

Noticeboard

**Children, Young People,
and Families Service**

February 2023

In this month's edition:

- + Practice week
- + Health and Well-being
- + HR updates
- + Congratulations and well done
- + Update from BAME
- + Mockingbird News
- + Children's support and safeguarding plan
- + Poetry Basket Resources
- + Maglug and your support for Children in Care
- + Your Life Your Care (Bright Spots)
- + Beth's Bit
- + Mind of My Own.

For feedback questions or queries please contact shelly.smith@n-somerset.gov.uk



Practice week

In January we did the second Practice week. This built upon the previous work we have done for Relationships Matter. Our staff survey highlighted the importance people place on relationships amongst colleagues and the need to create more opportunities for senior leaders to connect with those on the front line.



Sheila Smith opened the week and Becky Hopkins and Alison Stone both spent time on the Front Door. Both enjoyed the opportunity.

'It was clear that everyone understands the separate roles and touch points and there was a real energy and enthusiasm for the changes over the last 18 months or so and what is to come. It was lovely to hear how positive everyone is about closer working together and the opportunities this brings for confident decision making.'

- Becky Hopkins

Sheila worked with Alex Humphries and her team to outline how to do Signs of Safety Mapping for a particular family.

'many thanks for the collaborative work we did on the Signs of Safety mapping. I really appreciated the thought and care you put into your reflections and suggestions for Jas's work with the family. Thank you for all that you do for our children and their families – you were a credit to North Somerset today and I felt immensely proud of you all'.

- Sheila Smith

Shelley Caldwell visited the Parenting Team in the afternoon where she heard about having a strong practice for the benefit for children and families supported by our service.

On Tuesday, Carrie Yeates spent time with the UK resettlement Team and some of the families they support. The complexity and sensitivity of this work was obvious to Carrie. Councillor Gibbons spent time with Family Support and Safeguarding and Alison Stone spent time in the Children in Care Team. It was also the first of two practitioner sessions led by Christian Sweeney and Mike Rees. The topic was Relationship-Based Practice and this material was repeated on the Wednesday with Dawn Newton and Christian leading. There was fantastic input from everyone involved.

Also on the Tuesday was the first of three Appreciative Inquiry training sessions. 48 colleagues attended the three session and shared great feedback on them. Carrie Worth reported she saw it in action the very same day, so glad to see it had some immediate impact. The other training on offer to colleagues was run by Research in Practice, continuing with the theme of Relationship Based Practice, these three sessions on the Wednesday were full and again some great

feedbacks. Such was the positive feedback about both training sessions, we are looking to run more of these types of training sessions again in the future.

Wednesday was a busy day! Matt Greenhalgh joined foster panel and felt the panel asked some good questions and the decision making was rigorous. Mike Rees joined Family Support and Safeguarding and shadowed two home visits to families, where he was impressed with practice saying, *'Both social workers demonstrated good engagement skill and trusting relationships with parents/children including where some challenging messages had to be relayed.'*

Sheila joined the Care Leavers team in the afternoon and saw some effective team working and cohesion.

Now for the dog lovers amongst us, this would have been the highlight of the week had you been lucky enough to meet Lola the therapy dog, and this pleasure landed in Carrie's lap!

Thursday, I got to join the Early Help Hub, where colleagues showed me through various processes and how they link up to make the best possible decisions for children, I had a tour of the Carlton centre which is starting to look great and is an excellent location for a Family Hub. I spent time with the Placements Team where they took me through some of the challenges they must overcome when looking for homes for children, in what is a challenging climate currently. Finally I went to The Priory School where Ella Bunting and I met a group of our children in care. A busy and varied day but one that showed a diverse



range of the services we offer when supporting children and their families. Thursday also saw Becky met with a group of Foster Carers who really impressed Becky with their determination to do right by children, and Dawn Newton spent time with Family Support and Safeguarding. Finally, we got to Friday, and we still had energy left! In the morning Sheila spent time with the Children with Disabilities Team and joined colleagues on a home visit to meet a family. Again, another rich opportunity to see the impact upon children and families lives who we work alongside.



As all this was happening, Beth, Ella and Martyn were frantically trying to capture comments and reflections so they could produce a video for our closing celebration, for those of you who were not able to join us.

[Here is a link to a video of the closing celebration for Practice Week.](#)

Friday lunchtime we gathered at Castle Batch Children's Centre to celebrate the richness of the week and break bread (or to be more accurate eat cake) Thanks to Castle Batch for their hospitality. Sadly, there is only virtual cake left. On the upside, it is calorie free!

