

**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE,
Assistant Director – Children's (Safeguarding)**

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	23 July 2020
Subject:	Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report

Summary:

This report gives a summary and overview of activities with regard to V4C between January and June 2020. This is a longer period of time than the agreed quarterly report timescale due to February's report to the Corporate Parenting Panel focusing on updates regarding the Big Conversation and the Tell Us Survey, and the previous Corporate Parenting Panel being refocused due to matters related to the COVID-19 infection.

This report therefore provides an update of V4C activities early in 2020 in January and February, which have not previously been reported, and provides information on V4C activities over the more recent months within the context of significant disruptions and changes to working practices as a result of the COVID-19 infection, meaning in line with many other activities, V4C meetings have been taking place virtually and remotely.

V4C is Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being looked after in Lincolnshire and to inform teams who support Children in Care what does and does not work for them. V4C meetings are held within Children's Services locality quadrants and are delivered by Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and supported by Children's Services Participation Officers.

This report also provides Corporate Parenting Panel with an update with regard to some future planning and progress.

Actions Required:

Corporate Parenting Panel to provide comment and steer regarding:

- V4C activities and meetings undertaken in 2020
- Future planning and delivery of V4C meetings and activities

1. Background

Activities related to V4C below have been broken down in 2 parts within this section as delivery and format has been distinct following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020:

- V4C update January – March 2020
- V4C update post March 2020 – Virtual V4C Activities

V4C update January – March 2020

V4C activities over January – March 2020 are detailed below and have been outlined within the 4 quadrant areas:

- Lincoln and West Lindsey
- Boston and South Holland
- East Lindsey
- North and South Holland

Lincoln and West Lindsey

A summary of attendance and activity is provided below:

Month of meeting	Venue/Activity	Number of children and young people attended
January	Washingborough Bowl	10
February	Big Conversation 20 Adventure Lincolnshire (outdoor activities)	Meeting cancelled due to low number of bookings
March	Tension Escape Room	10

Alongside the activities the group discussed and continued feedback regarding:

- Language that Cares work, session planning March 2020 onwards
- Revisited Care Pledge and Language that Cares after Big Conversation 20
- Completed planning for future meeting and confirmed music workshops x 4 April – July 2020 (subsequently postponed)

Boston and South Holland

A summary of attendance and activity is provided below:

Month of meeting	Venue/Activity	Number of children and young people attended
January	Alley Catz (bowling), Spalding	6
February	Play Towers (climbing, soft play team challenges), Boston Bowl	10
March	Meeting with karting activity cancelled due to COVID-19 and lockdown	n/a

Alongside the activities the group discussed and continued feedback regarding:

- Language that Cares discussion in preparation for the Big Conversation, activities for V4C meetings going forward
- Team building, emotional wellbeing card feedback and mood board, looking at FAB! Awards activities

North and South Kesteven

A summary of attendance and activity is provided below:

Month of meeting	Venue /Activity	Number of children and young people attended
January	Music activity. The Showroom, Lincoln	6
February – week 1	Music activity. The Showroom, Lincoln	6
February – week 2	Music Activity. The Showroom, Lincoln	6
February – week 4	Music Activity. The Showroom, Lincoln	6

Alongside the activities the group discussed:

- Topics covered: Writing, performing, recording a piece of music about 3 young people in foster care. Collaborative working using 'Garage Band' software and keyboard.
- Activity: Music Project supported by the Showroom, with outcome being a song recorded to play at FAB! Awards ceremony

East Lindsey

A summary of attendance and activity is provided below:

Month of meeting	Venue /Activity	Number of children and young people attended
January	Pantomime, Horncastle	Cancelled due to low bookings
February	Chocolate Workshop, North Sea Observatory	11
March	Planning meeting to design workshop for Designated Teachers Conference with representatives from NK/SK V4C group. No further activities due to COVID-19 and lockdown	4

Alongside the activities the group discussed and continued feedback regarding:

- Language that Cares discussion in preparation for the Big Conversation, activities for V4C meetings going forward

V4C Update March - June 2020: Virtual V4C Activities

The following details are provided in this section:

