

**Participation and Engagement.  
Safeguarding and Professional Practice  
Service, Children's Social Care**

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**Report of Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager,  
Safeguarding and Professional Practice, Children and Young  
People's Services, Durham County Council.**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report provides an overview, with some examples, of the engagement and participation work that takes place across Children's Social Care (CSC) with children and young people, including the work of the Participation and Engagement Officer within the Safeguarding and Professional Practice Service. This report also shows the main priorities for the coming year and developments being made to increase the participation and engagement of our children and young people in the improvement and development of our service.

**Executive summary**

- 2 There is a variety of participation and engagement work taking place across the whole service. This includes practitioners working with individual children and young people (and their families and carers) to seek a good understanding of their lived experiences and to hear their wishes and feelings about their own circumstances and their own plan. Practitioners, managers and the Participation and Engagement Officer also seek the participation and engagement of children, young people, their families and carers to understand better what it can feel like to receive a service from us so that we 'know ourselves well' and consistently see things from other's perspectives that can sometimes help us to see things differently and further improve or alter our practice and services.
- 3 We have a wide range of participation and engagement activities in place, which included co-production of new and revised services. Examples of this include:
  - Young people and the parents being involved at the very beginning when the Adolescent Safeguarding Exploitation Team

(Asets) was just a concept. They led on the remit and approach the team adopted.

- The children and young people's Full Circle Therapeutic Team Steering Group who design new therapy rooms and reception for our refurbished building. They worked with interior designers and a graffiti artist with a grant from the Arts Council.

4 Our priority is to show how and what we learn from our children, young people, their families and carers and to ensure this strongly influences and shapes the further improvement and development of our current and any new services.

### **Recommendation**

5 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:

- (a) Note the contents of the report.

## Background

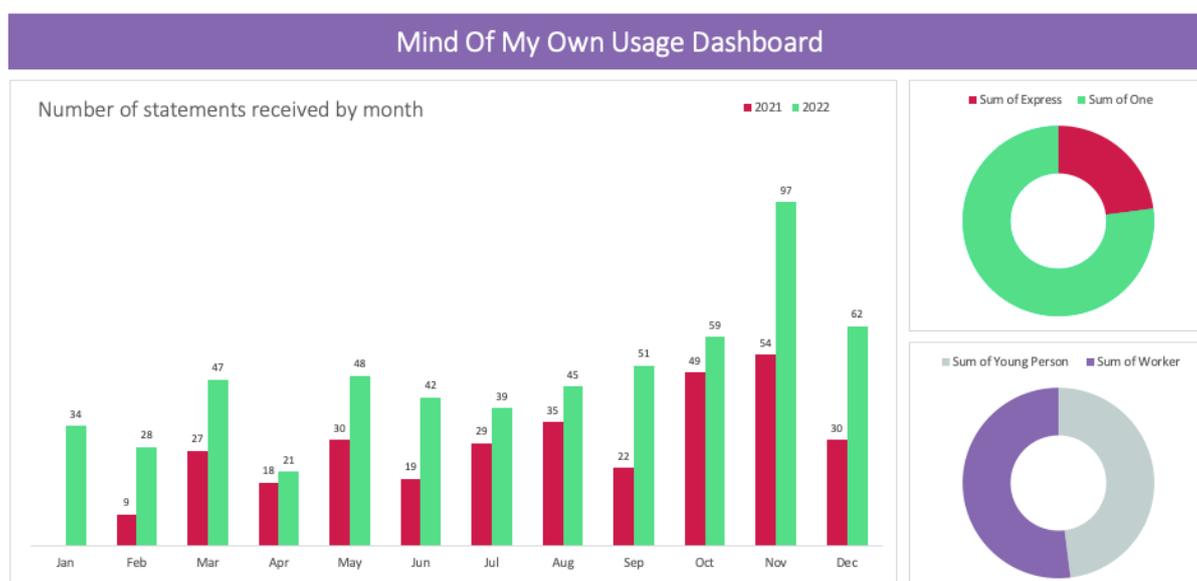
- 6 All Children's Social Care teams work with children and young people who they engage and encourage to participate in the creation and fulfilment of their own plans (the planned work that they, their family and carers and social workers know needs to happen to keep them safe, happy and fulfilled). Hearing, understanding and responding to the child and young person's voice and their day to day lived experience is a huge part of the work social workers, family workers and specialist practitioners do every day.
- 7 We, as a whole service, also seek the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families to help us understand what it feels like to receive a service from us. We seek feedback, through a variety of means, on what works well (so we can keep doing this and build upon it), and any learning about what we need to improve or do differently. It is this type of participation and engagement that this summary report focusses on.
- 8 Hearing the voices of our care experience children and young people: those who are children who are looked after and care leavers, and their families is, and always will be a priority. We are striving to move from consultation to a much truer participation approach with a wider and more representative group where children and young people can also set the agenda rather than us only consulting with them on the things we see as important as they may have differing priorities.
- 9 Since mid 2019, Children's Social Care has had a Participation and Engagement Officer who is based in the Safeguarding and Professional Practice part of the service. This officer is required to work with practitioners and managers across all of Children's Social Care to ensure the voice of children and young people is clearly heard and informs the day to day practice of social workers and contributes to service improvement and development work. They are required to work with staff across the service to improve the rates of participation and engagement which secures the voice of children and young people and ensure actions taken have meaningful impact on outcomes. The new Participation and Engagement Office came into this post in mid-September 2022.
- 10 This report focuses on the work of the Participation and Engagement Officer with children who are looked after and our care leavers only. Some of the work undertaken is done collaboratively with the Children in Care Council.

