

## Our Promise - Being Aspirational for Children and young People in care and Care Leavers.

### Annual Report 2022-2023

 <p><b>We will support you</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide emotional support</li> <li>• Wherever you do we will be there</li> <li>• Ensure all your needs are met</li> <li>• Provide advice, information, practical and financial support</li> <li>• We will make sure that you know what your rights are</li> <li>• Will not judge you if things go wrong. We all make mistakes!</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We believe in you</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will value your strengths and talents</li> <li>• Support you to overcome any stumbling blocks you face</li> <li>• Support you to achieve your goals</li> <li>• Embrace your individuality</li> <li>• Encourage your aspirations</li> <li>• Support you to succeed in life</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We will respect your identity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will respect your unique identity</li> <li>• Support you to develop your own personal beliefs and values</li> <li>• Accept, respect and celebrate your identity, culture and heritage</li> <li>• Value, respect and support important relationships</li> <li>• Encourage you to express your identity positively</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We will listen to you</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will listen and respect you</li> <li>• Strive to understand your point of view</li> <li>• Place you at the heart of all decisions</li> <li>• Support you to talk about your worries and happy times</li> <li>• Support you to seek independent advocacy</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We will support you to find a place you can call home</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will do our best to find you a home near to people who are important to you</li> <li>• Ensure you feel safe and secure</li> <li>• As you grow we will support you to learn new skills to support your independence</li> <li>• We are here to support if things go wrong</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We will inform you</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal settlements and services</li> <li>• Up to date and accurate information</li> <li>• Support you to access your care records</li> <li>• Provide information throughout your journey</li> <li>• We will support you if you need to make a complaint</li> </ul>	 <p><b>We will be a lifelong champion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support you break down barriers to other agencies</li> <li>• Work together with other services to better meet your needs</li> <li>• Encourage and support you to make positive life choices</li> <li>• Will make sure you know how to get support when you need it</li> <li>• Trust and respect you</li> </ul>
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## Executive Summary

- The commitment of Leaders within the Local Authority and Partner agencies is evident. In the feedback forms on progress over the last 12 months all had taken Our promise to their teams and discussed its meaning, based on their role. For example, the Support worker for the independent visitor's scheme shared her thanks to a colleague who had presented to her volunteers the importance of life story work to our children and young people.

We've had some children and young people share/talk about their Life-Story book with their Independent Visitors. We are really hoping that more of our Independent Visitors will have some insight and confidence to be able to talk about a child's book should a child raises this with them. Your talk and presentation will go a long way to supporting/enabling this.

- The districts have been front and centre in enabling positive developments and being aspirational for our children in care and care leavers. The leads have shared documents and identified key individuals for the services to link with. For example, the chief housing officers' groups get regular updates and encourages attendance of the care leavers team to enable progress around such areas as the Housing Protocols.

The Leaving Care Protocol has been reviewed to ensure a much more robust response for care leavers. The protocol has been revised to ensure prevention of homelessness is the main priority and that early response is key to a successful housing journey for care leavers. RC Melton Borough Council

- The Care Leavers Service has continued to develop and support SYPAC, a group which enables care leavers to come together and support each other and share experiences. The Care Leavers Council has been developed and although in its infancy is already having an impact in terms of reviewing The Offer for Care Leavers and discussing key issues such as considering care experience as a protected characteristic.
- Mutli agency working involving, health, police and education around those children and young people presenting with challenges they need help to overcome, for example CCE or CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) has developed well over the last twelve months. Adults service also ensure they have a presence to support when it is appropriate. Health services have ensured involvement in the services for children in care and care leavers even using our care leavers for recruitment.
  - In November 2022, recruitment was undertaken for the role of Named Nurse for Looked After Children within Leicestershire Partnership Trust. The Service Group Manager approached the Care leavers Council to support as stakeholders. The care leavers council facilitated a group discussion to review a video of the candidates and give feedback which was then incorporated into the interview process. Our promise would be that where there are senior posts within the Looked After Children's Nursing team, that we will ask for service user engagement as part of our stakeholder involvement in this process so that the voice of our young people is represented.

- Young people and colleagues have been involved in a language survey and over the next 12 months this will be a focus, once the data has been analysed and young people are able to reflect their views on the outcomes

## Introduction

In Leicestershire we want to ensure that all children and young people are given opportunities to be happy, healthy and to achieve their best outcomes. The Children and Family Service, Departmental plan states:

### **OUR VISION**

Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families.

### **OUR MISSION**

Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities.

We embody this in our Continuous Improvement Plan (2021-23), *The Road to Excellence* across Children’s Social Care. The core values and behaviours highlighted in *The Road to Excellence* are central to our engagement with our children, young people and their families and with partners, and are important to how we deliver ‘Our Promise’, and the services we offer to ensure have a meaningful impact (Appendix 1 for the full document).



## Our Promise



Our Promise embodies these values and behaviours and our commitment to children in care and care leavers. It was launched in April 2019. Our Promise represents Leicestershire County Council and other agencies' commitment to the seven principles of corporate parenting identified in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and is a commitment to all children in care and care leavers (relevant children and former relevant children).

The Council has a strong Corporate Parenting ethos which recognises that the care provided for children is not just about keeping them safe but also advocating for them and being aspirational for their futures.

Leicestershire County Council's Elected Members and key partner agencies have embraced and are committed to Our Promise. Collectively we want to enable all our young people to make positive life choices and achieve their goals and beyond.

Our Promise sets out our commitment to ensure that Leicestershire County Council and partners provide the best support, guidance, and care to our children in care and care leavers. It demonstrates that we value individuality, provide stability and offer aspirational life chances as a good parent provides for their children. Our Promise makes a commitment directly to children, young people and their families in 7 key areas:

### *We will Support You-*

- We will provide emotional support
- Whatever you do we will be there
- Ensure all your needs are met
- Provide advice, information, practical and financial support
- We will make sure you know what your rights are
- We will not judge you if things go wrong, we all make mistakes

### *We Believe in you -*

- We will value your strengths and talents
- Support you to overcome any stumbling blocks you face
- Support you to achieve your goals
- Embrace your individuality
- Encourage your aspirations

- Support you to succeed in life

*We will respect your identity -*

- We will respect your unique identity
- Support you to develop your own personal beliefs and values
- Accept, respect, and celebrate your identity, culture and heritage
- Value, respect and support important relationships
- Encourage you to express your identity positively

*We will Listen to you -*

- We will listen and respect you
- Strive to understand your point of view
- Place you at the heart of all decisions
- Support you to talk about your worries and happy times
- Support you to seek independent advocacy.

