

Aspire programme meeting: Ann Graham, Director of Children's Services attendance

The Aspire programme is a group of children in care and care leavers from Haringey. They meet regularly to discuss service development and improvement. The team review both positive and negative aspects of the service that children in care and care leavers use and/or receive.

Aspire members go on trips throughout the year, such as bowling, to amusement parks and an annual trip where there is lots of fun team building activities and confidence building outdoor pursuits. Collectively referred to as members, these are children in care and care leavers from Haringey who are part of Aspire: The children in care and care leavers council.

If you would like to find out more, please contact our Consultation & Participation Officer, anneke.phillip@haringey.gov.uk

In November we were lucky enough to sit down with Director of Children's Services, Ann Graham, when she joined one of the meetings and answered questions about her role with children in care, her visions and responsibility with the programme.

The children commented at the meeting how much they appreciated Ann's attendance and how approachable she is. They also commended Anneke's work at Bruce Grove Youth Centre during these very challenging and uncertain times.

Anneke Phillip conducted the interview and as well as the Consultation Officer for Haringey Council, she is also the lead for the Aspire programme and works with the Aspire members on a day-to-day basis.

How would you describe your job role to a child in care?

I feel that this is dependent on their age, younger children understand my role as similar to that of a Head Teacher, while older young people have described me as one of the bosses. I let children and young people know that I am responsible for managing workers in the service and for making improvements to the way that things work to support all the work that takes place to help all Haringey's children achieve the best outcomes possible – I really want to make a difference and make things happen.

What would you like to change in order to improve the care system?

If I could wave a magic wand and do anything, I would like for every child just to have one or two Social Workers, as opposed to a few, that would be the main thing I would like to do. In other places, children and young people have told me that this is what they would like too. This can't happen because social workers move and need to leave and work in another place. I have heard from some of the young people at the meeting today say that they would like more youth clubs as well as a more confidential way to report any incident that takes place with foster carers, and I whole heartedly agree with them.

How do you communicate with children in care and care leavers?

By coming tonight and meeting young people and going to other meetings with young people and attending various events throughout the year, it gives me the opportunity to meet and hear the views of children in care and care leavers. One of the Aspire members (young person) brought

along a lovely picture of him, his foster carer and myself from the Education Achievement Awards. It's moments like the Awards ceremonies that give children and young people the opportunity to show how well they have done and this makes me feel really proud of each and everyone of our children and young people. (The Education Achievement Awards are an annual event to celebrate the academic achievements of our children in care.)

How do you stay up to date with all the changes and ongoing things throughout the borough?

When I'm not at these meetings and events, I like to find out and keep up to date on how well children in care and care leavers are doing and being supported. I take time to read reports with those that work directly with children such as Haringey Community Gold, and consultations with Foster Carers and through Virtual Schools team meetings.

What does it mean to you be a Corporate parent?

Firstly, for those who don't know, a corporate parent is the collective responsibility of council elected members, employees and partner organisations to provide the best care and safeguarding for children and young people looked after by us, and to promote their wellbeing, so that all our children in care and care leavers will thrive and reach their full potential.

It means a lot to me, I take the role very seriously. I was working in Haringey when the concept of Corporate Parenting came about, Frank Dobson the Children's Minister in the 1990's wrote a set of standards and expectations for our children in care and care leavers for all Local Authorities to adopt, I recall this as a defining moment for children in care. The outcomes, including educational outcomes, for Haringey's children in care and their happiness is the most important thing to me and where I can, to support social workers, foster carers and others to help them achieve their own successes is what I enjoy about work every day.

How do you monitor the consistency/level of care & safeguarding in care homes and semi-independent placements?

There are a set of expectations and standards that Ofsted use to inspect care homes. We have our own set of expectations and standards that we expect for our semi-independent placements. I believe that all placements should be rated good or outstanding. There are workers who visit, monitor to ensure that placements are safe and meet our standards and expectations, they feedback to me and my management team so we can see where we are doing well and where we can improve. Social Workers visit and get feedback from the children/young people. In terms of foster carers they have a supervising Social Worker who works closely with foster carers and also monitors and supports them.

Why is there only one youth centre in Haringey? Are there plans to open anymore?

We have invested money into Bruce Grove Youth Centre (BGYS) recently and considerable improvements/upgrades had been made. Haringey is developing youth support in Wood Green and there is planning underway to open a youth centre in Wood Green soon.

Since coming into your role how have you made an impact? What have you done to improve the service?

I would answer this question by first thanking each and everyone in the Children's Services department for all the hard work that they do. There is a lot of work that takes place, that helps us improve and provide a better service for our children every day.

There is a lot to say including as mentioned about improving BGYS, that young people really like coming to, there are also more staff here to help young people and the additional staff means we can offer youth service support in Wood Green too.

The Octagon was a place that young people and parents told me that we needed to improve. We have now changed our alternative provision in the Borough including at the Pupil Referral Unit, the Octagon – if children need time out they can go to one of these alternative provision centres for a time and are now more quickly going back into main stream education. The education received in alternative provision is now improved and young people are pleased that they can return to mainstream education.

Also, more people have been employed to recruit more foster carers. This is good because we want more foster carers so that young people have more of a choice as to who they decide to live with. Our managers are dedicated to working with children, young people and families and always try to do a really good job. I think we have good social workers, we have stronger managers, and the children and young people are benefitting receiving an improving service.

Any final comments?

I just want to say again that it is a pleasure to attend these meetings, I am really pleased to hear all the things that the young people want to do in their lives. It is great to hear their ambitions and with all that they have achieved so far, I wish them absolutely every success and know that they can achieve their dreams.