

Middlesbrough's Virtual School Conference

Debrief

11.02.22

Children with a social worker deserve the same high quality education as everyone else. But statistics show that they often fall behind their peers in school.

That's especially true in a town like Middlesbrough, which has a much higher proportion of children who have a social worker, or are in the care system, than the national average. That's where Middlesbrough's Virtual School comes in.

The service works across all educational settings to create a culture of high aspirations to help every child to progress well in education – which aims to raise attainment and accelerate the progress of young people, improve school attendance and reduce exclusion, and improve life opportunities.

And the Virtual School's excellent work in promoting education for children with a social worker was showcased at a conference at the Riverside Stadium on Friday, hosted with its counterpart in Redcar and Cleveland.

Around 150 people attended to hear keynote speakers including some of the most respected names in the field, including Dr Nikki Luke from Oxford University, Elspeth Soutar, Lisa Cherry and Lemn Sissay.

Middlesbrough's Director of Children's Services Sue Butcher opened the conference, referencing the deprivation and child poverty levels in Middlesbrough, which are some of the highest in England.

The audience heard that almost one in five children will have been under the care of a social worker between the ages of 6 and 16 in the town.

Sue Butcher said: "Those who face trauma and deprivation are more likely to struggle to achieve high educational outcomes.

"Middlesbrough Children Matter, and it's against this backdrop that the work of our Virtual School is so vital."

Victoria Banks, the head of Middlesbrough's Virtual School, said: "Our job at the Virtual School is to advocate for children with a social worker across the town to make sure the most vulnerable children get the best education.

"We work with schools to try and identify any special educational needs, offer support, and look to minimise issues with exclusions or challenges.

"A lot of people might not understand what we do and think a Virtual School is an online education platform, but it's completely different.

"It was wonderful that we could host this conference, alongside Redcar and Cleveland's Virtual School, to share best practice and hear from some amazing speakers about how we can continue to improve outcomes for our young people."

One of the speakers at the conference was Luke Rodgers, who drew on his personal experiences to movingly explain how a young person responds to being taken into care – the loss of control and feelings of anxiety, confusion and sometimes, justified anger.

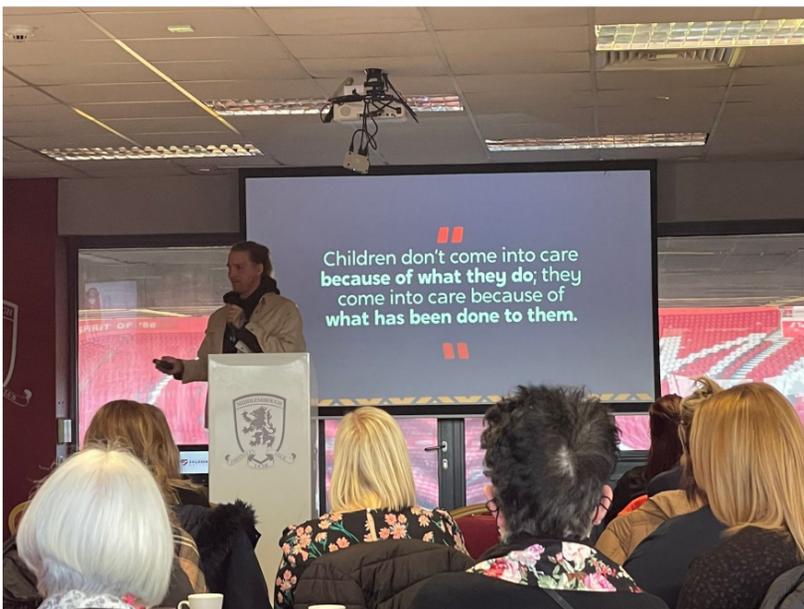
He reminded those at the conference that children have a social worker for things that have happened to them – and are not at fault for having a social worker.

Middlesbrough's Virtual School Conference Photos!



Sue Butcher, Director of Children's Services in Middlesbrough giving her opening address.

Over 150 delegates were in attendance at the conference.



Luke Rodgers speaking to delegates and sharing his powerful message. "Children don't come into care because of what they do; they come into care because of what has been done to them."

Lemn Sissay giving his keynote address to delegates.



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
MATTER