



Annual Report

Looked After Children Independent Service Children's Rights Team April 2017 to March 2018

Melanie Tiernan
Sara Miles

Independent Service Manager
Service Manager – Child Protection and Review
Unit
Children and Young People Service
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1 Introduction

Advocacy and children’s rights help to create a culture of openness where listening and responding to children’s voices is an integral part of everyday practice.

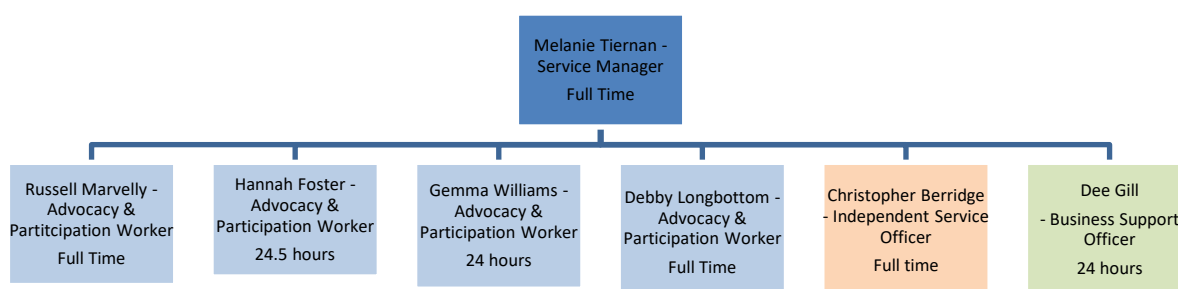
The Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children’s Rights Team) offer advocacy, advice and representation to children and young people who are Looked After by Kirklees Local Authority residing within the borough or in external placements.

2 The Aim of the Children’s Rights Team

The aim of the Children’s Rights team is to:

- Promote and support the rights of all children and young people looked after by Kirklees Local Authority within the current framework of legislation, incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNCRC)
- Support the empowerment of children and young people looked after by Kirklees Local Authority, to help enable them to engage in meaningful participation in respect of decision-making that affects them, individually and collectively.
- Provide a quality assurance function in respect of services received by children looked after by Kirklees Local Authority.
- Support children and young people involved in the child protection process to be able to voice their opinions.

3 Children’s Rights Team Structure



4 Children's Rights Team Overview

The Children's Rights team shares the views and opinions of children looked after with Children's Social Work Services to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and taken into account in respect of Local Authority policy development and service delivery. The service also supports children and young people aged ten and over when they are subject to a child protection plan.

The Children's Rights team deliver a number of other functions which include, supporting children and young people to use the complaints process and training them to be able to take part in the recruitment process for posts such as Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers. Children and young people are also trained to deliver their own training session to adults (Total Respect Training). This training helps adults to consider what the barriers are to the participation of children and young people and why it's important to listen to what children and young people say. Every child or young person who is new into care (or when they reach the age of 7) receives an 'Initial Visit' from a Children's Rights team, Advocacy & Participation Worker. During this, children and young people are informed about the service and the support that they can receive from the team, as well as what participation opportunities they can become involved in.

Following a Looked After Review, every child or young person looked after is invited to complete a Rate My Review feedback form, which is then shared with the Children's Rights team. The team subsequently contact children and young people who have completed the form to discuss their responses, in order to support the development of review meetings being conducted in a way which allows children and young people to be comfortable and able to participate in what is their meeting.

