



THE HOUSE PROJECT

Wolverhampton



ANNUAL REPORT

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Author: Julia Tompson – Supported Accommodation Manager – Children and Young People in Care Service

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Background

The City of Wolverhampton Council were approached by the National House Project with a view to delivering a local House Project in Wolverhampton supported by a local funder. In July 2019, cabinet endorsed the recommendation to implement a local House Project for Care Leavers within the City of Wolverhampton. The House Project framework gives greater placement choice for young people to be supported into independence and gives the additionality of peer support contributing to reducing feeling of loneliness and isolation. The theory of change that underpins the project is based upon improving young people's outcomes and wellbeing, supporting positive changes to enable care leavers to live successful healthy adult lives.

The successful implementation of a local House Project compliments the existing accommodation options available to the care leavers within Wolverhampton.

Launch

The Wolverhampton House Project was officially launched on 28th October 2019, during National Care Leaver week. Relevant stakeholders, the young people identified, their carers and Social Workers were invited to learn more about the project and to celebrate the launch. Young People from other House Projects also attended to provide encouragement and open discussions with young people from Wolverhampton to inform them of the success of their projects and the benefits from participating. The launch was a huge success and attended by most young people that were invited. Ten young people who applied to be on the project were successful in being offered a place.

Twelve months on:

Steering Group

The Steering Group continues to drive the project forward by meeting on a monthly basis. It has been agreed that due to the positive drive of the project, this group will meet bi-monthly moving forward. A member of the Care Leavers Independence Collective attends this meeting representing the young people and is now updating the Steering Group on the views of the young people accessing the project.

Psychological input

A key element of Local House Project provision is psychological support to ensure that projects are run safely', with a particular recognition of the importance of developing a trauma-informed approach to the support of organisations, staff and young people. Ideally this should have been in place at the beginning of the project but due to difficulties with sourcing this facility, there was a delay with the start of this. The National House Project has recognised that this is a generic issue and moving forward are now looking to commission this for local authorities and include this within the partnership contract.

Changing Minds have been contracted for 12 months to provide this to the Project. This service is being delivered by Consultant Clinical Psychologist with experience of working with young people in, or leaving, care and the systems around them. Their role includes:

1) The facilitation of specialist psychological team formulations to create a shared understanding of the young person and their strengths and needs.

2) A monthly psychological consultation day which provides ongoing psychological advice and consultation for the project, supporting staff to feel able to better manage the needs of the young people, with space for staff reflection/self-care and support.

Staffing

Staff members attend a monthly Community of Practice training day with the National House Project and other local House Projects, where good practice ideas and moderation of the learning programme takes place. In addition, staff attended 3 days training with the National House Project in February 2020, where the focus was on trauma informed practice. The National House Project also provides monthly consultations with the House Project staff.

A 12-month secondment for an additional House Project Facilitator has been approved and recruitment to this post is currently in progress. It is important to note that the House Project staff have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to promote the ethos of the project and to maintain positive relationships with the young people, and they are commended for this commitment not only by the City of Wolverhampton, but also from the National House Project.

Staff have also been commended by the National House Project AQA lead for their passion and commitment in thinking outside of the box, when working with the young people. Note the commendation:

