

Noticeboard

Children, Young People and Families Service

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Introduction

We had a call from Ofsted on the 13 September, as such, our energy and activity has not only focused on the issues ahead, but also our collective responsibility to showcase the great work the Front Door and the Family Wellbeing Team have been doing in recent months.

The Ofsted visit was preceded two weeks earlier by a follow up visit from Mark Riddell MBE, National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers.

Councillor Catherine Gibbons said about the visit:

'It was a very welcome positive feedback session! I would like to thank everyone involved for all the hard work and commitment – the recognition of the "great stuff" you are doing is well deserved. Will you pass on my thanks to all staff – and to the young people who got involved... it's all about them!'

Mark's visit is further covered in '**Beth's Bit**' of the newsletter.

We can expect published responses from Mark in relation to care leavers, and our Ofsted colleagues in relation to all things Front Door in the next 4-5 weeks.

Events and external eyes over the past month have helped us explore and showcase our progress at opposite ends of the system. This month's newsletter brings into focus a practice issue that spans a child's journey – permanency. It is paramount for us to consider permanency at the very beginning of our involvement, done well it provides children with the best outcomes from the start of their journey to the point of eligibility when leaving care services. The practice issue as you may have guessed, is permanency.

While many of us have an experienced hand when considering permanency options for children, it is essential that we keep the issues and solutions surrounding permanence alive in our conversation. In the coming weeks and months, permanence and early permanence will be a specific area of focus. The newsletter is a helpful way to (re) introduce the subject and bring it alive in our thinking, planning, and work with and for children.

At present we benefit from the experience, insight, support, and constructive challenge of Suzanne Lyus who currently fulfilling an improvement consultant role in North Somerset. Alongside colleagues, Suzanne's role leads improvement at all levels in the organisation, supporting heads of service and delivering professional development to our workforce. Further communication will follow as this programme of work continues to develop and unfold.

So...What is “Permanency”?

Many children who come into care return home to live with their parents. However, for those who cannot, there are many different permanence options in the UK. There is no hierarchy of permanence options; what matters is the welfare and wellbeing of each child and finding the right family for them.

Simply put, “permanency” means family. It means having positive, healthy, nurturing relationships with adults who provide emotional, financial, moral, educational, and other kinds of support as young people mature into adults. Ideally, permanency takes the form of a relationship with a legal component that provides a parent-child relationship. Older youth, regardless of age or need, deserve to be connected to a permanent family and support system which both lifts them up and cushions them if they fall.

Early Permanence refers to the arrangement where a child is placed with a family at the earliest opportunity. This is achievable by placing them with

approved adopters who have been prepared and assessed as suitable to undertake a temporary fostering role. They are then able to go on and adopt the child once the court proceedings have been concluded.

Early Permanence is usually, but not exclusively, used for babies and young children coming into care as they have a high risk of being unable to return safely to the care of their birth families. They are likely to need adoption, but still have a chance of being reunited with their birth families. If the court decides a child's future is best protected by adoption, the child already has a secure attachment to their carers who are now able to adopt the child.



Benefits of Early Permanence for the child

- develop a sense of belonging
- have a sense of security
- predict their future
- develop close trusted familial relationships
- acquire a “secure base” in attachment terms
- develop a robust, positive identity
- avoid the trauma of moves in care
- avoid getting older in care and never having the opportunity to be adopted

We really need to collectively focus on this issue, and advocate strongly for those who need support. In short, we need to relentlessly pursue the right families, the strongest practice, and advocate ardently across all systems to secure the best outcomes possible.

Quote from a parent on Early Permanence:

“Whilst we ultimately wanted to adopt a child, we were also interested in fostering. Early Permanence gave us the opportunity to do both, and we thought hard about how we would feel if a child were to return to the birth family, and whether or not we could cope with it.

The outcome for us was positive as the child we had in an early permanence placement has stayed with us, meaning we had them 4 or 5 months earlier than we otherwise would have – this enabled us to work on attachment at a critical stage which we would have missed out on if they’d gone through traditional adoption.

The process was incredibly challenging, but it was worth it a hundred-fold. It is impossible to know the risk and likelihood of the child going back to birth family so it’s important that early permanence carers feel able to cope with this potential eventuality and have a good support network.

Whatever the outcome, you’ll be doing something wonderful and important for a child that really needs it – and possibly for the first time in their life, the adults will be taking the risk so that they don’t have to.”

Launch of Child Protection Advocacy Service

The Child Protection Advocacy Service was launched on Monday 5 September as a result of a successful pilot period. The service is being headed by the Junction 21 Mentoring and Advocacy Service (North Somerset YOS) alongside colleagues from Children, Young People, and Family Services. The service is given by default and requesting to opt-out requires a reason.

All young people aged 8+ are offered an independent advocate to meet with them prior to the Initial Case Conference (ICC). This meeting ensures their voice is captured and the young

person can see how their wishes and feelings inform practice.

The independent advocate will then either attend the IOC with the young person or attend in lieu to represent the voice and feelings of the child or young person and are also available for Child Protection Reviews.

