

**Brent Council Children and Young People****Annual report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers****Period of review: 01/04/16 to 31/03/17**

This report outlines the contribution and participation of Looked after Children and Care Leavers in improving services for children in care. This report was developed with the contribution of children and young people and references a 'Bright Spots' survey conducted in March 2017. Some feedback from children and young people is included in quotations.

*'You listen to our views and discuss how you'll enforce them into the system. The system has bettered because of our contribution'*

**1. Summary of key messages****What children and young people said has gone well**

- The profile of the Care in Action (CIA) group was raised through awareness events held throughout the year.
- Participation on the recruitment panels for staff including senior managers was empowering and helped choose the right people to work in Brent.
- Participating in the Bright Spots survey with Coram Voice in partnership with Bristol University and Brent Council gave children and young people another opportunity to express their views. CIA supported with getting young people to participate, leading to 33 % of Brent's looked after children taking part.
- Working on the Brent Pledge and Care Leaver's Charter let children and young people in care know what they should expect from Brent.

*'Being part of Care in Action helped me to become more confident and I now speak out more'*

**What children and young people said needs to improve**

- Although CIA do not want the groups to be too big, it would be good to have more people involved.
- There currently is not an achievement award for Care Leavers. CIA would like to develop a Care Leavers achievement award.

- CIA members said that some social workers have left Brent and have not said goodbye. One young person said that this made him feel really angry and impacted on his education. As a result CIA will conduct a survey on the 'saying goodbye in a healthy way', the young people's chosen campaign theme and share the outcome with relevant teams.
- CIA want to be able to contact social workers when they need to, get a response to their query swiftly and reduce the frequency of the change of social workers.

*'My last social worker has written a letter informing me that she was leaving she is the third one to leave in a short period, I wish she stayed'*

## 2. Priorities from the 2016 – 2018 Looked after Children Participation Strategy

**Priority 1:** To provide opportunities for children and young people in care to shape and influence the parenting they receive, both in relation to their individual care and the overall strategy for Brent Looked after Children.

Looked after Children and Care Leavers have shaped and influenced services over the past year. They were consulted on the proposed structural change for the youth services; part of the interview panel for the recruitment of two Operational Directors, four Heads of Service and other staff for CYP; included in the consultations on a number of issues such as the setting up of a separate Leaving Care Team; and reviewing the Personal Educational Plan (PEP) template.

**Priority 2:** To increase children and young people's knowledge about the participation service and the different opportunities to have their views heard, including promoting how to contact the Participation Workers and Brent Care in Action.

The three participation groups currently have 18 members, consisting of 8 members of Care leavers In Action (CLIA), 7 members of Care in Action (CIA) and 3 members of Junior Care in Action (JCIA). A leaflet has been developed informing children and young people about the existence and work of the participation service. As part of the recruitment drive CIA presented at the Celebration of Achievement event and raised awareness of the participation service. Increasing membership will be an ongoing focus in 2017/18.

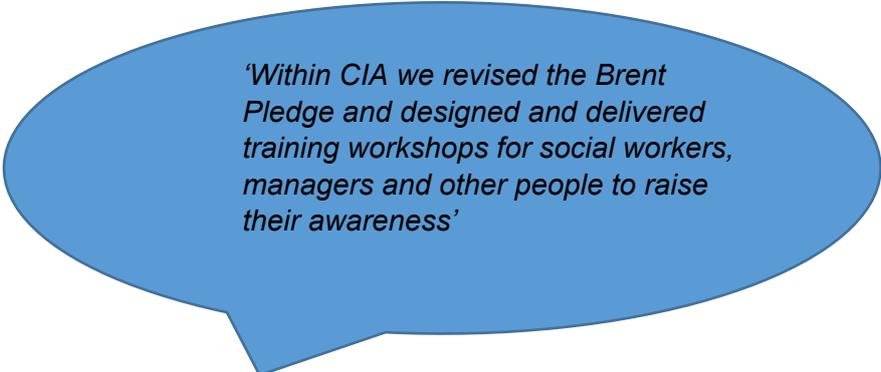
*'Care in Action helps me to speak out and feel confident in myself. I am able to make new friends that help me get through my problems'*

**Priority 3:** To raise awareness and profile of participation and consultation amongst staff, foster carers and corporate parents so they are more supportive of young people's attendance and involvement of participation within children and young people services and other partner agencies.