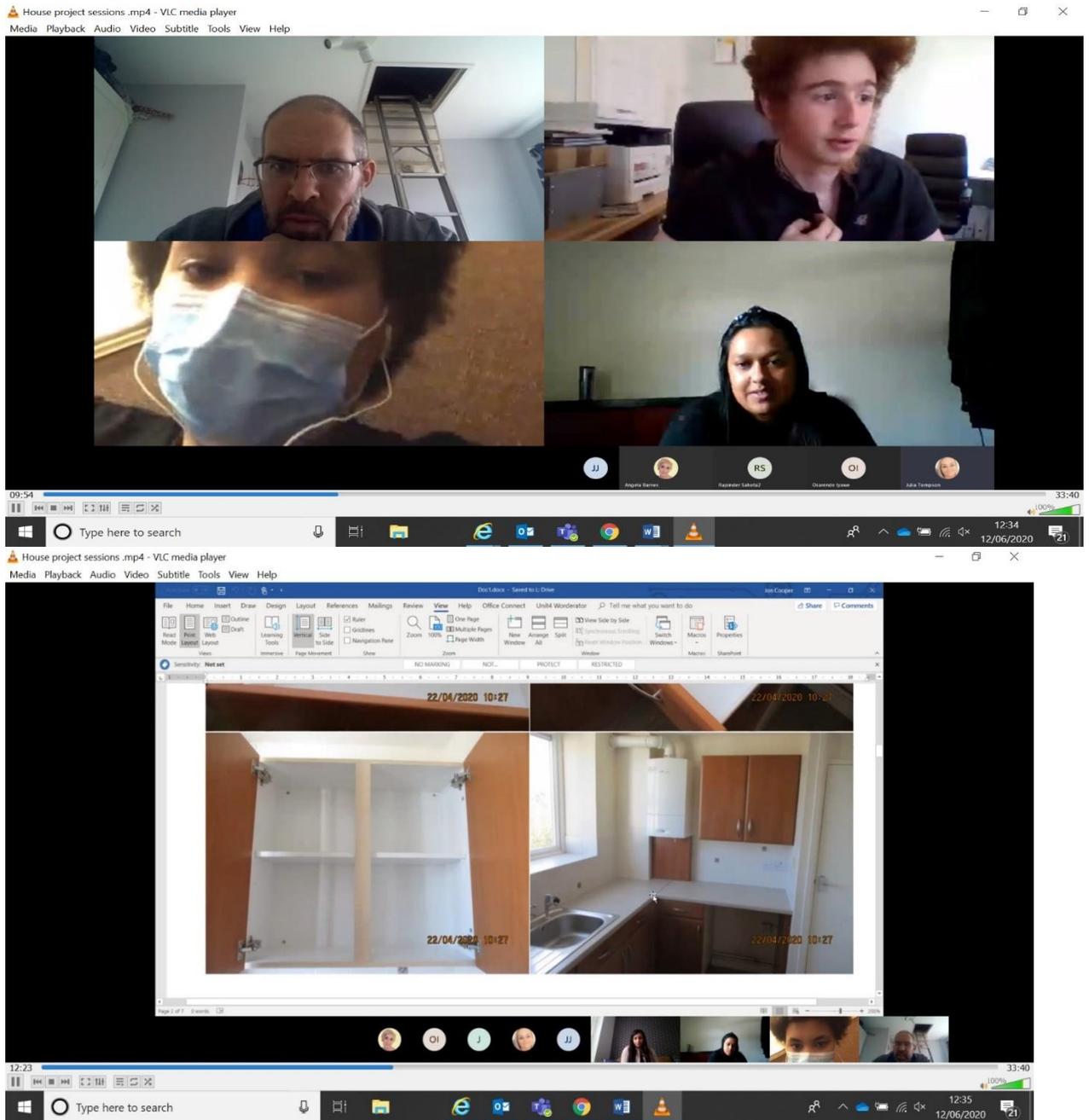
"I have just finished reviewing Ol's work on the Decision-Making module. Wow! I am so impressed with the work that Ol has done and the way he has been supported to achieve what was obviously a big step up for him. The evidence is great and particularly the way he has been challenged and supported by you all and by his peers. There is a real sense here of a team working together and supporting each other. The pitch videos are excellent, and I like the way that you as adults have helped the young people to share and develop their ideas. This is exactly what the House Project and ORCHIDS are all about."

In addition, a Supported Accommodation Apprentice post has been approved, which will be ringfenced for Care Leavers. It is noted that the post holder will support the House Project team with the participation sessions.

