

**Leicester City Children's Rights and
Participation Service**
2020/2021 Annual Report



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1. Introduction

Listening to children and young people lies at the very heart of Leicester City's commitment to improve outcomes for child and young people. This philosophy is fully aligned with Working Together 2018, which states that a child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives, and working in partnership with them and their families. Section 26A of the Children Act 1989 and DofE's guidance (March 2004) impose duties on local authorities in respect of provisions of advocacy service.

The Children's Rights and Participation Service is part of the wider Children's Safeguarding Unit and its role is to support participation structures for children, young people and parents across the wider Social Care and Education department, in line with the current legislation, national and local guidance. The services are delivered in ways designed to cater to the individual and collective needs of children, young people and parents across the city.

2. Executive Summary - Things we are very proud of

The past 12 months have been the busiest year for the Children's Rights and Participation Service; the start of the year saw us enter lockdown and thereby challenged us to think outside the box and find new ways of working.

Despite the initial teething problems, around online working and life in lockdown for young people, parents and staff, this has proven to be the most successful year to date for the city's Children's Participation Service, with a number of major achievements and accolades.

Our work has been nationally recognised with us winning national and local awards.

- **'Was Not Heard' - winner of the Recruitment & Professional Development Award from Children & Young People Now.** Also nominated for a Golden Trellick award for Best Documentary at the Portobello Film Festival



Was Not Heard was included in Public Health England's Psychological First Aid Training for professionals nationally with over 30,000 staff having accessed the training. Was Not Heard was also showcased worldwide on UNICEF's 'Voices of Youth' website. It is to date the most viewed film on the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership YouTube channel with over 34,000 views.

- **'The Words We Don't Say'** was selected to be shown at numerous film festivals, which is testament to the quality of the film. These included: • Little Wing Film Festival • Leigh Film Festival • Cine Youth Film Festival at Chicago Film Festival



- **Care Experienced Consultants' (CEC) Quaranteens project - winner of Best Project 2020 at National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF).** As a result of their national award, our CEC co-chairs were invited to co-deliver a national workshop for managers of care leaver services alongside NLCBF.



- The work of our participation projects saw the service's profile raised across the division, City council and partnership, with a **Certificate of achievement for**

outstanding contribution to the local community during the pandemic from Leicestershire Cares awarded to both the Young People Council's Quaranteens films and the Leicestershire Partnership Trust's Young Advisors Board for their **#TenSecondTips mental health campaign**. Our Cards from Care Campaign and Ten Second Tips were both covered by local BBC Radio.

The launch of **our Participation Approach** has seen us gain both national and international recognition for our application of the rights-based Lundy Model of young person participation. We are the first Local Authority in England to develop a rights-based Participation Approach and this compliments our strengths-based practice model embedded across Children's Social Care and Early Help. Professor Lundy has been actively involved in the development of the approach and we have benefited from her endorsement throughout

We also launched our **Children in Care Pledge** with our members of Generation Select.

The manager of the RaP Service has maintained the role of Chair of the East Midlands Participation Leads group. During the period of lockdown, the group met a number of times to ensure that participation practice wasn't compromised, and the group produced a regional statement, '**Still Hear**'. This document was disseminated through the region via the Directors of Children's Services group and was aimed at reminding regional leaders to ensure that participation was still a priority for children's services, the statement also showcased current practice taking place during lockdown.

We have been part of the Department for Education's consultation on the government's National Advocacy standards, about the importance of advocacy, what works well and what needs to change.

Children's Rights and Advocacy

Advocacy in its broader sense is about empowering children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and that their views and wishes are fully considered and reflected in decision making about their own lives. This is especially important for those times when children have a problem, concern or want to make a complaint.

The above principles, legislation and guidance, alongside our participation strategy, are the basis of our advocacy and children's rights offer. Leicester City is committed to promoting children and young people's rights to be informed, listened to and actively involved in decisions that affect them, as outlined in Article 12 of UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Our Advocacy Offer will ensure we fulfill this obligation and as such our offer is:

- A process of helping children to express themselves and be heard
- Empowering children to ensure their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard within CP and LAC processes.

- Focusing on what the child says they need and want.
- Supporting young people to attend conferences and Child who is Looked After reviews and be prepared well to be able to express their views in a variety of forms.

During 2020/2021 we supported 128 children and young people via our advocacy children's rights offers. As already alluded to, during the review period, we have all experienced the pandemic lockdown and its impact leading to all advocacy and children's rights sessions being moved online, using where possible MS Teams. This approach appears to have suited very well our young people (including younger children); in the period we had the youngest child in receipt of advocacy service - a 6-year-old. Our staff have ensured the children and young people are fully engaged by making the sessions interactive and interesting, using a variety of resources and worksheets.

