



# VIRTUAL SCHOOL NEWSLETTER TO SCHOOLS

**SPRING 2022**

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Happy New Year!

I hope the new term has begun well for everyone.

Our team has been steadily expanding this academic year with new Advisory Teachers and Learning Mentors joining our team to help us support you in meeting the needs of our Children Looked After. You can see who's who in our structure diagram further into this newsletter. Do stay in touch with us and let us know what you need and how best we can help.

We continue to develop our website and are increasingly using this platform to share our resources, training materials and guidance documents. Again, if you have ideas to improve this medium, do get in touch with us.

The Extension of Duties work we are developing sees our strategic support being linked to Children with Social Workers. We are beginning to roll out some test and learn pilots and some additional support that identified schools can access which we hope will have some real impact for this cohort. Please read more about the work in this newsletter.

All best wishes for the spring term,

**Emily Walters**  
Virtual School Head

## SOME MEETING/TRAINING DATES FOR SPRING 2022

### **DT network meeting**

**10.2.22 -Face to face at Dillington 2.00 - 4.00**

### **DT workshop**

**14.3.22- Online 2.00 - 4.00**

### **Working with the Traumatised Child**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March (all day**

**– one session in am and one pm)**

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March (all day**

**– one session in am and one pm)**

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April (9.30-1.30)**

**NB: This is a programme of 3 sessions, all taking place at Dillington and attendance at all three sessions is required**

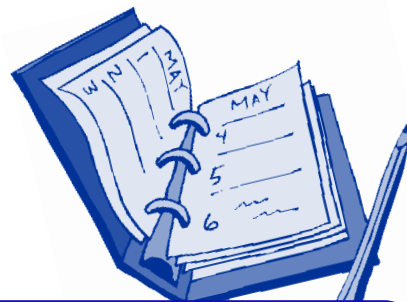
### **Sensory Processing**

**Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March - Face to face at Dillington**

To book a place please visit the SSE website

[Support Services for Education](#)

and search for the event



For more details of opportunities visit the training page of the VS website

[www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk)



## SEMHSNAPSHOTS

Look out for our **SEMHSNAPSHOTS** being sent out to schools during each term. The autumn 2021 edition came out via email to all DTs in November, full of helpful suggestions about supporting CLA and other young people with traumatic backgrounds to manage the run up to Christmas which can be such a challenging time.

Links to all editions of the Snapshot are available on the resources page of our website in case you missed them [Resources – Somerset Virtual School](#). Each edition has links to SEMHSNAPSHOTS resources, ideas and practical suggestions to help support vulnerable learners.

If you do not appear to be receiving the Snapshot email, please check that we have your details on file by emailing [thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk)

You can also use this email address to share any ideas you have for inclusion in future SEMHSNAPSHOTS, or any feedback about this developing resource.

Don't forget the *SEMHSNAPSHOTS Toolkit for Schools* Written by the Somerset Educational Psychology Service [SEMHSNAPSHOTS Toolkit](#)

And please don't forget to help us to help you by completing the short SEMHSNAPSHOTS Survey [Virtual School SEMHSNAPSHOTS Survey](#)

## Decision making, language development and building sense of self - all in one book!

Book sharing is always a great way of nurturing positive connections and providing a quieter moment in the day for a child to reset and refocus in the midst of a busy classroom environment.

'You Choose' by Nick Sharratt and Pippa Goodhart is an excellent resource to support Reception and Key Stage 1 children develop their skills in making decisions, justifying their reasons and using their language skills. With colourful pages of interesting places to live, foods to eat and hats to wear, 'You Choose' is a highly supportive tool to engage a child in the the question...What do you think? There is no right or wrong, just lots of fun to be had talking about a child's choice of funky footwear or desire to own a pet dragon.

This book is great for building positive relationships as the child and adult explore the pages together, generating interesting and engaging conversations which support deeper connections and an opportunity to explore a child's own interests and personality in a fun and friendly way.

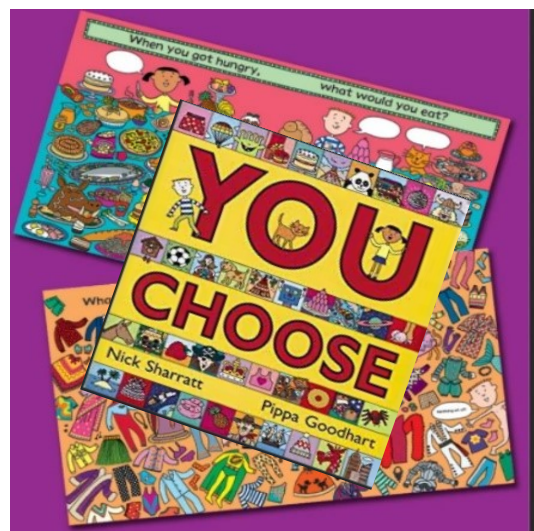
## QUESTIONS AREN'T CONNECTIONS

QUESTIONS CAN \*INCREASE\* ANXIETY FOR MANY KIDS

Instead, try statements that show you are interested and paying attention:

- How was school? → • You look like you've had a long day
- Did your math test go ok? → • I was thinking about you today during your math test.
- Did you find a friend to play with at recess? → • I remember last night you were worried about recess.
- How do you feel? → • Your smile is SO big!

