

Next Steps

Welcome to the Autumn Edition of our newsletter for those of you aged 16+.

We want to make this newsletter full of lots of useful information to help you think about the choices you have to make as you get older.

We also want to hear about you and what you are up to! Email us at VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk or via the Kent Cares Town website.

VSK PARTICIPATION TEAM



Included in this Issue:

- Staff Update
- YAC
- Rob and Tom's Top Tips for cheaper shopping bills!
- County Wide
- Recruit Crew
- MOMO
- Activity Days
- Accommodation
- Co-Production
- 18+ Open Day
- 16+ Awards Ceremony
- Kent Cares Town

We would also like to introduce
Paul Manning,
Deputy Head for Achievement and Standards Key Stage 5, VSK

I joined VSK in August 2018 after working in Further Education for 16 years. Having started my working life as a chef I returned to Thanet College where I studied to teach catering and hospitality in 2002. I taught on a variety of levels from pre-entry up to Level 3 and had particular success mentoring students to compete in local, national and International competitions. I was promoted to Director of Education, and then appointed Principal of the Broadstairs then Folkestone Campus prior to returning to Broadstairs as College Principal in January 2017.

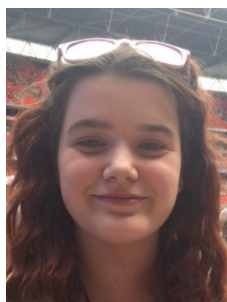
The experiences I have gained over the past 16 years have given me a strong understanding of the post 16 education and training offer. I am now very much looking forward to utilising these skills in this new challenge.

I am particularly looking forward to working with colleagues from across KCC and our stakeholders to ensure we gain the best possible outcomes for the looked after young people of Kent.

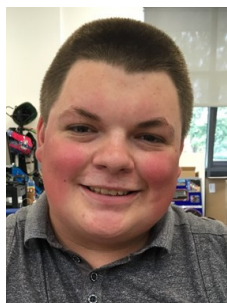


Staff Updates

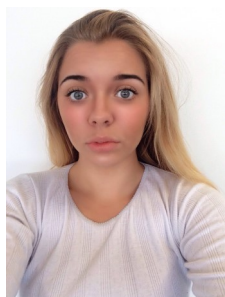
Our Participation Team is growing which means we have more time and opportunities to get out and meet you. This really is the best part of our job! Our team is led by Jo. Sophia and Andrea work in East and South Kent, and Chelsea, Tom, Sarah and Reece work in North and West Kent. We are happy to welcome new staff members, Tia and Rob. Keep reading to find out a bit more about them as well as celebrate some of our existing team's achievements!



Hi my name is Tia , I'm a new addition to the VSK participation team and my role will be as an apprentice participation worker. My hobbies and interests are ice skating and horse riding. I am really looking forward to engaging with and helping young people.



Hi, my name is Rob. I am an Apprentice for the Virtual School Kent. An actor at heart, I love being able to express my feelings through shows and songs, so beware. I have become an apprentice for multiple reasons. The first reason would be because of the background I grew up in and my knowledge of the care system. The second reason would be seeing the enjoyment on a young person's face when they know that things have been done for them and that rewards are coming to them as well.



We are happy to announce that Chelsea will be continuing with the Virtual School after successfully completing her level 2 Apprenticeship. She is now working towards a level 3 qualification, well done!

Contact Us:

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Joanne Carpenter - Joanne.Carpenter@kent.gov.uk

Sophia Dunstan - Sophia.Dunstan@kent.gov.uk

Andrea Wood - Andrea.Wood@kent.gov.uk

Sarah Newman - Sarah.Newman@kent.gov.uk

We love hearing from you!

YAC

The Young Adult Council (YAC) is a forum for young people in care and care leavers aged 16+. We discuss the current issues around the care system and come up with ways to make things better for everyone.

YAC meets up on the first Thursday of every month. We always have food and we will pay your travel costs to get to the meetings too.

At the meetings, we like to make them as fun as we can yet still focusing on current issues that young people face in care.



We started off the meeting by welcoming a new member and answered some fun questions on a dice as an icebreaker, so the new member could get to know everyone.

Chelsea, our Senior Apprentice, went through the previous minutes of the last meeting and listed the actions. One of the actions was to research into supplying Railcards for the YAC members, because they travel from all around the County to attend the meetings. Another action was made by Paul Startup the Head Of Care Leavers 18+ Service for the members to come up with suggestions for a new name for the Care Leavers 18+ Service. One of the members suggested the name the Young Adult Care and Advice Service. All of the members agreed they liked this name.