All our advocacy work is being evaluated through the feedback gathered from young people. The feedback is overwhelming positive with evidence of real impact. An example is provided below:

'During this difficult and stressful but amazing period of my life growing my daughter in my stomach I have to say that my advocate R has helped me a lot. She has supported me and guided me in ways I never thought she could. She has been there every step of the way and helped me be heard by those who I felt never listened. Working with her has made me more optimistic and made me work harder and better towards a better future for me and my daughter. I want her to carry on working with me and assisting me during my assessment and meetings so that I can remain confident that my side is being put across.' (Young Person looked after)

3.1 Advocacy surgeries

This a bespoke offer available to all Leicester City Council's Children's Homes. During the period, 12 advocacy surgeries have taken place, some were virtual and some took place face to face, using the appropriate PPE. These are opportunities for children and young people in our care to have access to an independent advocate, advice and support.

3.2 ME Group

As a response to an increase in advocacy support for looked after young mums, we have developed a young mums group, ME. This is in partnership with a personal advisor from the Leaving Care Service and staff from Leicestershire Cares. The group have met several times, and are starting to shape their own programme, such that they are planning sessions on baby weaning, baby massage, healthy cooking, baby first aid. The group will eventually work towards becoming a participation group with young mums working with decision makers to shape services. Quotes from young people, social media posts and promotional materials are included in **Appendix 1**.

3. Young People's Council (YPC) and Care experienced Consultants (CEC)

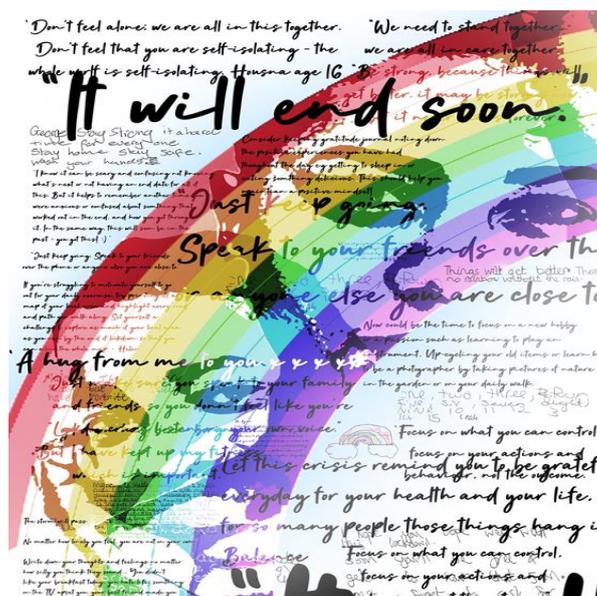
In the City, we facilitate two main participation groups:

- A) Our YPC is a participation project for young people aged 11 – 18, who are elected to represent areas of the City. The group work with officers and elected members on scrutiny of council decision making and services, and they campaign on young people's issues.
- B) Our Care Experienced Consultants is a participation youth group for young people aged 16 – 25 soon leaving or who have left care, who work with the Corporate Parenting Forum on shaping and evaluating services for young people looked after and care leavers.

During the period, both the YPC and CEC started developing strong partnerships, attending joint meetings working together on a lockdown social media campaign '*Quaran-teens*', - campaign aimed at supporting young people living in lockdown.

Staff and young people, using social media platforms, promoted positive 'Stay Safe' messages. The CEC joined Twitter and started to promote their profile.

The first campaign that Quaran-teens delivered was 'Cards from Care'. Members of the CEC designed postcards with positive messages on the front, and these were sent out to all young people in care, care leavers and staff. People were invited to send back their own message to young people living in lockdown. This campaign was well supported corporately, with the council Twitter profile showcasing it, and young people and staff were interviewed on BBC Radio Leicester about the campaign. All returned messages were turned into a piece of art with plans underway for its display at City Hall.



We launched a series of films for young people during lockdown, looking at how to live in lockdown, how to study at home, how to maintain good physical and mental health, how to stay safe, etc. We were able to produce Quaran-teen films with supporting messages from key decision makers, so that young people across the City could hear direct from them, help them to understand the issues, and more importantly be thanked for their hard work in sticking to lockdown regulations. We also used the Quaran-teens platform to make films for young people on other topics, such as supporting Mental Health Awareness Week and Carers Week 2020.