*We will support you to find a place called home-*

- We will do our best to find you a home near people who are important to you
- Ensure you feel safe and secure
- As you grow, we will support you to learn new skills to support your independence
- We are here to support you if things go wrong.

*We will inform you -*

- Legal entitlements and services
- Up to date and accurate information
- Support you to access your care records
- Provide information throughout your journey
- We will support you if you need to make a complaint

*We will be a lifelong champion -*

- Support and breakdown barriers to other agencies
- Work together with other agencies to better meet your needs
- Encourage and support you to make positive life choices
- Will make sure you know how to get support when you need it
- Trust and respect you.

## **Being a Trauma Informed Organisation**

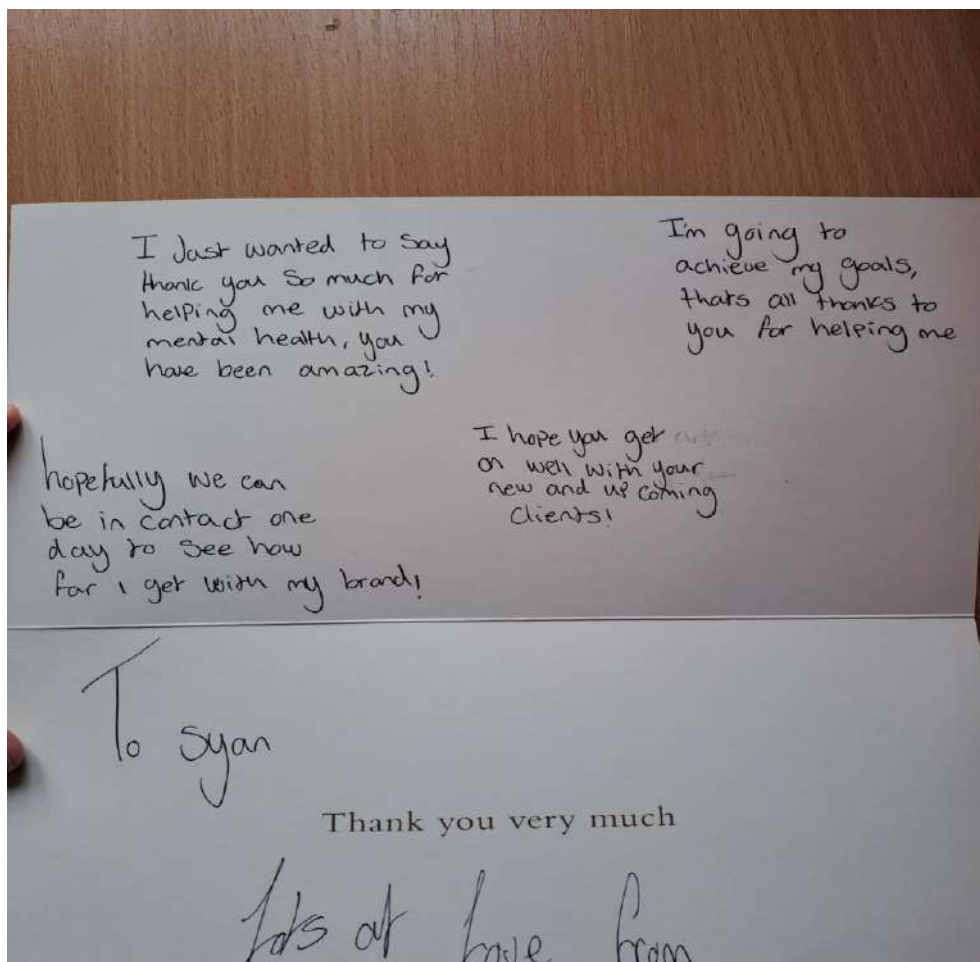
Children and Family Services have embedded an approach of being trauma informed, hearing and seeing the impact of the trauma children and families experience is critical to the intervention and support we provide. Also, to appreciate the trauma the staff themselves may have lived through and the impact of the work that they do. Young people and families need to be heard and seen for who they are, they need to be supported to understand the trauma they have experienced and its impact.

The trauma young people experience has been a focus both nationally and locally particularly after COVID and the mental health issues now faced by old and young alike. For young people who still feel a stigma and challenge around their mental health it is vital we stop and hear and develop services to meet that need.



During the past year and into the next year the Practice Excellence Team have been supporting the Children in Care Service with training around trauma, its origins, its presentation and ways of supporting young people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma. By doing this we will be able to support children and their families and their networks with a clearer understanding of what the impact of their experiences have been both now and in the future. The staff will also have an improved understanding their own trauma both personally and secondary trauma through the work they do. This understanding and access to appropriate support will enable effective and meaningful relationship-based practice with our children.

Within the care leavers team there is a mental health worker. They support the staff with contacts and links as well as working with individual young people who feel unable to engage with mainstream agencies and providers. The impact of the role can be summed up by one young person who sent a thank you card highlighting the impact for her and wrote; -



### **The Role of a Corporate Parent**

In the same way that a family shares responsibility for bringing up their children with their extended family members, the corporate parenting responsibility must be shared by everyone involved in supporting children in care and care leavers. Put simply, the term

'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us.

When a child becomes looked after in Leicestershire as Corporate Parents, we are committed to provide stability, security and aspirational care for our children, the ambition to secure emotional attachment, physical stability and long-term commitment to children. It also aims to ensure that all children in care receive access to appropriate, high quality and stable education, thus affording them with positive educational experiences.

### **The Corporate Parent 'test' is to always challenge, 'would this be good enough for my child'?**

As Corporate Parents we work with children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. During this period the Council had between 680-691 children in care. Of these 261 were female and 423 are male. 120 are between the ages of 0 and 5, 116 are between the ages of 5 and 10, and 442 between the age of 10 and 18.

421 of these children and young people live with foster carers or family/friends foster carers, 71 live in residential care. Other are placed with parents, have disabilities and are in specialist residential, independent living or placed for adoption.

In addition, the Council supports close to 440 children who have left care aged 18-25 years, of which 58 are between the ages of 22 and 24 years of age. (July 2023)

### **How have we met Our promise in 2022-23?**

In this annual report we will focus on seven key areas where we will check and challenge how we have implemented 'Our Promise' and where it has made a difference. The seven key areas are:

- Leadership
- OFSTED
- Equality and Diversity
- Recruitment
- Partnership
- Staying Close
- Impact and Voice

Teams and services within Leicestershire County Council and external partners who had all signed up to Our Promise have been asked to share information about what they have done to support children in care and care leavers and how their engagement has supported the 7 principles of Our Promise.

Leicestershire believes that voice and impact is a golden thread throughout our work with children and families. Within this annual report we will reflect on some of the fantastic voice work undertaken. Teams have gathered the voice of young people and children including the Virtual School, Fostering and the Disabled Children's Service. This will be showcased and referenced in section 3. We have some amazing talent to share with you also!