@LINDSAYGRAMANE



# Hearing Our Children and Young People

Through the academic year 2020-21, Cassie Jones, one of the VS&LST Advisory Teachers, undertook a piece of work to explore how the voice of our CLA was heard through our various education processes. The outcome of this work, 'An analysis of pupil attendance and participation in Somerset Virtual School's PEP process during 2020-2021' can be found on our website and was shared with those Designated Teachers and school staff able to attend the DT workshop on December 9th 2021.

The aim of the study was to understand how successfully we were hearing and capturing the 'voice of the child' through Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings and how effectively pupil engagement is facilitated in these meetings. Through increasing our understanding we hope to develop stakeholders' understanding of pupil participation in PEP meetings and identify and address any possible barriers to engagement in the PEPs, thus increasing pupil participation in these critical meetings.

Cassie's report is well worth a read in full but here are the 'Top Tips' articulated by Somerset's CLA themselves as a starting point for us all as we plan PEPs in 2022.

## Top Tips from Somerset's CLA

- **Make sure I know that the meeting is taking place**
- **Ask me if I'd like to attend the whole meeting, or just part of it**
- **Allow enough time for the meeting**
- **Ask me who I would like to be in the meeting**
- **Ensure that the meeting doesn't clash with my favourite lesson(s)**
- **Remind me that I can leave whenever I would like to, or need to**
- **Speak to me before the meeting about my worries**
- **Ensure that my views are collected prior to the meeting, as this can help me to focus my thinking and express myself in the meeting**
- **Have the right adults there – those who know me, can advocate for me and are able to make decisions about me**
- **Have the same adults attend each meeting, wherever possible**
- **Make sure everything is explained really clearly**
- **Keep the meeting as positive as possible and celebrate my achievements**
- **Focus on the future and on my education – avoiding topics that I might find distressing, sensitive or embarrassing (while I am present)**
- **Speak about those other (boring) things when I am not there**
- **Speak to me after the meeting about any questions I might have**
- **Provide refreshments**

This list of Top Tips really captures the voice of the child and highlights the fact that there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to holding PEPs and including children and young people meaningfully. In order to ensure that the meetings are as child-focused as possible, it is crucial for Designated Teachers (and social workers) to speak to their CLA about the meetings: to ensure that they are aware of the purpose of the meeting; that they are invited to attend – in a way that is as inclusive and accessible for them as possible; that they are encouraged to contribute and that they are clear about the outcomes of the meeting.

## EXTENSION OF THE DUTIES OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD

On June 16th the DfE announced the extension of the duties of the VSH with the intention of increasing a focus to:

- create a culture of high aspirations that helps all children with social workers to make educational progress
- make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities to help all agencies
- hold high aspirations for these children. Promote practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting can be an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.
- level up children's outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential. This will include helping to make sure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover from the impact of COVID-19.
- enhance partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together.
- identify the needs of the cohort and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes and ensure pupils make educational progress.
- offer advice and support to key professionals to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

To support this work, a one off sum has been allocated to the Virtual School Head.

Following meetings with schools, Education Safeguarding, School Improvement and CSC through the autumn term, we have firmed up our initial work, focusing on three key strands.

### **1. Training**

- Development of a trauma awareness 'staff meeting' (1 hour) available free to any Somerset school and delivered by a VS team based on development of the Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction training package delivered December/January 2021/2.
- Development of training package for CSC to support social workers to provide effective challenge and support in their work with CYP in schools

**2. Test and Learn Projects** – facilitate schools in developing evidence-based learning for evaluation and development, and application in schools.

Suitable schools will be drawn from those with

- significant attendance issues for vulnerable cohort
- significant and/or repeated FTEs of vulnerable cohort

**3. Developing and supporting SW practice for key cohorts** – Supporting social workers to build, manage and monitor plans to improve the attendance of CYP with extremely low attendance.

We will be in touch with schools identified in the next few weeks to see if there is an appetite/capacity for engagement, hoping that some additional funding may be helpful to schools looking to secure improvements and explore developments in these areas.

# Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) Updates



The new VS&LST PLAC documents are now completed and ready for schools and parents/carers to access. From January the documents will

be available on the VS website

[Previously Looked After Children and Young People – Somerset Virtual School](#)

and we would love to see as many schools as possible using these resources to support Previously Looked After Children.

## Spotlight On

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales, they support family members who are raising children when their parents can't.



## Did you know?

- 36% of children in kinship care had SEND – this is 3 times the national average.
- 62% of carers believed that their children had long-term physical and mental health needs.
- 40% of carers reported their children displayed risk-taking behaviour including self-harming and drug and alcohol misuse.
- 47% of carers reported that they felt their child's school met their needs and supported them well.

*Taken from Kinship Care Annual Survey 2021*

Check out their website to find out more

[Homepage - Kinship - The kinship care charity](#)



## POST 16 Update

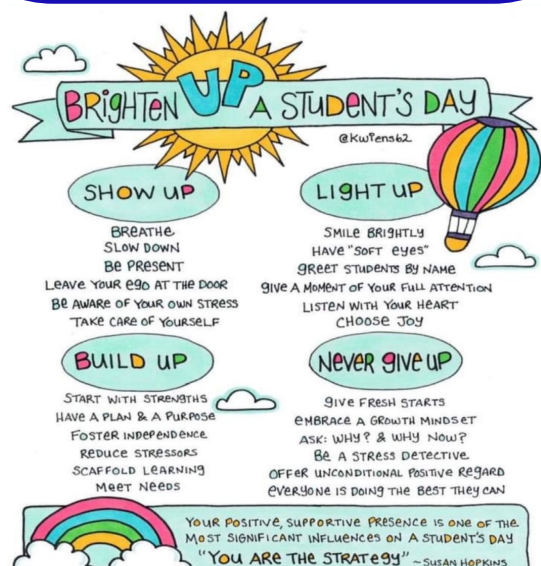
For those of you in Post 16 settings or with 6th form provision, our newest colleague, Elizabeth Fox, will be a useful contact for you. Elizabeth has just joined us as Lead Advisory Teacher Post 16 and will be developing our offer and ways of working with our KS5 learners. With an extensive background in Post 16 education, Elizabeth will be linking up with providers, agencies and organisations as she develops her understanding of the Post 16 landscape in Somerset. We are really pleased to have her on board.

## TalentEd Academy Programme

The first series of the Somerset TalentEd Academy Industry Insights concluded earlier this month with the Digital industry giving students an insight into careers in organisations such as BT, Teapot Creative and Somerset County Council.

All four Industry Insights from the series are now available to view on demand making it even easier to schedule into work plans for students. Each insight has a comprehensive **set of resources** to accompany it and you can find **planning resources** on the talent academy website also.

Series 2 will be starting in 2022 For full details of the programme, including a schedule of all Industry Insights, [visit website](#)