## Strengthening the Voices of Children and Young People

### Mind Of My Own

- 11 The implementation of Mind Of My Own (MOMO) is a key responsibility of the Participation and Engagement Officer. MOMO is an application that children and young people (all children and young people involved with a worker from CSC and Early Help) can use on electronic devices such as mobile phones and laptops. It is an app that provides an additional way by which children and young people can be heard and involved by expressing their views, ask questions, giving feedback, prepare what they want to be said at their meetings and many other scenarios. The great thing about MOMO is that it can be at any time of the day or night that suits the child or young person.
- 12 MOMO has two parts designed for children of different ages and abilities. Both of these, One app and Express app, were launched on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in Durham for the Independent Reviewing Officer service and Children in Our Care (children looked after) and Fostering and Children's Homes (Residential Services) Teams. From May 2021, training was made available for all CSC teams. All children and young people can have access to MOMO by either setting up their own One app account if they have their own email address or by accessing the apps via a worker's account if a child or young person cannot access them on their own. A group of children and young people designed posters and launched the apps. Their work was recognised nationally by the Mind Of My Own annual awards where they won the Creativity Award.
- 13 We continue to have an extensive training plan and offer support sessions to promote the use of MOMO in order to further strengthen the child's voice and involvement. To date, 361 of 668 staff in CSC have been trained to use MOMO (54%). Children who are in our care can be supported by their social worker and their Independent Reviewing Officer to use MOMO.
- 14 The increasing usage by children and young people of MOMO to engage, communicate, feedback and share with their workers and their managers is evident in **Table 1** below. The red columns show usage month by month in 2021 (year one) and the green columns show the use, to date, in 2022 (year two). This is encouraging but is not yet where we want it to be.

**Table 1**



## Next Steps

- 15 Training will continue through 2022/2023 to further support the use of MOMO as an additional way of supporting children to participate and engage with their workers. It is agreed that there will be a re-launch of MOMO in early 2023. A five point plan is being devised which will include young people ambassadors, using pioneering teams and our Voice and Change Champions (staff representatives from teams and children's homes) to re-enthuse and set expectations for services.

