

Noticeboard

Children, Young People and Families Service

October 2022

This electronic communications bulletin is available on the North Somerset Children's Service tri.x area

www.proceduresonline.com/northsomerset/cs/local_resources.html

In this month's edition

- Fostering Service
- Lola the Therapy Dog
- Youth Offending Service (YOS)
- UNICEF Gold Award for Family Wellbeing and Sirona Care and Health
- Family Wellbeing
- Free Social Work Qualifications
- Updated Legal Guidance
- Pause Update
- Beth's Bit
- Meet our colleagues



At the end of September we held the Children, Young People, and Family Services Annual Staff Conference. With well over 150 attendees, it was a great opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, network amongst new faces, and reflect on the whole service.

'**Relationships Matter**' was not only the key theme of the day, but it is also of paramount importance that it remains in focus as we move forward. We are hopeful that bringing this subject around culture to the forefront helps us all invigorate our relationships and consider their importance in our everyday practices. Best practice is informed and aligned with the needs of those it impacts. The only way to understand those needs is through meaningful relationships based on support, open communication, and willingness to learn with children, young people, families, and colleagues.

Another important message of the day was how the language we use in our daily practice impacts the lives of those we work with. Beth Swann (Young Director) and Ella Bunting (Participation Officer) gave an insightful and powerful presentation on this subject which influenced many staff pledges taken from the day.

Director’s message: Sheila Smith

I was really looking forward to the Staff Conference for Children’s Support and Safeguarding having gone a long time without being in a roomful of people! I thought the organisation of the day was brilliant and many of you were very positive about it being an opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and feel valued. Many of you fed back that the sessions from Dez, and from Beth and Ella were motivating and inspirational. My reflection is that the conference showed how far we’ve come and what more we need to do to be confident that our relationship and strength based practice is consistent and embedded across the Service. I came away with hope (and HOPE), pride in what we do well, and reaffirmation that relationships are key.

The day before I was pleased to be invited to The Big Thank You event for our foster carers – again it was good to reconnect with foster carers, and meet some new ones, and see colleagues from the Fostering Service. The support they receive from you as children’s social workers and from the Fostering Service is really important and I thank all of you for recognising them as colleagues.

I look forward to resuming team visits – see you soon 😊

Sheila

Pledges and reflections from the annual conference

“To be thoughtful and considerate with the language I use when talking about a young person”

“To make more time for reflection and take notice of how my feelings impact my work”

“To communicate with my colleagues especially when I’m struggling with my work”

“To build positive relationships with families and colleagues”

“To respectfully challenge my peers in pursuit of the best practice”

When we look back at the day, we observed the commitment to the theme of Relationships Matter across all staff groups and teams. We can think about the vibrant conversations stemming from Beth, Ella, and Dez.

A key takeaway that may not have been as prominent as other aspects was Dez’s reference to HOPE, if we were to connect this to the Relationships Matter then an appropriate acronym for all of us to take away in terms of what we do every day may be to think how we promote **HOPE**, how do we **Help Other People Excel**.

This especially resonates with the Leadership Team as they lead the service through the end of 2022 and approach preparation for 2023. The below graphic from Dez reflects how Relationships Matter and how we can collectively model and hold a mirror to our practice.

research
in practice

Role Modelling and mirroring

(Adapted by Child Centred Practice from Ofsted , 2010)



‘Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means .’

Albert Einstein

Expanding on her point, Dez posed the question, **if North Somerset Children's Services was a practitioner....**

What would they be like?

Heart: values, motivation, attitude, understanding why, how they manage pressure / conflict...

Head: knowledge, technical expertise, ideas, understanding what, how they think critically...

Hands: skills, tools, understanding how, behaviours...

Key Considerations

Relationships Matter, therefore, as we negotiate the systems in which we operate, we should reflect on practice and ask ourselves:

- **Are children and young people active partners in their own planning?**
- Do our skills, critical thinking, and relationships promote self-efficacy?
- How does our language influence our relationships and impact the lives of those we work with?

These are key considerations to keep in mind as we help children at different touch points when they travel in, through, and out of our organisation.

In the coming weeks we will develop the fundamentals which underpin our work and how we weave this into our practice and approach. The ideas are evolved through your contributions and work in group sessions so participation from staff is greatly appreciated.

Key points relating to Language that Cares is picked up in **Beth's bit**.

The Big Thank You

The day before the annual conference we had the opportunity to say thank you to our foster carers. Once again, a brilliant event organised by the superstars in the Fostering Service for the superhero carers.