Huge thank you to everyone who took part, feedback so far has been the week was great. It created opportunity to build relationships, share practice and doing most of this face to face felt important.

'It has been fantastic to meet teams and foster carers as part of our good practice week – there is so much to be proud of!

- Becky Hopkins

Any ideas, suggestions for our 2024 Practice Week, feel free to send them through.

Jo Ratcliffe

Health and Wellbeing

There are a range of activities already in place if you want to do something to focus on your health and wellbeing. Please click on the link here to find out more: [Bitesize activities](#).

In February and March we have:

Menopause Café - March 7th @ 12:30 – 13:30 Relationships and menopause

April 5th

Sharon Hartman, menopause specialist

Reading for Wellness: March 13th @ 12:30 – 13:15

Connecting to a better you: April 4th @ 12:15 – 13:15

Meditation for wellness: Every second Friday @ 12:00

Face to Face wellbeing conversations for all: Feb 15th, March 15th @ 12:00

Room 108 Town Hall.

Yoga for wellness: Feb: 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th @ 09:15-09:45

Staff Coaching and Mentoring – Available to staff that are interested.

Staff can also access individual support (from public health advisors) if they wish to stop smoking, are experiencing domestic abuse or are breastfeeding.



HR Updates



Annual Leave Purchase Scheme

The window for being able to 'buy' additional annual leave will be open between 1 and 31 March. For more information please refer to the Annual Leave Purchase Scheme policy and accompanying FAQ's on the Intranet

- [Annual Leave Purchase Scheme Policy](#)
- [Annual Leave Purchase Scheme FAQ's](#)

Reference Policy

The reference policy has been reviewed. You will shortly be able to find it on the intranet accompanied by a recorded briefing for managers, a manager summary guide and FAQs. I would encourage all managers to have a look at this to ensure they are writing references in line with corporate policy.

Congratulations

Belinda Wilson

It is with great pleasure that I share the achievements of 3 Children's Services social workers.

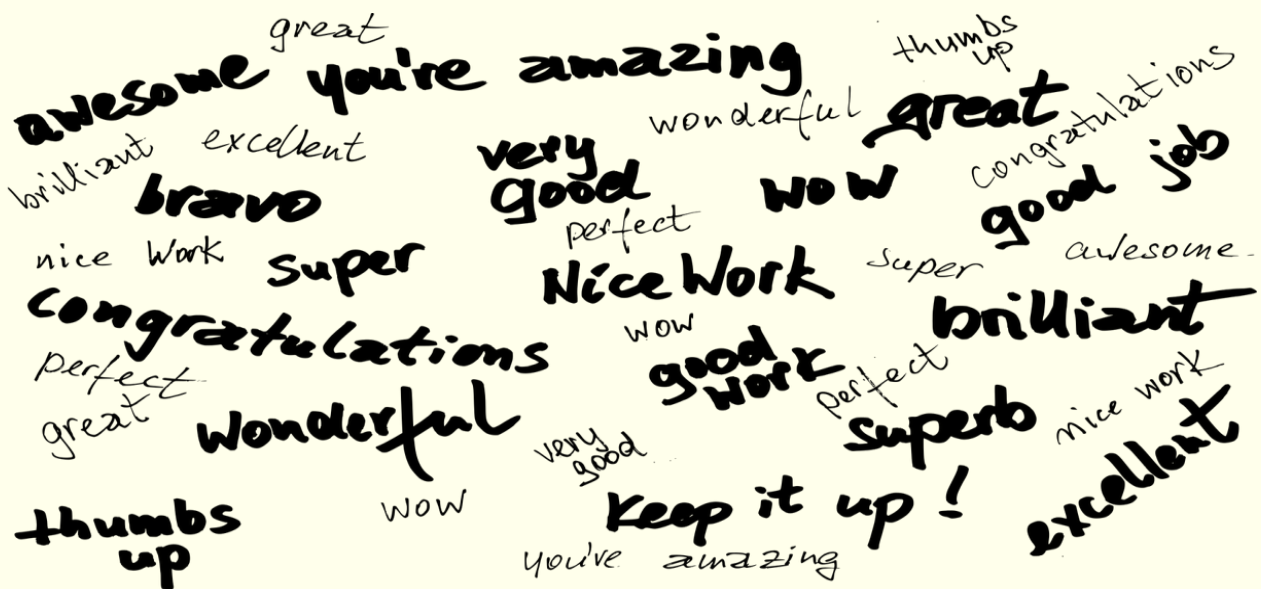
Not only have they risen to the ongoing challenges and demands on them as practitioners, but they have also provided student social workers with successful placements and met the requirements of the Practice Educators' Professional Standards (PEPS, BASW, 2019).