As the country was emerging from national restrictions, Leicester was facing an unprecedented rise in cases and were the first City to enter a local lockdown. In response, #Quaranteens was extended and we produced videos explaining the new restrictions. The YPC chair was invited on to local BBC radio to talk about the impact of the local lockdown. We recorded special #Quaranteens films for young people giving advice about the return to school, we were aware that anxiety about returning to educational establishments was high amongst young people, and Government advice was not clear for students.

As a response to the gap in participation projects for younger children, both within the cohort of children looked after but also across our open access participation offer, we developed *Quaran-tweens*. The project has included:

- ✓ Young Champions from Early Help were supported to script and film their first lockdown film.
- ✓ The Young Champions have also been involved in the promotion of Early Help Get Up & Go summer programme

The YPC and CEC met with numerous decision makers and partners; the young people led the meetings with their agendas which all centred around young people's concerns around covid-19 and life in lockdown.

They met with the Director of Public Health and one of the Public Health Consultants; the Strategic Director of SCE and the Director of Social Care and Early Help; the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and representatives from the Violence Reduction Network; the Heads of Service for Safeguarding Unit, Corporate Parenting, Early Help, Social Work Teams; the Lead for Speech and Language Therapy consultation; Oxford University; Leicester City Football Community Trust; the Corporate Parenting Forum; the Healthwatch Community Outreach Lead; and (again) the Violence Reduction Network - introduction to 'Mentors in Violence - Bystander Approach' etc

Young people and parent champions have supported various interview panels in the last year, including the recruitment of the Safer Children's Partnership Independent Advisor; a Senior Youth Worker - Youth Service; the Service Manager – Safeguarding Unit; the Head of Service - Inclusion and SEND; a Children's Commissioner; the Head of Service Early Help, etc

In response to feedback from young people who were receiving food parcels that young people weren't sure how to cook the food, the CEC created a closed Facebook group and launched ***Monday Night Dinner***, an online cooking session. Sessions were delivered by staff and young people themselves, using the ingredients delivered in the food parcels.

The CEC met with staff responsible for delivering the food parcels and were able to negotiate different ingredients to be added. The session also included a live quiz, delivered by a various members of the group. This was then brought back for a Christmas Cook-along with staff, elected members and care leavers.

Our lockdown programme became more extensive and much broader than we have ever offered before. We introduced open youth work sessions for all young people in care aged 12years+. We delivered two music projects, one a series of workshops on singing and song writing and the other on MC'ing. Feedback from young people was that "they would like to do it again", "made new friends", and "learnt new techniques to sing". One young person had access to the studio, where he collaborated with the tutor and recorded some songs. All young people received a certificate of participation.

4. Children in Care Generation Select

Children in Care Generation Select is a group of young people looked after, aged 11 – 16 years who run inquiries into services for children and young people looked after. The inquiry theme is '***What makes a good corporate parent?***'

Our Children in Care Generation Select panel have completed their training, have agreed their questions and key lines of enquiries and have met with the Directors. They have designed artwork for the inquiry. They are looking forward to being able to meet for the first time. Feedback received from foster carers of young people:

*"Hi Bez I'm so proud of young person I burst with pride she has come a long way, she is such a great role model to children in care I know she feels so passionate about making a difference, we always tell her to be proud of who you are, you guys are amazing too Bez it's so lovely too for us all to work together to change these young people's lives 😊" - *young person's name removed**

"Hi Bez,

That's so amazing to hear, thank you so much for taking the time to share with me. She absolutely loves doing generation select and at first wanted me to join her as she was nervous about her reading and writing abilities. Now she knows to embrace who she is and is growing so much in confidence and wants to do it all on her own! She always makes me very proud and I'm so happy with all the opportunities she's had since having Raakhee as her advocate. Thanks for everything you and your whole team are fab".

5. Environmental Youth Board (EYB)

We worked with young people from the County and joined forces with the local authority's sustainable school's co-ordinator, and explored how young people, locally, can contribute to plans to combat climate change, and we established Leicester City Environmental Youth Board. The group includes memberships from across our participation groups, local climate activists and City council, and their focus to develop achievable, climate actions plans.

6. Leicestershire Partnership Trust Youth Advisory Board (LPT YAB)

Since November 2019, we have supported the development and delivery of a youth advisory board for the Trust. This board was created as a direct result of recommendations from the YPC Generation Select report.

When lockdown started, we moved all their sessions to weekly, and all on MS Teams, they ran a very successful social media campaign 'Ten Second Tips', films to promote positive mental health during lockdown.

The group also carried out a series of mystery shops of the Chat Health text service. As a direct result of the mystery shop, an instant change to services was made by the Trust, following issues being shared with commissioners.

