

Amplifying the voices of care experienced students in outreach

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Student Ambassadors: Abdella, Master of Mathematics (MMath) student, Kristina, Law LLB student, and Michael, Law LLB student

Introduction

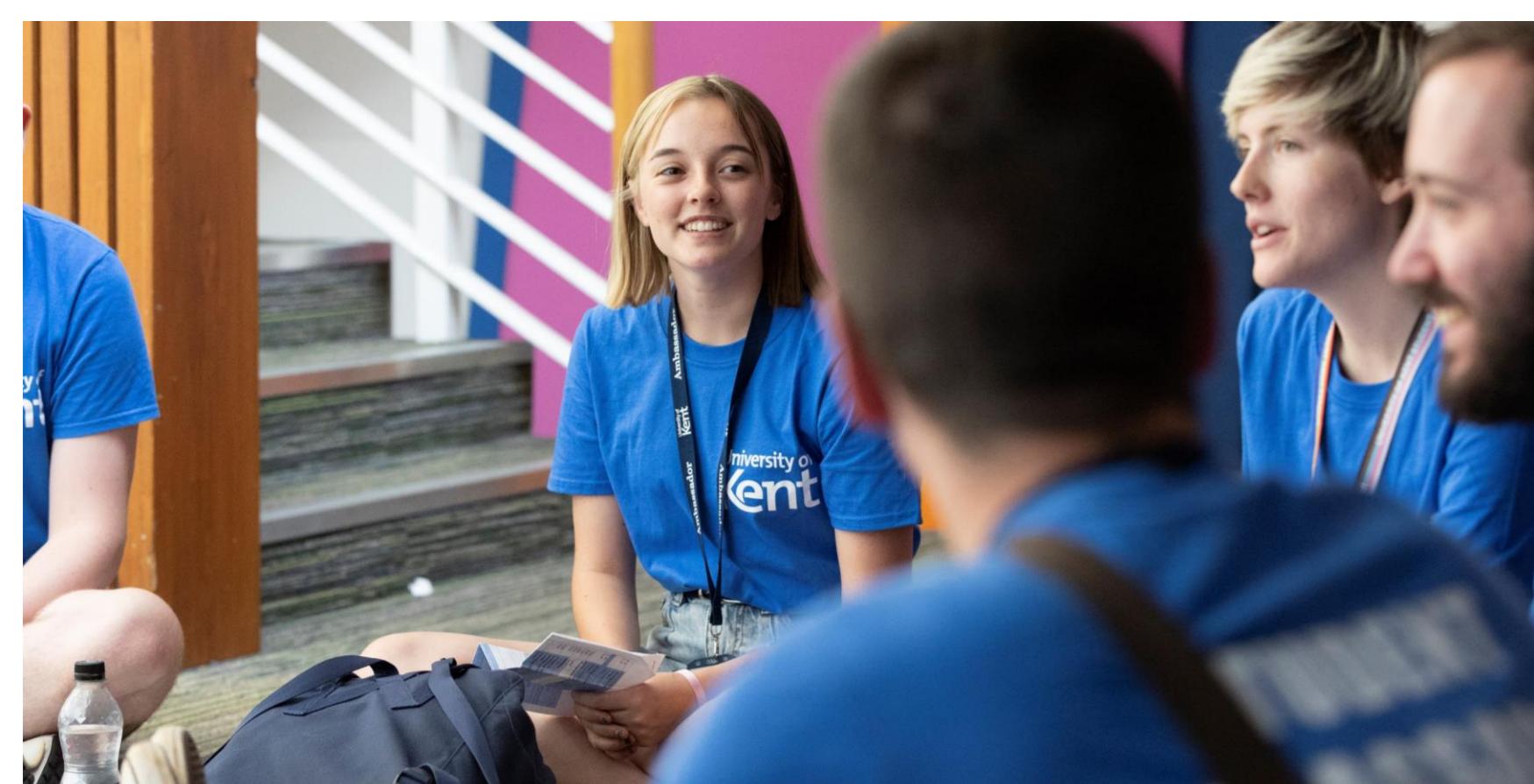
Asking care experienced student ambassadors to reflect on their co-construction journey with the University of Kent's Outreach and Widening Participation team, this research addresses the benefits of collaboration.

Methodology

We know that care experienced students are underrepresented in higher education and have significantly poorer educational outcomes (OfS, 2022). But we also know that every care experienced students' journey is unique, and these figures do not fully explore individual barriers. We could not assume what care experienced students needed or what we could do to help increase the numbers of care experienced students' progression to HE and support their success. It was essential for us to consult and collaborate with those who have living experiences and to amplify their voices.

We have worked with three care experienced student ambassadors since February 2022 to develop an outreach programme for children in care, care leavers, foster carers and professionals working with children in care.

This research has been done in consultation with these ambassadors, to see what they think the benefits of co-creation are in targeted outreach work.



Results – Why co-create with care experienced ambassadors?

The benefits to young people

- Seeing people like them further along on their journey, which helps them to gain a positive first-hand experience of student life.
- Supporting them to overcome negative stereotypes of care experience.
- Working with peers, not just professionals, to build trust and create a shared learning space.
- The opportunities are more authentic, tailored, relevant and useful.