Members of CIA are part of the Corporate Parenting Committee and have representation at each meeting. The lead member for children and young people, the Strategic Director, Operational Directors, a number of Heads of Service and other professionals regularly attend CIA meetings. Young people have fed back that they appreciate and value this proactive approach by senior officers and have used the opportunity to raise issues relevant to them.

A member of CIA presented at the annual Foster Carers Conference on the importance of stable placements. Members of CIA have also been part of training for staff, foster carers and work with other partners such as the LSCB.

Two members of CIA also joined Brent Youth parliament (BYP) this year



*'Within CIA we revised the Brent Pledge and designed and delivered training workshops for social workers, managers and other people to raise their awareness'*

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#### *Case study: Lisa*

*Lisa is a 16 year old who came into care as a young child. Her IRO encouraged her to join CIA to help build her confidence. Since joining, Lisa has been involved in events and did a great job presenting to a group of young people, professionals and foster carers at the achievement awards.*

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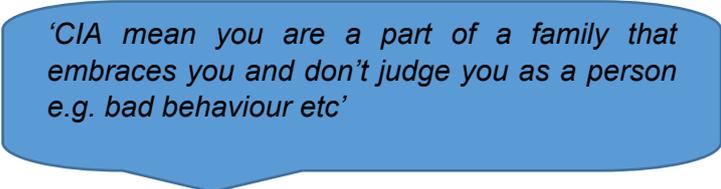
*'I participate in more things and am more confident as a person'*

### **3. Support for Care in Action**

The children in care participation officer supports Care in Action. This role was integrated into Review, Engagement and Participation Team in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service in January 2017. The Review, Engagement and Participation team includes Independent Reviewing Officers, Engagement and Participation Officers across CYP. This has increased independence from frontline operational services as well as encouraging collaboration with IRO's. Consideration is being given to the amount of support provided to the CIA groups, particularly with the ambition to increase membership.

### **4. Key Events and Activities**

CIA meets twice a month whilst the Junior Care in Action (JCIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) meet once a month. Please see Appendix 1 for a full list of events and activities.



*'CIA mean you are a part of a family that embraces you and don't judge you as a person e.g. bad behaviour etc'*

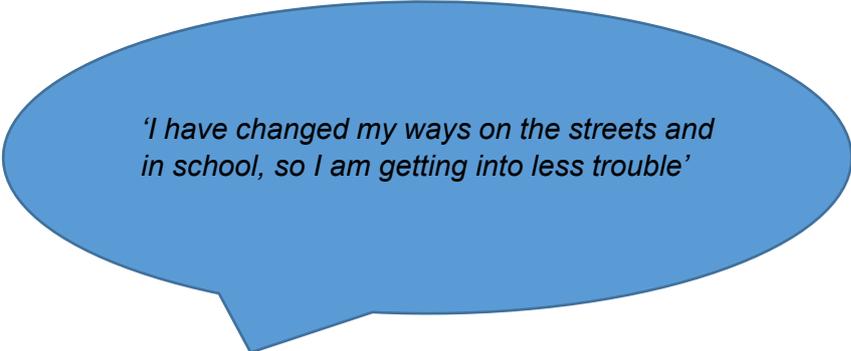
## 5. Debating Society

Two CIA members have joined the monthly debating society that is run at the Yellow Pavilion in Wembley Park and attend this on a regular bases. This is open to all children and young people.

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*Amara is 12 years old and her new foster carer encouraged her to join CIA. Amara started in the junior group before joining the main group. Amara said that CIA has helped her become more confident and she is now part of the debating society. Amara said she is able to help other looked after children.*

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*'I have changed my ways on the streets and in school, so I am getting into less trouble'*

## 6. Bright Spots Survey

Brent took part in an online survey called “Your Life, Your Care” conducted by Coram in partnership with Bristol University in March 2017. The survey looked at the wellbeing of looked after children on a variety of issues which will provide Brent with an overview of children’s views.

The participation officer took an active part in coordinating this and facilitating the CIA to promote the survey being completed. Other staff from across the department including Virtual School and Looked after Children and Permanency service were key players in promoting the completion of the survey. As a result, a total of 96 (33%) Children and Young people looked after filled out the survey.

A summary of the survey has been shared with the working group as well as senior managers within CYP with a view to disseminating the results to all Looked after Children. An action plan will be developed to address the key issues with the input of CIA.