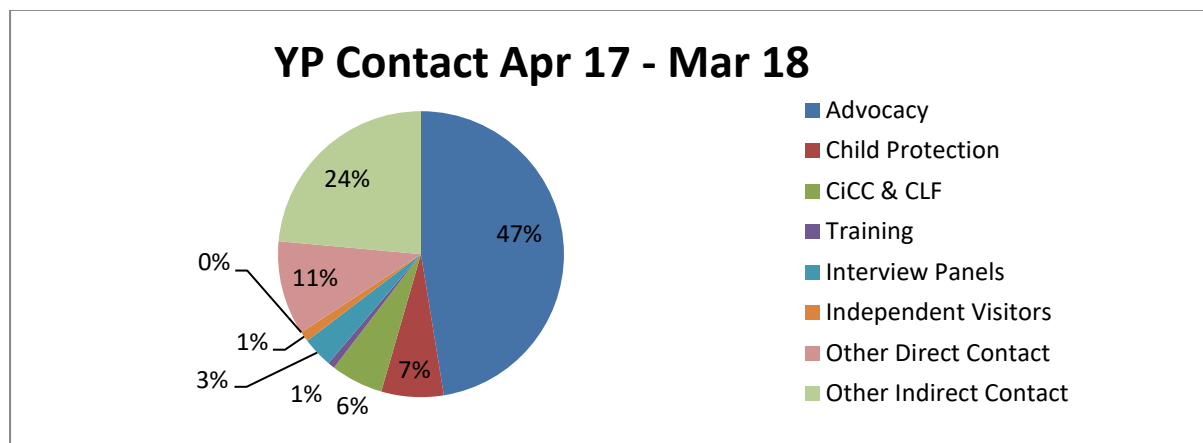
Within the Children's Rights team, a full time Officer co-ordinates the Independent Visitors Scheme. This scheme matches children and young people with volunteers who spend time with the child or young person they are matched with; supporting and listening to them, as well as undertaking positive activities. A separate annual report is produced for this scheme and this can be found at appendix 1.

Although for the majority of 2017/18 the responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum was held by the Leaving Care Team, as from June this year this responsibility reverted back to the Children’s Rights team. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum enable children and young people looked after by the Local Authority and young people who are Care Leavers to come together to work on projects, and to meet with Senior Managers to enable their voices to be heard and influence service provision.

4.1 Contact with young people

Every child looked after by the Local Authority has the right to an independent advocate. The Children Act 1989 placed a duty on Local Authorities to provide advocacy for children and young people looked after, who wish to make a complaint. Subsequent updates and other legislation such as The Adoption and Children Act 2002, extended this to include care leavers, and to children and young people outside of the complaints procedure when decisions are being made that affect their lives.

The chart below shows that the highest proportion of work undertaken by the Children Rights team between April 2017 and March 2018, related to advocacy for children and young people looked after, (47%).



In the chart above, ‘other direct work ‘ includes the team sending birthday and Christmas cards to every child or young person over the age of 7 looked after by the Local Authority, or who is a Care Leaver.

In the period between March 2017 and April 2018, the team received 61 referrals for advocacy services for children and young people from professionals and carers. The team also received requests from professionals for support in obtaining the views of young people relating to Court proceedings and ongoing care planning.

During 2017/18, the service has supported 16 children and young people in care, who have a physical or learning disability.

The majority of children and young people have received support from the team on more than one occasion, with the most common support being for their Looked After Child Review or other meetings.

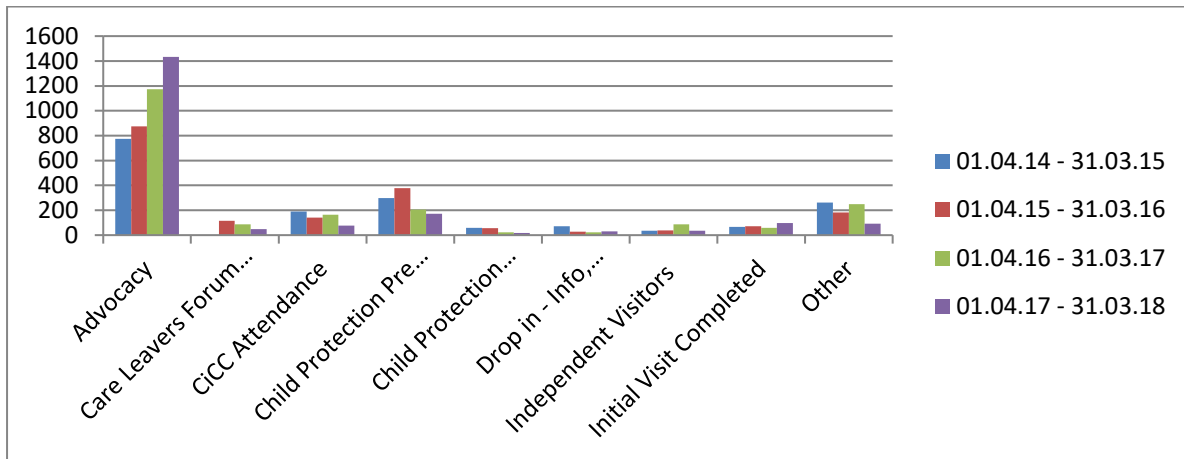
The service continues to receive more requests relating to girls and young women; within this reporting period the service supported 106 girls and young women and 75 boys and young men.