## Collaborative Evaluations and Family Satisfaction Surveys

- 16 CSC has an audit programme which includes auditing children's whole file and thematic audits. Our full file audits are known as collaborative evaluations. These involve an auditor (a manager who is not the line manager for objectivity) and the social worker looking at the child's file together and evaluating the child's journey through our services. Part of this evaluation includes the auditor speaking directly with the parents, carer and or the child or young person to gain their views on what we have done well, the impact we have made and what we could learn or have done better.
- 17 The benefit of including family feedback in this way was noted in the Ofsted inspection in In the May 2022, "the majority of audits include family feedback, which adds richness to the audit and ensures that the voice of the family is informing practice learning".

18 The feedback we receive from children, young people, families and carers is predominantly very positive, below are some recent examples of what has been said:

- “*Mr P (a father)*. was keen to highlight he felt *H, the social worker*, support has been great and asked that this be fed back. *Mr P.* feels *H* work has had a significant impact on their family, the work she has done as been 'excellent' and *Mr P.* feels as a family they 'wouldn't be where we are now if it wasn't for *H.*”
- “*K (a young person)* feels that she has been involved in the plans and has been kept up to date. *K* feels that the care team have worked well together and supported her.”
- “*H (a young person)* on speaking about her Social Worker described *C* as the best Social Worker that she could have had. she saw her through some dark times and offer her support which was a million percent, stating that she could not have done it without her. *H* recognises that without all of the support network, she would have found it difficult to be where she is today. All the help and advice have helped her to date either, through education or financial advice and a Personal Advisor for the future. This is one area that *H* feels really grateful for, that workers did not judge but were patient and helped support her when she started to build her relationship with her mother. Being close to her friends and her boyfriend have also been a high priority, one that *H* feels *C* did support her with.
- “They (*social worker*) have helped me (*young person*) find support in my friends and family as before I wouldn't open myself up about how I was feeling”
- “(*Child*) spoke to me (*auditor*) and said he is very happy and everything is going well...(*child*) feels supported and listened to and wouldn't change anything

19 This positive feedback offers assurances that we are providing a good service. We also learn from the more critical feedback even though this is in the minority.

### **Children, Young People and Family Feedback Questionnaires**

20 Annually, we seek the views from our children who are looked after and our care leavers, along with the views of their adults around them. The Service Managers for Children in our Care and Care Leavers have recently met with some children and young people to explore what and how they would like to be asked about our services. Once refined,

these will form a survey. During a set two-week period, likely to be during Quarter 4 (January, February or March) our care leavers and children in our care will be asked if they would like to complete the survey either online or in person, supported or unsupported by their social worker or young person's adviser. The responses will then be collated, analysed and reported on and use to inform service improvement and practice development.

## **Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership**

- 21 Using kind, non-blaming, precise and easy to understand language when speaking with and writing about children, young people and their families is essential in building helpful, trusting relationships and true engagement. This is a whole service focus. The Language that Cares guidance ([Durham's Language that Cares](#)) for which the CiCC developed a chapter in 2019, continues to be an actively used tool in staff inductions, training, briefings and practice conversations. During the Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership's (DSCP) Safeguarding week in November 2022, a care leaver and members of the Safeguarding and Professional Practice Service presented a workshop on 'The power of language' to over 70 practitioners from CSC, Early Help and other partner services and agencies.
- 22 We know from our auditing programme, that the language used when speaking and writing about children and young people is becoming kinder, less blaming, specific and easier to understand. Significant improvement has been achieved, but we still want to improve this further.

## **Care Experienced Youth Support Apprentice**

- 23 CSC has a Youth Support Apprentice post which has recently been appointed to. This post is ring fenced for our care leavers to give them an opportunity to have a 'job in the family firm'. The new Youth Support Apprentice commenced work in the Care Leavers Team in September 2022. This role is being shared between the Care Leavers teams and Safeguarding and Professional Practice team in order to make the apprenticeship more varied.
- 24 The apprentice works with and supports the work of the Young People Advisors and the Participation and Engagement Officer. As a care experience young person, the apprentice also provides valuable insight, ideas and is in a unique position to facilitate and support children and young people in expressing their ideas, thoughts and feelings. To date, she has: been part of the young people's interview panel for the Head of Service; supported a Christmas party for some young people who live in supported homes (supported lodgings); been involved in training

planning and sessions for multi-agencies and our newly qualified social workers.