The event itself was the first time in years to come together in person – an experience that everyone enjoyed as they reconnected and developed new relationships. Flowers were provided to those who have been our carers for over 30 years. A montage video from children, young people, and staff across the service was created and presented to showcase the admiration and gratitude

from all those who are touched, supported, and helped by these amazing people.

The keynote speaker was Judith A.M. Denton. Judith believes that stories have the power to change lives, and has written her story, 'Foster Care and Me' in a real-life narrative which openly details the challenges faced and overcome during her journey through the Foster Care System. Judith shares her experience of exclusions from school and college, a run in with the Law, and then as a Care Leaver, a period of poor mental health.

But thankfully her story doesn't end there and her presence at the event was emotive, inspirational and empowering.

Her handbook is **free and available to download:** '**The Foster Carers Superpowers**'



The event was a resounding success, mirroring the outstanding day to day work and contributions of our Fostering Service. So, in keeping with the theme, a **big thank you** must also be given to all our staff who give so much to support and deliver such an excellent service.

Fostering Service

Mockingbird update

2022 has been an exciting year for North Somerset Fostering Service regarding Mockingbird. We have three constellations that are all thriving, and we are about to launch our fourth constellation at the end of November.

During the summer months our constellation one home hub carers, Nick and Fran Hooper took part in a BBC Radio presentation hosted by BBC World Service. The series was called “People fixing the world”. It is a series that looks at problems in the world, ranging from climate crisis, how important technology is, and anything else that is relevant!!!! In each episode the presenters and guests talk through and discuss

solutions which are relevant to these questions.

When the BBC contacted us, we had no hesitation in asking Nick and Fran as they have been integral to our Mockingbird Journey right from when we first launched Mockingbird in North Somerset in 2019. Nick and Fran built our first constellation and have also helped and mentored our other two constellations, and now they are

helping us with our fourth!

Mockingbird is such an important model and really helps young people. It aims to replicate an extended family and helps to nurture relationships between children, young people, and their satellite families. The Hub Home carers are thought of as the “crucks” of the family who offer and support everyone involved, whenever they need it. Without our Hub Home carers Mockingbird in North Somerset would not be the success it is, and we really are extremely grateful for their loyalty, support, and commitment.



Lola the Therapy Dog

Children’s Services have recently received a highly qualified and passionate volunteer to help children and families in therapy. Her name is Lola, she’s a Spanish Greyhound and completed her ‘Petsastherapy’ certification to become a therapy dog in September.

Lola was rescued as a working dog chasing rabbits and vermin 6 years ago by Sebastian Symons (Family Support North) and she is thoroughly enjoying her recent career move.

Lola and her line manager Sebastian attended a one-day assessment which involved safety training, theory work, tests to display Lola’s control around distractions such as treats and toys. Lola now supports Sebastian in all his sessions including one-to-ones and group work.

Therapy dogs like Lola can help put people at ease when they’re confronting difficult topics in their lives. One of Lola’s projects has been to support a 10-week domestic abuse course running in Bournville School where attendees have been able to walk Lola, feel at ease, and work through difficult discussions.

Sebastian said,

“The feedback from children, families and managers has been really, really positive. Lola puts people at ease as soon as they walk into a room and she’s a great icebreaker when children meet with professionals”

Sebastian and Lola will soon be offering courses of one-to-one sessions with children in schools.

Youth Offending Service (YOS)

Education Engagement Project (EEP)

The Education Engagement Project in YOS works voluntarily with young people aged 10-18 years who are at serious risk of school exclusion due to behaviours associated with involvement, or risk of involvement, in exploitation or youth crime.

From referral, young people are allocated a preventative caseworker who initially meets with their school or education provider. They discuss barriers to the young person's education and how YOS can support their engagement with education to avoid further exclusion or school moves. The first meeting with a young person usually involves carrying out a full health and wellbeing assessment to inform the programme of work. Meetings with young people are often held in school but can be held in their home, in the YOS office in Weston-super-Mare, or in a community setting such as a park or café.



The project offers a range of interventions and services tailored to the needs of the individual but may include one-to-work support or group work such as:

- information, advice and guidance
- support and assessment from YOS Speech and Language Therapist where needs have been identified
- diversionary activities
- range of therapeutic interventions
- drug diversion sessions
- drugs education and harm reduction work
- work around knife crime and violent crime
- supporting young people involved in or at risk of exploitation
- referral to other services and support to access them
- support around emotional and mental health or managing feelings

Contact Lucy Frampton for further information or the YOS Admin Team for an EEP leaflet and referral form.

Email: yosadmin@n-somerset.gov.uk

UNICEF Gold Award for Family Wellbeing and Sirona Care and Health

The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) UK Baby Friendly Initiative Gold Award celebrates excellent and sustained practice in the support of infant feeding and parent-infant relationships. The gold award is the highest standard for services which are accredited as Baby Friendly by UNICEF UK.