The work of the LPT Youth Advisory Board, has started to have real impact within LPT, their profile has risen, and the work has seen introduction of changes to services. The LPT Youth Advisory Board agreed to inspect and youth proof the young person specific website for health.

7. Participation approach #ThisIsLundy #ThisIsParticipation

The Local Authority's commitment to put the voice and participation of children and families at the heart of everything we do. This commitment has been formulated via our new Participation strategy, launched in October 2021. This approach is the first one of its kind (in England) based on the rights of children and the principles of the Lundy model of participation. We have the full support of Professor Lundy, from Queens University, Belfast who has worked with us very closely in developing and implementing our new approach.

The strategy was due for public consultation earlier in 2020, but due to lockdown this had to be slightly postponed. We have regrouped and worked with our colleagues from the Communications and Media Team to develop a virtual consultation platform. We started by initiating a social media conversation in order to gently introduce the concept of the new strategy and give advance notice that the consultation was coming soon. We used a new hashtag **#ThisIsLundy #ThisIsParticipation**. The public consultation for the strategy went live

Monday 13th July 2020 and the final Participation Approach was launched October 2020, and training has been delivered across the division.



'Every child has the right to freely express her or his views, in all matters affecting her or him, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity'

Since the Strategy's launch, the Participation Champions Training programme was initiated across the whole division. The four pillars of the Participation model are now evident/evidenced at key points during the child's journey through services.

8. Parent Community Development Workers

Parent Champions Workers are facilitating the participation of parents accessing early help services, in partnership with Coram. Champions support planning activities for families across children's centres, parent voice events and support recruitment processes of staff.

Young champions - participation project for young people aged 8 - 14 years for young people who access children's centres, they support planning and delivering activities at a local level.

The group have delivered

A) Get Up and Go Programme 2020

Following going into lockdown, plans were made to redesign the summer Get Up and Go offer, and so our virtual Get Up and Go was born! The idea was grown and developed in planning sessions where all members contributed to the thinking process and we all agreed

on the final product. Colleagues' creative imaginations ran riot, from water play using squeegee bottles, through to storytelling and using everyday objects in a creative way to teach counting skills and maths, all based around low cost, no cost ideas.

We produced a Get Up and Go (GUAG) activity pack, complete with resources and instruction cards, for families to undertake at home, in their gardens or local community space (restrictions permitting). The Young Champions and Parent Champions planned to video all the activities and post them on Facebook, with a different activity for every day of the school holiday.

All the GUAG activity cards were also posted on our web page for families to download if they wanted to. These activity cards will remain there as a future creative resource. The group had to be mindful of costs, so it was agreed that 1000 bags and activity packs would be produced, put together and distributed to the families in greatest need in the city. As families needing emergency help and resources due to COVID 19 had already been identified via the city council social care and early help division, a group decision was taken to use this information to inform to whom we should prioritise delivery of our resources.

Delivery of the bags to families commenced on the first day of the summer break, following the very successful virtual launch of this year's scheme which involved a very creative video clip featuring Head of Service – Jackie Difolco, but included Parent Champions, Young Champions and other partners.

B) Parents Voice events

We have completed parents' voice and teen parents' events. All forum meetings have taken place on Teams and recruitment has been through social media and cluster managers. The first parent voice meetings asked 'what services have the parents used and what were the most helpful' and 'how might we improve and what would you like to see more of'. Feedback from parents has been shared with cluster managers. All parents who took part received a voucher for participating.

For the teen parents' event, we worked with two other professionals, a team manager from children's centre and a professional from a charity called Fun with Families. The idea was to work with the teenage parents from Fun with Families because teenage parents do not use children's centres services as much, so that they could give us their feedback about Early Help and children, young people & families services and inform us of future services, a full report for this forum is currently being prepared. Our parent champions are currently planning the next parent forum events, in the hope of recruiting more champions.

9. Next Steps

Capacity has remained the biggest challenge for the service throughout the year. As demand has grown, the service has responded well and managed to grow our offer, however we are now at a stage when the structure of the service and its remits need to be redefined. Therefore, an Organisational Review is scheduled to be undertaken in 2021.

As a service priority, we aim to:

-  Promote and support the full implementation of our Participation Approach across the whole division
-  Ensure children's and adults' co-production at all levels of service delivery
-  Conclude the First Generation Select Inquiry – Children In Care
-  Expand the 'Mystery Shopper' type programmes across the Children's Social Care and Early Help division
-  Develop a range of performance indicators to ensure timeliness of our service delivery around advocacy and Children's Rights

Bez Martin
Engagement and Participation Manager