## 7. Building Partnership with the Corporate Parenting Committee

The chair and representatives from Care in Action attend the Corporate Parenting Committee quarterly meetings to share children and young people’s views. Over the last year, young people trained the committee members about the Brent Pledge.

## 8. Meeting with senior leaders

The Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children and Young People attend Care in Action meetings on a regular basis. The Strategic Director and Lead Member have attended five meeting over the past year and have participated in group discussions and activities with young people. The Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes attended a joint CLIA and CIA meeting. He used the

time to find out what issues the young people were facing in their lives and what service improvements they would like to see in the future.

The children and young people say that they value the proactive approach of senior officers and elected members. They have made full use of these sessions to raise issues, influence, shape and input into policy and other major changes being proposed.

## **9. London Participation Network meeting**

The participation officer continues to attend London wide quarterly meetings for participation officers. The meetings are a support network, where officers share initiatives that are happening in their borough. The meeting covered topics such as a starter pack for care leavers who are going to university or moving into semi-independent living. Brent hosted the most recent meeting in April 2017.

## **10. Participation officer attendance at team meetings**

The participation officer continues to attend Team meetings within Children and Young People's Services in order to raise awareness, promote Care in Action activities and events for children and young people.

## **11. Foster Carers' Newsletter and Support Group**

There is a regular Care in Action update in the Fostering Newsletter sent out to all Brent foster carers, informing carers of the work of Care in Action and promoting the groups and any upcoming events. In order to recruit new members for the groups, the Participation Officers have attended the Foster Carers' Support Group meetings. They have also been involved in training foster carers and other professionals.

## **12. Priority Areas for 2017/18**

1. To recruit more children and young people and increase members of JCIA from 3 to 8 active members, CIA from 7 to 11 active members and CLIA members from 8 to 12 active members.
2. Arrange the annual Summer Fun Day. Thirty five children and young people attended the event last year. By working with the Participation Champions to promote the event there is a target to increase attendance to at least 50 - 60 young people.
3. Arrange the first care leavers' celebration event in partnership with the Leaving Care Team and other partners.
4. To work with CIA on their chosen theme for campaigning, 'saying good bye in a healthy way', the impact of this and share the outcome with relevant services.
5. To share the learning from the Bright Spots Survey with looked after children through Care in Action (junior and senior) groups and work with them to share the results with staff and the Corporate Parenting Committee. This includes feedback about getting in touch with social workers and changes of social worker.
6. To complete the Bright Spots Survey in 2018/19 and to improve participating in this survey from 33% to 40%.
7. Develop a new Looked after Children participation strategy and align this with the wider Brent children and young people engagement strategy.

Shirley Rickets, Participation Officer

Goitom Mebrahtu Review, Engagement & Participation Team Manager

Sonya Kalyniak, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

## Appendix 1: Key Care in Action activities and events in 2016/17

Date	Activity	Outcomes
Apr 16 (All groups)	CIA members designed a workshop for to give full awareness of the Brent pledge to professionals and Foster Carers.	In June 16, CIA members delivered workshops to professionals to raise awareness of the Brent Pledge and gather professional's views. At the end of the workshops, the professionals' were asked to sign a commitment to say that they would attend an event to promote the Brent Pledge and Care Leaver's Charter. 35 professionals pledged to come to the launch of the pledge and charter. They also signed to say that they would bring some of their young people to an event to promote the Pledge and Charter. From the evaluation forms the professionals who attended the event pledged to raise awareness of the pledge and charter amongst their children and young people.
May 16 (JCIA and CIA)  CIA and CLIA	Advisory Teachers for Brent Virtual School visited the CIA group to find out their views on the existing PEP forms.  Big House Theatre	Views of the children and young people, were incorporated into new PEP forms that were introduced in September 2016.  Ten young people went to see a production of "Knife Edge" with a cast of the play that was made up mainly of care experienced young people. From the feedback received, this was a positive experience for the young people.
July 2016 (CLIA)  (All groups)	A Participation Officer accompanied two young people to an introductory session workshop run by "MyBank". The purpose of the workshops were to help young people to prepare for financial stability.  A group of children and young people went to a trip to Oxygen Free jumping in Park Royal. This was followed by a meal at Pizza Hut.	The young people found this helpful and gained more insight and understanding on budgeting and financial stability. There are plans for the Connexions Service in partnership with the Leaving Care team to run more workshops in the future.  10 young people attended

