

Corporate Parenting Board

Date: 15th February 2022

Title of report: Progress report – ‘Elevating young peoples’ voices in digital resilience’ – ‘Digiwise’

Purpose of report: The purpose of this paper is to provide a progress report to members of the Board in relation to the ‘Digiwise’ project which covers ‘digital parenting’ in respect of Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

Key Decisions - To note the progress
To continue support for the project
To agree to consider the final policy document, once developed.

Date signed off by the Director of Children’s Services:

DMT Date: Thursday: 03 February 2022

Cabinet Member Portfolio Lead: Cllr Mieka Smiles.

1. Summary report

In March 2021, Middlesbrough Council were successful in a funding application for £36,220 which is to research, consult and produce a policy/practice document for digital parenting for Children Looked After and Children Leaving Care.

Funding by Parentzone and Nominet has been allocated to 9 interlinked projects under 3 key areas of which Middlesbrough’s sits within Design Challenge 3, that is:

*Elevating young peoples’ voice to influence the services that **impact on their digital safety and opportunity**.*

*Care experienced young people have invaluable insight which is currently **unde used in relation to digital and online safety policy development**.*

More specifically the project is to ensure care experienced young people can influence the service policies, process and practice that impact on their digital lives, we need to extend participation; and diversify and improve channels of communication and feedback.

This is based on significant risks posed to Children Looked After (CLA) being at risk of online grooming and exploitation, exposure pornography, peer pressure to send youth produced sexual imagery and access to drug sales and other harmful products.

Since its inception, the project has:

- a) Employed an apprentice who has care experience
- b) Utilising the wider national project the Middlesbrough project lead and the apprentice have been trained in ‘The Theory of Change’
- c) Consulted with young people and established the name ‘Digiwise’
- d) Formed a Steer Group to advise on key issues
- e) Developed an action plan which drives the project
- f) Hosted a care leavers football match and consultation event at Middlesbrough Football Community Foundation
- g) Designed and implemented a consultation survey for young people with care experience
- h) Designed a consultation survey for Foster Carers, Residential Workers and Social Workers.
- i) Is in the process of undertaking all consultation in g) and h) above

The project has seen delays in recruitment of our care experienced young person caused by the COVID back log on DBS checks. However the apprentice has now started and has a clear passion for engagement with working young people.

As a result, the target set to complete the young person consultation by the end of January 2022 has been delayed until the 28th February 2022 due to issues in recruitment. This should not impact on the final completion date of the whole project which is January 2023.

Early indications from the young peoples' survey shows:

- 100% are accessing the internet
- 93% access 1 or more social media account as their main activity
- 60% of the young people surveyed are going online for more than 8 hours per week,
- 87% are using their smartphone as the main device to access the internet, but choosing their own data plans over the residential home internet connection, this is because they have unlimited access data plans (this potentially poses a risk if there are no filters or controls enabled)
- 60% of young people surveyed reported that they had seen the sale of drugs on their social media
- 33% had requests to send youth produced sexual imagery (Indecent images)
- 73% had seen fake news reports

One outcome of the project so far has been the introduction of Foster Carers to introduce the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Digital Passport (government backed), provides structure and safer conversations, for both the child and the carer. It allows children to express their feelings, hopes and interests and to talk about all digital focused issues why these are important.

The project will continue with a survey for Foster Carers, Social Workers and Residential Workers. This survey is with our consultation portal and expected to be live by end of January 2022, which will also inform the final policy which will be expected to be finalised and rolled out for mid-October 2022.

The next update for this board will be in June/July 2022.

2. Background Papers and History of Decisions (where applicable)

To support the recommendation for use and adoption of the Digital Passport for Children Looked After (CLA) [UKCIS Digital Passport - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukc-is-digital-passport)

To request all professionals working with children in our care to complete the Digiwise survey with our young people [MCM Toolkit - Middlesbrough Children Matter](#)

3. Contact officer: **Ralph Jordinson, Risk and Resilience Coordinator**

4. Director responsible: **Sue Butcher, Executive Director, Children's Services**