

Kent County Council



Next Steps

Welcome to the Summer Edition of our VSK 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!



VSK PARTICIPATION TEAM

Email us:
VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk

Included in this Issue:

- Hello From Paul Startup
- YAC
- VSK Talent Showcase - challenging stigma
- Thinking of an Apprenticeship?
- MOMO
- CV writing tips and tricks
- Recruit Crew Info
- The Big Interview with Paolo Hewitt, music journalist

We would also like to introduce our new Head Of 18+ Care Leavers Service – Paul Startup

My name is Paul Startup. I became the Head of the 18 plus Care Leavers Service in February 2018. My last job was Head of Safeguarding for Children's Services in Kent. I am a qualified Social Worker and have been qualified for around 25 years. I love all sport and I compete in marathons and do lots of cycling. I really want our service to be the best it can possibly be. So far, I have been recruiting permanent Personal Advisors to ensure we have fewer or no changes to PAs for our Care Leavers.



Recently, I have been working on the Local Offer for Care Leavers. This will be published in December but I hope that we can get the views of as many of our Care Leavers as possible before we finish it. We are planning to develop a Lifelong Links pilot in Kent to enable our Care Leavers to have a really good support network around them. I will be allocating Personal Advisors to 17 years olds, so they can work with Social Workers to improve the transition of Care Leavers into our service. We are going to run Drop-ins for Care Leavers in certain areas over the next few months, so look out for more news about these. We are also going to work hard to ensure that our Care Leavers can get good education, training and employment opportunities. We will be sending out a survey to our Care Leavers during August/September so we can hear from Care Leavers about how we are doing.



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 in Maidstone. 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.

Member of YAC visits the Houses of Parliament

On Wednesday 21st March, our apprentice, Chelsea and Young Adult Council member, Rob, met with the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Children and Families, Nadhim Zahawi along with the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield. The minister wanted to meet with children and young people with care experience as the government are currently exploring ways to improve fostering. Both he and the Children's Commissioner wanted to listen to children and young people with care experience, as they have had first-hand experience and they know both the best parts of being in care and what needs improvement.

The meeting consisted of 14 young people all of whom had different experiences of being in care. The young people came from six different local authorities.

Chelsea and Rob told the minister about their own experiences of foster care but also emphasised that these experiences can be different for other young people. They were keen to give a balanced view. One of the issues that was mentioned was social workers not being consistent and changing

frequently. However, the independent reviewing officer (IRO) was more likely to be a consistent adult while young people were in care and the young people believed they played an important role in helping to make sure their voices were heard. This feedback was particularly important as the recent Fostering Review recommended removal of this role.

When the meeting was over the young people had the opportunity to have an individual discussion and photo with the Minister and the Commissioner. Chelsea and Rob enjoyed their experience and felt they delivered many important points on behalf of young people in care and care leavers in Kent.



Good News for Care Leavers

Changes to the law means that local authorities now have new duties to provide additional support to care leavers.

- All Care Leavers have the right to support from a **Personal Adviser** up to the age of 25. Previously, this was only available to young adults in full time education. Now Care Leavers are entitled to this advice and support even if they have previously said they don't want it.
- Local authorities are now required to consult and publish their **Local Offer** which contains all the services and support available to Care Leavers.

Challenge Card Update - Rent Guarantor Scheme

A year ago, a challenge from YAC was raised. The challenge was -

“If a young person over school leaving age decided to be fully independent and work full time paying their own rent, would KCC as a 'Corporate Parent' act as the young person's guarantor?”

Initially this was rejected because the Kent county Council were unsure if this was something a local authority could do. Around After the original challenge was raised, a research report was released by Centre Point, a charity that supports young people at risk of homelessness. The report urged local authorities to support young people by being a guarantor to them. YAC read this and re-submitted the challenge.

Now, Kent County Council is running a pilot scheme to see if being a guarantor for young people is something that would work. It is also something that will be part of the **Local Offer**.