Partnership working

Partnership working has been instrumental towards the success of the first twelve months of the project:

Wolverhampton Homes – one of the main partners have shown their full commitment to the project and are active members of the House Project Steering Group. More recently they participated in virtual meetings with the young people, acknowledged and understood their needs, and sourced properties in the areas that are important to them, which has enabled them to access their support networks. In addition, they have provided decoration allowances which has enabled the young people to have choice around how they decorate their homes.



Reconomy – as with Wolverhampton Homes, have shown their full commitment to the project and again are active members of the House Project Steering Group. Despite the challenges faced with Covid-19 and key staff members being furloughed, they have continued to support the project. More recently they have committed to offering apprenticeships to all young people participating in the House Project.

Communications

The Wolverhampton House Project now has a microsite, which is linked to the National House Project Website – Wolverhampton was the first House Project to launch their microsite. This site is used to update on local information and celebrate the success of our young people.

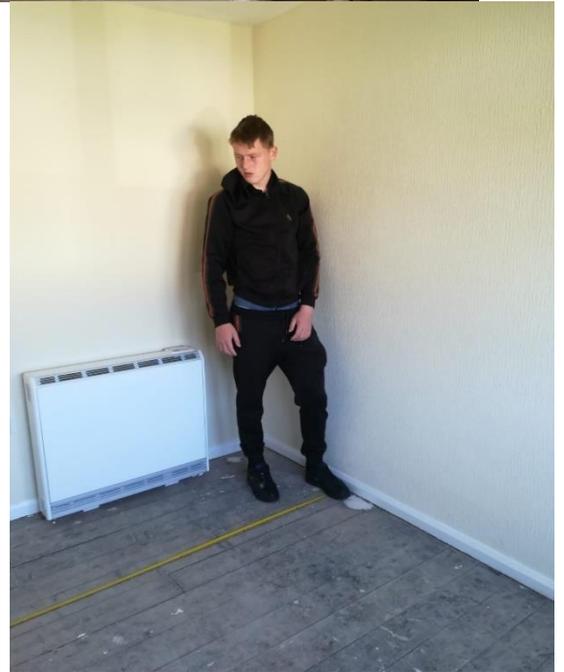
In addition to the website, we have a Twitter page and a Facebook page. Within these social media platforms, the team provide:



There is also a requirement for the young people to complete a learning programme, which constitutes the completion of 13 modules, all of which will develop the skills needed for them to progress into independence. They focus on an ORCHIDS framework, **Ownership, Responsibility, Community, Homes, Independence, Developmental** and **Sense of wellbeing**. The modules are as follows:

- Application and Interview
- Our rules base and identity
- Learning plan
- Safety plan
- Cook and share
- Residential
- Do something creative
- Independence
- Home
- Decision Making and Care Leavers National Movement
- Power, pitch and purpose
- Network event, Businesses and EET providers
- Benefit my community

All the modules are interlinked, and our young people have completed all those that they are able to complete without Covid restrictions, such as the Residential, Network event and Benefit my community. There are no plans to complete the three modules until restrictions are lifted but this has not prevented the young people from progressing. At the time of writing this report, we have four young people now moved into their homes, two in the process of decorating and furnishing theirs. One young person is waiting for the keys, and another is actively sourcing a property in the area of her choice. We have recognised that two of our young people are not ready to progress into independence and still need support to develop their independence skills and their ability to keep safe, so they will be progressed at their own pace and will be invited to be part of the next cohort of young people. It is important to note that this is not seen as a failure but more a commitment to our young people and an acceptance of the diverse needs of our young people, and the support offered from the House Project will continue until they are ready.



Young People are continuing to invest in the project and there is a sense of community amongst the group. Young people are keeping in contact since moving into their own homes and checking in on each other. There have been noticeable developments in their skills as they transition into adulthood and they have recognised that being part of the House Project has enabled them to progress. One young person recently commented:

"I am so glad that I chose to do the House Project, I'm moving into my flat feeling 100% ready, rather than moving in and struggling. I think every young person in care should be part of it"

We have one young person who has become a member of the Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM). This group is made up of care leavers from Local House Projects across the country. They use their skills as expert advisers to develop House Projects and improve outcomes for all young people leaving care. They are currently promoting the need for the recognition of Digital Poverty amongst young people leaving care.