One of the outstanding events over the past 12 months has been supported through the Cultural Participation Team, a part of the communities and wellbeing service and shared by Franne Wills (Head of Service).

A month-long exhibition of the artwork created by C&YP, inspired by a book chosen by them, was held at the High Cross Shopping Centre. Young people involved in the project were invited to be part of a panel to co-curate the inspirational exhibition. The group influenced and shaped the exhibition in lots of different ways including the color scheme, designing the logo, shaping the feel of the virtual exhibition, deciding on the frames for the artwork and creating the visitor interaction part of the exhibition. We have attached photos of the launch of the exhibition, opened by the Chair the virtual exhibition, deciding on the frames for the artwork and creating the visitor interaction part of the exhibition. We have attached photos of the launch of the exhibition, opened by the Chairman of the County Council and the Lord Mayor of Leicester. The exhibition can be viewed following this link

<https://www.cultureleicestershire.co.uk/projects/my-books-my-story/>

Some of the comments of the young people simply and precisely show the impact for the young people; -

- I think that looks really good. It's been really good making this and having this time out"
- "I can't do it, it looks bad" then "Wow! Nothing else, just wow. I'm glad I kept trying, I could do that more"
- "I like the book because the main character is like me because he doesn't live with his mum and dad."
- "I love loads of different manga series, and this is one of my favorite's so it was great to have a workshop where I could ask to draw exactly what I wanted."

## **Leadership**

For all services provided for children and young people it is vital to ensure that all levels of workers understand their role and responsibility and our vision and aspiration for the children and young people that we work with. Leaders and managers are there to ensure that the services we provide are robust, the right service at the right time and to offer high challenge and high support. Good strong leadership supports effective service delivery for our children in care and care leavers and is also central to meaningful partnership working.

Councillor Deborah Taylor (County Councillor for Bradgate Division, Lead Member for Children, Families, Safer Communities and Regulatory Services, Deputy Leader of Leicestershire County Council) recently said

- *As the lead member for children in care I have been proud to attend events, speak to our young people and hear their views on how they receive our service. As the Lead member for children in care, I attended an event at Beaumanor Hall on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022, to listen to the feedback from our regional conference for Children in Care. I supported our Children in Care and sat with them for lunch to*

*understand how the event had been for them and what they had got out of it.*

- The conference was about language and what language our young people would like us to use. Following this event, I made a promise to ensure that I would look at the language I use when I talk about our Children in Care.*
- As co-chair of our Corporate Parenting Board, I will now I have actively led on asking partners how they will get their organisations to look at the language they use when talking about our Children in Care.*
  
- I attend our Council in Care council as often as I can and listen to our children and young people's voices on the issues that are concerning them, and I always take on their feedback.*
- When I am making decisions as lead member, I always check that I understand how that decision may affect our children, and if I am not sure I will ask them. I have heard the initial feedback from the Language survey the young people have been involved in and look forward to progressing its finding through the corporate parenting board going forward.*
- I see it as key role to always champion children and support them to the best that they can.*

Jane Moore the Director of Children and Family Services says; -

- I continue to be so proud of our children and young in care and leaving care. Some incredible work has been completed over the past 12 months, by workers, the young people themselves and our partner agencies. Seeing our records being written to the child brings children alive.*
- In 2023, we supported our children in care council and participation service to develop a language survey. This has been taken to our corporate parenting board and will be further developed to ensure we are aware of the words our children and young people understand. Our language is so important to ensure our children, young people and families feel valued and supported to achieve their best outcomes.*

**Sharon Cooke – Assistant Director**

*I remain focused on making sure that our children in care and those leaving care experience stability, feel safe, listened to and cared for. That they remain at the heart of their individual plans and all service design and development. I am immensely proud of what our children and young people achieve and the services we deliver for them.*

*Supporting key areas of work by the Children in Care Council and After Care council is enabling our children and young people's voices to be heard loud and clear, and for us all to evidence that we will "be the difference" that helps them to be their best brilliant selves.*

Nicci Collins, Strategic Lead Transformation and Change, Nicci described her strategic lead as the following:

- *it is my primary role to advocate for the right services at the right time to meet children and young people in care and care experienced young people's priority needs. In order to do this well I have to*
  - *Understand your needs*
  - *Hear your voice*
  - *Hear the voice of those who work closest to you*
  - *Work with you and others to design services to meet your priority needs*
  - *Use resources, like staff and money and partner support, to meet these needs.*
  - *Show that these services are working.*
- *This approach is the golden thread of ensuring services stay relevant and engaged.*

Nicci will post good practice examples and voice of the child on social media and Yammer to ensure they are show cased and shared and the developments and pride in the services she supports is evident.

**AND SHOUT OUT TO LEONA HUBBARD:** We received this lovely positive quality assurance alert from the IRO, that shows the commitment of our staff to permanence and establishing a sense of belonging for our children:  
'...E, although you are only aged one the case note truly captures your voice... E, I am also really impressed at how Leona has communicated with the court to ensure that the application for Mummy T and Daddy M to adopt you can be progressed as quickly as possible. I think that when you are a grown up that you will really like the way that Leona has written about your life and I think that you will be pleased that she has worked so hard to progress your plan for you. E, I know that Mummy T and Daddy M feel very well supported by Leona as they have told me that at your last two reviews...'

"I thought I would share this lovely email about L – a young Vietnamese woman I am lucky to recently become PA for. She is also on the Student Council and Student Union at her college, **including being the BAME officer!** And today she has led a Lunar New Year project on campus, which she has spent all month designing, budgeting for etc. It has been so great for her confidence and social skills.

She has her substantive interview with the home office on Monday and was trafficked into the UK for domestic work. Her Supported Lodging carers are very supportive and promote Linh's cultural identity wonderfully. The whole house has just celebrated Chinese New Year!"

Thank you for sharing! What an inspiring young lady.

Senior leaders fully understand and engage with Our Promise and lead from the top. They are actively involved in ensuring they hear the voice of children and young people, with a focus on 'You said, we did'. Our senior leaders are visible and accountable to children in care and care leavers. They support and engage in different participation events and activities including Children in Care Council, SYPAC, Care Leaver Council and summer playscheme. Observation of practice and gaining feedback from children, young people and families is central to senior leaders understanding how we are implementing Our Promise and the difference it is making. This occurs through a variety of practice engagement activities such as Practice Focus Week, Keeping in Touch Meetings and 'warm' audits. Senior Leaders are actively involved in ensuring they hear the voice of children and young people and develop the processes, procedures in collaboration.