## **Collaborative Working**

- 25 Corporate Parenting Panel is fully aware and regularly informed of the wonderful and valuable participation and engagement work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC). CSC supports the work of the CiCC by the Participation and Engagement Officer attending the CiCC monthly meetings, supporting the implementation of the CiCC work and helps to build upon their work, supporting their events and facilitating forums for their views to be heard by the service. An example of this is some CiCC members shared the view that it is helpful and reassuring to know a little about your worker other than just their name before you meet them for the first time. The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) already have worker profiles for children and young people. CiCC have developed a template and the Participation and Engagement Officer will start to role this out across the service. The Participation and Engagement Officer will also be supporting CiCC with 'gatekeeping' and the prioritisation of requests and approaches from CSC and Early Help to the CiCC.
- 26 This support and co-working is also reciprocated, in that members of the CiCC will often support us in service development, consultation and training. Examples of this include two young people from CiCC offering to provide a training session to the Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Safeguarding Week in November 2022.
- 27 The young people decided what they wanted the session to focus on and designed and presented the session with the support of the Participation and Engagement Officer. Their interactive workshop was called 'What it means to me to feel safe' and looked at two aspects of safety from the perspective of a child and young person: the pushes and pulls of exploitation and the importance of listening and hearing the child or young person's perspective of the worries we hold. The workshop was deemed to be very helpful and valuable. One attendee wrote, "I really enjoyed the training and fed back to my team in our team brief this morning. This was really powerful training as it came from the child / young person's voice. This training is really important to make us reflect and make sure we think about have we made them feel safe."
- 28 One young person for the CiCC also supported the CSC Signs of Safety celebration conference in November 2022, for which she worked with other CiCC members and created a poem, "It's The Small Things" about belonging, feeling safe and cared about, which she read as part of the opening remarks. The impact this had on the attending practitioners and managers was evident throughout the day with them frequently referring

back to the 'small things' that are important to and have an impact on children and young people and make them feel really safe and cared about. CiCC member also provide other training including that to foster carers and newly qualified social workers annually.

- 29 Other examples of CSC participation and engagement includes us contributing to Care Day in February 2022, by facilitating and supporting children and young people's ideas which included: a play about the importance of promoting relationships with brothers and sisters; young people sharing their stories, poems, achievements and experiences and a Virtual Quiz - young people v staff.
- 30 Also, in July 2022, Children's Services held an Ofsted briefing where two young people, who are CiCC members, supported and co-hosted the event alongside the senior management team. They shared some of their poetry and communicated the final Ofsted outcome. Other care experienced young people met with Ofsted inspectors during the inspection in May 2022.

### **Bespoke Participation and Engagement Groups**

- 31 Teams also develop their own local groups as part of their commitment to getting and maintaining their Investors in Children Award.
- 32 In addition bespoke children, young people, family and carer engagement groups and individuals across the service are regularly created and used for specific service development, training and other tasks. The work of these types of groups have included:
  - Informing and supporting the service design of the new Adolescent Safeguarding Exploitation Team (Aset)
  - Creating appreciative enquiry videos featuring children, young people, their family members and foster carers for staff training
  - Initial evaluation of the Signs of Safety practice model implementation
  - The development and changes to the Child and Family Plan
  - The use of Words and Pictures (a way to work with parents to develop a words and picture explanation for their child explaining why they have a social worker and what the family plan is to keep them safe and that allows everyone to use a honest and shared language around the worries that are held and what is being done to keep the child safe)
  - The development of videos and direct work tools by children for children

## **Voice and Change Champions**

- 33 The Participation and Engagement Officer leads the Voice and Change Champions (VCC) who are made up of practitioners from teams within CSC and these include two representatives from the Children Looked After service and the Youth Support Apprentice. This group meets every three months to share good practice and champion the voice of the child, their engagement and participation. On occasions, young people are invited as guest speakers. The VCC are responsible for promoting good engagement work in their own teams, including MOMO (please see paragraphs 10-14 inclusive), the use of the questionnaire (paragraphs 17&18) and supporting language that cares (paragraphs 19-21 inclusive).