This just shows that if you believe in an idea and don't give up, KCC will stop, listen to you and take action. So well done to the YAC

YAC members have their say on the Local Offer

As the 18+ Leaving Care Service have been busy working on these new requirements, Paul Startup, the Head of the Service wanted to come to YAC to find out their opinions about the **Local Offer**.

At our July meeting, he presented some of the new ideas his team have been working on which they hope will benefit all care leavers. He asked YAC to think about which would benefit care leavers the most and rank them in order of importance. YAC members were impressed by all the proposals and there was a lot of discussion about each one. Some of the most popular were:

- Increased financial support for Care Leavers when they are setting up their own home.
- Making counselling and culturally appropriate mental health support more widely available.
- Financial support for IT equipment for care leavers in higher or further education.
- Help to live a healthy lifestyle, for example support with a gym membership or other costs associated with sports activities.

YAC also wanted Paul to be aware of some of the challenges young adults experience when they leave care. These included financial and budgeting worries, loneliness, the challenges of living independently, issues with travel and transport and difficulties accessing education, training or getting a job. They even suggested some ideas of their own to add to the Local Offer!

Paul also made YAC aware that the 18+ Care Leaver Service will soon be carrying out a survey to find out Care Leavers' views about the service.

Contact the VSK Participation Team for more information

Email: VSK_Participation@kent.gov.uk
Or contact Chelsea: 07773 080864

VSK Talent Showcase

On Friday the 1st June 2018, the VSK Participation Team held our very first Virtual School Kent Talent Showcase at County Hall in Maidstone. We invited members of the Children in Care Councils, the Corporate Parents, Foster Carers and Social Workers to come along and watch every one have some fun.

The aim of the Talent Showcase was to dispel some of the myths and stigma around children and young people in care and show just how talented young people in care in Kent really are! Within the Children in Care Councils, the idea of stereotypes around what a Child in Care is like has come up from young people time and time again. Together with the Apprentices, the Young Adult Council contributed to a film for the Showcase to highlight this negative labelling, challenge prejudice and show that children in care are not one homogenous group. They felt it was important that the event showcased the varied strengths and achievements of children in care, demonstrated their individuality and showed that they have positive stories to tell.

On the day, we had some truly fantastic singing, some amazing dancing, thought provoking artwork and so much more! Members of the Participation Team also visited young people around the county to find out more about their talents as they couldn't all be demonstrated on stage. Films of scootering, trampolining, cheerleading and gymnastics wowed the audience.

We expected the performers to be good, but we just didn't know how good they really were! The performers were so brave to stand in front of everyone and they all performed their hearts out!



The whole event wouldn't have been possible without all the amazingly talented young people.

So, from everyone in the VSK Participation Team,

Thank You!!!

Contact Us:

Reece Graves -

Reece.Graves@kent.gov.uk

Chelsea Goodwin -

Chelsea.Goodwin@kent.gov.uk

Tom Byrne -

Thomas.Byrne@kent.gov.uk

Chloe -Elizabeth Mutton -

Chloe-Elizabeth.Mutton@kent.gov.uk

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!

A Day In The Life Of A VSK Apprentice

So, my day starts off like any other. It begins with an annoying alarm from my phone telling me it's time to get up. I do all the usual morning stuff, and then rush out the door to get my train, because I'm interviewing potential Foster Carers this morning. Now, this may not sound the most interesting start of the day but it's actually pretty great and I really enjoy it because I have an opportunity to get my voice heard. Although we have a



“strict” set of questions to ask we often go on tangents’ because we find most of the people wanting to be foster carers kind and interesting to talk to. Of course, they’re not all like that, and that is why we’re there, to separate the wheat from the chaff. These interviews generally don’t last too long and by lunchtime we’re finished (Unless we overrun because of all the talking).