July 2016 (CLIA)	Awareness on The Challenge, a programme through the National Citizen Service (NCS). This is an intensive, part-residential programme followed by a number of social action days, designed to empower young people to meaningfully impact their local community and gain new life skills.	A Participation Worker shared information and promoted the scheme with social workers and the CIA members.
August 2016 (JCIA and CIA)	Summer fun day. The young people reviewed the previous year's fun day, considered what activities they would like to see in the next fun day. They decided that there needed to be more activities for teenage boys, came up with the idea of having someone who could teach a martial art and a fitness zone which was adopted.	35 Children and young people attended the fun day hosted at the Bridge Park complex.
April - Nov 16(CLIA and other care leavers)	Participation on young people's interview panels	Young people contributed to the recruitment of the two Operational Directors and four Heads of Service.
October 2016 (CLIA and other care leavers)	<p>An event to mark "National Care Leavers week" was organised. They considered the achievements that they had already made and the things that they would like to achieve.</p> <p>There were presentations from 3 care leavers about their experience of leaving care and the difficulties that they have faced and where they are now in their lives.</p> <p>The event was attended by the Strategic Director, a number of Senior Managers, foster carers and other staff.</p>	<p>17 young people attended. They shared their views about what is going well, what is not going so well and what needs to change.</p> <p>The feedback from the activity was taken away by the HOS for LAC and Permanency for action where possible.</p>
October 2016 (CIA)	Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) "Voice of the child" Conference, hosted by CAFCASS. The conference looked at the experience of children who are subject to care proceedings. Presentations included by the President of the Family Court Division, and the Chief Executive of CAFCASS.	Three members of Care in Action attended with the Participation Officer and Team Manager.
November 2016	Foster Carers' conference	A care leaver attended Brent

		Foster carers' conference. He spoke of his experience of being in Foster Care and the importance of stable placement.
January 2017 (CLIA)	Connexions consulted with the group on the barriers that prevent Care Leavers accessing and remaining in education and Employment. They said that they would like help with budget and employment issues.	The young people's views will help to inform the programme of workshops that Connexions aim to put on for Care Leavers.
January 2017 (JCIA)  (JCIA and CIA)	LAC review quiz  Celebration of Achievement - Care in Action members stalled a stall and ran a recruitment drive as well as doing presentation on the benefits of joining Care in Action group at the Celebration of Achievement event.	Most of the children were also aware of the process of the LAC review.  The young people's presentation was well received and as a result two children expressed interest in joining the group.
January 2017(JCIA and CIA)	National Children's Bureau consultation The young people were asked a number of questions about how their wellbeing is measured and who measures their wellbeing.	The overall findings of the research will be used to help to improve the care that looked after children are given and to influence national policy and practice. The NCB will provide a copy of their findings which the Participation Officer will share with the children and young people who were consulted.
February 2017(CIA)	The Participation officer attended Brent Youth Parliament with two Looked after children who were identified to join Youth parliament	Two Looked after Children are now members of Brent Youth Parliament and one of them put her name forward to be considered for the executive group. Though she was not successful this time round she will be encouraged and supported in applying again in the future.
February 2017 (CIA)	The CIA members considered and discussed the campaign theme they would like to work on.	CIA chose to look at the impact 'Saying goodbye in a healthy way' when social workers leave the department. The young people would like to find the impact this has on looked after children through different methods and will consider who they will share the findings and recommendations with.
March 2017 (CIA)	In preparation for the professional workshops on missing from home/care return	The young people's feedback was presented to a group of social workers at a return to

(CIA)	<p>interviews, the CIA members were asked to think about questions that could be included in the return interviews. They were also asked to consider who would be the best person to carry out such interviews.</p> <p>The Service Manager for the Inclusion Service visited the group to find out what targeted provisions if any, the young people would like to see in the borough.</p>	<p>home interview workshop and this has now been made part of the regular training on conducting return home interviews.</p> <p>The Service Manager will come back to a future meeting to inform the young people how their views have been utilised to shape the targeted service for young people.</p>
March 2017 (CIA and CLIA)	Dr Sam Wolfe and Dr Helen Watson from New Beginnings visited the young people to find out who inspires and motivates them to consider going to university in the future.	The views of the young people will be used in a proposal to Central Government for funding. Sam and Helen have agreed to come back to inform how the project has developed.