## **Developments and Priorities**

### **Collation, Analysis and Action**

- 34 A key priority is to develop further our process of pulling together all that we are learning from children, young people and their families and carers from across all the mechanisms we use and identifying themes and responses.
- 35 It is of the utmost importance for participation, engagement and feedback to create a greater understanding, change and improvement: you said and we heard is only part of the story. Going forwards, part of the Participation and Engagement Officer's responsibility is to collate and analyse what we learn from our children, young people and their families and carers. This will be presented to the Quality Improvement Board (QIB) with suggested actions and improvement work. The development of a You Said, We Did, type of communication for children, young people and our practitioners and managers, is under development. This will share the themes found from the different types of participation, engagement and feedback practice and the changes this has led to.

## **Seeing Our Own Social Care Records**

- 36 In October 2021, a group of children in our care and care experienced young people, practitioners and foster carers had VIP seats at the Durham Book Festival to see Lemn Sissay facilitated by the Participation and Engagement Officer. Lemn Sissay is a care experienced poet and author of My Name Is Why. He spoke about his memoirs which includes reflections around the impact of receiving his care files and the use of language within them. This prompted some young people to have conversations with the Service Improvement Manager about their own records. Following on from this plans to seek feedback and evaluate how it feels to receive a copy of your care

records (Subject Access Requests - SARs) and our services around this has commence. We, officers and the young people who prompted this, will be devising a plan that will includes hearing from some young people who are care leavers and who have received a copy of their files (SARs) in the last two years about their experiences and ideas on how to further improve this part of our service. Last year, the Care Leaver Teams invited one of the young people to speak with them about her experiences of requesting and receiving her files to help influence good practice.

### **Poetry Book**

- 37 Inspired by some of the poetry form our children, Corporate Parenting Panel have requested that a book of poems by care experiencing and care experienced children and young people be created. This will be made during the latter part of this year with children and young people, with the support of the Virtual School, Participation and Engagement Officer and other CSC staff.

### **The Voice of Our Young People Living Outside of County Durham**

- 38 We always strive to keep our young people living close to their families and communities to support and improve relationships. Keeping them living within County Durham usually helps them to get better, more responsive care and support. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, young people need to live further away, making it more difficult for them to become involved in the CiCC. We want to ensure they, as a specific minority group, still have good and varied opportunities to have their voice loudly heard. This is a project the Participation and Engagement Officer will be developing this year.

### **Overview and Scrutiny by Care Experience Young People**

- 39 A new care experienced young people's group is currently being developed by young people. They have the support of the Participation and Engagement Officer and direct links with the Practice Lead, Children in Care and Care Leavers, both of whom are championing their work and ambitions for the group. The young people have just started to explore what they want the group's remit to be, how they will work and what they want to call their group. They are exploring how they can further influence, feedback on, and approve new services/teams and other developments within CSC.

### **Conclusion**

- 40 This report shows the main mechanisms we use to gather the views of children, young people, their families and carers and some of the work of our Participation and Engagement Officer. We have a good foundation of engagement and participation work, which compliments

the work of CiCC and IIC, and we will be working to increase and develop this in the coming year.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on the Local Authority to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child. Both the Children Act 1989 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child both have general and underpinning principles of the child's welfare and best interests being the paramount concern.

### **Finance**

Limited, the Service Improvement Manager has a small budget which currently covers gratuitous provided to children and young people who give up their free time to help us design, understand our services and their impact.

### **Consultation**

Consultation with our children and young people form part of our practice model in informing service design, delivery, policy and procedures that have an impact on them

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

CSC has a duty to consult with and listen to the view of children, young people and their parents and carers of all backgrounds and abilities.

### **Climate Change**

No impact.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

CSC has one permanent and full time Participation and Engagement Officer

### **Accommodation**

None.

**Risk**

There is risk associated with not engaging and encouraging participation with children, young people and families as without this we cannot know our services and their impact well.

**Procurement**

None.