

Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

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| Report to: | Corporate Parenting Panel |
| Date: | 07 July 2022 |
| Subject: | Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report |

Summary:

This report gives a summary and overview of:

- Activities regarding V4C between February – June 2022
- Actions to support future V4C planning and progress

V4C is Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being in care 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.

Actions Required:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is invited to provide comment and steer regarding:

1. V4C activities and meetings undertaken within the reporting period.
2. Future planning and delivery of V4C meetings and activities.

1. Background

V4C delivery February – June 2022

During this reporting period the delivery of V4C groups have been continuing to focus on holding face-to-face meetings following the easing of Co-vid restrictions. Meetings within this period have been held in LCC youth centre buildings and other settings where there are established risk assessments in place.

The details below provide a summary of V4C sessions and attendances by locality:

Lincoln and West Lindsey

| Date of meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 2 nd February 2022 | Lincoln Youth Matters (LYM) Youth Centre | 6 |
| 2 nd March 2022 | LYM | 5 |
| 5 th April 2022 | Holiday activities - RAF Cranwell | 2 |
| 7 th April 2022 | LYM holiday activities | 2 |
| 11 th April 2022 | LYM junior holiday activities | 1 |
| 12 th April 2022 | LYM senior holiday activities | 3 |
| 13 th April 2022 | LYM junior holiday activities | 3 |
| 14 th April 2022 | Holiday activities – Karting, Lazer Tag | 3 |
| 11 th May 2022 | Northolme Residential Home, Gainsborough | 6 |

Face to face meetings have been held with young people who are attending enjoying the sessions, and with regular attendance by several young people from Northolme Children’s Residential Home. Over this period there have been a range of holiday activity events taking place over the Easter break, linked to the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, with some V4C members attending these sessions.

Discussions within the meetings involved children and young people giving their views on mental wellbeing, physical health, and feedback around summer holiday activities, with a view to feeding into the Big Conversation meeting held on 1st June.

Members of the group felt that they have a good selection of activities to attend over holiday times, along side time to meet with family members.

Members of the group discussed how the group identity could be developed and it suggested branded logo t shirts to wear would be a good option and will be progressed.

Boston and South Holland

Attendances within the Boston and South Holland locality are below, with regular monthly meetings taking place face to face. Support is being provided where needed for transport for young people to attend when needed and this is reviewed regularly to ensure there are no barriers to attendance if possible.

| Date of meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 9 th February 2022 | Carlton Road Youth Centre, Boston | 5 |
| 9 th March 2022 | Carlton Road Youth Centre, Boston | 6 |
| 6 th April 2022 | Holiday Activities | 7 |

| Date of meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 4 th May 2022 | Carlton Road Youth Centre, Boston | 5 |

Overview of sessions:

Discussions with members of the group have focused on their experiences of moving into care and what has worked for them and not worked for them in terms of the support they have received

The young people feedback that they felt that they have been kept safe, but sometimes felt confused when in discussions with workers. As a result, they would like to have everything explained to them in a way they can understand so that they understand what is happening to them, and why.

Members of V4C also discussed getting support and issues affecting young people:

- Mental health issues were a serious issue with it commented that it feels like most children and young people are dealing with mental health issues, including depression
- In terms of physical wellbeing the group discussed their views about sport/physical activities that that are open to them – activities they would like to do but cannot, and if so, what barriers there are.

Activities such as dancing, football and hockey were given as examples of sports/physical activities they enjoy and have access to.

One young person viewed the law as a barrier to doing the sporting activities he wanted to do due to the recent law regarding trans athletes competing with their own gender.

The group discussed the barriers to attending activities in the holidays and developed a list of activities they would like to do in the holidays to feed into the Big Conversation meeting in June.

It was felt that they were sometimes unaware of what is available to them, and they do not always get the information passed on to them about possible opportunities.

The group also discussed what had gone well for them this included feeling safe, a good home life, enjoying being at school and V4C providing activities to them.

The Young Carers group has approached V4C in Boston and South Holland with a proposal to bring the groups together into a single meeting. This would help to share experiences, generate discussion and feedback and help build confidence of children and young people. It is proposed that this is piloted to determine if it is effective.

East Lindsey

Attendances for the East Lindsey locality area are summarised below:

| Date of meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 16 th February 2022 | Big Conversation Event | 2 |
| 15 th March 2022 | Skegness Youth Centre | 2 |
| 19 th April 2022 | Skegness Youth Centre | 2 |
| 17 th May 2022 | Skegness Youth Centre | 1 |

Overview of sessions:

Young people were given four 'Big Questions' on the topic of health and it was discussed that: they would speak to people they trust like family and friends; think mental health issues occur frequently among young people and that more advertisement is needed to raise awareness of mental health.