4.2 Comparison over a 4 year period

The demand for Advocacy work with children and young people looked after continues to increase, (as indicated in the graph below). This increase demand coupled with the team holding a vacant post for a number of months between April 2017 and March 2108, resulted in a reduced capacity to support children and young people subject to a child protection plan.

4.3 Work undertaken under the heading of 'other' includes:

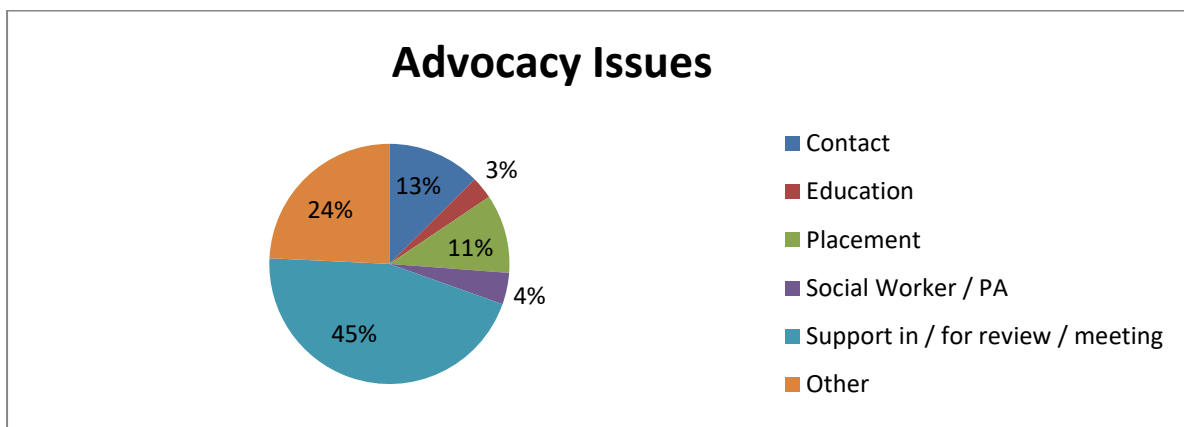
- Training and supporting children and young people to undertake interview panels as part of the Kirklees recruitment process
- Supporting children and young people to deliver training
- Monthly visits to the Kirklees Local Authority children's homes
- Weekly attendance at 'Number 11'; the Care Leavers Drop in facility



4.3 Advocacy Issues for children and young people who are Looked After

The pie chart below shows that apart from support at Looked After Child Review or other meetings, the highest number of advocacy issues for children and young people have related to contact and placement. The 'other' section incorporates a number of individual issues that children and young people have raised such as;

- personal belongings
- residential day to day issues
- finance (including pocket money or other celebratory allowance issues / or requests for additional financial support)



Children and young people looked after, placed in another local authority area, are some of our most vulnerable children, and over the last twelve months a total of 78 children and young people placed outside of Kirklees have received support from the Children's Rights Team. In the main this related to children and young people

requesting support at their Child Looked After review meetings, but there were 6 other specific issues and a further 6 which related to placement planning such as:

- wanting to stay in placement
- not knowing where they would be living
- obtaining their views in order to inform planning

Positive outcomes for children and young people have included:

- Additional contact with family being agreed
- Clarity about contact arrangements being reached
- Children /young people remaining in placement or new placements being agreed.
- The views of the child or young person being taken into consideration about what they wanted from their long term placement
- Attending school trips or holiday activities

4.4 Child Protection Conference Advocacy

The Children Rights team have been notified of 174 initial Child Protection conferences and 467 Child Protection review conferences since April 2017. This resulted in an additional 37 children being supported at their initial Child Protection conference, and 94% of children visited by the team accepting the support of an Advocate to help them present their views at their Child Protection conference meeting. This level of engagement and feedback received from professionals and parents has indicated that this provision is highly valued.

