

## **Update of the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families**

Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee – 18 January 2024

### **1. Department for Education visit**

- 1.1. On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 9 colleagues from the DfE's commercial team came for a general visit– this was led by Jenny Williams, DfE's Commercial Director and Tim Aldridge, Camden's Exec Director of Children and Learning.
- 1.2. The day started at Agar Family Hub, and included a tour, presentations, and a networking lunch with frontline practitioners across services. In the afternoon, colleagues split up with some visiting Netley Primary School and Centre for Autism and their Adult Community Learning Centre, and the Greenwood Centre. The other part of the group visited the Avalon Project and met with the leads from the Honest Grind Coffee project, and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, before heading to 5PS to hear about the MASH and SEND Clusters. Some DfE colleagues visited Wac Arts to see some short-breaks provision.
- 1.3. DfE colleagues had a great day and were really impressed by the amount of great work happening at Camden and struck by the warmth and expertise of the Camden staff in supporting children, young people and families. They also said the visit had given them lots of food for thought.

### **2. Fostering film project**

- 2.1. 'Any of Us' – a powerful short film to encourage people from all backgrounds to consider becoming foster carers for their local authority – picked up two prestigious awards this month. The film was submitted on behalf of all councils that took part, including Camden. The film won the 'Best Collaboration' and 'Best Creative Comms' categories at the comms2point0 UnAwards, which recognises excellence in public sector communications. Camden participated in the project and supported it with funding.
- 2.2. 'Any Of Us' looks at three very different people who all show some of the attributes needed to be a foster carer in incidents from their daily lives – Ayesha going to the aid of a pedestrian after a minor road accident, Neil calming down an aggressive situation in a snooker club, and Marsha identifying a young person showing signs of distress and intervening with them at school. The film develops so that it becomes clear that one of these three everyday people will become the foster carer to Chloe. But which one of the three will be the one to make the difference? The main character's stories are all interwoven with Chloe's, as we see her journey into fostering. The message of the fostering film is "any of us can foster a child or young person, if you have the capacity to care". You can watch the film on YouTube by clicking on this [link](#).

### **3. Upcoming care-experienced themed debate**

- 3.1. The themed debate for the January Council meeting will be on Care Experienced young people and improving our offer.
- 3.2. The Care-experienced themed debate will be an opportunity to hear about care experienced young people and adults' lived experiences, the disadvantage and stigma they can face but also the diversity of people's experiences.
- 3.3. As the portfolio lead for Best Start for children and families, I am truly committed to champion the voice of our care experienced young people and adults, and to keep looking at what the council and its partners can do as their Corporate Parents to further improve outcomes of those with experience of the care system. We will be doing further work as a Corporate Parenting Board in 2024 to refresh our Corporate Parenting Strategy and enhance our offer for our care-experienced young people.

### **4. Winter HAF programme**

- 4.1. The Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme continues to play a crucial role in supporting children and young 5-16 who are eligible for benefit-related free school meals during school holidays, by offering them the opportunity to engage in a range of enriching educational activities while enjoying nutritious meals during the school holidays. As with the summer programme, the Council have supplemented the HAF DfE funding using the Council's Family Crisis Fund to ensure that significant demand for additional support is addressed. The additional Council funding has ensured that all children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who may require one-on-one staff assistance requesting a space in the HAF Winter programme have been accommodated. Our primary focus is on ensuring that both eligible and non-eligible children with SEND needs and other vulnerable children can access a place in the HAF programme.
- 4.2. The Camden Winter program is scheduled to run from December 27th to January 5th, and it will provide support to a total of 918 children. Out of these, 871 children are non-SEND needs and 42 children with SEND needs, which will be supported by HAF funding. The Family Crisis Fund has increased the number of non-SEND participants by 70 and 21 children with SEND needs bringing the total HAF places to 1004. This is 13% support to children and young people eligible for benefit related free school meals. The Winter HAF programme will be delivered by 21 providers across 27 venues across Camden.
- 4.3. During this time, I will have the privilege of visiting one of our program providers, LISA (London Inclusion Sports Academy), which collaborates closely with Camden's Swiss Cottage Special School and on January 4th, I will be joined by the Mayor of Camden, Cllr Nazma Rahman, to witness first-hand the positive impact of the HAF programme on our community. Having visited HAF venues during this year's Summer programme, I had the opportunity to hear directly from parents and children about how much this initiative means to them during school holiday periods. I remain committed to working tirelessly with Camden Council to enhance the support provided by the Camden HAF programme to vulnerable families in Camden.