
- Support and further contribute to the Barnsley 2030 project
- Identify and support a young person's representative to the Corporate Parent Panel
- Continue to work with the Virtual School for looked after and other vulnerable children to involve young people in discussions and service developments in relation to education
- Further support the development of the Independent Visitor Service and participate in any consultations and service design work necessary

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- Participate in the 2021 Takeover Challenge building on last year's successes
- Promote the Local Offer and its purpose to Care Leavers in 2021/2022