4.5 Children's Rights

The team works to ensure that the rights of the child in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are upheld for all children and young people who are looked after. This includes ensuring that the voice of the child is heard within care planning. This year, the team was asked to provide an Advocate to undertake the role of a 'Litigation Friend', which is someone who speaks on behalf of a young person in respect of a matter which is being decided by the Courts. In this instance the

Advocate supported a young person who was seeking to resume contact with his sister and a successful outcome for the young person was achieved.

4.6 Participation Opportunities

The Children's rights team works with children and young people in a number of ways to support participation opportunities, these include:

- **Children in Care Council:** The council consists of children and young people looked after aged between 12 and 16, who meet to consider issues relevant to being looked after, and work with professionals to promote the views of children and young people to inform change and best practice.
- **The Care Leavers Forum:** is for young people aged 16 and over, in which young people work with professionals to ensure that professionals hear their views when considering how best to deliver Care Leaver service provision

The responsibility for co-ordinating these groups was transferred to the Leaving Care Team in 2017. However, this responsibility will revert back to the Children's Rights Team from June 2018.

- **Professional Interview Panels:** Children and young people have been involved in a high number of interview panels over the last twelve months particularly for posts within Children's Social Work Services Assessment and Intervention teams.
- **Total Respect training:** Two sessions have been delivered to professionals in the past year, with both dates being fully booked. Evaluation from the training, indicates that professionals find attending the course worthwhile, with feedback highlighting that it impacts on consideration being given to how they can improve their daily practice.
- **Skills to Foster training:** Six sessions of this training have been delivered by young people to potential new Foster Carers. Again, as with the Total Respect training this has been well received.

- Engagement Event: In October 2017 Independent Reviewing Officers and the Children's Rights Team worked together to organise an Engagement Event for children and young people to share their views about contact and placements. Feedback received indicated that the children and young people didn't like the terms 'contact' or 'placement' and would prefer professionals to use terms such as 'keeping in touch' and 'where I live'; highlighting the importance of professionals adopting child friendly language.

4.7 Quality Assurance

The Children's Right team works closely with The Child Protection and Review Unit (CPRU) in endeavouring to support young people in obtaining the best possible outcome there can be for them, and sharing information such as trends from Advocacy.

In addition to this, the Children's Rights team manager meets regularly with the Complaints Manager to discuss ongoing complaints and cater for joint working to resolve these, to ensure services provided to children in care are of a high quality, and separately with the Head of Corporate Parenting to discuss trends in advocacy and/or individual cases as required. The Children's rights team manager also now attends Corporate Parenting Board.

5 Young People's Voice

Following completion of any advocacy service children / young people receive, they are asked to complete an evaluation feedback form and share their views on how the service could be improved, overall feedback received indicates that children/young people are happy with the support and services that they receive.

Over and above the 'formal' feedback route, how much children and young people value the service they receive can be measured in other ways, such as direct feedback to advocates and /or via thank you cards, or by what children and young people say about the service to others, for example; during a visit to Parliament, when one young person was asked by MP's in a discussion about the issues for Looked After children, if he had access to an advocate, he said that he did and described his advocate as '*awesome*'.

6 Independent Visitors Scheme

Whilst this scheme is one of the functions of the Children's Rights Team a separate annual report is written by the scheme Co-ordinator which is available at appendix 1. In summary, demand for the scheme continues and the number of volunteers who are matched with a young person with whom they can build a positive relationship has increased during 2017/18.

7 Conclusion

2017/18 has seen a continued demand on the service, with an increase for children looked after and care leaver's advocacy. Request for support around issues relating to contact, placements and Social Worker relationships have continued to be the highest received, with the majority of these being resolved informally, rather than through the formal complaints process. Alongside this the team has continued to offer advocacy support to a number of children and young people subject to a child protection plan and arrange and support Young People's interview panels, which have had an influence on the recruitment of a substantial amount of the current Children's Services workforce.