Challenge Card Update

On numerous occasions, Young People have said they want to be part of the interview panels that recruit KCC staff, but they are unable to because they fall during school/college time. YAC suggested that the interviews should be held at times that suit the Young People to ensure that as many different young people can take part as possible. YAC discussed how interviews could be held within the school holidays, so more Young People can sit on the interview panels. YAC decided to make this a Challenge Card to challenge their Corporate Parents.

Contact the VSK Participation Team for more information:

Email: VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk

Goodbye Jasmin

At this meeting, we had to say goodbye to one of our members Jasmin.

Although it was sad to see her go, we celebrated because she is off to University. Jasmin has

helped with fundraisers, interview panels, sat on the Corporate Parenting panel and much more. We got Jasmin some goodies for Uni and made her a memory book of her time at YAC. We also celebrated with chocolate cake!



The Local Offer

Next, the members looked at the Local Offer, which details the support young people receive once they leave care. Whilst YAC members thought that this was an important document and contained really interesting information, they agreed that it was too long and a little repetitive. They thought Young People wouldn't read the document from start to finish because of its length. Chelsea asked how this document could be presented so young people would read it. The members said it needed to be more colourful and suggested that bullet points or another way to highlight key points should be used. They also suggested that the 'Getting Your Voice Heard' section should include information about YAC, Challenge Cards and the Care Leavers' Charter, all of which are now included.

Top Tips for cheaper shopping

At our most recent YAC meeting, the council members and apprentices got to try lots and lots of food. The catch? They were blind folded! Half the food came from the very pricey Marks & Spencer, the other half from the far more affordable Aldi. Could they tell which was which and was the M&S food worth the extra money?!

The Results

Whilst M&S definitely came out on top for a few things (especially sausage rolls!), YAC members were surprised how often they picked Aldi as their favourite of the two (particularly for fruit, vegetables and sandwich meats). They were astonished at how much cheaper Aldi products were and how much more you could get for your money in a budget supermarket. In fact, the entire shop was about half the cost in Aldi as it was in M&S! It reminded all of us of the importance of shopping around. Whilst M&S might be great for the occasional treat, there are definitely cheaper alternatives out there that are just as good!

This activity made YAC think about how we all can reduce our food bills more generally – Tom and Rob with the help of YAC members compiled their **Top 10 tips and tricks for a cheaper food shop...**



1. Plan ahead and go in with a list to stop you topping up with expensive extras. People who take a shopping list save on average £200 a year on their food shopping!

2. Try supermarket own brand food – it's substantially cheaper and can be just as good. Some own brand tea bags for example can be up to 95% cheaper than the most expensive brands.

3. Buy in bulk – check out the shelf labels for the price per weight. Buying a huge bag of pasta might seem pricey initially but you won't need to replace it for quite some time!

4. Make your own sandwiches. It might be convenient but buying a ready made sandwich every day soon adds up. Even the cheapest sandwich will still cost more to buy every day than a loaf of bread and packet of meat which can last all week!

5. Use your freezer! Portion up bread, meat or cooked meals like curry, Bolognese or chilli. This reduces waste and means you always have something ready to defrost and eat.

6. Store food correctly to prevent waste. Put cheese in resealable bags in the fridge, potatoes in a dry, dark, well ventilated cupboard (not a plastic bag or air tight box) and keep bread fresh in a bread bin.

7. Check out whether frozen fish and vegetables could save you money. Choosing frozen salmon over fresh can save you up to 55% for example!

8. Choose cheaper cuts of meat. Chicken legs or thighs, for example, are much cheaper than chicken breasts and often tastier too.

9. Double check those offers. They might sound like a bargain but are they actually cheaper than other brands?

10. This may sound unexpected, but don't always buy the cheapest product. Some things cost more for good reason. Buy sausages and burgers with plenty of meat rather than fat, gristle and who-knows what. They're probably better for you, cost just a little more and you don't have to eat five of them to feel full.

County Wide Event

The Countywide Children in Care Celebration was held on Wednesday 1st August 2018. The event was attended by young people in care who attend the Children in Care Councils and some who wanted a taster of what the Children in Care Councils are about. Some members of the Corporate Parenting panel, senior officers and elected members attended the event and met with our young people.

We started the day off with decorating our rosette name badges and talking about what we had planned over the summer. Next, we delivered a presentation welcoming everyone and sharing what the Councils have been up to throughout the year. The apprentices had made a timeline to show the Children in Care Councils' progress throughout the years and celebrate some of their successes.