The Assistant Director, Sharon Cooke provides young people with assurance, that we don't just listen to what the workers say, we hear the young people, we go out on visits and attend meetings to hear a rounded view.

*There is evidence of working with you and capturing your voice and working in a respectful manner. You are supported to continue your relationship with your family, and professionally this includes supporting your voice in an adults assessment for support in the future based on your diagnosis, needs and vulnerability.*

The importance of Life Story work was a key area identified by the Head of Service, Kelda Claire. During a Children in Care Council meeting, children in care and care leavers spoke passionately about the need to understand their experiences in care and the decisions made for them. Many did not feel that they had a full understanding and that they did not have life

story work that was meaningful. This resulted in the life story guidance being updated to ensure at each stage of a child's care journey there is life story work completed and this expectation was embedded in the transfer expectation between teams. Listening to the voice of our children the focus has been to ensure that life story work continues throughout a child's life and is not a one-off event for our young people. Life Story Fortnight was established in 2022 and is an opportunity to have an annual event which brings together people from around the departments to celebrate best practice, develop learning and embed good practice.

Over the past year the children in care services have ensure young people have a life story book which will be updated. When the young people come in at a later age then consideration is given how information is best shared such as words and pictures and a later life letter which outlines the key decisions and experiences. All young people transferring to the Care Leavers Team will have a latter life letter completed for them.

Workers within the Children in care service have been to other areas of the service to share the value of life story work and how to best support children and young people when they want to share and talk about their life journey. Some feedback has included,

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*I just wanted to express my sincere gratitude for your attendance and Life-Story presentation at our recent IV network event. You were absolutely amazing and the feedback that we received was excellent. I was looking around the room and I could see you captured everyone's interest. Your interaction and engagement were warm, passionate and genuine and I think your round of applause at the end summed it up perfectly 😊*

*We've had some children and young people share/talk about their Life-Story book with their Independent Visitors. We are really hoping that more of our Independent Visitors will have some insight and confidence to be able to talk about a child's book should a child raise this with them. Your talk and presentation will go a long way to supporting/enabling this and we can't thank you enough. Denise Cole (Independent Visitor Scheme support worker)*

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### Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board's purpose is to ensure that the whole Council and partner agencies have a joint commitment to Corporate Parenting. The Corporate Parenting Board is held four times a year and includes a membership of children and young people, the Director and Assistant Director of Children and Family Services, elected members, professionals from a range of partner agencies including Social Care, Health, Education and Police.

The board is co-chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families and a member of the Children in Care Council representative. There is strong representation from our Children in Care council and Care Leavers Council, which enables our children to have the platform to challenge, influence and celebrate

The Board ensures that the Council members and partner agencies fulfil their statutory duty as Corporate Parents and are held to account for identified actions from the board, to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people. In addition to



the prioritisation and acting in the best interests of all our children and young people keeping them at the centre of decision making.

In the last 12 months Corporate Parenting Board has championed and supported the language survey which was developed by our Children in Care Council. The 'conversation' with children in care was supported by social workers, personal advisors and foster carers. The results from the survey will be shared with Corporate Parenting Board in 2023-2024. This will directly influence guidance, policy and engagement with children and young people. The outcome of which will be shared in Our Promise Annual Report 2023-24

### Three Member Champions

This year we have re-engaged with member champions. It is vital that as a part of Our Promise to children in care and care leavers we can work with local communities, businesses and councils to embed good practice and utilise resources for the benefit of young people. Members can do this with us and guide us in their specific areas. It is fair to see that the role of the member champion over the last 12 months has been a challenge in the getting together of partners and members as well as staff within the council and there is a real drive going forward to re-engage.

The Member Champions will be appointed to support the following areas: -

- a. Education, Training and Work;
- b. Housing and Accommodation; and
- c. Health.

The role of a Champion is to: -

- a. Act as a sounding board for the Cabinet Lead Member and the Director of Children and Family Services on any policies and decisions which affect their Champion area;
- b. Ensure that they understand the needs of Children in Care and Care Leavers and the issues that they face;
- c. Ensure that they are fully aware of the policies and strategies of the Council that relate to their Champion Area and to act in accordance with them at all times;
- d. In consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member, develop and carry out a programme of activities to promote opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers;
- e. Take a role, where invited by the Cabinet Lead Member, in discussions with partners and other stakeholders where those discussions are aimed at resolving issues faced by Children in Care and Care Leavers or improving their outcomes;

Whilst this all sounds very formal the role is a crucial one and from our recent meeting the drive and passion is evident in their support for the coming period. Our Member Champions for 2023-2024 are Mrs Posnett, Mr Boulter and Mr Hunt. They will lead on the three areas and will come to visit children and young people across the areas to get a real sense of what is needed in the areas of Health, Educational and Accommodation.

### Children in Care Council/Care Leaver Council



The Assistant Director and the Lead Member are regular attenders at the Children in Care Council to ensure they lead from the front in hearing from children and young people.

Over the last year leaders have engaged with the Care Leavers group SYPAC (Supporting young people after care). This has enabled children to have a direct line to the top and can engage in meaningful discussions around potential changes and developments. The group has been and will be used to gather views and opinions around potential changes including for Defining Children and Family Services for the Future Programme. DCFS is a change programme focused on ensuring children and families receive the right services at the right time, that has the highest impact and enables them to sustain change.

Over the last 12 months the Care Leavers Service has developed a care leavers council which has enabled care leavers to come together with managers and senior leaders. This was a direct result of our care leavers wanting to a meeting in which they are supported to collaborate and influence policy which was separate to SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care) which they wanted this to remain as a social gathering.

### **OFSTED**

Whilst this report is for the year ending April 2023, I have taken this chance to highlight an amazing OFSTED inspection carried out on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> May as this was a focused visit on work completed since 2019.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with social workers, managers, parents and children. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and children's case records.

The main headline from the inspection was

Since the previous full inspection in September 2019, when the overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement to be good, and services for children in care were judged to be good, the quality and impact of social work practice have improved. Increasing numbers of children are achieving permanence within their own family networks via special guardianship orders, and more children are achieving a sense of belonging via permanent foster placements. Social work practice with children in care, including those with a disability, is consistently child focused. This impacts positively on their life experiences and their physical and emotional well-being. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths of their services for children in care. They also continue to proactively address challenges in respect of recruitment and retention and placement sufficiency. Senior leaders know what they still need to do to ensure that every single child's journey to permanence is smooth and timely.

In our feedback with the Ofsted Inspectors, they highlighted several children's cases that demonstrate good practice.