After lunch, I need to get back to our office, as I have activity day permission forms to send out and one of the other Apprentices needs help with their prepping for a big presentation on “Lifelong Links” (Which is a project about making life long connections with people to create a mega support network, which is extremely useful at any age). We essentially get to go back to playschool for the afternoon to do some colouring, sticking and other arty crafts. Of course, it’s not all gluey hands and coloured paper, every now and then I did have to check my emails for permission forms for our activity day, of which I had to put on a spreadsheet, definitely as fun as it sounds,

I can assure you, but it’s only for a couple of minutes per permission form so I can pop back to my art work shortly! After making a few phone calls to Social Workers to see if their young people would like to attend YAC we need to make sure that the venue is booked for our upcoming activity day to Bewl Water. Whilst on the phone I also check that we can go along and complete a risk assessment.



We have a YAC meeting in the evening, although it’s not exactly one of our usual meetings where we have a professional visit and hold a discussion or talk about issues that face care leavers. On this day we were going bowling, so we made our way to the bowling alley and waited for a short while for our YAC members to arrive. First things first though, once everyone had arrived we ordered food and drinks! So, after stuffing ourselves with food we moved over to the bowling lanes and began to bowl. Competition wasn’t exactly light with even one of our own apprentices who ended up getting very competitive with numerous strikes to their name. Overall though it was a great night and a really fun end to an already good day. All that was left was a wait for a train and a walk to my place where a comfy sofa and a kettle for me to make a nice cuppa were waiting.

- Tom, Apprentice Participation Worker.

Gurpreet Mahay

For any of our long term readers you may remember our old apprentice Gurpreet (Gups). We got in touch with Gups to see how he was doing in the world of work, This is what he said:

"I joined Kent County Council as an apprentice in Virtual School Kent at the end of 2014 where I worked as part of the Participation Team. My experience with VSK was amazing! They supported me and helped me get a recognised qualification whilst also helping me network with professionals and learn about the services that that Council have to support children in Kent. I gained lots of experience in working with Children in Care and now I work full-time as a Social Worker Assistant helping teenagers and families!



My journey with Virtual School Kent meant I was able to kick start my journey in training to become a Counsellor which is my ultimate goal. I would say to any young person interested in Apprenticeships that it is a great way to start your career, you get paid whilst you are learning and gain valuable experience about the world of work."

If you would like to find out more about apprenticeships have a look at the websites links below:

<https://www.kenttrainingandapprenticeships.co.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships>

Good Luck!

Firstly, we would like to congratulate everyone who has been sitting GCSEs this term and say well done for all the hard work. We hope everyone gets the grades they want!

However, if you don't get the grades that you expected, don't be too disheartened. Talk to your teachers or tutors at school or college as soon as you can or you can contact the VSK Progression Officers:

Tyler Johnson (West Kent) - 03000 416726

Lisa Millgate (North Kent) - 03000 411059

Paula Howe (South Kent) - 03000 411741

Karen Wood (Canterbury and Swale) - 03000 417572

Leigh Knell (Thanet) - 03000 416883



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Student Survival Guide

If you're heading off to College or University in September it can be an exciting but daunting time. We have made a student survival guide to help you through those first few weeks!

Familiarise yourself. Before the first day, make sure you know where you're going in terms of how to get to the campus and where you are expected to be on the first morning. Make sure you check out public transport, so you get there in plenty of time—it might even be worth a trial run.

Preparation. A lot of colleges will send you a reading list that they will ask you to purchase books before the start of your course. These can be expensive so look out for last years students selling books on second hand selling sites or social media groups linked to the college.

Get involved. Most colleges or universities will have lots of societies, clubs, organisations and sports teams. These are a great way to meet people during those first few weeks. Also, it gives you an outlet, away from studying.

Get in to a routine. It may take a while to settle into your new life at college but after those first few initial weeks, create a routine for yourself so you have some structure. This could include study time, library sessions, classes and not forgetting free time. By sticking to a study routine, you are much less likely to fall behind.

Look after yourself. Whilst you are studying hard, it is also important to look after yourself too. Taking regular exercise and eating healthily will improve your mental health and increase your brain power.

Ask for help. If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask. Tutors are there to help, and it's better than soldiering on and feeling left behind. Make full use of tutorials, extra study sessions and your personal tutor if you have one.

