

SHOW ME THAT I MATTER

YORK'S CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2015- MARCH 2016

INTRODUCTION

Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM) is the name of York's Children in Care Council (CiCC). Monthly panel meetings are held for young people to raise and discuss issues that are important to them, with the aim of shaping and improving services for children and young people in care in York. Councillor Jenny Brooks, Lead Member for Children's Services, and Councillor Carol Runciman attend the panel meetings, along with members of Speak Up, York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service.

The aim of this report is to detail the issues identified by the CiCC, how these issues are being addressed and what issues are still to be taken forward. This report will also detail professionals and partner agencies that met with the CiCC, the outcomes of these discussions and different projects that the CiCC is involved in.

PANELS: SMTIM AND I MATTER 2

SHOW ME THAT I MATTER

SMTIM consists of up to twelve care experienced young people, aged between 13-19 years. The panel meets monthly at West Office to discuss issues that are important to children and young people in care in York. Any issues raised are fed back to senior managers, with the aim to help change and shape services for children and young people in York. Young people regularly invite professionals and agencies to attend the panel to discuss issues and give feedback on service provision. SMTIM hold a second meeting monthly, routinely used as an informal planning meeting or focus group, to organise work and meet the demands of ongoing projects.

SMTIM agreed that they would like members of SMTIM to chair meetings, therefore every twelve months the group vote for a new chair and vice chair to help lead meetings with the support of staff. Young people have also been encouraged to take on other formal roles within the panel but to date haven't taken up this opportunity.

I MATTER 2

I Matter 2 is a sub-group of SMTIM, jointly delivered by Speak Up and the Looked After Children's Support Team. This group meet monthly at Hamilton House and is aimed at younger looked after children aged 8-13 years. The group has a more informal, activity based approach, allowing a more relaxed environment for children and young people to share their views and raise any issues. Issues raised at I Matter 2 are shared with the SMTIM, who are then able to take these forward with senior managers and Councillors. In light of the difference in approaches of the two groups a degree of flexibility is needed to ensure that children and young people are able to participate in whichever group they feel more comfortable accessing.

WORK CARRIED OUT

Between April 2015 and March 2016 SMTIM carried out 10 formal panel meetings, 18 focus groups and 2 social events / activity days. In addition to this a number of panel members have participated in conferences, training sessions and interview panels throughout the year.

CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS

SMTIM have invited a number of professionals to attend panel meetings and focus groups, either to address specific issues raised by the panel or after an expression of interest to attend.

April 2015	Paul Kind, Chair of York Area Foster Carers Association
May 2015	Jon Stonehouse and Eoin Rush, Director and Assistant Director of Children's Service
June 2015	Debra Lane and Sarah Wild, Fostering Team
July 2015	Emily Taylor, Talent and Resource Advisor and John Thompson
Sep 2015	Lindsey Skelly, Youth and Community Development Team
Oct 2015	Sarah Furness, Castlegate
Nov 2015	Dave Purcell, Pathway Team
Jan 2016	Paul Murphy, author of the new Strategy for Looked After Children and Young People
March 2016	Luke Rodgers, Fostering Focus, Kev Curran, Inspired Youth

REGIONAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCE

The Yorkshire and Humberside Children in Care Council meets periodically in various locations across the region. Young people's meetings and professionals meetings take place separately and are an opportunity for different authorities to meet, share and discuss their CiCC with neighboring authorities. Representatives from SMTIM and Speak Up have attended Regional CiCC meetings and in April 2015 hosted a young people's regional meeting at West Offices.

In 2015 the National Children's Bureau and A National Voice held a series of workshops across the country for CiCC members to attend with their Corporate Parents. SMTIM attended workshops in Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, where the following issues were discussed: Pathways to Adulthood and Independence, Raising Achievements, and Diversity and Inclusion. To conclude the work a national celebratory event took place in London in February 2016, which representatives from SMTIM and Speak Up attended.

Other conferences that SMTIM have been involved in include the No Wrong Door Conference that took place in January 2016, the National Conference for Virtual Schools in

March 2016, and a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group in Westminster in March 2016.

REWARD AND RECOGNITION

The work of SMTIM is rewarded and recognised in a number of different ways. SMTIM members are financially rewarded for their time and effort with a stamp system in operation, enabling young people to receive a £20 cash reward for attending 3 sessions. SMTIM members also have the opportunity to take part in social activities and to have their work recognised via the Vinspired Awards Scheme (nationally recognised certificates for various levels of volunteering). Members of SMTIM have also recently had their hard work recognised at the Lord Mayor's Shine Awards and the Coram Voice 2016 Awards.

KEY ISSUES RAISED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

STIGMA AND TERMINOLOGY

Stigma faced by children and young people in care and the terminology used by professionals was an issue identified by SMTIM during the previous year. As a result the Speak Up and Hear My Voice training was developed and remains an ongoing project of the CiCC. The matter was further discussed with Jon Stonehouse and Eoin Rush in May 2015 when it was agreed that the term 'LAC' in particular would no longer be used. This was reinforced at the No Wrong Door conference in January 2016 and reflected in the new Strategy for Children and Young People in Care (2016/2020).

SMTIM were keen to address the wider issue of stigma and embarked on a media arts campaign with Inspired Youth, which they named Aspire to More. The Aspire to More Project has been a huge piece of work for SMTIM and will remain a key priority in 2016-17.

IMPROVING FOSTERING PROVISION

SMTIM met with the chair of the York Area Foster Care Association in April 2015 to discuss the role of foster carers and share their views on what qualities and attributes they would want to see in a foster carer. Discussions also took place in June 2015 with members of the Fostering Team regarding this, as well as the issue of delegated responsibility for foster carers and specific issues relating to best practice. An outcome of this discussion was the committed to an improved partnership between the Fostering Team and SMTIM. It was agreed that there would be a named worker from the Fostering Team to attend the panel regularly, and that young people would actively be involved in foster carer training and the recruitment of workers for the Fostering Team. SMTIM have since delivered training as part of the Skills to Foster training for potential new foster carers and taken part in a young people's interview panel for the post of Fostering Social Worker.

SMTIM have also been actively involved in the Make York Home Project where their views have been represented by Speak Up and, when possible, young people themselves.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

Social Work Contact Cards were produced by Speak Up and distributed to social work teams in March 2015, in a response to concerns raised by SMTIM that young people often had difficulties contacting their social workers (in particular young people didn't always know how to contact their social worker or who to speak to in their absence). In August 2015 SMTIM raised the question of whether these were being routinely used and a further distribution took place.

SMTIM also raised concerns about relationships with social workers, and issues regarding communication and confidentiality. SMTIM came up with guidelines that they would like social workers to consider when communicating with young people. This guidance will be used for training purposes for Children's Social Care staff and also help to shape an agreement between social workers and young people. A draft agreement has been drawn up and will be further progressed with the new Permanence Team.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

SMTIM have raised a number of issues relating to the health and wellbeing of children and young people in care. In July 2015 they identified that not all young people have sufficient information about the kinds of health provisions they are entitled to, or how to access them. It was agreed that a focus group would take place in October 2015 when further discussions took place with representatives from Castlegate about young peoples existing knowledge of the Castlegate service, and their entitlements to accessing provision.

SMTIM also fed back some unhappiness about the way Health Assessments were conducted and did not feel there was always enough information provided about what this entailed. In February 2016 an opportunity arose to get involved in a piece of work with North Yorkshire County Council surrounding Initial Health Assessments. It was agreed that a LEGO themed health clip would be devised by young people, explaining what a health assessment was and what was involved. The project is still ongoing and further discussions are planned within senior health professionals within CYC about the wider issue of how Health Assessments could be conducted differently.

March 2016 SMTIM highlighted mental health as an issue they felt needed further consideration. Young people felt that there was a great deal of stigma surrounding young people's mental health, resulting in young people suffering in silence. They questioned what support was available to them and suggested that young people should be better informed so that they can support their peers who may be experiencing mental health problems. This issue will be taken forward in 2016-17.

PUPIL PREMIUM

In May 2015 SMTIM identified that they thought young people were unclear on the meaning of pupil premium and what it was suppose to be spent on. Subsequent discussions took place with the Virtual School for Looked After Children and in June 2015 it was agreed for details to be included in their Virtual School leaflet. A link to the Virtual School leaflet was also added to the SMTIM website so help to promote this information to young people.

WORK EXPERIENCE

In July 2015 SMTIM raised their unhappiness about the reduction in work experience opportunities routinely offered to young people. In February 2016 Speak Up sought funding from the Careers and Enterprise Fund to set up a new project with York Cares to deliver taster sessions, skills based workshops and work experience opportunities for young people in care. The Bright Futures Project will run from April 2016 – Aug 2017.

LEAVING CARE

In May 2015 SMTIM requested that consideration be given to care leavers having the same rights to free bus pass provision that young people in care have. Following discussions between Education Transport and Children's Social Care it was agreed that bus passes will be extended to those young people post 18 who are in an apprenticeship, education or training.

In September 2015 SMTIM raised concerns that young people approaching 16 didn't always have sufficient information about the Pathways service and their rights and entitlements. Some young people were unsure at what age they would be due to start working with the Pathway Team and what support they would receive. A subsequent focus group took place with the manager of the Pathway Team to discuss. It was agreed that steps would be taken by the Pathway Team to make information more widely available and the IRO team were asked to routinely check that young people approaching 16 felt they had sufficient information.

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENT

In July 2015 SMTIM raised the question of the best way to celebrate the achievements of children and young people in care. In the past celebratory events have taken place, with children and young people receiving awards for their achievements, however there have always been mixed views as to whether this is the best approach or whether the achievements of young people should be acknowledged on an individual basis. The views of SMTIM members and those consulted via social media were split equally; with half of young people wanting a larger celebration group styled event and the other half preferring recognition on an individual basis. This is something that will be discussed further in 2016-17.

YOUNG PERSON FRIENDLY ROOM AT WEST OFFICES

SMTIM fed back to Jon Stonehouse their view that steps should be taken to make West Offices more young person friendly, by allowing them to lead on taking over the development of a space in West Offices. Following these discussions in May 2015 agreement was sought from Facilities Management for SMTIM to begin a Room Development Project which remains ongoing.

ONGOING PROJECT WORK

ASPIRE TO MORE – RAISING ASPIRATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Aspire To More is a creative project in partnership with Inspired Youth, the Children’s Rights and Advocacy team and SMTIM. The aim of the project is to raise the aspirations of children and young people in care. By utilizing the learning and insight they gain from speaking to successful care leavers they will be equipped to create a positive campaign that will raise aspirations and open minds to the possibilities of promising and inspiring futures. It was agreed that 6 role models would be interviewed by SMTIM and feature in a poster campaign, along with a blog showcasing all the work. To find out more about this project you can visit aspiretomore.wordpress.com or follow the campaign on [twitter](https://twitter.com).

SPEAK UP AND HEAR MY VOICE TRAINING

The Speak Up and Hear My Voice training was developed in a direct response to SMTIM’s views on the importance of reducing the stigma faced by children and young people in care. It was agreed that young people would co-design and deliver a training programme which would feature the Arts4Care film, “Listen to Me” that was produced in 2014. The training, whilst providing professionals with the opportunity to hear directly from children and young people in care about their experiences, also offers practical tools and resources as to how practice and service development could be adapted to embed participation. Seven young people were trained as young trainers and a total of eight training sessions took place, including three full day sessions, three workshop sessions and two bespoke sessions to York College and Out of Schools Club Network.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S INTERVIEW PANELS

In 2014-2015 SMTIM identified the need for more young people to be involved in the recruitment of staff working with children and young people. Training took place to create a team of young interviewers and the interview panels were launched in April 2015. Young person’s interview panels have been in high demand throughout 2015-2016, with SMTIM sitting on 13 interview panels for roles in children’s services including senior management.

TAKEOVER AND BRIGHT FUTURES

In March 2016, York Cares (an independent employee volunteering charity) successfully acquired funding from the Careers and Enterprise Fund to work in collaboration with Speak Up to provide further work experience and takeover opportunities for children and young people in care, as a direct response to issues raised by SMTIM. By providing an insight into the working environment, Bright Futures aims to support young people to further develop their skills, knowledge and attributes, providing experiences to enhance their curriculum vitae and potentially lead to future employment. The project aims to provide career guidance through a variety of ways, using the experience of employers to give practical and meaningful advice about careers in their area of work.

CONCLUSION

The work SMTIM have been involved in throughout 2015-16 illustrates the growth and value of the CiCC. SMTIM have invested a lot of time liaising with senior managers and partner agencies to tackle the issues raised in panel meetings; with the Assistant Director and Director of Children's Services, the Fostering team, Social Work team, and Elected Members attending meetings. This has resulted in a number of outcomes and an increased awareness of the role and functions of the CiCC.