We then had a discussion on our tables about what a Corporate Parent is, who can be described as a Corporate Parent and what being a 'good' Corporate Parent actually means. After that, we shared our points with the other groups and placed all the ideas on a board. Feedback included:

- Look after your health
- Consistent communication
- Stability and listening
- Help you feel safe
- Support for Care Leavers
- Believe in you



There were 2 key themes that were brought up repetitively—feeling safe and stability.

Later on, we got in our teams for the County Wide obstacle course. The events were: the caterpillar, ring toss, inflatable darts and a inflatable climbing wall. Everyone, including the corporate parents, got involved!

The Participation Team will now be creating a guide to Corporate Parenting using the young people's ideas!



Contact the VSK Participation Team for more information on the Councils:

Email: VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk



Want to have your say on the people who work with children in care and care leavers *and* gain some important skills for the world of work?

Our '**Recruit Crew**' is made up of young people who help interview potential social workers, foster carers, personal advisers and senior Kent County Council staff members.

There's an accredited course too which helps prepare you for sitting on an interview panel. Not only does this help you when you interview, but also gives you tips for your own college, university or job interviews. You can put the course and the interview experience on your CV too!

The Participation Team will be holding training sessions throughout Kent in the upcoming months. If you would like more information about the Recruit Crew please contact Chelsea Goodwin.

Contact Chelsea:

Email: VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk

Office: 03000 418328

Mobile: 07773 080864

MOMO: Mind of My Own

MOMO has a new look.

The people at MOMO have taken on board some feedback and made their App and website easier to use. It still works exactly the same way but looks a little different! So, continue to use it to help structure your thoughts and let the professionals you work with know how you are feeling. Check it out at:

How's it going?

Use the slider to show how happy you are.



Slide me!

www.mindofmyown.org.uk

MOMO  **One**
MIND OF MY OWN



Angry



Enthusiastic



Unsafe



Hopeful

Activity Days

Dover Sea Sports



On Monday the 6th of August, we took a jaunt down to the coast to the Dover Sea Sports Centre with some of our 16+ members. We started off with a safety talk and were handed wetsuits, float jackets and helmets. Once we were fully equipped for a day in the sea, we headed down to the shore where we were handed paddleboards and paddles to head out into the sea. At first, everyone was paddling on their stomachs but soon the instructor made us stand up... Our apprentice, Tom, didn't quite manage this the first... second... or third time, while everyone else seemed like they had been doing it as a hobby for years! After a well-earned lunch we moved onto raft building. We had barrels, long planks of wood and some rope. We had to fasten the barrels to the wood and hope it would all stay together while we were on the water... they held together, at least until we were made to jump on them!

Contact the VSK Participation Team for more information

Email: VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk

Or contact Chelsea:

Office: 03000 418328

Mobile: 07773 080864

Gliding

On the 3rd of August, we took some of you guys gliding at the Kent Gliding Club. Everyone got to go up as it was a beautiful and boiling hot day, especially in the gliders! Some of the young people could even see the Isle of White from their glider. Everyone loved the experience and got at least 20 minutes. Some were up there so long we got worried they had got lost! Eventually, they glided over and circled for what seemed like ages, until they were slow enough to land. Hopefully, there will be room for some apprentices to get a go next year!



Accommodation

Moving on from Social Services accommodation is a big step, and you might have concerns about finding somewhere to live. Your Personal Advisor (PA) will be able to go through your options with you.

Accommodation Types



You might have registered with Kent Homechoice and be hoping for an offer of Council or Housing Association accommodation. Unfortunately, there are many more people on the waiting list than there are homes, so you might not be offered anything. However, there are other options.

Private renting is a popular choice. Many landlords and letting agencies advertise their properties online. It might be more affordable to rent a room in a shared house, rather than renting a flat or house by yourself.



Spareroom.co.uk is a popular website, which also gives advice and information for people who are looking for a flatshare. Many letting agencies also have shared houses to let. In shared accommodation, the cost of gas, electricity, water, TV Licence, Council Tax, maybe even Wifi is shared with the other tenants, and you pay less rent because you share.

What to think about

When looking for accommodation, think about what you would like to live near to: your workplace or college/university? Do you need to attend regular medical appointments? Perhaps you have friends and family who you would like to live near to? It is important to find out how much you should expect to pay for rent in the area you plan to live in. Rents can be high in Kent (although not as high as in most areas of London).

If the rent is too high, is there somewhere nearby that is cheaper? Maybe even a short bus journey or drive away? Whether you will be paying your rent out of your wages, or by claiming Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, you need to be sure that you can afford it before you sign the tenancy agreement.