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*They highlighted X to be a good example of listening to the child and achieving permanence in his residential home. They highlighted that this shows the importance of providing stability for a young person. And...They highlighted by*

*being a good example of achieving permanence in residential care. Listening to the child's voice and working hard to achieve stability. Sharon Cooke Assistant Director.*

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Two cases of young people, two different workers and stability achieved and acknowledged by senior leaders

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*Furthermore, wow, wow, wow, genuinely blown away with the feedback from Ofsted yesterday regarding their time with you all. The highlighted the passion that you have for the children you work with, that it is evident that they are at the centre of decisions and the writing to the child and direct work is something to be really proud of..... I am so proud of you as individual workers and managers and of our service. Onwards and Upwards. Kelda Claire Head of Service.*

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One of our children says it for everyone! The excitement and pride in what **has** been achieved for him comes through his words and actions!



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Consistency was a key driver this year. With the audits and the involvement of the practice excellence team we have developed the understanding of plans and their role with the staff teams. This has seen a change for the positive. Social workers and personal advisor are more creative in their written documents as well as ensuring the young people have copies and realise, they are a live document.

You told me that you have a great relationship with your PA E - she is responsive to you and listens and has offered lots of help and always gets back to you if you call and ask for help. You feel able to reach out for her for help if you needed it.

In terms of supervision, this remains a high focus of attention for managers. They have been supported through managers meetings, training, and support from the Practice Excellence Team to ensure as a group they are committing to the same quality of practice for our children and young people. As a department consistency remains a part of our Road to Excellence. For example, workers now come to their supervision with part of the forms completed. This matters because it gives more quality time for reflection and discussions regarding Childrens care plans. This remains a key focus for 2023/24.

The use of Pods (group supervision) has been driven again with the support of the Practice Excellence Team to ensure again consistency and reflection opportunities across services as well as across the grades of workers.

You may ask why does this matter for our children in care and care leavers? It matters because as Children and Families services we support children in the communities they live in, are from and will return to. As Children and Families, we aim to provide the right support at the right time. For those children where that support means becoming a child in care, timely and effective intervention will support achieving stability and security for children in care and care leavers.

Getting the work right early on means the ground is laid for better support into care and then the foundations are built for children returning to families when it is safe to do so and developing the skills for independence.

Finally your mum said in relation to your social worker A “we couldn’t fault him” that lots of people dread having a social worker, but that as a family the support had had a “positive impact”.

## Equality and Diversity



The Director and senior leaders are actively involved in the Equality and Diversity agenda ensuring the needs of children, young people and staff are met regardless of their identify race, gender or another characteristic. The following is an example of bringing the agenda alive by offering themselves to be mentored on different cultural experiences.

In March 2022, Our Race Equality Strategy – We Care – was launched. It sets out CFS commitment to the principles of diversity, equality of opportunity and inclusion, and recognises the importance of adhering to these principles at all times. Diversity, equality and Inclusion together form a positive approach to recognise that everyone is different and can make and bring their own unique contribution, experience, knowledge and skills to the work across the Department. Jane Moore. Director.



The Equality and Diversity Guidance for practitioners across Children and Family Services was launched in April 2022. The guidance is to ensure that equality and diversity is fully considered in all our work and engagement with children and young people. we aim to ensure that all people can truly see equality in the experience they receive. The guidance sets out our vision for ensuring the core values held by Leicestershire County Council.

In March 2023 we undertook a survey to evidence the use of the guidance and the impact. The survey was sent to all service areas in Children and Family Services and 45 people responded. Of those that had responded 67% identified that they had read the guidance. Of those that read the guidance 97% identified it as helpful.

'It is a reminder to all that inclusion is paramount in our work, home and social circles'

'Equality and diversity have been a core principle belief and practice in my role, a policy provides organisational overview'

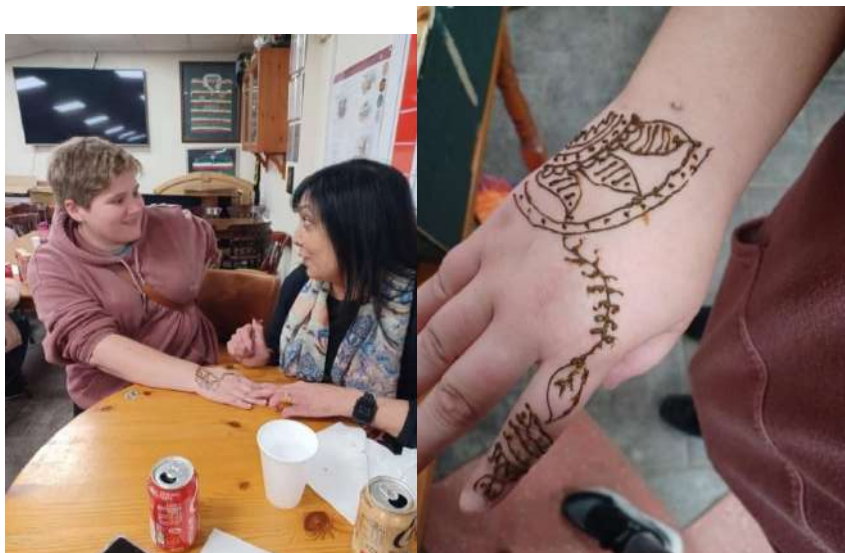
'To reflect on my own attitudes and think about how i can incorporate those into practice in the future'

[https://www.proceduresonline.com/llr/childcare/leicestershire/user\\_controlled\\_lcms\\_area/uploaded\\_files/compressedCFS%20Equalities%20Guidance%20updated.pdf](https://www.proceduresonline.com/llr/childcare/leicestershire/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/compressedCFS%20Equalities%20Guidance%20updated.pdf)

During the last 12 months the Children in Care Service has held a purposeful practice event focusing on EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion). This enabled the service to come together and develop its understanding and challenge its thinking around Diversity and Inclusion. The following slide show a few of the discussions results.



SY PAC, the care leavers support group spent one of their meetings looking at Equalities issues which included the Team Manager Depa Bhundia showing the young people her Mendi Skills and chatting about the issues young people may face around equality and diversity.



The Corporate parenting and participation service ran a cultural awareness day which gave children and young people the chance to experience various aspects of diverse ways of living. They got to for example take part in Belly dancing and henna!





Mental Health has been a driver this year. We have a mental health worker within the service who has been able to be available to our young people when they need it and in a timely way. This has meant those presenting in crisis but not meeting the threshold for other services for example CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) or adult services are supported effectively.

