

Ashlea's Blog.

My name is Ashlea Harvey and I was a child in care from the age of 13 and stayed with my foster family until I was 19 and got my own place.

As a looked after child, I was part of my local Children in Care Council , which consists of a group of young people in care who meet up to try and make things better for looked after children. I joined the Children in Care Council through the NSPCC because I really wanted to make a difference to the care system and other children like me who were being cared for by 'corporate parents'.

We regularly met with Senior Managers and councillors to have our say. We talked about being in care and helped our corporate parents to improve the service and meet our needs. The key thing for me was to have a voice in the decisions being made for us. The best thing about it is that we really did make a difference; we were listened to and achieved some really positive things.

One of the needs we identified was help in gaining employment. This resulted in four apprenticeship placements being ring-fenced for young people in care or care leavers. It was great to know I played a part in securing these places for young people like me that just needed a chance to get into employment.

I then started working for Barnsley Council where I was an apprentice doing Business Admin work. I worked there for 18 months until I secured a temporary job for 1 year at Rotherham Council which later became a permanent contract.

My current role as a Young Inspector Coordinator is to deliver the Young Inspectors Programme which is made up of a group of volunteer young people from the ages of 11 to 24 who inspect services used by children, young people and families in Rotherham. They make sure that the most vulnerable are listened to and understood. I recruit young inspectors who carry out inspections of children, and young people's services. It's a great post for me - something I believe in and can relate to at a personal level. As part of my job I help organise the inspections, keep in touch with young inspectors, write up the findings from the inspections and request action plans from services with the findings the young inspectors have recommended.

Twice a year the young inspectors raise money for their chosen charity and last year they raised over £1,018.40 for Safe@Last and Rotherham's Children's Hospital, through a bake sale and tombola. The money raise helped buy toys, books, televisions and also a camera and printer.

The Young Inspectors programme is all about making children's services better and child-friendly to children, young people and their families. Since the programme was set up in 2015, 28 inspections have taken place with over 160 improvements made.

We undertook an inspection of our leaving care accommodation where young people reported that people who weren't in education were being rewarded with activities but those who were in education and doing really well were left with no activities. The team took the young peoples' views on board and now activities have been booked in during half term, evenings and weekends for those in education.

Two care leavers won places to cook with Jamie Oliver in his London Restaurant, with two members of staff from the Care Leavers team supporting them to attend.

Improvements have been made to related websites, our buildings, the quality of information, new procedures and staff training.

The best thing about my role is I get to meet new people and help make a difference to services for other children and young people of Rotherham.

As the saying goes, 'if it's not good enough for my children, it isn't good enough for any child'