Many congratulations to Sam Board and Lauren Hill for achieving their stage 1 PEPS and to Josie Bennett for her stage 2 PEPS approval.

Their work has been validated by robust moderation processes.

Lauren's portfolio has been confirmed by both readers to be of such a high standard that it will be put forward as an exemplar for the region.

Josie has built on her stage 1 approval from last year to gain PEPS 2. Again, her essay, focussing on her development as a Practice Educator, will be shared with the region as an example of best practice.



BAME

Heena Crabb

I am proud to be co-chair of the Black, Asian Minority Ethnic, (BAME) Staff Forum which was formed after a Listening Event during lockdown 2020.

We currently have 27 members with 3 co-chairs and meet 6 times a year.

Peer Support sessions are an opportunity to discuss and reflect, in a safe confidential way, any issues or worries that may be taking place for members, either personally or professionally.

Our Corporate Action meetings look deeper in the council ways of working, policies and procedures and lots of rich conversations take place with senior leaders to take to corporate action to affect positive change within our council.

Last year we held a pilot scheme for something called Reverse Mentoring. This is a scheme which supports senior leaders to be mentored by staff from the BAME group to raise awareness of the barriers and challenges experienced by our staff. This relationship enables senior colleagues within the council to have a real understanding and perspective of the experiences of BAME staff members and to use this platform to look internally at our council and to make positive steps in becoming a more inclusive and diverse employer. It was this scheme that won us **The Respect Staff Award for 2022**.

I am really looking forward to continuing this great initiative and hoping many senior leaders sign up.

To mark **Black History Month this year**, the members met for the first time in person since the pandemic, contributed with some awareness raising articles in The Knowledge and engaged with colleagues from Town Hall library to select books that went on the BHM display.

As part of **Ways of working** the following was welcomed by staff

- The provision of a prayer room. This is currently being set up as part of a multi-function room for staff. More communication on this will be shared once the details have been finalised.
- The review and amendment of the Bereavement Policy to include the eventuality of support for travel abroad was very welcomed between the members of the group.
- Currently taking part in discussions relevant to BAME. Staff group members to address and influence the NSC Wellbeing Strategy.

And most importantly, NSC BAME Staff Forum welcomes the anti-racism statement released on 8th April 2022 and we are looking forward in working together with the Leadership Delivery Team to further develop North Somerset Council's Anti-racism action plan.

We have many aims for 2023 and I look forward to sharing with you more details.





Mockingbird Hub

Our Mockingbird hub supports 8 foster families and 15 young people. We celebrate Birthdays and fun times together, we are there for their successes and, crucially, during times of crisis as well. Our motto is “Expect the unexpected” we have to be prepared for anything 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Over the past three years, we have built strong trusting relationships with our carers and young people. We’ve done this with our monthly get together for families as well as our meetups with parents and carers. It’s the hub home’s role to coordinate these.

The challenges are finding activities that can meet the needs and interests of young people from 0-18 years, dates for the majority to attend and negotiating with venues the best price, to make it affordable to all. We like to try introducing a range of different activities to the young people such as paddle boarding, forest school, theatre trips or a hike up Crookes Peak.

This month it’s Ninja Warriors! Seeing the adults and young people having fun together, the laughter and the friendships that have developed is our reward.

This week, it’s a busy one as usual. A zoom chat to support an adoptive parent, a placement planning meeting, a CONSULT meeting, an introduction to a carer to see if she’d like to join our group, supporting new carers with their foster carer standards and our monthly adult meet up.