Some of the feedback from the young people supported by her includes,

- I really liked S as she was really attentive and such a lovely lady to talk to even when I only saw her twice, I liked how she listened and really Engaged in conversations with me which made me feel so comfortable and able to talk about things. (Young person)

- S was helpful when I was struggling with my Job and gave me coping strategies and ways to word conversations with colleagues when I was struggling to communicate about my worries. S made me think more positively about my debt and anxieties that I have. (Young person)

- I liked the fact I didn't have to talk about some things if i didn't want to, going for a walk while talking about my mental health really helped, S was really supportive and understanding the whole time, gave me a very positive outlook on my life, been the best mental health worker I've had.



In March 2023 the Practice Excellence team organised a week of EDI activities to support the learning of staff across Children and Families service. This included

- Advocating through an Anti-Racist lens
- Staff Network support with inclusivity
- Stable Homes built on love
- EDI guidance and Survey
- Parents and carers support group LGBTQ+
- Neurodiversity
- Equalities mentoring
- Safeguarding case review
- Transgender training

The week started with an introduction and welcome from the Assistant Directors for both Children and Adult services which ensured inclusivity and the bringing together of workers across teams and departments. The sessions overall were recorded and made available for future learning.

The Participation service runs an Out in Care group for young people who are LGBTQ+. The group were asked why they attend the group. Some of their comments were and reflected the impact of having a safe place to be with others and be themselves whilst their confidence grows.; -

- I like spending time with likeminded people
- I don't get judged!
- Like chilling together
- We relate to each other as we are LGBTQ+ in care.

### **Recruitment**

From the start of recruitment, we are engaging young people in the decision making through them being part of the interview process. This enables young people to hear what potential staff say, ask Questions and be an equal part of the recruitment process. There are several ways we do this. One of which is for young people to interview staff as part of a young people's panel, and another way is for young people to be on the same panel. For the Assistant service Manager for Care Leavers, a care leaver sat on the panel with managers and asked questions as part of the panel and helped the decision making as an equal panel member. The candidates reflected they found this very challenging but also positive as an experience. The young man reflected he really enjoyed the process and felt his views matter.

Over the past year we have run workshops for potential candidates and involved workers already carrying out a role to share what it is like to work for the children in care service and to be able to ask questions before they apply for roles. This has had a positive impact with two workers now employed saying they went to the workshops, and this influenced their decisions to apply.

From the first point of recruitment, we ensure the people applying for post realise our commitment to Equality and Diversity. Our Job adverts say

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*We are on a journey to be an inclusive department where a culture to celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded and discrimination challenged at every level together as a department. We warmly welcome those from all cultures, ethnicities, and beliefs - this diversity is vital to our journey and is fundamental to our values and enriches the services we offer our children and families. We particularly welcome applicants from black, minority, ethnic (BME) communities, disabled people, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities, as they are currently underrepresented within our workforce.*

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In terms of the recruitment of foster carers We involve young people in our recruitment of foster carers. The young people attend and talk through their experience of being in foster care, they talk through what they want / wanted from a foster home.

The young people provide feedback to the assessors of their perception of potential carers, this informs the general feedback.

Our applicants tell us that this session on skills to foster is the most powerful.

## **Partnership**

### **Who are our Partners?**

The Leicestershire Partnership Board was established to ensure the progress and development of the Children and Families Partnership Plan: Our Children – Our Future:

All these aspects are embedded within Our Promise specifically for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Partners include schools, colleges and universities, the police, health providers, the LGBT centre, housing providers and district councils, Turning Point, DWP, members, and charities. Evidence of LCC and partners supporting children and young people is built of relationships. It is recognised that relationship-based Practice ensures a trusting and honest relationship whereby young people feel they are listened to and supported to make positive life choices.

Relationship-based practice isn't just about the support to the children and young people but with and between services. For children in care and care leavers this includes the links we make with others including with their families, health and education services, police, and for the child or young person we work with. In this way we build strength and resilience for children's and young people through networks.

### **What is Partnership working?**

This is summed up well as the forward to the Leicestershire Children and Families Partnership Plan 2021-23, the strategic approach and targets for Partners over the next year.

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*'Our Children and Families Partnership Plan brings together partners who work closely with our children and young people. Over the past*

*three years we have made great strides in improving the lives of our children and young people, their families, and carers in Leicestershire. A partnership approach where the child's voice is at the forefront of all our thinking and action, provides a safe and supportive culture for our children to thrive. This in turn supports our vision that Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their full potential. We are united as partners, and I am incredibly proud to be the Chair of the partnership as we move forward over the next three years'*

*Cllr Deborah Taylor Lead Member for Children, Families, Safer Communities and Regulatory Services, Deputy Leader of Leicestershire County Council*

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Health Services and Leicestershire County Council have continued to develop services for children in care and care leavers. Operationally there is a group who meet on a regular basis to ensure we are providing the right services at the right time and when there are challenges these are addressed, and solutions found. This has required professional challenges particularly during 2022-23 with health colleagues experiencing a backlog in completing Review Health Assessments which has meant delay for some children in them having their annual health assessment. Health colleagues have utilised partnership meetings such as the Operational and strategic Health meetings and Corporate Parenting Board to update of the plans and actions to ensure collective understanding and solution finding

We have over the last year developed the Complex Case approach. The aim for Multi-Agency Complex Risk Process is to provide a consistent response to the risk management of our 'low', 'medium' and 'high' risk children. To provide a structure which ensures a joined up multi-agency approach which will create more effective safety. Children and young people who should be considered by this process are assessed as displaying increased risk-taking behaviour; over and above behaviour and risks associated with children who have experienced disruption, loss and trauma. The process has seen positive partnership engagement and provides a multi-agency forum to co-own the plan and decisions. The meetings also engage family and young people where this is appropriate, and this provides a forum for openness and transparency to develop a shared plan.

We are very proud of the work that has been undertaken with T and mum and this has involved excellent multi-agency working with agreed safety plans being created. Every involved with T has an excellent understanding of his trauma history, as well as Mum's and we work with them in a trauma informed way which also seeks to consider risk. We have consistently had risk meetings and updated the safety plan, and we are seeking to include mum in future meetings.

Our partners at Melton Borough Council have collated what has been achieved for the past 12 months for the districts and we continue to see developments in the working relationships for our young people: `

- Our Promise has been shared at Chief Housing Officer Group. Our Promise commitments are referenced in the introduction of the protocol re the ambition of the district and borough and county councils to work together.
- The Leaving Care Protocol has been reviewed to ensure a much more robust response for care leavers. The protocol has been revised to ensure preventing homeless is the main priority and that early response is key to a successful housing journey for care leavers.
- Taking forward to equip properties with carpets and white goods as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities.
- All care leavers have a high banding on each districts housing allocation policy to reduce waiting time. Enabled interviews for any care leaver meeting the minimum criteria for a vacancy.
- Clear communication to avoid red tape and a smooth advice service for vulnerable care leavers. The hope is for better engagement of partners and understanding of each other's processes.
- This is to prevent care leavers from falling into homelessness and for the "corporate parents" to have prevented homelessness, provided support, guidance etc. to ensure any accommodation placement is successful.