It was feedback that it was felt there are enough physical health activities, particularly through school, available.

The Big Conversation from February was reviewed, and feedback received - the one young person who attended liked being able to meet other young people in the same situation as them.

Discussions were held about their views on being in care and the support they receive from workers. They stated that they preferred contact over the phone, would like more regular contact and to get to know workers as well as getting support with school, home and mental health if needed.

Feedback was requested regarding V4C and the Big Conversation events:

- They preferred face to face delivery as it is harder to communicate and share with each other virtually
- They are happy to travel to Skegness but would be happy to travel to other locations if carers were able to transport them and that they would prefer to spread out activities and discussions over a longer period
- They suggested that having a way to get to a venue is the main barrier to attendance. It was proposed that the issue with attendance to V4C and the Big Conversation sessions is due to carers being unable/unwilling to transport children and young people to venues. They suggested that information is not passed on from workers about the opportunities/sessions available and that it would be better to contact the carers directly with this information to encourage attendance. A joint transport option to venues that are out of area was suggested so that multiple children and young people can be picked up and transported together

- They felt like they had an identity, particularly as a V4C group and liked meetings with similar people. They liked the idea of having t-shirts to promote identity and thought this would encourage attendance and suggested logos on pencils and jackets.

Discussions about school holidays were held and the following feedback was received:

- Barriers to attendance: cost, transport, taxis not showing up, scared to go to activities alone
- Ideas for school holidays: art, going to the park, hiking, rugby, football, rounders, cooking/baking, movie night, escape room, swimming, ice skating, fun fair, go karting, dance
- Awareness of activities: some young people in care know about activities because carers/workers are informing them what is available, but others do not – suggestion of more publicity/social media, workers need to give out the information.
- Positive story: a young person stated they feel safe and happy since being in care and came 1st in a 300m running race!

They also completed a review around Missing Return Meetings leaflets for children and young people at the request of the service. They fedback on a leaflet explaining the return home meeting and the name of the multi-agency meeting. They liked the colour, length, and words which they felt were easy to understand but needed a section on why young people run away.

North and South Kesteven

Attendances for the North and South Kesteven locality are summarised below

| Date of meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 15 th March 2022 | Earlsfield Youth Centre, Grantham | 3 |
| 19 th April 2022 | Earlsfield Youth Centre, Grantham | 4 |
| 17 th May 2022 | Swingbridge Children’s Centre, Grantham | 2 |

Overview of sessions:

During this period, we have asked the question around how supported the young people feel they are in school. The young people said they have good teachers that they can go to in school, and they were able to name times workers have helped them to engage in other activities.

The young people also took part in some feedback work requested by the Future4Me service to look at the Young Person Missing Return process, and specifically changes to the name of meetings held for young people who frequently go missing, and feedback on the missing return interview leaflet given to young people. The feedback was passed back to the service and will form part of the broader consultation regarding the changes.

Young people had discussions around potential barriers and challenges they face with regards to accessing holiday activities, ranging from transport, and not wanting to travel too far, to costs being too expensive and if they have pets there not being anyone who can look after them. Young people said they tend to find out about opportunities via social media and their friends, but it would be better if their workers informed them of other activities going on and not just the ones that LCC run.

The Big Conversation

| Date of Meeting | Venue | Number of young people attended |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 st June 2022 | Storehouse Conference Centre, Skegness | 19 |

19 children and young people attended the latest Big Conversation meeting, which was held on Wednesday 1st June in Skegness at the Storehouse Conference Centre. In the afternoon, an activity at a ‘high ropes’ centre was provided for the children and young people to enjoy. Transport was provided where needed to help young people attend.

Discussions with senior managers and elected members were held with feedback provided by some children and young people on matters such as making the residential homes more homely, having more things in the garden, and improving broadband and internet access within children’s residential homes. The children and young people were pleased to hear that this has already been recognised as an issue and there would be actions taken to address this.

There were also discussions and feedback regarding views on holiday activities and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. There was a consensus that there were a good range of options though further publicity and raising awareness of opportunities would be helpful.