- Overview And Background
- Risk Assessment and Good Practice – Virtual Groups
- Delivery Planning
- Virtual V4C by Locality
- Participation Activities Across The Groups
- V4C Newsletter and Communications
- Next Steps

Overview and Background

Alongside other Children's Services participation groups, V4C members are being offered the opportunity to have virtual meetings, via Zoom, with their groups in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All current members were contacted during April 2020 by their V4C leads and Virtual V4C was discussed. In recognition of the fact that not all young people feel comfortable being on a video call, or indeed speaking in a group, all members were offered the opportunity to catch up with their group lead individually via telephone, email or 1:1 Zoom call if preferred to keep updated and engaged.

During the initial phases of setting up Virtual V4C, sessions were primarily focused on relaxed activities and conversations to support young people to build their confidence with the technology and this new way of working. Now members have

become settled, the sessions have shifted towards participation and engagement pieces of work that can be delivered via this mechanism. This has involved sending information out to the home for pre-reading prior to the next Zoom meeting.

To enhance users experiences of the Zoom technology, premium licences have been purchased in June for 8 Youth and Community Development Worker staff to improve connectivity and sound quality as well as enabling longer meetings.

Risk Assessment and Good Practice – Virtual Groups

The Participation Team developed a Risk Assessment and Good Practice Guide for Virtual Participation Groups to follow, based on a Leeds City Council Participation Group paper. (See appendix)

Delivery Planning

Debbie Barker, Senior Youth and Community Development Worker and V4C lead for Lincoln and West Lindsey, has coordinated the project across the Youth and Community Development Teams within the Future4Me service. Debbie developed an action plan which detailed all activities required and completed to support the delivery of this project across the county. She has supported team members to establish contact with young people, carers and colleagues to raise awareness of this new project offer.

Virtual V4C by Locality

Following the development work and planning highlighted above, the Virtual V4C meetings and contacts have been taking place since the end of April, and are described below by locality area:

Lincoln and West Lindsey – 11 young people attending meetings

- All young people have been contacted to see if they wish to be involved
- Now running two Virtual Zoom groups to meet the needs of the young people as not all are confident with larger groups or with young people they don't know well. As a result, one is a general group and another based around members from Northolme Children's Home
- Each group currently runs fortnightly on alternate weeks, this enables the more confident young people to join the Northolme Children's Home group. The young people have now asked for the meetings to return to their monthly schedule now that they have become used to the format.
- The 'Cress Egg Head Challenge' has been very popular. Pancake challenge making and decorating a pancake were popular with some fantastic results. The groups have now been doing virtual bingo and a talent competition.
- One young person has moved from Lincoln/West Lindsey to Skegness. Debbie Barker made contact with new foster carer to introduce herself and give an overview of V4C, also sharing information about the East Lindsey group and the present situation with Zoom. The young person has been invited to stay with the Lincoln group as well if they wish

Boston and South Holland – 7 young people attending

- All young people have been contacted with meetings taking place since the end of April
- The group's first zoom went really well with great reaction from the young people. The group is now very settled and runs weekly currently
- During the weeks the young people asked for virtual games of bingo, with all cards sent via mail or post so the young people can take part. Cooking challenges, writing poems about the Health Service and drawing pictures of their heroes and a talent show have also taken place
- The group are continuing to set challenges or activities each week
- The Youth and Community Development Worker organises for a bundle of materials to be sent to each of the young people's homes so they have relevant information and materials to participate

North and South Kesteven – 6 young people attending

- All young people have been contacted to see if they wish to be involved
- The young people have all requested 1:1 Zoom check in meetings. The young people in the group have requested not to have group meetings due to issues around lack of confidence and mental health and wellbeing issues. There is an aim to support to gradually move towards group meetings where possible, with the option of using breakout rooms to pair up or have smaller numbers in the first instance.
- The Youth Worker is involved in one young person's review meetings with their Social Worker and the V4C Zoom meeting has helped with this
- Although the young people are doing 1:1 if more young people wish to join then group Zoom meetings with these will be arranged and young people can join other virtual meetings