It is envisaged that a student Social Work placement in the autumn, coupled with recruitment to the Participation post, (which has returned to the team's structure) will help the service to meet the current levels of request for advocacy support.

8 Key areas of development

8.1 To work with Senior Managers to ensure that the voice of the child is included in sufficiency planning.

8.2 Offer Student Social Work placements within the team, to lead on gaining the voice of the child within the child protection process.

8.3 To re-establish links between Senior Managers, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Groups, with clear pathways that enable young people to present their views clearly and influence service provision.

8.4 As per the annual report / action plan for the Independent Visitors Scheme, re-assess the current offer and function, proposing changes as necessary in order to provide a service which meets the needs of children in care and care leavers.

Appendix 1

Kirklees Independent Visitor Scheme (IV)

Annual Report – 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018

1.1 Introduction

Kirklees Independent Visitors Scheme, also known as Care2Listen is a Local Authority funded scheme which sits within the Looked After Children Independent Service. The Scheme was established in its current format six years ago and is coordinated by an Independent Service Officer. Day to day administration for the scheme is provided through Business Support within the wider Children Independent Service.

The aim of the scheme is to provide independent adult volunteers to befriend young people in Care; to spend time with them on a one to one basis, undertaking activities and developing a positive relationship with a trusted, responsible adult. The volunteers are someone who the young person can talk to, seek advice, guidance and support from and have fun with, in an informal setting.

Volunteers undergo a rigorous recruitment and selection programme including submitting a formal volunteer's application, adult and young person interview panel and bespoke training package, tailored to equip and inform volunteers for the role of an Independent Visitor. Enhanced DBS checks are undertaken, together with employment checks and two references are sought.

Young People are referred to the Scheme by either their Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO has a duty to discuss the Scheme at a young persons' review. Young people are also encouraged to express an interest themselves in having an Independent Visitor, and can discuss this directly with the Scheme Coordinator, their Social Worker, key worker or carer.

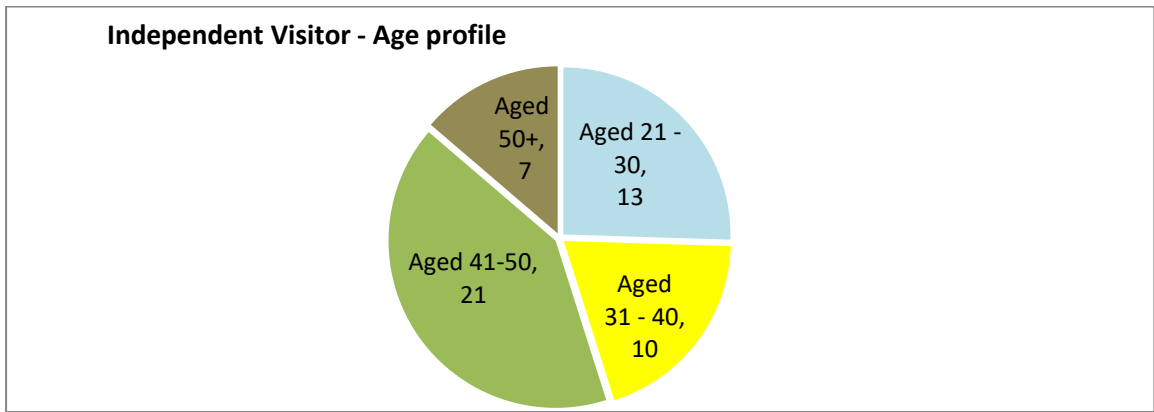
1.2 Current position

- There are currently 51 trained volunteers, 44 of whom are matched on a one to one basis with a young person. In addition, one volunteer supports two young people who are seen individually.
- Eight volunteers have recently completed training and are in the process of being matched with young people.
- There are 8 young people placed out of Kirklees who are waiting to be matched. To date, attempts to 'spot purchase' Independent visitor services from other authorities have been unsuccessful due to limited volunteers' availability and waiting lists in the host authorities. Continuing attempts are being made to match these young people from the existing pool of Kirklees volunteers.
- There are 9 young people placed within Kirklees waiting to be matched, the majority of whom will be matched shortly from newly trained Independent Visitors. Waiting times for young people to be matched are monitored and have significantly reduced from an average of 4 to 6 months to 8 weeks. Once the existing pool of available volunteers are matched however, the waiting times for young people who remain on the waiting list will inevitably increase as the Scheme does not, at present, have sufficient capacity to sustain additional volunteers.