Advocates are paid workers who have significant background experience in working with and supporting young people.

For further information please contact:

Steve Coggins and Louise Calcutt
0776 170 028/01275 888 360

Junction21@n-somerset.gov.uk



Recognising Staff for Outstanding Practice

All of the staff in children, young people, and family services know the importance of recognising colleagues' work and celebrating their accomplishments. This month we acknowledge Jenny Coughlan and Shona Blease, who received praise for outstanding practice with children who have child protection plans.

The ISRO commented:

“I want to send praise for the children's social worker Jenny Coughlan and family support worker Shona Blease. There has been a targeted plan of direct work with this family, who have previously been hard to engage and resistant to working with professionals. During the Child Protection plan, I have observed significant changes in the parents' attitudes and understanding about the impact of their actions upon the children's behaviours. Parents have been supported to actively engage in safety planning and have taken ownership in developing plans alongside the children and CSC.

Direct wishes and feelings work with the children has supported the parents to understand how the boys have been feeling and have supported the children to have a clear voice. Mum, in particular, has demonstrated huge change and is very reflective about the impact of her past behaviours on the children. She can identify “wobbly” times recently and feels proud and empowered that she has managed these difficult situations without them escalating or impacting on the children.

Parents are now working together to support the children and keep them

safe. Impact on the children – both boys have a calmer home environment with clear boundaries. They told me they are not worried about mum and dad arguing anymore and do not feel they have to take responsibility for helping to sort out family difficulties. The boys are spending regular and consistent time with their dad. They feel confident that they can speak to mum and dad now if they are worried about anything. School attendance has improved, the youngest child is less anxious about his transition to secondary school and behaviour both at home and at school is reported to be significantly more settled for both boys. Both children have attended core group meetings and the RCPC. The parents both acknowledge that their working relationship with Jenny has been tricky at times, however Jenny and Shona's consistent support and good practice in working with this family has resulted in a very positive outcome in my view. Well done both.”

We will be recognising all of the staff from children, young people, and family services who have been nominated for staff awards in the edition after the event has taken place. If you would like to acknowledge your colleague in addition to this, please contact nat.chadwick@n-somerset.gov.uk.

Events



Celebrating Parents in North Somerset

This November the Family Wellbeing Parenting Team are holding their first ever annual “Parenting Celebration Event” at The Grand Pier.

“We want to celebrate the important role they play in their children’s lives.

Over the last two years the parenting offer in North Somerset has grown by 200%, we have responded to feedback and made our groups more accessible and less shaming by advertising them as “Advanced Parenting groups” and opening a parent self-referral route.

More parents than ever are attending, and feedback from parents and results through measuring outcomes are impressive. But we are not stopping there: Our aim is to make sure parents in North Somerset feel there is no stigma attached to attending groups, that it’s a natural process for parents who want to share and learn ideas. We want our communities to support families by sharing and supporting each other and the event is our way of highlighting the amazing stories we are so privileged to hear from parents on a weekly basis.”

The Big Thank You

On Wednesday 28 September we welcomed our wonderful foster carers to our annual conference, which this year has been named named ‘The Big Thank You’.

It was a fantastic occasion and a wonderful opportunity to bring everyone together and show appreciation for the tireless dedication and care they provide for children and young people.



Exploitation Awareness Day

North Somerset Children’s Services would like to invite professionals working with young people or families to the Exploitation Awareness Day on Tuesday 8 November 2022 at the Winter Gardens (Weston-super-Mare) organised in partnership with North Somerset Violence Reduction Unit.

There will be a series of key partner presentations from the exploitation arena throughout the day including Avon and Somerset Police, St Giles Trust, and Barnardo’s, as well as other partners with stalls to allow for information sharing and networking during breaks and lunch break.

The event is free and more information is available within the event links below.

Please register your attendance here:

- North Somerset Council employees with access to CPD – CPD Online – Exploitation Awareness Day
- Those external to North Somerset Council – Eventbrite – Exploitation Awareness Day

This event is bookable through CPD and we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on the day. Please share this event with your teams.

Did you know about our Senior Social Workers Development group (SSWDG)?

As part of the Senior Social Workers Development Group, we are combining the talent that we have within our Senior Social Workers with the effective use of the Research in Practice (RIP) resources.

This partnering to date continues to successfully add new and exciting learning and development opportunities to our Children Services training offer during 2022-2023. Helping to embed our learning culture and consistent messaging throughout our organisation for a range of roles.

They will have facilitated two sessions on reflective supervision in September. The programme and the subject matter will provide for double loop learning and bring thematic and targeted area of practice into focus as we enhance our collective understanding across whole service.

Please remember these sessions are open to all staff irrespective of role. For example, the reflective supervision is, and has been, available to supervisor and supervisee. Please continue to look out for the next round of sessions, we will likely run another series in November, alternating between month on/off to enable our seniors to develop the material and plan. Please support your colleagues in the evolution of this programme by way of attendance and utilising their enhanced knowledge of the subject matter on a day-to-day basis.

Our senior practitioners have demonstrated their commitment to get the ball rolling with this programme.