Benefits to professionals working with care experienced young people

- To deepen their understanding of care-experienced students through these ambassadors' experiences, allowing for more effective support strategies.
- Many professionals working with care experienced students haven't heard from care leavers going to university.
- To encourage them to improve their practice.
- To become better advocates for their young people's individual journeys.

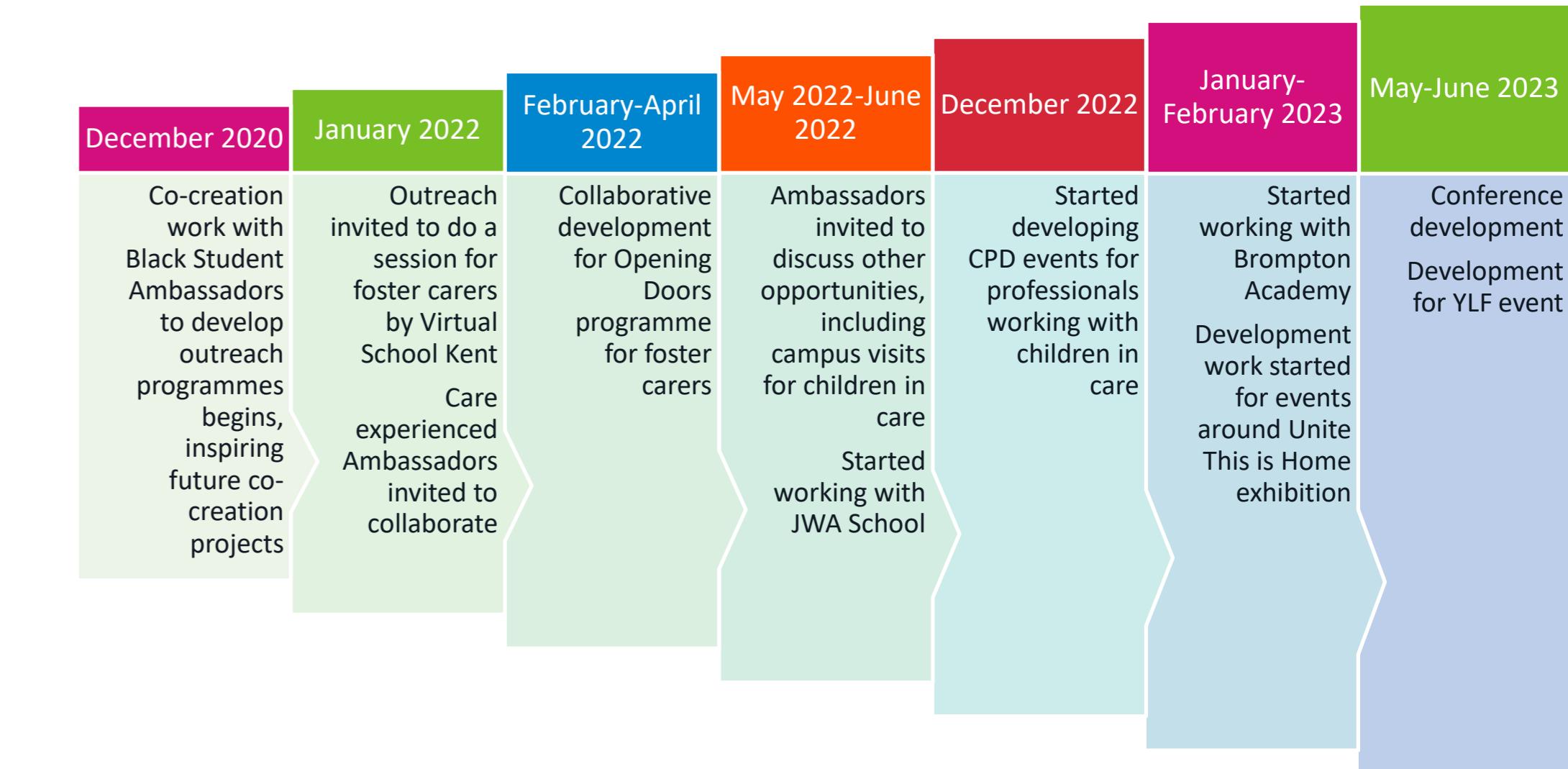
Benefits to Ambassadors

- To provide a platform for personal and professional growth.
- To provide opportunities for self-reflection.
- Discovering ways to make care experience into a strength and articulate that.
- Increased confidence and feeling of empowerment.
- Sense of belonging to a community.

Benefits to Outreach and Widening Participation Staff

- To learn from living experience and improve our practice.
- To increase institutional knowledge around the needs for care experienced students
- To build a creative, inclusive, and inspiring space for development.

Our Co-creation Journey



Conclusions

Co-creation benefits all those involved. Working closely with care experienced ambassadors has allowed us to create an authentic, responsive, and tailor-made programme.

The more we have worked with care experienced ambassadors, the more they have wanted to do, as trust has grown. Co-creation is person-centred and requires everyone to listen, learn, make mistakes, and try new ways of working.

'I feel a lot more comfortable and confident to tell my story. Doing this work has made me own my story a little more.' Student Ambassador

References

- 1 Care experienced students and looked after children Office for Students Topic Briefing, 2022 (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/care-experienced/>)