

Update on Voice - Jan 2021

Nikki Wilson, Children's Rights Manager

Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum

As a result of the COVID restrictions all our participation work is now being carried out remotely, with young people being engaged virtually via Zoom meetings, Facebook and Live Messenger. Our Children in Care Council (Show Me That I Matter) and Care Leavers Forum (I Still Matter) have continued to be delivered each month and meet with senior managers and elected members on a quarterly basis. In addition to this, representatives from SMTIM and ISM regularly co-deliver training and within the last quarter have taken part in the Skills of Foster Training for prospective foster carers, delivered a workshop to social workers as part of the Adolescence Practice Week and presented at the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership's Development Day.

Current areas of interest identified by ISM and SMTIM members are:

- **The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people in care and care leavers** - SMTIM and ISM feel there has been a good level of contact with social workers via face to face visits and video calls but their experience of education has been mixed, with some finding the new ways of learning more challenging. There are anxieties around the uncertainty of what this year will look like.
- **Access to Records** – ISM would like more information to be available regarding how to access records / information about your life and the support young people can receive around this.
- **Training for professionals** – SMTIM and ISM would like to know more about what training is available to foster carers and social workers and how this training is evaluated.
- **Perceptions of care leavers who are young parents** – an issue that ISM would like to explore further after it was raised that some care leavers reported feeling stigmatised.
- **Awareness raising about bullying that children and young people might experience from their peers due to being in care** – after some young people shared they had experienced this in the past.

Advocacy

We have continued to take a blended approach to how advocacy support is provided, with support taking place remotely unless there is a clear need for face to face contact. Remote support has continued with advocates engaging with young people via phone, text, email, video call and using platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Attend Anywhere. Whilst this briefing doesn't cover information relating to specific advocacy themes, quarterly reports are compiled containing an analysis of issues raised to enable key messages to be shared with Children's Social Care Managers.

Between October and December 2020, Speak Up received a total of 8 referrals for advocacy; 4 referrals for children and young people in care, 2 referrals for young parents aged 18 and under whose child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, and 2 referrals for young people subject to a Child Protection Plan. Of the 8 young people referred, 5 receive SEN support, with 1 young people also having an EHCP.

Quarter	Advocacy referrals received	Advocacy cases closed	Active caseload at end of quarter
Q1 2020/2021	24	11	45 (30/06/2020)
Q2 2020/21	18	21	42 (30/09/2020)
Q3 2020/21	8	14	36 (31/12/2020)

There has been a clear decline in referrals for young people who are eligible to access advocacy, as evidence in the table above. The reason for this is not apparent but Speak Up will continue to ensure that the social work teams have a good awareness of advocacy provision and that children and young people in care continue to be made aware of their right to access advocacy, via the distribution of New to Care Information Packs and regular newsletters.

Mind Of My Own

Mind Of My Own is an online platform that we are now using to enable children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings. Mind Of My Own is used by 100+ local authorities, voluntary sectors and

organisations and is an accessible and empowering way for children and young people tell their workers about things that are important to them.

There are two versions of the app: the One App which young people can access independently and can be used on any device with internet access, and the Express App which is ideal for younger children and those with additional needs as it is designed specifically to help those children who may otherwise struggle to communicate their views. The Express App is accessed with the support of a worker and helps children express their views, wishes and feelings in a fun way that's easy for workers to understand and evidence.

Since October we have trained 144 workers across the social work teams, Pathway Team, IRO Team, Children's Rights and Advocacy and Local Area Teams. Whilst we are still in early stages of usage, during December we received 37 statements from young people indicating that Mind Of My Own is starting to be used with children and young people.

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