Kent

In Kent, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) doesn't cover the full monthly rent for most rental properties. This means that you will need to have some way of paying

whatever is owed to your landlord after you have paid your Housing Benefit to them ("the shortfall"). As a care leaver, you are entitled to a higher rate of Housing Benefit up to the age of 22. This is helpful when you are looking for somewhere to live, but you will need to think about how you will pay your rent after the age of 22, when your benefit is reduced to Single Room Rate. There is a lot to think about, but your PA can advise you on issues around rent, benefits and tenancy agreements, to help you decide what is best for you.



Guarantor

Many lettings agents ask for a guarantor. A guarantor is a person you know – usually a family member - who will be responsible for paying your rent, if you can't (or don't). A guarantor is usually a home owner, in employment, earning over a certain amount of money. Not everybody knows someone who they can ask to be their guarantor. Kent County Council has recognised this difficulty and has introduced a rent guarantor scheme. In certain circumstances, Kent County Council can act as a rent guarantor on behalf of a young person aged over 18, where there is no family member willing/able to do so. Your PA can give you information on the guarantor scheme.

Setting up Home

Setting up a home is expensive, but Kent County Council can offer a Setting Up Home Allowance up to the value of £2,000.00, to buy *essential* items when you move into your own home. From 1st October 2018, additional financial support can be provided to you, to cover your first month's rent, deposit, and letting agent fees, when moving into private rented accommodation. This is *in addition to* the £2,000.00 Setting Up Home Allowance. The Council also provides an option to put some or all the Setting Up Home Allowance into an adult ISA or Help to Buy scheme, to help promote your financial security, financial independence, and savings for future accommodation. This is something else that your PA can speak to you about.

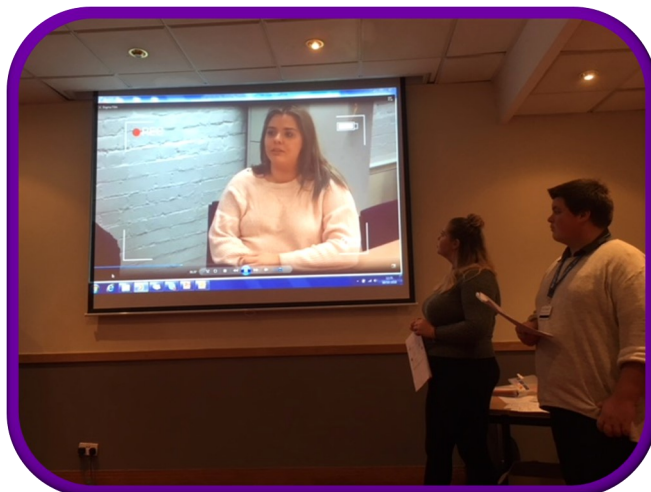


Co-Production

On Wednesday 10th October, we were really fortunate to be able to present our 'Co-Production with Children and Young People training' to senior KCC officials. The focus for the morning session was how young people's views can be heard and genuinely influence decision making within Kent County Council. The training was prepared and presented by young people from Virtual School Kent, Head Start Kent and Kent Youth County Council. It was a brilliant opportunity to talk to senior officials about the benefits of involving young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services and how they can make this participation easier. What made this training even more special was that it was completely developed, prepared and presented by the young people themselves.



Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education said, "I would like to thank Millie, Jess, Jenn, Chelsea, Thomas, Robert, Tia and Sophia for leading what was an engaging, informative and very well organised session...As part of our own individual pledges, we will ensure that co-production will feature in future action planning within Children, Young People and Education and beyond."



After the event, we were given the chance to feed back our thoughts on how the session went:

- "Brilliant, we have educated people who make decisions."
- "I feel I have an opportunity to connect with people I may not have."
- "Went really well, audience were engaged."

18+ Open Day



On 31st August 2018, the Participation Team had the pleasure of promoting YAC at the 18+ Open Day at Oakwood House in Maidstone. It was an information filled day with many stalls that young people could go to. Care Leavers could find out about a variety of things such as further

education, benefits, accommodation, work opportunities, health and being a care leaver. There were a number of charities who support Care Leavers too.

It was a day for us to meet young people in care and care leavers and to tell them about the Young Adults Council. We set up our stall and were all set to meet lots of new young people. The Team also talked about YAC's achievements, such as challenge cards to improve things for other young people in care and care leavers.

The team also promoted the app Mind of My Own (MOMO). The apprentices feel strongly about this app because it helps young people express themselves and share their wishes, feelings, achievements and complaints with professionals.