Their generosity to shape, understand and develop the idea has been greatly appreciated. Learning and development have really enjoyed working alongside the Senior Social Workers, it is a further example of working together, developing a positive culture of collaboration that we can be proud of.

Moving forward there will be a different theme on alternating months, facilitated by different senior social workers. All the subjects are closely linked to our learning and development priorities. Below are some of the themes you will see and be able to participate in the future.

- analysis and critical thinking
- neglect and poverty aware practice
- relationship based family support and child protection
- reflective supervision
- transitional safeguarding
- setting up care leavers to succeed

Some of the comments from Senior Social workers on the day!

I am already reflecting more about my own participation in supervision both from a supervisee and supervisor role.

It was actually great to have had this protected time to look at these resources.



Beth's Bit

Bethany Swan, Young Director – North Somerset Council

Hello everyone, welcome again to the third edition of Beth's Bit! Sadly, there hasn't been much glorious weather to bask in for the last few weeks of summer. However, in Weston we have been able to enjoy the last few activities of the summer like the Drone show put on by the See Monster and the immersive installation in The Tropicana looking at the past, present and future flood risks in Weston.



The previous 'Beth's Bit' included a lot about what was going on in our wider community, however, this edition will be focused on the work being started/completed in North Somerset Children's services under the corporate parenting umbrella.

As "Care Leavers Week" fast approaches, I believe it is important that we think about how we can celebrate the young people we support, and how can we help the young people we support to celebrate. Some of our care experienced young people have suggested having a sit-down meal, or the possibility of a day out being organised. If this is something you think you can help with or if you would be interested in being involved, please contact me at

Bethany.swann@n-somerset.gov.uk or contact the participation officer for children's services

Ella.Bunting@n-somerset.gov.uk.

In September, we were thrilled to have another visit from Mark Riddell. In 2017, the secretary of state appointed Mark to help local authorities implement new duties introduced through the Children and Social Work Act and to secure senior managers' buy-in to improve their local offer. Mark has visited over 60 local

authorities in England since he took up post. Mark also has lived experience of being a child under the care of Aberdeen's local authority. He has since used his experiences to write and publish his own book, which can be found here.

Mark's visit last year gave us a few recommended actions we could make, such as the need to strengthen the membership of the board. We were happy to show Mark that, a year on, the corporate parenting board is now chaired by the Executive member for children's services and lifelong learning. The Director of Children's Services is also a member as well as me, the Young Director. Along with the strengthening of the membership of the board, we have also given each of the meetings a theme to discuss, which will in turn help to provide structure and stability to the board meetings.

Something positive to turn Mark's attention to was about our ambitions to have 70% of our care leavers in education, employment, or training within the next twelve months. We have been working to make this happen by reviewing and enhancing the offer to care leavers entering higher education and introducing financial support for those continuing their studies into a master's degree.



Mark sat with a group of Care Leavers from North Somerset to hear their experiences and review the local offer for care leavers. Our care leavers spoke openly and confidently about things affecting them. Mark gave us some great feedback about improving our work methods.

Another positive point would be the renewal of our Joint Housing Protocol for care leavers and the new rent guarantor scheme, which gives care leavers a higher chance of being able to get into privatised housing and out of social housing projects. Another big win is the three housing projects for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the hub home promoting community and peer support.

Mark’s visit reminded us about the need for cooperate parents to make decisions as though it were your own child. So, when asking yourself, “Is this decision right for my young person?” you can also ask yourself, “Is this a decision I would make for my own child?”, because realistically, you’re the closest thing to a parent that some of us will have.

Your faith in us is what builds the faith in ourselves. Your ambitions for us help us to believe and achieve more than we thought we could.

If you have any bright moments that you’d like to see highlighted in the blog, or you have any questions, comments, or queries please email:

Bethany.swann@n-somerset.gov.uk

Meet our colleagues

My name is Ella Bunting and I am the Participation Officer for children and young people in North Somerset Council.

I have been in post for almost a year after completing further education at Weston College to work more directly to help support children in care. The role has been exciting, varied, and focuses on increasing the level of engagement of children and care leavers across children, young people, and family services. The Children in Care Awards day in May 2022 was a particular highlight so far. It has been amazing to get to know so many of you across the teams and I look forward to our continued working together as we strive towards having more children and young people voicing their experiences.

There are many projects we are working on to increase participation for children and young people including:

- Monthly Care Leavers Forum (always involves pizza!)
- Development of a Participation Strategy
- Introduction of Mind of My Own Mind Of My Own | Making it easier for children and young people to communicate
- Development of social media platforms
- Event planning and more!

Beth Swann, our fabulous Young Director, and I are working closely with our local councillors to provide some

fun trips and events later in the year for our children in care and care leavers. I don’t want to say too much yet but there will be some brilliant experiences coming soon!

I will make sure to keep everyone updated with everything we are doing to support participation throughout the authority.

I wish everyone well and look forward to getting together for the Staff Conference later this month.

In the meantime, if anyone wishes to contact me, please do. Ella.bunting@n-somerset.gov.uk

Ella

