

Rotherham Looked After Children's Council & Lil' LAC CLUB November Update- Corporate Parenting Panel

The LAC Council and Lil' LAC Club have creatively adapted the way we are engaging with each other during the Coronavirus pandemic. We have seen a shift from face to face group weekly meetings to holding virtual meetings on Zoom and more recently MS Teams. These were challenging times as some of our young people didn't have the digital technology or know-how or strong enough signal to use it effectively which were real barriers to their engagement. Over the first 6 months we reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel and shared all the fantastic things our young people were engaging with and activities that had been provided specifically tailored to meet their needs to keep our children connected, maintain social capital, to support their mental well being and resilience. These have included, creating a Newsletter for the Residential young people, engaging in Zoom Activities and LAC Affinity Summer programme to support connectedness and social capital, in the Coram Voice Writing competition giving them opportunities to reflect and express themselves and their lived experience of Covid, plus engaging in Work-Wise Summer Academy to support and explore their future work ambitions.

Young people have faced many challenges, emotionally, educationally and socially as they have navigated through the corona-coaster of changes to their lives. Global research into the impact of COVID 19 indicates that young people's mental health is greatly affected when faced with a public health emergency, couple this with the complex vulnerabilities of our Looked After Children, which is exacerbated through isolation from the few friends that they may have at the LAC Council then you may understand the importance of supporting and meeting our young people's needs head on.

These changes have affected not only the way we have worked together with LAC Council & Lil' LAC Club members over this period but has also shifted the focus of our 'meetings' from Voice & Influence work to 'LACC Chats' supporting individuals and meeting their needs, talking through changes, feelings, worries, sending out information, providing Affinity Tablets to those who could not access the virtual technology and help them keep connected with the outside world, providing Bags of Care full of arts, crafts, reading materials and bath bombs, to help raise their spirits, to give our most vulnerable something else to focus on etc. We have seen a shift from group working to engaging with our young people individually via text, phone, emails, facetime and meeting with individuals face to face.

However, we have found that the Virtual LAC meetings or chats for our young people are no way comparable to the real connectivity of engaging with each other face to face, and do not meet the psychological needs of human interaction efficiently. The forced etiquette of virtual meetings whereby only one person may speak at a time, restricted view of a person as head and shoulders, lack of non-verbal cues during interaction collectively add to the artificiality. The young people feel unmotivated, uninspired and bored with the artificiality of virtual contact that undermines their sustained engagement as they feel inhibited, don't feel as connected to each other and just

aren't as much fun. Feeling saturated with online learning and meetings over this period they are experiencing ZOOM GLOOM.

Since our last CPP update our LAC Council have been supported individually, having 1:1 catch up meetings face to face, talking on the phone, texting, facetimeing and even emailing each other. We continue to work together to explore other models of group engagement that will sit alongside increased individual support to better meet the LAC Council & Lil LAC Clubs needs throughout the second wave.

The LAC Council would like to thank all of our friends, families, foster carers & social workers for their continued support.

Thank You! 😊

Authors Contact Name: Lisa Du-Valle
LAC Voice, Influence & Participation Lead
Children in Care
Tel: 01709 822130 or Mob: 07748143388
Email: lisa.duvalle@rotherham.gov.uk



@LACCRotherham



LACC Rotherham