There were also plenty of staff from the Care Leavers 18+ Service available to speak to care leavers. If you would like to talk to someone in the 18+ Service, find their contact details below:

If you are based in North and West Kent, contact the 18+ team at Worrall House, West Malling on 03000 421124.

If you are based in South and East Kent, contact the team at Thistley Hill, Dover on 03000 410701.



APPG

On Wednesday 24th October, Rob Barton, one of the Apprentice Participation Workers attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (APPG) at Portcullis House in London. These meetings are a great chance to connect with politicians, care leavers and professionals from around the country and share ideas. The session was titled 'From Care to Careers: Care Leavers' Roundtable on Employment'. The speakers, who are all care experienced, were:

Christel Dee, presenter, writer and digital creative for the Doctor Who series
 Luke Elkins, film & TV production assistant and actor
 Ashley John-Baptiste, BBC Journalist
 Jenny Molloy, author, adviser and trainer

The members of the panel discussed their experiences of the care system, how this impacted their future careers and what helped them become successful in their chosen fields. They spoke about the importance of professionals having high aspirations for young people, making sure that children in care get the same or better opportunities and experiences as other young people and helping young people to develop contacts in their chosen fields of employment. Being persistent and resilient and reaching out to those who can offer support was emphasised by all the panel members. However, care leavers present in the audience were keen to highlight how housing difficulties can impede young people in following their career dreams.

All the members of the panel were extremely inspiring. As a Doctor Who fan, Rob was particularly interested in what Christel Dee had to say! If you would like to attend an AAPG in the future, get in touch!



16+ Awards Ceremony



Virtual School Kent held their fifth annual Post 16 Awards Ceremony. This event recognises and celebrates the achievements of looked after post 16 young people and there were some amazing success stories.



As in previous years, lots of nominations were received and 88 awards were presented to young people, many of whom attended the awards ceremony. It was a truly fantastic evening with over 50 young people attending, supported by their friends, carers, social workers and personal advisers. The event had a red, black and gold theme with red carpet, balloons, photo screen, sports activities and a delicious buffet. Everyone, including Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education and Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, was blown away by the young people's achievements. The event also included an entertaining quiz about the Young Adult Council led by the VSK Apprentices (some tables were very competitive!) and a talk about the National Citizen Service by Ben Powell. Awards presented at the ceremony included:

- Young people achieving excellent GCSE results
- Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards for our post 16 students
- Young Adult Council members received recognition for their commitment to the Council
- National Citizen Service Award

There were some really inspiring stories from these young people and they rightly deserved the recognition of their achievements!


Well done again to all the winners!

KENT CARES TOWN

MOVING ON AND CARE LEAVERS PORTAL

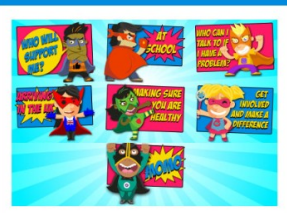
Kent Cares Town

Thanks for visiting Kent Cares Town. This website is for all young people who are or who have been in the care of Kent County Council. Choose the section that best suits you to find out more.




Primary

This is the section to find out everything you need to know about being in care if you are aged under 11. Click on the superheroes below!



Secondary

Aged 11 to 16? Click below to learn about being in care, how Kent County Council supports your education and health and lots more.




Moving On

Click here to find out about what happens when you turn 18. The information here will help you plan for when you leave care and start to live independently.

You will also find lots of useful information to help you once you are a care leaver.

Have your say on the 18 Plus Care Leavers Service.
[Click here to access our survey.](#)

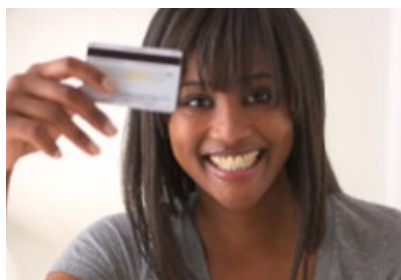


Get Involved!

There is a gallery of wonderful art created by children in care and you can even send in your poems, stories and experiences to our [Virtual School Kent](#) gallery.

Kent Cares Town is for all young people who are or who have been in the care of Kent County Council. You can visit the website find out about what happens when you turn 18. The information there will help you plan for when you leave care and start to live independently.

<https://kentcares town.lea.kent.sch.uk/>



You will also find lots of useful information to help you once you are a care leaver. It will tell you what services are available to you and what you can expect to receive from Kent County Council when you turn 18. This is known as the 'Local Offer'. The full version will be available on the website in December. The Care Leavers 18+ Service can assist you to access housing, education, training, work experience and health services, as well as provide advice and encouragement to help you make the most of your journey through the care system.



Contact the VSK Participation Team for more information:

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