Family Wellbeing and Sirona Care & health have achieved revalidation of the award for their Children's Centres and Health Visiting services for the second year running.

After being awarded gold status in 2020, the services go through an annual validation process. A portfolio of evidence is submitted to make sure the

services are maintaining their excellent standards.

In the feedback from this year's report assessors said they were 'delighted to see the quality of work that is being implemented by the service and the positive outcomes being achieved as a result.'



Family Wellbeing



New role:

Reducing Parental Conflict Coordinator (RPC)

The Family Wellbeing Team are excited to welcome Abi Holt as the new Reducing Parental Conflict Co-ordinator. Abi's role is key to ensuring we have a multi-agency response and recognition to parental conflict across all thresholds of support. This means preventative support is put in place at a universal level, through to the delivery of evidence-based programmes where targeted support is required.

Evidence suggests that conflict between parents, whether together or separated, can have a significant negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life outcomes. Not all conflict is damaging, but where it is frequent, intense, and poorly resolved, it can harm children's outcomes. The RPC Agenda is tasked with tackling parental conflict below the threshold of domestic abuse. We will be rolling out support, advice, and guidance for our service and partner agencies over the coming months.

As our RPC Coordinator, Abi will develop and implement a North Somerset-wide approach to inter-parental conflict, helping locally to raise the awareness of the importance of healthy relationships and managing communication. This will include supporting the development of an education and training plan, the delivery of evidence-based interventions, training where required, and providing consultation and guidance to multi-agency professionals.

New advanced parenting group: Parenting when separated – available in January 2023

Families going through separation can experience increased isolation and conflict. The Family Wellbeing Parenting Team are proud to announce a new, advanced parenting group to add to the parenting offer in North Somerset. With our 'Parenting When Separated Programme', we support parents to personally cope, and co-parent effectively, to help their children cope and thrive.

Parents learn to:

- solve co-parenting problems in a positive way which focuses on the needs of their children
- create practical arrangements for children that minimise stress and conflict
- improve communication with their children and with the other parent
- cope with the emotional impact of separation and learn stress management techniques
- help their children cope emotionally with separation
- deal with the challenges of lone parenting or being a 'live away'

To make a referral to any of our advanced parenting groups or to signpost parents, open your camera and follow the QR code or view [Advanced Parenting Groups on the North Somerset Online Directory](#).



Free Social Work Qualifications

The Frontline programme

The Council is a valued partner of The Frontline Organisation which offers training and practice development opportunities in the realm of social work. The organisation are currently accepting applications for the 2023 cohort of the Frontline programme.

The Frontline programme offers:

- fully funded master's qualification
- two years of intensive, paid training
- qualify in one year (compared to two years on a traditional master's course)
- earn while you learn working directly with children and families
- tax-free bursary in year 1
- newly qualified social worker's salary in year 2



[View The Frontline Organisation](#)

[View the Frontline programme brochure](#)

[Apply for the Frontline programme](#)

Apply with a 2.2 in any non-social work degree

In addition, this year Frontline are running a pilot scheme in conjunction with local authority partners. If you have two years' employment in a local authority in a role within child and family social work, you qualify to apply with a 2.2 in any bachelor's degree (except social work).

[Find out more about our other eligibility requirements.](#)

Updated Legal Guidance

Language that cares

Following increased focus on 'Language that Cares', Legal have confirmed that the term 'family time' can be used instead of 'contact' in documents, provided it's used consistently.

Documents on tri.x

All required forms for legal processes and legal work can be found in [tri.x in the Legal Processes area](#). The following documents have recently been reviewed and uploaded to tri.x:

- Pre-Proceedings Timeline Overview – ensures we track and measure our progress against the 16-week timescale and review at week 7 and 15
- Practice Guidance for Pre-Proceedings
- Review Pre-Proceedings Meeting Agenda

Pause Update



Pause is a pilot project launched in March 2022 in North Somerset for women who have their children removed and taken into care. The aim is to give the best possible support so that it never happens again. There is one practitioner with a full caseload of eight women. Pause is currently funded until August 2023, we hope to gain further funding and to become established in North Somerset.

Affected women have shared their experiences. Several reflections have said how during proceedings there are lots of professionals supporting them directly. However, once the decision for removal has been made, services fall away, and women are cut off from support – as well as losing their role as a mother.

Women report feeling lonely, some become more reliant on unhealthy coping mechanisms, and struggle to engage with debt/housing issues which may result in risk of losing housing. Women report feeling confused about where they stand with care proceedings and what they can and can't do. It is important to bear in mind that they may not have been able to take in this information the first time it was explained.