One of the outstanding events over the past 12 months has been supported through the Cultural Participation Team, a part of the communities and wellbeing service and shared by Franne Wills (Head of Service).

A month-long exhibition of the artwork created by C&YP, inspired by a book chosen by them, was held at the High Cross Shopping Centre. Young people involved in the project were

invited to be part of a panel to co-curate the inspirational exhibition. The group influenced and shaped the exhibition in lots of different ways including the color scheme, designing the logo, shaping the feel of the virtual exhibition, deciding on the frames for the artwork and creating the visitor interaction part of the exhibition. We have attached photos of the launch of the exhibition, opened by the Chair the virtual exhibition, deciding on the frames for the artwork and creating the visitor interaction part of the exhibition. We have attached photos of the launch of the exhibition, opened by the Chairman of the County Council and the Lord Mayor of Leicester. The exhibition can be viewed following this link

<https://www.cultureleicestershire.co.uk/projects/my-books-my-story/>

Some of the comments of the young people simply and precisely show the impact for the young people; -

- I think that looks really good. It's been really good making this and having this time out"
- "I can't do it, it looks bad" then "Wow! Nothing else, just wow. I'm glad I kept trying, I could do that more"
- "I like the book because the main character is like me because he doesn't live with his mum and dad."
- "I love loads of different manga series, and this is one of my favorite's so it was great to have a workshop where I could ask to draw exactly what I wanted."

## **Staying Close**

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### *Staying Close Vision*

*To ensure that young people within our care are provided with the correct nurture and support from an early age and able to grow organically, to enable them to move to independent living at a point in time when it is right for them. This means fully embracing our corporate parent role to help our Young People prepare for independent living, so they can make a successful transition and are able to make positive choices in future.*

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Over the last 12 months there has been a team of workers developing a package for young people around Staying Close.

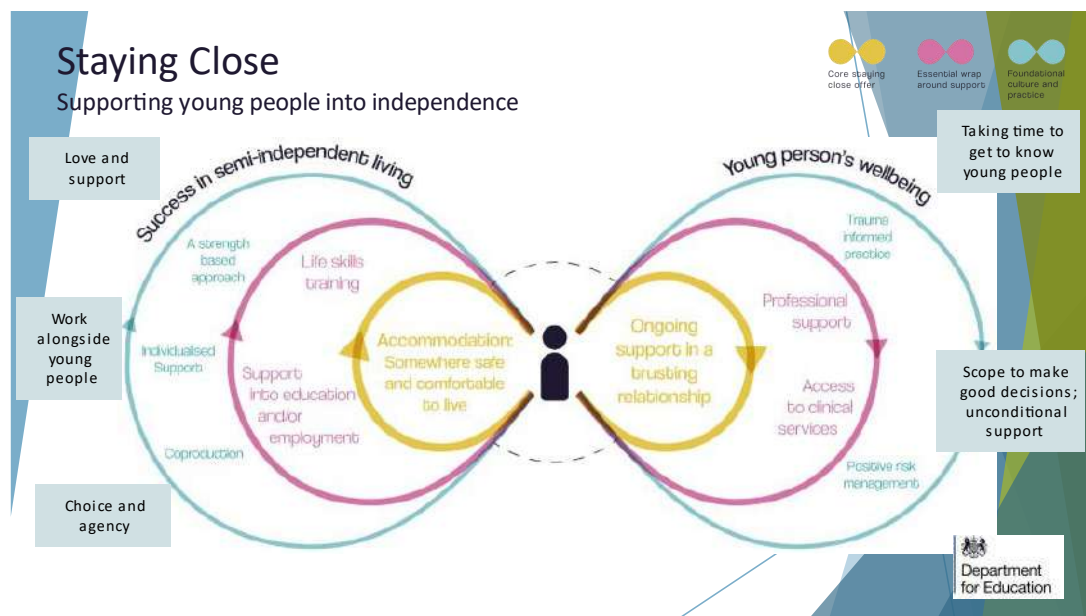
The Staying close model is about providing an enhanced package of support for care leavers leaving residential care or supported accommodation that is comparable to those who remain living with foster carers under Staying Put arrangements.

Not simply a housing offer - the model provides bespoke packages of support that help develop a care leavers confidence, skills for independent living and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

Addresses the 'cliff-edge' of leaving care and smooths the transition into independent living. Care leavers are more likely to report being lonely or isolated and have higher rates of poor emotional health and well-being.

Over half of care leavers become homeless at some point in the 2 years following leaving care. 4 in 10 care leavers aged 19-21 are NEET.

The Staying Close model encompasses several of the principles from Our Promise 'We will support you', 'We believe in you', 'We will support you to find a place you can call home'.



LCC's Staying Close Team will work with a targeted group of young people. Because sadly the bid we asked for was not successful the team over the next few months will develop a model alongside partners to ensure we do what we can to achieve the potential of the model even if we didn't get the resources requested. The department has committed to support its development.

### **The Voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers**

*Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says every*

*young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have those views considered and taken seriously. It is extremely important that young people get the opportunity to shape their own future, have a say on relevant things that affect them and that they are taken seriously. It will be us as young people who will be most affected by any political or local changes made. Lots of policies and services affect us already, and if they don't yet they soon will. Putting the user of a service, the young person, at the*



*centre of its design makes sure that it addresses their needs. (Members of youth parliament 2020)*

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Leicestershire Children and Family Service's Voice and Influence Strategy sets out the vision and aspirations for all Leicestershire's children, young people and their families to participate and engage in the services that affect them. This strategy relates to children and young people from 0 to 18 and to care leavers and young people with disabilities up to the age of 25. The Voice and Influence Strategy evidence Leicestershire County Council's commitment to putting children and young people at the heart of all our activities through involving them and their families in the decision making, planning, commissioning, design, development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their daily lives. The voice of our children in care and care leavers is central to Our Promise and is reflected on throughout this annual report. Our children are enabled to share their views and opinions through a variety of forums such as school councils or CYCLE, the Youth Parliament as well as Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Council, Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC) and other forums.

In Leicestershire our Children in Care council is one of the groups able to share their experience and influence decision making. This is reflected by the young people in the following video; - Insert video

As part of the quality assurance carried out in social care we always try and hear the voice of the children and families. The following quote was taken from recent audits.

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*"R identified that being involved with a social worker was extremely positive and contributed towards him now having stability and security. R referred to positive relationship he has with his allocated worker and that he finds her support invaluable. R outlined that if he did not receive this intervention, he would not have been able to flourish or achieve all he has."*

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The following Videos, link and photos show case some of our amazing young people and their achievements over the past year!

Over the last year our children and young people have been involved with an initiative through Care to dance. Care to dance has enabled young people to express their feelings, abilities, and talents through dance. The aim of care to dance is to build young people's confidence and self-esteem and wow has this been achieved for the children and young people who took part.

The following comments were posted on LinkedIn, a social media platform, by Nicci Collins Strategic Lead, following a show case event to which we were invited to see the work of the young people. Although shared in 2023 the group was started at the end of last year and we look forward to their amazing progress going forward.

*What incredible Leicestershire County Council young people who performed last night- DancetoCare! I was so impressed with their courage, their teamwork and*

*support of one another. They have dance memories, a sense of achievement and friendships that will last a lifetime. Thank you Beth Vecchione, your team and the Virtual School for your support and devotion to our children in care. Proud to be part of The Art Mark Award, opportunities for our children through creativity and expression.*



It really was fantastic! Such a great experience for our young people and so emotional. The dancing and singing were fab, they have achieved so much in just 12 weeks! Can't wait to see what they achieve in 12 months! Donna Chapman (Virtual School Head)

Another amazing achievement this year was the beautiful singing of a few of our children in care and care leavers who have agreed we can share their work.

K is a young person in supported accommodation. One of the support workers where she lives has written a book called Jamaican Super Girl. He asked K to sing this song as he loved how it sounded and he therefore asked her to sing for the promotional video. Well, Done K!!



kim (2).mp4

S another of our talented young women has written and produced and uploaded to YouTube an incredible song and has agreed we can share it here. Well, Done S!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNCEwqyk4UM>

One of our young men has developed his art skills over the past 12 months. His worker describes him as his Crown Jewel! Brilliant pieces of work A!



The youth and Justice Team Manager reflected on the voice of young people and its impact not just for the young person on the day but the young people going forward. Even after they close a worker to a young person, they still have a contact number which means the young people can contact them if they are worried or want to share the successes they are making.

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*In one particular case we assisted a care leaver, at the time one of our highest risk cases to attend the Youth Justice Management board and address the board directly, openly and honestly about his experience as a Looked after child, ex prisoner and care leaver that had a profound effect on the board members and led to particular emphasis being placed on post custody accommodation for other looked after children in custody. This Care leaver has gone on to take part in manager and case Manager interviews providing lived experience voice that formed an equal and active part of the decision making for the posts applied for.*

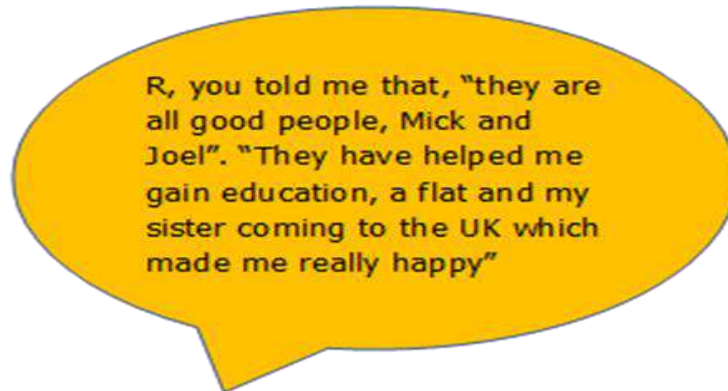
*Adrian Bakari*

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A growing area of work for the children and families service is the work supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. They have experienced significant trauma not only in the country of origin but also in their journey to reach the UK. It is critical we ensure we understand their needs and that they receive the right support to enable them to be part of their cultural community and integrate into local communities.

The Social Worker was very confident in being able to work with this young person and reduce and address any inequality he faces. She had a very good understanding of the situation young people find themselves in. She was very empathetic and understanding of UASC. She appeared to understand this young person background and his

The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Team holds a 'Friends and Food' group which allows the young people to come together with no other agenda than to meet others from the same or similar experiences and play cricket! This group hasn't yet engaged in larger voice and support groups like SYPAC and the CIC (Children in Care) Council. The services recognise several barriers for these young people, like life experiences, language and expectations are different. Through Friends and Food, these young people are being given the chance to engage with each other and build networks within their own community, and to build confidence so that they may join SYPAC or the Children in Care Council.



The Care Leavers Team have established a Care Leavers Council. This has been attended by one of the UASC young people and she expressed how amazing it was to talk about all the different things a care leavers council could do! She is very excited by this and will continue to be a part of the council going forward.

The personal advisors remain aspirational for young people, and this is shown with a recent reflection to senior leaders.

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*S has been in the UK 3 years and spoke no English when he arrived. He is from Sudan, so things are difficult for him emotionally at the moment. He is in BACA accommodation*

*He lives in Loughborough but travels to WQE college – about an hour – to attend college because he wants to progress quickly, and this college allows him to do that. Despite the travel, his attendance is excellent. He recently got 100% on his Entry level 3 ICT exam and is already looking to take a level 1 exam soon. He has also passed Entry level 3 English and started level 1 and is on track to pass level 1 maths.*

*S is hoping to start a mechanics course in September and is keen to work over the summer to learn some terminology.*

*S is a very caring and responsible young man and looking forward to living on his own when he can get his bid accepted. Deb Green Personal advisor*

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Young men getting to Visit Leicester City Football Club!



Young parents are supported through the care leavers team and the corporate parenting services. Parents and their children are supported to come together and support each other and play! Children this year got to meet Santa and very exciting that was too.





### **Conclusion and priorities**

The year has been a busy one again! We as partners, young people, families and services continue to drive Our Promise and engage with young people and families along the way. We work to enable aspiration and progress. Our work is 'done with' not 'done to' and that will continue.

Our Priorities for the coming year are

- ✚ Develop the role of the three member champions and their lead area
- ✚ Ensure children and young people are consistently receiving a good relationship-based service.
- ✚ To ensure we see and hear the child both in visits and that their voice comes alive through their paperwork, by writing to the child.
- ✚ To sustain and develop the complex case model of working to bring together agencies, children and young people and families at the tricky times in their lives to help move forward for positive outcomes
- ✚ To develop the Pilot Staying close model with partner agencies to enable young people to stay close to their networks as they reach independence with the right support at the right time.
- ✚ To develop links with other departments to enable children and young people to integrate into local communities for example through the family hubs
- ✚ To develop Life Story work with children and families
- ✚ To work with teams such as Teen parents, young carers groups and youth services to ensure care leavers are part of the communities they live in not just their care experiences.



- ✚ To ensure we are implementing the Lundy Model in our voice work to ensure that it influences and directs service development and delivery.