Be committed. Although it may sound sensible and boring, you want to achieve the qualification you set out to achieve. Try to get a good balance between study life and social life. Once you have your qualification, whatever it may be, it will last a life time so put all your commitment and effort into achieving your goal.

Be prepared to feel overwhelmed. It will get easier! Those first few weeks you will be given so much information about so many different things, it is easy to feel like you are drowning and it may feel all a little too much. This is perfectly normal and once you are into the swing of things, you will look back and wonder what you were worried about!

Most importantly.... ENJOY!

MOMO

What is Mind Of My Own (MOMO)?

Mind Of My Own (MOMO) is an app that makes it easier for children and young people to express their views and for workers to respond to them.



Sometimes it can be pretty hard to express how you are feeling to your care workers. Whether you're worried about something, not happy about how things are going or even just want to share some good news. The MOMO app can help with this, allowing you to express feelings that can be hard to do face to face. Have you got a meeting of some sort coming up or want to share some news? Just go onto the MOMO app, select the appropriate options and it'll bring up a list of short, simple questions about how you're feeling. It will have a variety of answers and emotions to choose from or if the pre-set ones don't quite get the message across you can add your own! Your feelings and opinions get sent straight to the appropriate workers so you can have peace of mind.

Great! How do I sign up?

There are a few ways to sign up; you can download the app for free through the Apple App Store, Google Play or use the online web app on the actual MOMO site; <http://mindofmyown.org.uk>, clicking on the "Young People" tab Scrolling down and clicking the "USE ONLINE WEB APP" tab for MOMO One. From there it's a standard sign up requiring some minor personal details.

When asked to select your local authority make sure that you choose Kent

From young people:



"It's an amazing app for young people in care like me"

James, young person.

"MOMO makes it easier for people to listen to you and understand how you're feeling. Don't be afraid to be honest about what you want."

Your first and last name *

Young Person ✓

Your date of birth *

For example, 20 3 2007

1 1 2000 ✓

What part of the world do you live in?*

England ▼

◀ BACK CONTINUE ▶

MOMO Conference

On Wednesday 16th June, Sarah, Andrea and Reece travelled to Birmingham to attend the Mind Of My Own Conference. They got to speak to other local authorities that had travelled from around the country to talk about what MOMO means to their young people and how they use it in their areas.



Reece said “ *the MOMO conference was an incredible experience. We had the opportunity to meet Lemn Sissay MBE, who is a care leaver who is now an poet, author and broadcaster. We shared our ideas on using the app and even ‘borrowed’ a few ideas from other authorities that we can’t wait to put into action!*”

At the conference MOMO unveiled their future plans for the app which included the new designs (They’re really cool!!).



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

CV Writing Tips

Education - Start with your current or most recent qualification first and then work backwards. You don't need to include full addresses of school/college.

Additional Information - If you have a current, clean driving licence add this in or any membership to professional bodies.

Personal Details - Make sure you check your mobile and email if you include them on your CV. Make sure your email address isn't offensive, or that your voicemail message is rude!

Interests - Be honest and specific, Don't include things like 'I like socialising with my friends.'

Referees - You need two referees. If you are currently in education you should include your current tutor. It needs to be people that know you well and can talk about your character. Make sure you ask their permission first!

Personal Profile - 3 or 4 lines of text about you and your character – make sure it is positive and true!

Skills - Only include skills that you haven't mentioned in the Personal Profile section.

Use sentences starting with:

- I enjoy
- I took part in
- I am interested in
- I raised money for
- I organised
- I have experience of
- I learnt that I
- I successfully
- I was chosen to
- I was fascinated by
- I am keen

The following links can help you write your perfect CV:
<https://www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/school-leaver-cv-template/>

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/write-first-cv-tips-students-school-leavers/>

<https://www.indeed.co.uk/>

Dos:

Be positive about yourself and your attitude to work

Divide each section with clear headings

Use the space on the page

Use a font like either Ariel or Times New Roman

Use size 11/12 font

Use bullet points to divide up blocks of text

Check your spelling and grammar

Be truthful!