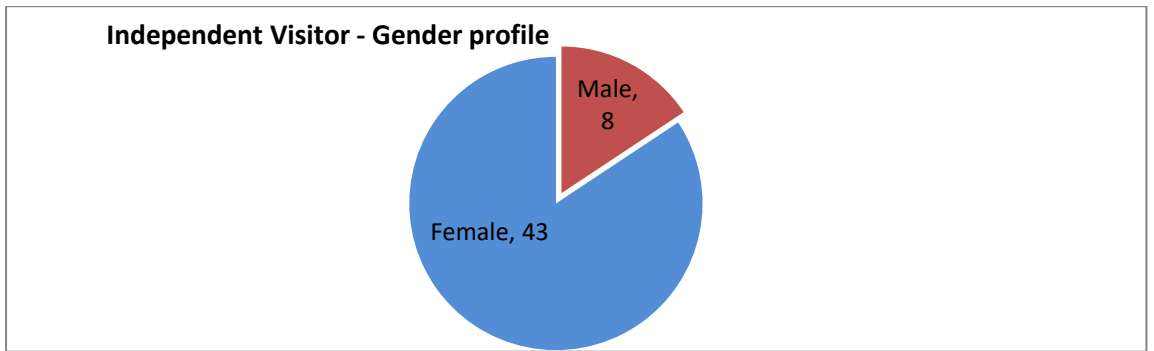
2 Volunteers and Young Person Profile

2.1 Volunteer profile

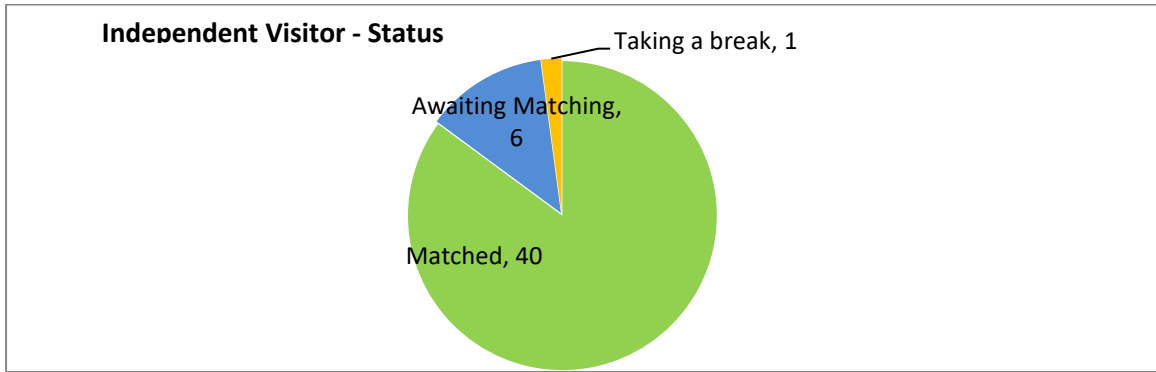
The Independent Visitors Scheme has a diverse range of volunteers. Volunteers have to be at least 18 years old and there has to be at least a 5 year age gap between the adult and young person. Volunteers in the youngest age range are only accepted by the scheme if they are able to demonstrate an appropriate degree of maturity.



Currently 85% of the volunteers involved with the scheme are female; this is broadly the same as seen in other regional schemes. Attempts have been made to specifically identify and recruit more male volunteers, such as advertisements being placed in traditionally male dominated work and leisure places, however this has not been overly successful. In practice, although some young people have specified that they would like a male volunteer, many have accepted a female volunteer and these relationships have been successfully sustained.