One Young Person's journey

Reece attended the House Project launch in October 2020 and was reserved and nervous about being on the Project, expressing how he lacked confidence and did not like being part of groups with other young people. Reece felt that he was never good at academic work at school and his tutors always made him feel "dumb". Reece told the staff at The House Project during initial conversations, "If I don't work with you, pick your calls up or come to groups, you will just leave me alone, won't you"- this was his way of building a wall as he felt he had no confidence in his education/ academics and "everyone gave up on him".

Reece initially attended the group sessions; however, he was not always punctual, left early or did not engage fully in the sessions. Having done some one to one sessions with Reece, a relationship was built between Reece and the House Project staff and he was supported to get to the sessions.

Reece started to enjoy the sessions and quickly showed his leadership skills. He encouraged others to be part of the group work and when his peers did not engage or feared doing a particular piece of group work, he was always a positive influence. Reece would sit next to peers that were shy or not as confident to include them in the groupwork and also conversation.

Reece initiated playing interactive board games in the session and this helped the group to bond quickly. The games were something that everyone looked forward to in the sessions and it felt like a real treat to the young people. He quickly made a strong connection with peers in the group and started independently coming to groups.

Reece's personal development has been huge during the last year. He attended sessions in the beginning of the project, sometimes angry, that would result into tears. This was due to a relationship breakdown with his mother. Reece hated being in care, whilst his other siblings were living with his mother. Reece would often attend sessions and ask to speak to staff separately as he had fallen out or had an argument with his mother.

One to one sessions and daily telephone conversations helped Reece deal with his emotions as he did not want external support from agencies. During Christmas, in a quiet session, Reece sang a rap for his mother. This was recorded and then sent to his

mother. This was the point where Reece received a hug and a kiss from his mother, after a long time. From this point, Reece and his mother's relationship started to develop positively. During lockdown Reece moved into his mothers house and went on his first family holiday.

Reece's relationship with his family and mother went from strength to strength. Reece also met a girlfriend which helped with his independence and confidence further.

Reece confidently completed his portfolio for the House Project independently with House Project staff and sought no support from placement. Although Reece felt he was not academically capable, his creative skills overpowered this. He confidently lead and planned a residential for his group, planned for a Pitch to managers to raise money for the Residential and a community/ network event to awareness of the House Project. Reece also had great plans for the House Project base and designed the logo for the Project. Reece was also able to restoratively amend historic issues that he had with peers.

Reece has shown great budgeting skills during his move into independent living. Reece prioritised what he felt was an essential, finding the best deals. The relationship between Reece and his mother is still strong and his mother has been part of Reece's journey to independent living.

During the last year, Reece has grown in patience, maturity, confidence and independence holistically. Reece has a great sense of humour that is infectious, and he can make any bad day/ situation into a positive one. Reece is really caring, helpful, protective of his loved ones- including his leaving care staff and is not afraid to ask for help or admit his failures/ wrong-doings.

Financial Implications

The House Project was funded in its first year by troubled families, due to an underspend during this year, £25,000 was carried forward into year 2.

The financial model of the House Project is based on supporting young people to step down from regulated placements (internal and purchased foster care and residential care) in to House Project (HP) properties. The Covid 19 pandemic has delayed young people from leaving care and move on through the House Project. Finance have projected that the annual savings for the Project up to 31st March 2021 are estimated at approximately £109,000.

The Next Steps

The House Project will continue to support the young people whilst they live in the own properties, this support will continue for as long as the young people feel they need it.

A virtual event was held on 23rd September 2020 with young people inviting them to be part of the second cohort of the project. The event was well received and there are already 7 young people interested. The team are currently in the process of supporting the young people to complete their application forms.

The House Project is also already identifying young people for the third cohort.

