

YOU ARE NOT ALONE RESOURCE

MAY 2018

BACKGROUND

Mental health has been identified by young people as a priority for York's CiCC, Show Me That I Matter, as was documented in the last SMTIM Annual Report (2016-17). Show Me That I Matter were aware that a great deal of work was taking place in the city to address the issue of mental health and emotional wellbeing; they had met with the Wellbeing Team and heard about the work that the Youth Council had done around the Minding Minds initiative, but felt that young people in care needed to be more aware of mental health issues and the services available.

Show Me That I Matter decided that they would like to create a resource to highlight some of the issues faced by young people in care, with a particular focus on mental health, in an attempt to raise awareness amongst young people. Therefore, in March 2017, ten care experienced young people came together from across the three participation groups that form York's Children in Care Council (Show Me That I Matter panel, Speak Up Youth and York's Care Leavers Forum, I Still Matter) to begin this work.

DEVELOPMENT OF RESOURCE

Young people took part in a series of workshops with Speak Up and Inspired Youth and had the opportunity to develop their creative writing skills, at the same time as exploring some of the feelings and emotions that are often experienced by children and young people in care. As part of the project young people were able to help to shape a fictional story that was subsequently published online by Inspired Youth.

Young people were able to articulate that without the right support and help some of these difficult feelings can impact upon placements and future relationships. They told us that through participating in the sessions they could see the benefits of talking about mental health; that early experiences stayed with them but that with the right support young

people could be better equipped to manage these difficult feelings and emotions. The group identified key messages that they wanted to share with other young people and went on to design a booklet which they named 'You Are Not Alone'.

KEY MESSAGES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people identified key issues that they wanted to focus on which were grouped into the following themes:

Dealing with coming into care: - Young people told us that learning to fit in with another family can be really hard and that it is important to be able to feel part of a family. Dealing with separation, coping with having two families, feeling unsettled and having to retell their story to different professionals can be really difficult. Young people wanted to communicate the message that it is perfectly normal to have these feelings and that talking to a trusted adult can really help.

Managing ongoing relationships: - Young people told us that managing ongoing relationships with family members could be really difficult; that they could feel anxious about how family members may be coping, may feel forgotten about by family members or divided loyalties between birth and foster family, with certain times of year being particularly difficult. In the booklet young people are urged to let the people around them know how they are feeling so that they can be aware of triggers and provide some support.

The impact of pre-care experiences: - Young people told us that often their difficult experiences before coming into care meant that they found trusting adults particularly difficult. They wanted to help other young people to understand why this might be the case but that there are people out there who genuinely want to help.

Identity: - Young people told us that developing a positive sense of identity can be more difficult for young people in care; that feelings of insecurity, uncertainty about how much to tell others about their situation, anxiety about the longer term impact of experiences and whether they will impact on their ability to form future relationships or parent. Young people wanted others going through this to know that coming into care is not their fault and does not need to define them.

Mental health issues: - Young people wanted to ensure that the booklet provided young people with information about mental health issues, in particular depression, anxiety, stress and self harming behaviour.

The booklet was then structured around these key themes and provides advice, inspirational quotes and poems written by young people, as well as signposting young people to support services and online resources.

NEXT STEPS

It is proposed that the You Are Not Alone booklet will be rolled out to all young people in care, aged between 11-17 years, and the booklet will be included in the Information Packs that are routinely given out to young people when they first come into care. Show Me That I Matter plan to share information about how this resource was created with other Children in Care Council's across the region, via the Yorkshire and Humber Children in Care Council Conference that is taking place on 30/05/18.

Nikki Wilson, Children's Rights Manager – 24/05/18