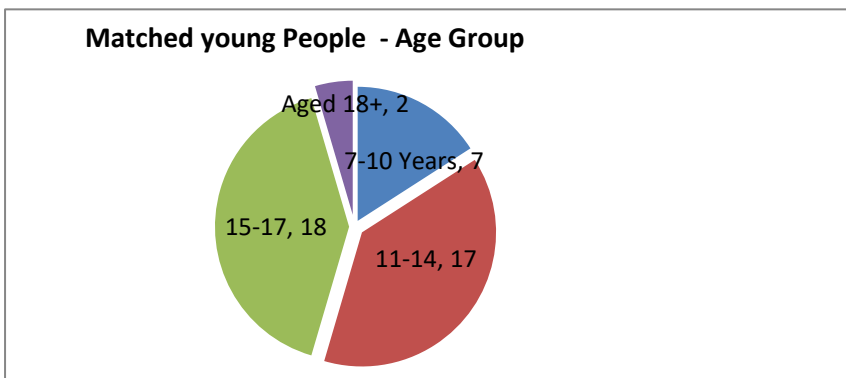
Once training and necessary checks have been completed, the Scheme seeks to match volunteers within 8 weeks with a young person who meets their preference in terms of placement location, age and gender.



2.2 Young Person Profile

- There are currently 44 young people matched with an Independent Visitor, of these:
- Slightly more girls (59%) than boys (41%) benefit from the scheme.
- 18 are older teenagers (15-17 years old)
- 17 are young people aged 11-14 years old
- 7 children under the age of 11 have an Independent Visitor and;
- 2 young adults over 18 are currently being supported.

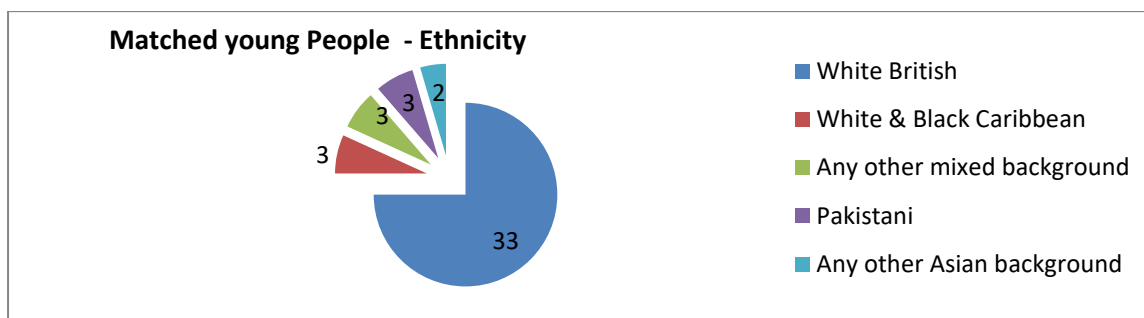
Whilst some Volunteer / Young person relationships have ended shortly after the young persons' 18th birthday, the 2 young adults over 18s shown in the chart below have each had their Independent Visitor for a number of years and continue to benefit from the relationship and the support and guidance offered within this.