# Somerset Virtual School & Learning Support Team

## Designated Teachers' Networks and Workshops

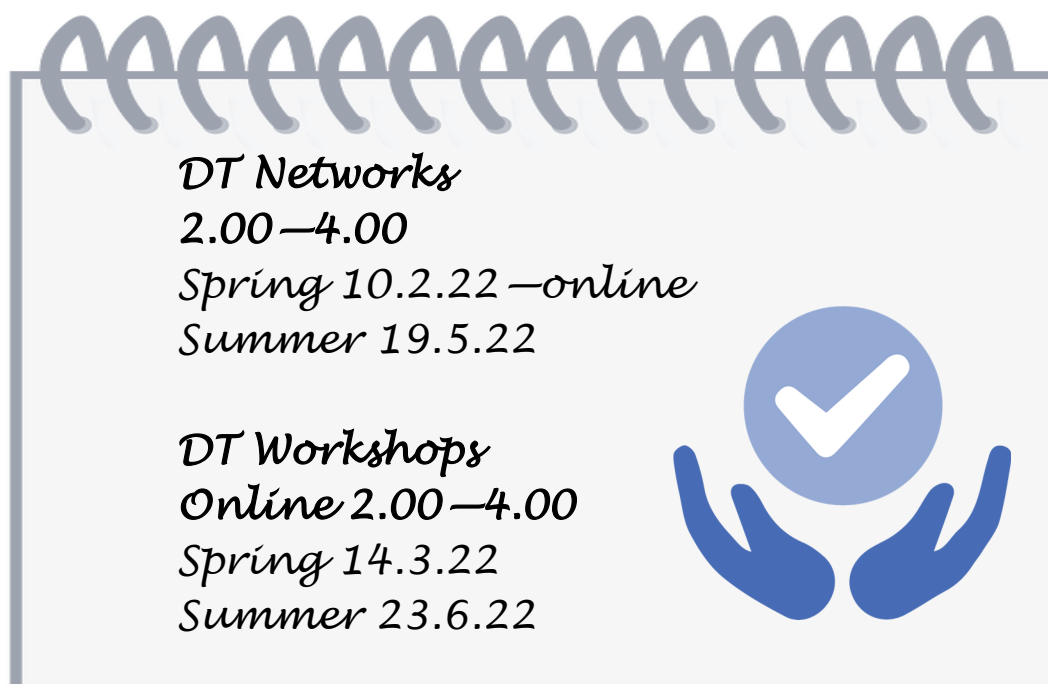
### 2021-22

#### Network Meetings

- Take place in the first half of each term
- Are held face to face at a central venue
- Provide input and awareness –raising opportunities
- Build Networks
- Provide space for joint practice development
- Are attended by Somerset Virtual School and Learning Support Team

#### Workshop Meetings

- Take place in the second half of each term
- Are virtual/online meetings
- Include Solution-focussed work with an EP
- Build networks
- Provide access to support through discussion
- Are attended by Somerset Virtual School and Learning Support Team



- Further develop partnership working
- Connect and utilise Designated Teacher expertise
- Access support from the Virtual School Team
- Develop skills, knowledge and understanding of CLA/PLAC agenda



# SiCC & SLCC news

Somerset In-Care and Leaving Care Councils

[www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk](http://www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk)



## SiCC & SLCC are looking for new members

Would you like to use your experiences and views to help others?

- Talk to your social worker, IRO, Leaving Care Worker, advocate or independent visitor
- Take a look at the website [www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk](http://www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk) to see the sorts of things S&S do
- Call or text the Participation worker on 07585 983356



## Who are SiCC & SLCC?



A group of young people aged 10 – 20 who are in care or leaving care

They do things like surveys, attend meetings, interview new staff (like social workers or managers), make films and have fun together!

They use their experiences, views and opinions to help improve services in Children's Social Care

This is what some members have said about being in SiCC & SLCC:

*"Makes me happy knowing someone is here for me"*

*"Nice to know that our words are being used in paperwork"*

*"I didn't have a good experience, so I want to help other children and help social workers to do their job better"*

# VIRTUAL SCHOOL & LEARNING SUPPORT TEAM

## CLA SUPPORT 2021-22

(UPDATED JANUARY 2022)

### WEST

**Lead Advisory Teacher - Sarah Melhuish**

#### Advisory Teachers

- ◆ Cassie Jones
- ◆ Claire Eastwood
- ◆ Julie Hunt
- ◆ Zoe Crarer
- ◆ Louise Conway– Byron
- ◆ Lucy Herring

#### Learning Mentors

- ◆ Bev Robson
- ◆ Polly Slade

**Post 16 Officer - Ella Kusiak**

**Lead Advisory Teacher (Post 16) county wide —Elizabeth Fox**

### EAST

**Lead Advisory Teacher - Helen Berryman**

#### Advisory Teachers

- ◆ Heidi Humpage
- ◆ Jackie Jones
- ◆ Mark Long (LAT for SEND)
- ◆ Sian Biggs
- ◆ Wendy Birkett
- ◆ Jo Milum
- ◆ Nicky Harper

#### Learning Mentors

- ◆ Kerry Ashworth
- ◆ Catherine Steadman

**Post 16 Officer - Gary Roper**

From September 2020, the advisory team supporting CLA has been working out of East and West pods, with the staff within these two areas linked to the schools, colleges and settings there. We hope this has worked well for schools.

We have welcomed Louise Conway-Byron and Lucy Herring to the team during the autumn term and have two further new staff who will be joining us this term, Elizabeth Fox as Lead Advisory Teacher for Post 16, and Nicky Harper as Advisory Teacher. As they take up their new roles, we will introduce them to you, and we look forward to gaining their skills and expertise within our team.

## GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL & LEARNING SUPPORT TEAM

If you are not sure who you need to contact about a particular CLA, please email

[thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk)

and your query will be directed to the right person. This mailbox is staffed year round although much of the advisory team works during school term time.

If you have a query about Previously Looked After Children, we have a dedicated mailbox for these questions [PLACSomersetInclusion@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:PLACSomersetInclusion@somerset.gov.uk)

The Virtual School website remains a source of information and provides links to a range of resources and guidance including support for completing PEPs, Education Plans for Previously Looked After Children (EPPLAC) and the current Pupil Premium Policy [www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk](http://www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk)