

Looked After Children and Care Leavers: Engagement with Young People during Covid-19

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Introduction

This briefing has been prepared to provide an overview of the statutory service provided to our Children Looked After and Care Leavers during Covid-19 pandemic.

When the Local Authority and the country went into full lockdown on 23rd March 2020, we had to quickly develop a new way of delivering a statutory social work services to our children in care and care leavers. In the week that lockdown started we had responsibility for 250 Looked After Children and 239 Care Leavers.

Service Delivery in response to Covid19

The requirement to support the Stay at Home message meant that we were actively encouraging our young people to remain in their placements, and that the majority of our staff were working from home. It was not appropriate to ask foster carers and residential staff to allow home visits, and therefore we moved to a position where only critical visits face to face visits are scheduled. All staff are required to have a virtual contact with their young people at a minimum level of once every two weeks.

All face to face visits are risk assessed and must be agreed by the line manager and PPE is provided for all visits. The reasons for physical visits include responding to a new care arrangement, placement break down, managing an acute mental health or emotional presentation, arrest, or return from a missing episode. We have also provided outreach to young people who are feeling particularly isolated.

In addition, young people have a minimum of fortnightly contact from the Virtual School to support them in developing positive routines and to plan their home-schooling timetable.

A range of other agencies and professionals are also having virtual contact with our looked after children and care leavers including their Independent Reviewing Officers, the LAC nurses, LAC Assist, supervising social worker, and mentors/support workers and of course their carers.

Our social workers are finding creative ways of engaging with children and young people. Some examples include:

- Undertaking Pilates and fitness sessions together
- Handwritten personalised cards sent in the post. Feedback from this that the children concerned treasured these cards, read and re-read them, and were excited to receive physical post addressed to them.
- Video CV writing session with a hard to reach young person who found it easier to undertake this work virtually
- Use of interpreter during video sessions
- Undertake online mybank training together with some young people

A Good Practice Guidance for Virtual Visits has been developed by the Principal Social Worker network, and this has been shared with all our practitioners and a workshop is planned in the next two weeks. Workers have been asked to make sure they undertake the

usual functions of a statutory visit at least every six weeks. This might be through the weekly or fortnightly contact they have, or they might undertake a longer and more in-depth session at least 6 weekly.

All review health assessments are currently being undertaken virtually by our two LAC nurses. They are finding that they are able to have longer and more in-depth conversations with children and young people about their health and emotional well-being, virtually than in an actual visit.

The Virtual School team are providing virtual online sessions for those wanting to progress to Further Education next year and those searching for employment and are leading online ESOL tuition sessions.

There has been an adaptation of the usual Virtual School support, to ensure that additional bespoke support is in place for identified young people including continuing art therapy, tuition and mentoring virtually.

Outreach and Participation

Additional mentoring and outreach support provided through WIPERS, QPR, VIP, Key 4 Life and ASE for identified young people in need of further support.

Our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Group have daily communication through our WhatsApp groups, with some of older ones sharing content and advice to make each other smile in these uncertain times. This includes a daily check in and weekly visual quiz.

The Children in Care Council and /Care Leaver Groups have met online to share their experiences and shape the consultation for the wider cohort. The young people have identified they have struggled with the Skype and Teams platforms and would prefer to use Zoom to meet.

A consultation survey has been sent to all Looked after Children and Care Leavers and the responses will be collated and analysed to further shape services through Corporate Parenting. A virtual Corporate Parenting meeting is being arranged to take place in May half term and the survey results will be discussed at the meeting.

Enrichment Activity

A weekly creative challenge is being shared with all our Looked After Children and Care Leavers and their carers and professionals who work with them. The aim is to encourage everyone to explore a range of creative skills and talents, to have a shared goal and activity, to distract from worries and to feel connected. An online gallery of the contributions has been created and shared and the ambition is that one day we will have a live exhibition and be able to bring everyone together to share and celebrate their talents. Our young people have told us that they are enjoying the

challenges, look forward to the new themes and viewing the submissions that have been shared. Submissions can be viewed here:

<https://sites.google.com/view/creative-challenge/home>

We moved our Easter creative enrichment project to a virtual version with some fantastic contributions on the following:

- Draw an unusual fruit with a personality
- Share either a piece of your own art or an object from your home that is special to you and tell us why
- Make a "person" out of objects you find in the kitchen
- Write out your favourite word and draw images around it that you connect with that word



Future Developments

Our Enrichment Coordinator is developing a 'Corona on my mind' proposal to give young people a means of exploring and expressing their thoughts and feelings about current challenges. This project would include a series of online sessions with creative leaders introducing their artforms including a performance poet, a visual artist, a storyteller, an actor, a rapper and others, followed by the creation of an online space to share work in progress and completed pieces. The aim would be to create personal and collective stories of young people's experiences; which can be valued among all the other stories that will be told and help young people to have control over the next stage in their lives.