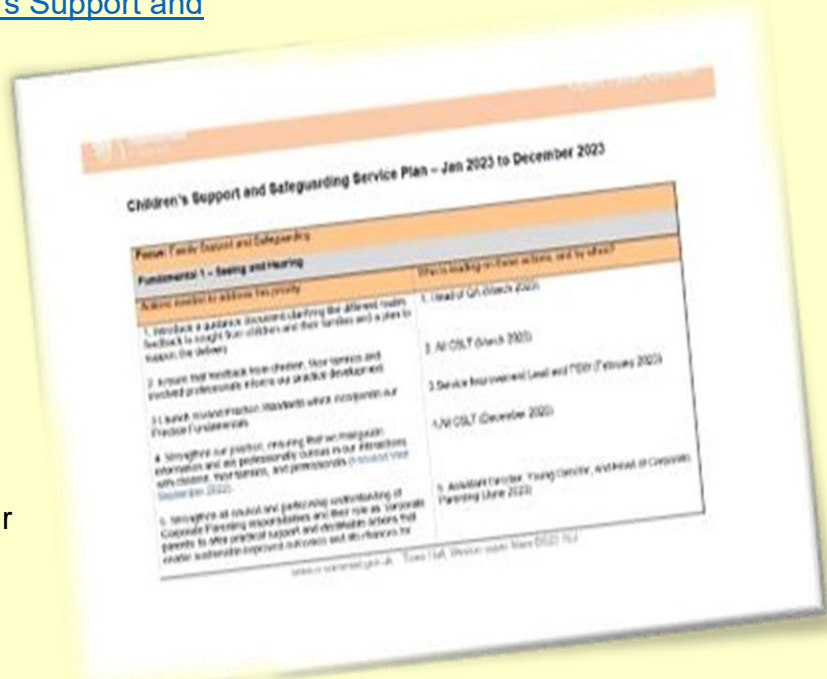
This month it’s Makaton training so that we can all support two nonverbal children that have joined us. These are the planned known activities for the week but there will also be the unknown and we must always be ready for it.

Children’s Support and Safeguarding Plan.

We are pleased to share our [Children’s Support and Safeguarding Service Plan for 2023](#), developed using our Practice Fundamentals which were launched at the staff conference in September 2022.

Each service area will have a plan which sits underneath and contains detailed actions relating to the teams you’re in.

Your Heads of Service will be sharing these plans with you over the coming weeks and will maintain a focus on our progress against them throughout the year.



The Poetry Basket

These are the videos of the Poetry Basket Poems made for the EY team to publish on Facebook. They are a really good resource for everyone working with children.

If you publish the poems, please acknowledge their source: The Poetry Basket was created by Make Believe Arts.

[Find out more about the Poetry Basket at Helicopter Stories under Online Learning.](#)

January- [I Can Build a Snowman](#)

February- [Popcorn](#)

March- [A Little Seed](#)

April- [Spring Wind](#)

May- [Pitter Patter](#)

June- [Under a Stone](#)

July- [The Fox](#)

August- [5 Little Peas](#)

September- [Leaves are Falling](#)

October- 5 Little Pumpkins (No video)

November- [Breezy Weather](#)

December- [Chop Chop](#)



Mental Health services

A free service to support you in taking care of yourself and the people around you!

VitaMinds works in partnership with the NHS in Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire to offer a range of short-term psychological therapies. It is a free service

[Further information](#) is available to download.

NHS
Bristol, North Somerset
and South Gloucestershire
Local Community Unit

in partnership with
vita
health group

How are you feeling?

We all experience times when we feel like we can't cope, sometimes this can start to affect our everyday lives and prevent us from doing the things we normally do. VitaMinds can help to improve your mental health and wellbeing.

VitaMinds works in partnership with the NHS in Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire to offer a range of short-term psychological therapies.

It is a free service

VitaMinds is your local NHS talking therapies service, known as IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies).

Arrange an appointment

- Scan the QR code
- Call us on 0333 200 1893
- Ask your GP to refer you to Vita
- vitahealthgroup.co.uk

Madlug Bags and Backpacks

We've been talking a lot recently about all of our roles as corporate parent to our children in care and care leavers.

You may have seen our presentation about this at the staff webinar or read something in the Knowledge. We really want everyone to keep our children and young people in mind and keep thinking about what you, as a corporate parent, can do to help.

Madlug are a social enterprise who not only sell bags and backpacks, for every bag bought, they donate a pack away travel bag to a child in care. We want to move past the days of children in care having their clothes and belongings packed into bin bags if they have to move. There are charities out there who support our children in care and help our children know that they are valued.

[Learn more about Madlug on their website.](#)



Family Support and Safeguarding

A development session was held where we launched our fundamentals action plan.

We heard from social workers who have had recognised success with children, young people and their families from using child and family led planning.

Alex Humphries, Team Manager Support and Safeguarding South, talked about how her team have achieved great work in this area

and are striving to consistently offer a family network meeting at the earliest opportunity to support the assessment and plan.

Paul James Social Worker from St Barnabas, North Team Family support and Safeguarding, Holly Flower and Jasmine Stabins from The Beach, South Family support and Safeguarding Team talked about their examples of successes.