Research shows that women are more likely to become pregnant immediately after giving birth, immediately after removal of a child, and during care proceedings. Pause do not work with women to get children back

into their care. However, we can provide support around Family Time with their children.

Pause is working well in North Somerset. In the first year, referrals came from Children's Services. Through strategic meetings with partners, Pause are now asking for nominations so we can gather an accurate picture of need and provide a multi-agency response.

Pause work with women until they state themselves that they no longer want to work with us. We do our best to assertively engage women in the program. The work with women is completely varied, individual, and led by them. Work is built upon trusted-relationships and working closely with partner agencies is essential. We know the need is both great and diverse and therefore we are increasing engagement with other agencies. For example, helping women engage in appointments by ensuring that they have access to food, and working with agencies that can support this if it is an issue.

Beth's Bit

Bethany Swan, Young Director – North Somerset Council

Buckle up humans and non-humans because here we are, ready for our newest newsletter edition! Please try to hold your applause until the end of the article. 😊



This month has been an absolute rollercoaster of successes, technology issues and much, much more! I would like to talk about everything, but I think I'm going to concentrate on just one thing... and that is my personal highlight of the month, delivering our 'Language that Cares' presentation alongside my friend and colleague, Ella Bunting, at the staff conference.

Not only did it give me a chance to brush up on my performing arts skills, but it also allowed us to deliver a very key message: "Words have power".

Why do words have power you ask? Or maybe you didn't...but just play along anyway!

Well, just for a second quietly imagine this: If everyone you had ever met, decided to write a book about your life...would you want to read it?

Maybe you're thinking "yeah that doesn't sound too bad", or maybe you're thinking "goodness no, I couldn't imagine anything worse!". Each answer is up to YOUR personal preference. However, for our care experienced children and young adults this often isn't a preference.

Included in a Subject Access Request, young adults have access to masses of information written about them from every professional involved throughout their life.

Not only is the information itself often hard to digest but the language used can confuse them, or even become permanently damaging to a young person.

For extra impact at the conference, I brought along my own Subject Access Request with me. I wanted to have a physical representation of the amount of hard to digest and hard to understand documents we release to young people to read. Often, they come with no support to understand what words or even entire documents mean.

To elaborate a little more, within my documents, I was able to pick out things that had been written about me by professionals – and just to say that I was shocked at the number of times I had been labelled using negative words – who wouldn't then follow up describing what that physically looked like?

The two words I have taken directly from my documents are "Dirty" and "Disintegrating" ...



Let's get into it:

“Dirty” what is dirty? Was I dirty or was it my clothes? Did I have toothpaste on my uniform? Was my hair unbrushed? What is “dirty” to you could be different to your colleagues’ idea of what “dirty” is.

“Disintegrating” – What an odd word, were parts of me falling off? Was I drifting into space in the form little particles much like the Avengers at the end of Infinity War? Nope – the real context behind that was basically that my schoolwork was slipping!

I am lucky that I can advocate my support needs surrounding accessing my files – I have a fantastic support network inside and outside of the council – but that isn't the case for every young person. Not anywhere near the case at all.

If I can leave you with one final message and this is something Ella so brilliantly brought to the conference: “the ways in which we work will forever be changing and adapting”. However, the reason why we undertake the work we do will never change. To reiterate – our ways of working may change, but why we are working will not.

Not a final note but a little request – if your team has recently had a spotlight and you'd like to highlight some things you're proud of – please drop me an e-mail so I can include it in next month's piece!

(Quality Assurance Team I'm looking at you! 😊)

Finally, please enjoy your week and feel free to email over any questions, comments, or queries that you may have about this month's edition!

Meet our colleagues

Martyn Pudner, Quality Assurance Officer

Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has already welcomed me to North Somerset in my role as Quality Assurance Officer for Children's Services. I can already see a culture of support and friendliness which is great.

I moved to the Council after working in the Prison Service for nearly 20 years. During that time, I gained experience working and managing many complex areas, to name only a few; mental health intervention units, vulnerable adults, managing violent incidents, and chairing complex case reviews. My skillset in later years leaned towards areas that needed improving such as excessive violence, poor retention and

performance issues. As a prison governor, I found success in areas of quality assurance, performance, and positive staff/resident relationships. I look forward to bringing all my experience to the team.

I moved to North Somerset in the hope to have a positive impact, in my small way, to my local area, as well as enhancing my own work-life balance.

I look forward to meeting everyone over the coming



weeks. Please feel free to reach out and say hi, or if I can assist with anything (although I feel I might be the person asking all the questions for the first few months while I settled in).

Many thanks,
Martyn