East Lindsey – 5 young people attending

- All young people have been contacted with one to one meetings currently taking place via Zoom
- The Senior Youth and Community Development Worker for East Lindsey has been redeployed to another role and another member of staff from the team is now taking over responsibility for developing the meetings
- Group meetings are currently being arranged

Participation Activities Across The Groups

Group leads are supporting their young people to continue to engage in participation activities during this period:

- *Language that Cares* – as this work moves towards its final implementation phase, young people have been invited to record short videos discussing the following questions:
What did you think of the old language?
Why do you think it needs to be changed?
What difference do you think the changes will make to you?
These videos are to be used as part of sharing the changes and training all staff working with Children in Care and Care Leavers in using the new Language That Cares.

- *Caring Promise* – groups have been asked to look at the new document and graphics, as voted for at Big Conversation 20 in February 2020. This is the last opportunity for any feedback/design changes by the young people before the document is finalised and circulated wider
- *soundLINCS* – The Children's Services Participation Team have spoken with the team at soundLINCS to scope the opportunity to provide virtual music sessions to the V4C groups. The initial plan is for 12 weekly sessions covering 3 different areas of music e.g. vocal, instrumental and digital on a rotational basis to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to access something of interest to them where possible. soundLINCS are collating a plan to be shared in July 2020 outlining the programme and costs associated.

V4C Newsletter and Communications

- **Virtual V4C Newsletter**

The Participation Team work with Debbie Barker to produce monthly Virtual V4C newsletters which are used to keep carers, support workers updated with meetings, activities and challenges. The first newsletter May 2020 was circulated to all foster carers in the county with updates being sent out via staff contacts and carers directly (see appendix). There is now an online subscription version of the newsletter in development which will allow readers to subscribe enabling the team to set up a direct line of contact with young people and stakeholders.

- **Foster Carer News, Int. Comms, Daily Briefing and Facebook articles**

Publicity and awareness raising is ongoing: the team have written articles to promote Virtual V4C in the Foster Carer Newsletter, Internal Comms, Covid-19 Daily Briefing and LCC Facebook. Positive responses and enquiries regarding joining sessions are coming through and followed up. See appendix for examples of communications.

Next Steps

A primary issue to consider is future planning to continue with the option of providing virtual V4C meetings in addition to physical meetings and activities when they resume. This will help to offer V4C for young people who are unable or do not wish to attend physical meetings. Further steps are to:

- Continue to support and deliver services to young people within our V4C groups
- Look to further establish and develop meetings in localities and support young people to feel confident in engaging in virtual groups
- Update young people and carers with meetings and activities via the Virtual V4C newsletter
- Continue to raise awareness of Virtual V4C to the wider children in care community via communications with staff, carers, media and newsletters
- Develop the music session delivery schedule with soundLINCS
- Begin to plan for the return of physical meetings and activities

2. Conclusions

- A) Prior to March 2020 the V4C groups continued to achieve more engagement through meetings being activity based and being held in alternative venues to the traditional youth centre based settings. However, attendances and interest do appear to vary based on the type of activity being offered and its location. It is therefore important moving forward that the choice of activities and venues for future V4C meetings should be child and young person led, in addition to ongoing publicity and awareness raising.
- B) Virtual V4C meetings, using Zoom at present, have been popular among certain young people. They offer a different mechanism for young people to communicate, engage and give their views. Some young people prefer this method to physical meetings. It also enables participation where young people are unable to travel to certain locations. It is therefore recommended that these options of meetings continue in some form when physical meetings resume. At the same time, some young people find using platforms such as Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams uncomfortable and difficult, and services need to be mindful and supportive of this.
- C) As the situation across the country changes with regard to the COVID-19 infection, initial planning with regard to future physical meetings needs to be considered.

3. Consultation

Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

Risk assessments carried out via the Senior Youth And Community Development Workers

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached	
Appendix A	V4C Virtual Risk Assessment
Appendix B	V4C Newsletter May 2020
Appendix C	Examples of Communication

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Ben Lilley, Team Manager (Quality and Standards), who can be contacted on 07876 212470 or at ben.lilley@lincolnshire.gov.uk