My thanks to them all for sharing their work so we can develop practice across the teams. Thank you to everyone who brought their energy and focus to this event.

- Shelley Caldwell

Your Life, Your Care.

The 2023 Your Life, Your Care survey will run from Monday 20th February until Friday 31st March so children and young people across North Somerset can make their voices heard.

With the help of Coram Voice and the University of Oxford, we've put together 'Bright Spots' to improve the welfare of children and young people in the county. Through our Your Life, Your Care survey for children in care aged 4-17, we want to learn what our young people think of their social workers, carers, friends, hobbies, and feelings.



"I'm really pleased that the council is once again working with Coram Voice again this year on Bright Spots, the programme that involves distributing the Your Life, Your Care survey for all our children and young people in care aged 4-17.

Our young people were part of developing the first ever survey, and now the project has become a national research study that's delivered in local authorities across the country to identify how we can make changes that feel genuinely meaningful to children and young people in care. Making sure that we seek to hear the voices of children and young people in care and listen to what they tell us is part of our practice fundamentals that must remain at the heart of all we do.

I hope everyone will prioritise this by encouraging the children and young people they work with to complete the survey."

- Sheila Smith, Director of Children's Services.

Our children and young people were involved in developing the survey from the very beginning of the programme. These surveys are an essential part of how we improve the care we provide. The survey takes around 10 minutes to do. It is aimed at three different age groups: 4-7 (13 questions); 8-11 (35 questions) and 11-17 (50 questions).

Children and young people who take part will do so with an adult they trust who is not their primary carer or social worker. This could be a designated teacher, Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Independent Reviewing Officer (ISRO), family support worker, family time worker, etc. These professionals will help make those taking part feel safe to answer honestly. We need your help making sure children and young people's voices are heard by:

- Encouraging the children who you work with to fill the survey in
- Supporting children and young people who need help filling in the survey
- Informing us of children or young people you work with who may struggle to complete the survey in school and need extra support

For all questions about the survey, please email Brightspots@n-somerset.gov.uk or finley.kidd@n-somerset.gov.uk Finley Kidd: 01934 426839

Beth's Bit

Good day my fellow humans! What an exciting January it has been! I am over the moon to announce Mind of My Own training is still underway and available for people to book onto, however as of March we will be moving to one training session a month. There will be more information a little further down the page under the "Mind of My Own" heading.

So, before I go on too much about Mind of My Own, I would like to discuss some participation opportunities we have coming up and what participation we have been a part of this month. We have our "Awards Day" coming up and we are looking for young people to join us on a "young person's planning committee" to help us plan the right event for them. If any of your young people might like to be involved, please contact either myself at: Bethany.swann@n-somerset.gov.uk or Ella.Bunting@n-somerset.gov.uk.

As well as the awards day we also have an opportunity for children in care and care leavers to help North Somerset workers to develop a strategy for NS CAHMS/LD. We are looking for young people who might feel comfortable sharing experiences. Alternatively, they might want to help look at our language to make sure it is appropriate and understandable. It might even involve helping us to design some graphics to go on the document. There are lots of ways to get involved and by co-producing this strategy we know it will be beneficial.

The three key age groups we are hoping to have involved within this strategy:

- Under 11's (Year 5 and 6)
- 11 – 16 years old
- And our 16 – 25-year-olds.

If you have anyone that might be interested or if you have any further questions, please contact either myself or Finley Kidd at Finley.Kidd@n-somerset.gov.uk

One bright spot for myself was the involvement of a care experienced adult at our most recent foster panel and the forward plan to have her continually involved throughout the year. Our young person said she felt happy to be able to contribute and saw it as an experience she has really enjoyed so as a result she has been invited back as a paid panel member!

Mind Of My Own:

Since the release of the communication tool, we have had 134 workers sign up. We have had 26 One statements sent in and 15 express statements in.

Up at number one this month our top worker is:

Clare Towler!

Please e-mail me to arrange collecting your prize 😊



I love working with mind of my own as it gives me information that I may never get from a general chit chat with the young person. They love the interaction on the device and will ask questions and talk as they are filling it in. This leads to information gathering to look at support on a whole new level. I have used it as an engagement tool or sometimes in the middle of wishes and feeling to give the young person a choice on the direction of the conversation. It informs future conversations and when they are comfortable the older children will send me information about how they are feeling so you can start thinking of planning the next visit or changing the direct work pathway

- Clare Towler