Don'ts:

Title with CV or Curriculum Vitae, it is clear what the document is!

Put anything negative!

Include qualifications you have failed!

Include every job you have ever done!

Use more than 2 A4 pages!

Include your marital status or National Insurance number!

Use colours!

Qualities that employers look for:

- Hard Working
- Energetic
- Sociable
- Neat
- Supportive
- Careful
- Active
- Sense of humour
- Friendly
- Enthusiastic
- Willing to learn
- Punctual



This is a Draft CV that uses a lot of the tips that we have given you.

Name

Telephone number/ Email address

PERSONAL STATEMENT:

I am a creative, organised and efficient individual whom approaches new challenges and tasks with a positive manner. Works well within a team, but also self motivating and able to prioritise workloads. I have good time management skills and am able to communicate well with others.

EDUCATION:

Mid Kent College

2006– 2008

BTEC National Diploma in ICT– Distinction

Keys Skills Application of Number Level 3– Pass

Valley Park School

2001- 2006

GCSEs-	English - B	Maths– C
	Science– C	Art– C
	French– C	History– C
	ICT– A	P.E- C

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

Conran Estates

2008- Present

Sales Negotiator. This role consisted of negotiating lettings and sales for properties in Greenwich. Working towards sales targets and directly with clients has led to me gaining knowledge regarding the property market. Alongside this, I worked with the company's mortgage advisor gaining experience in this sector as well as referring new and current clients for mortgage advice.

Tesco Supermarket

2006- 2008

Working as part of a team, including dealing with customer enquiries. This role also involved cash handling and working with members of the general public to make their experience in store the best it could be.

OTHER SKILLS:

- Qualified Lifeguard
- PC/Mac literate
- Full UK drivers license
- Member of the Young Adults Council

References available upon request.

The Big Interview with Paolo Hewitt

Welcome to the first in a series of interviews with influential care leavers and those involved in the care system. This edition we meet Paolo Hewitt.



Paolo Hewitt was placed in care at a very early age. Initially, he went to live with a foster family but was sent to Burbank children's home in Woking at the age of 10. Paolo has used his experience of the care system to publish two books. He is also a successful music journalist. We interviewed Paolo to see if he could give some insight on what life is like for him now. Paolo is a great example of what YOU can do if you set your mind to it.

Question: How did you begin your career?

Paolo says: I've always wanted to be writer. I left my Children's Home at 18, stayed with a very good friend until I was 20 and then went to college in North London because I knew I had to get there to realise my dream. The key was to be focussed on the goal and not allow anything to get in the way.

Question: Can you describe one of your typical work days?

Paolo says: If I am researching then it is days spent at the British Library going through books, magazines, old newspapers etc. Coffee and a laptop at dawn until I am too tired to go on. The next day I revise everything I have written and then move on.

Question: What skills and attributes do you need for the job?

Paolo says: Persistence and the courage to keep going.

Question: If you could start over again, would you change your career if so why?

Paolo Says: No. This is the perfect job for me.

Question: What drew you to this line of work?

Paolo Says: One reason - maybe - is a very unhappy childhood which meant that books, music and football assumed high degrees of importance to me. Why? Because they put me in the present. When reading or listening or playing I was not conscious of my hostile surroundings because I was in the moment, I was in the now. Books in particular were sacred objects to me so for me able to publish my work in this format means so much to me, especially my two books about care - 'The Looked After Kid' and 'But We All Shine On'.

Question: What advice would you give to our readers?

Paolo says: My social worker once told me if dealt a lemon in life make lemonade. Which is what I try and do. I am very proud to be care experienced. It gave me so much – it taught me about loyalty, friendship, courage and so many other things and allowed me to shine - and shine every day. Instead of dark, see light in your mind. Costs nothing. Just think of how great you are, how great life will be. It will make a difference.

Question: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Paolo says: Watching Spurs lift the Champions League trophy for the fifth successive year!