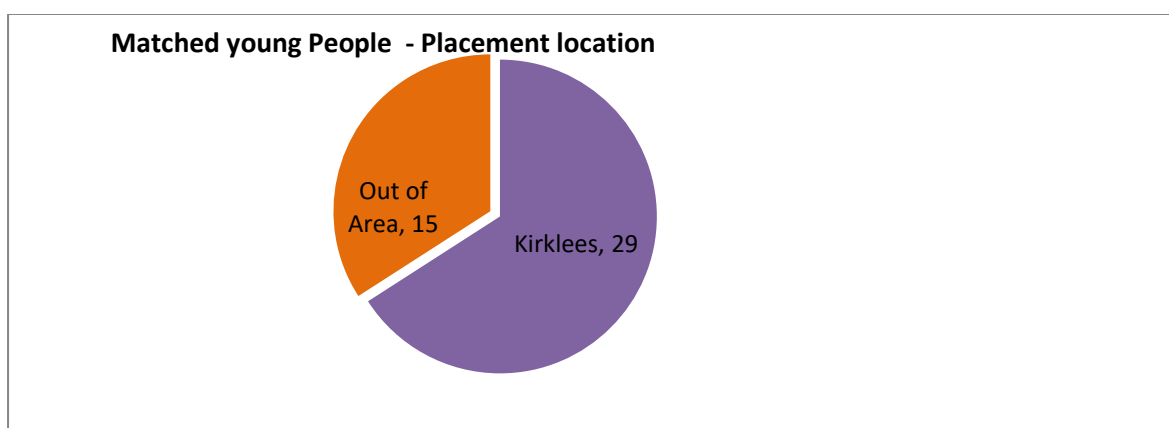
44 young people matched

- 59% Female
- 41% Male
- 18 aged 15-17
- 17 aged 11-14
- under age of 11
- over 18 years old

The ethnic background of young people who have an independent visitor is broadly representative of the wider Kirklees community. ¹



34% of matched young people are in placement in a host authority, with a high proportion of young people living in neighbouring authorities' i.e. Leeds, Calderdale and Bradford. There are three young people placed further afield who also benefit from regular outings and activities with their chosen Independent Visitor.



3 Making a difference.

The scheme Co-ordinator speaks with children and young people who have an Independent Visitor at least every twelve months and more regularly if needed, for example, if issues are identified with the relationship. A questionnaire regarding their Independent Visitor experience is sent out to children and young people on an annual basis. Some of the positive feedback received includes:

- *'He is very supportive and kind'* (Boy, aged 8)

¹ <http://observatory.kirklees.gov.uk/profiles/ethnicorigin>

- *'Because it's nice to have someone to talk to'* (Girl, aged 10)
- *'I'm able to get out and about more now'* (Boy, aged 12)
- *'My Independent Visitor has helped me gain confidence in interacting with people socially'* (Girl, aged 16)
- *'I have a friend that I can trust and spend time with'* (Girl, aged 13)
- *'My Independent visitor has helped me to do things and become more independent'* (Boy, aged 15)
- *'I really like my IV, we have fun together, we've been to the theatre, swimming and played football in the park.'* (Boy aged 11)

Following each visit or activity with a child /young person, Independent Visitors are requested to submit a short feedback form. Below are some extracts from these which highlight some examples of the positive difference /experiences volunteers believe have been achieved with children and young people.

- *'Had a full day out with my dogs at Bolton Abbey. We enjoyed a picnic and walking the paths of the estate. B said that she really enjoyed it all and she had never had a picnic so this was a first'.* (IV for a girl aged 13)
- *'Visited the National Coal Mining Museum, took the underground tour and visited the pit ponies which C said she really enjoyed.'* (IV for a girl aged 17)
- *A day of sport in Greenhead Park. **Football** after the World Cup, J was keen to demonstrate some of his skills and tell me about being selected for a team at his new school. **Basketball** J introduced me to the 'slow-mo' video feature on my phone and we took a great video of a basket being scored. **Tennis** after Wimbledon, he'd obviously been practicing his backhand, given the number that whizzed past me. Also did a World Cup Quiz for J to identify players and their country. I thought it was quite difficult but he quickly reeled off 10 correct answers! Covered 8 miles with all the running about. So some aching muscles for me. J seemed fine!* (IV for a boy aged 11)

Key Priorities

- **Create a 'pool' of volunteers either living within the Kirklees area or elsewhere who are willing to travel regularly to meet with young people placed Out of Authority.**

The need for flexibility of volunteers to travel out of area and meet young people more frequently is being discussed with applicants at an early stage. A number of volunteers are prepared to travel greater distances and this has helped in matching some young people living in host Authorities.

- **18+ Care Leaver offer**

In line with recent legislation relating to support for care leavers up to the age of 25 the Independent Visitor Scheme will be evaluated and consideration given as to whether it currently meets the needs of children who are looked after and care leavers. Currently the continuation of the Independent Visitor relationship post 18 is offered only to those who are the most vulnerable. It will be explored as to whether this should be offered more widely. Alongside this consideration will also be given as to whether an Independent Visitor should be offered to young people who are already 18 plus. If this were to be the case there would need to be clarity about what the role would entail and any differences between the volunteer role and that of the Personal Advisor who is currently appointed to all care leavers by the Leaving Care Team.