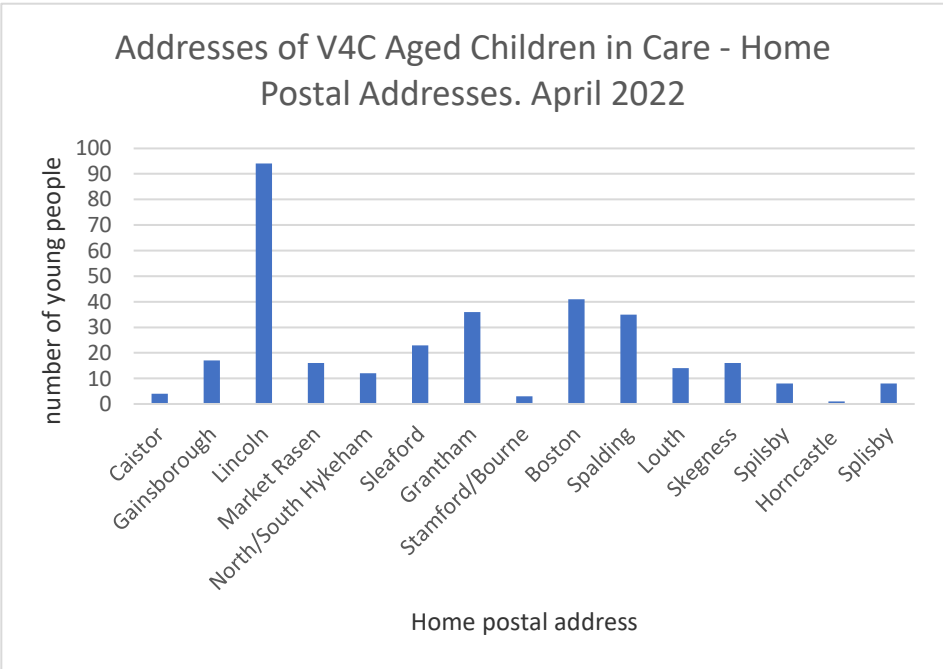
V4C Planning

There are ongoing attempts to raise awareness of V4C to increase attendances. Key to this is encouraging staff and carers to discuss V4C with children and young people and referring them to the Participation Team so they can be contacted, and any support needed for them to attend can be put in place. The following points summarise current V4C planning:

- The Children’s Services Participation Officers have visited Children’s Services Children in Care, Fostering and Virtual School teams over this reporting period to

raise awareness of V4C and to request that Social Workers speak with children and young people about V4C to encourage attendance. Ongoing further visits to front line teams across Children’s Services will continue for this purpose.

- V4C meetings continue to take place across all 4 of the locality quadrants now on a face-to-face basis and this again has been the focus of this reporting period. Further discussions will take place with children and young people with a view to developing V4C further and building attendances. Attempts have been made to hold virtual meetings as an option but there has not been interest in this option currently.
- New publicity regarding V4C has been developed and shared, with work taking place with the Council’s Digital Engagement Team to update information regarding V4C on the Council’s website. A new SharePoint page has been developed as a site for information regarding V4C for staff as well to help raise awareness and provide information. Information regarding V4C is sent out to carers via the Foster Carer newsletter on an ongoing basis. A short film where V4C members talk about how V4C has helped them and what they do will be produced to help raise awareness further.
- There has been continued positive feedback about the return to face to face meetings and the activities taking place within the meetings which will help inform future discussion.
- An analysis of postcodes of Children in Care has been completed to help inform future V4C delivery in terms of geographical delivery:



2. Conclusions

- A) Face-to-face meetings within this reporting period have continued across each of the 4 Children's Service's quadrants, although attendances have not yet increased.
- B) Several actions have been outlined in this report to raise awareness of V4C to increase attendances. Key to this is the importance of front-line workers and carers discussing V4C with children and young people in care to encourage attendance
- C) Ongoing work will continue to publicise V4C and review meeting options, with an aim to gain children and young people's views to encourage attendance and engagement.
- D) There seems to be higher attendances and more interest when there is a centralised day time meeting during holiday times. Feedback received is that this is easier for children and young people to attend when compared with the current monthly evening meetings. A possible reformatting of the timetable of V4C meetings to be held as single central meetings and to include daytime meetings in each of the 6 school holiday periods could be an option to increase attendance, engagement and identify of V4C.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Risk assessments are carried out via the Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and Participation Officers.

4. 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, Practice Supervisor (Quality and Standards), who can be contacted on 07876 212470 or at ben.lilley@lincolnshire.gov.uk.