



Annual Report

Looked After Children Independent Service Children's Rights Team April 2018 to March 2019

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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.

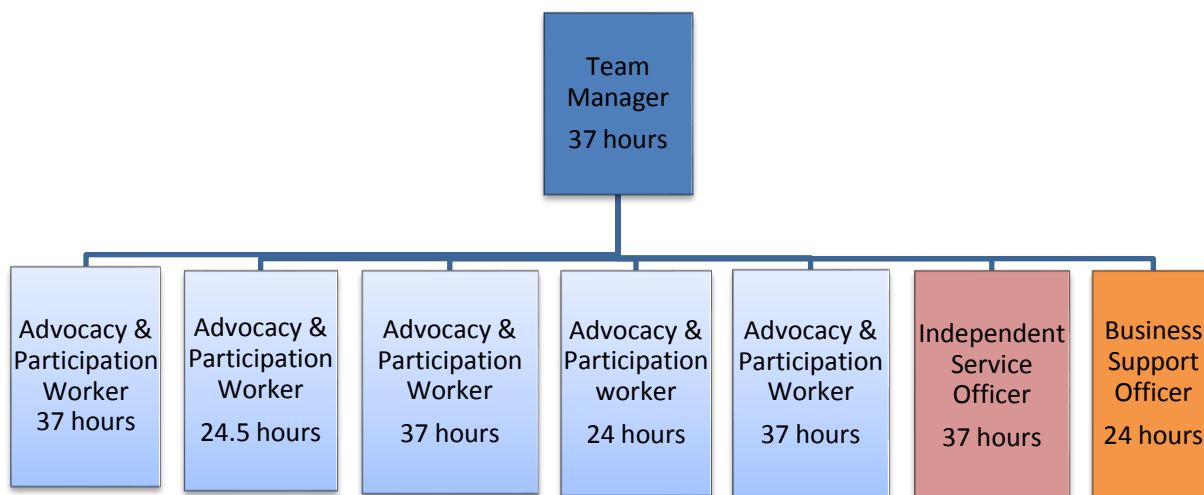
The Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children's Rights Team) offer advocacy, advice and representation to children and young people who are Looked After by Kirklees Local Authority residing within the borough, or in external placements in host authorities.

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 them 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, training and supporting children and young people to enable them to undertake a meaningful role in the Kirklees recruitment process, children and young people are also supported / trained to deliver their own training session to practitioners and professionals (Total Respect Training). This helps practitioners and professionals to consider what the barriers for participation of children are, and why it is 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 visit the child or young person is informed about the service, what support that they can receive, and what participation opportunities they can become involved in.

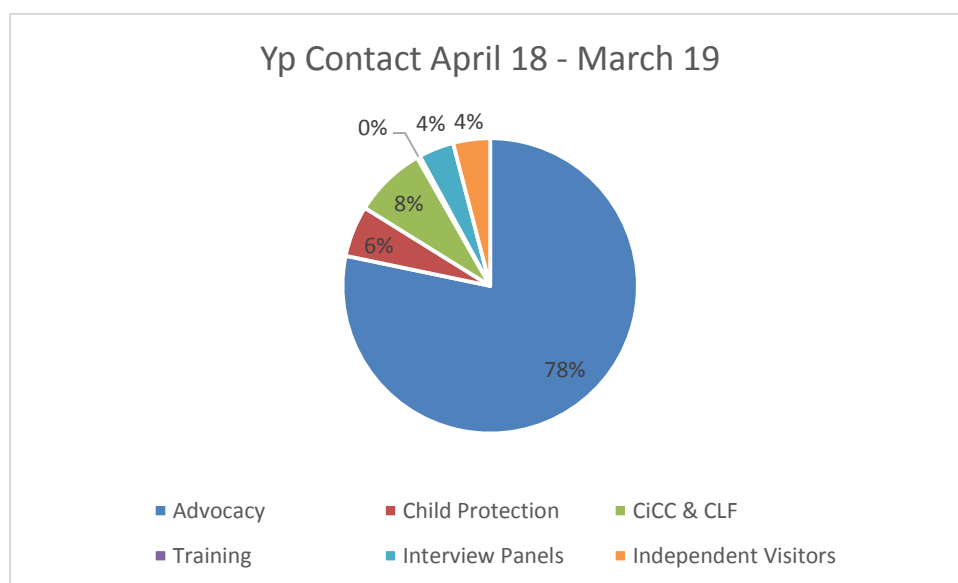
An Advocacy & Participation Worker in the team has the responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. This post was vacant for the first half of the financial year, but was recruited to in October 2018. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum enable children and young people looked after by the Local Authority and those 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. Appendix 1 of this report provides an outline of the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum.

The Children's Rights team also has a full time Officer who co-ordinates the Independent Visitors Scheme. This scheme matches children and young people who are in the care of the Local Authority 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 2.

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's Rights team between April 2018 and March 2019, related to advocacy for children and young people looked after or care leavers (78%).



In the period between March 2018 and April 2019, in addition to referrals received directly from children and young people, the team received 80 referrals for advocacy services for children and young people from professionals and carers. **The training that young people deliver is always well received and they delivered 2 Total Respect sessions and 6 Skills to Foster sessions.**

During 2018/19, the service supported 21 children and young people in care, with a physical or learning disability. For a small number of these children / young people the support offered was non instructed advocacy. This is provided when a young person does not have the capacity to clearly communicate their wishes or have a level of understanding. For these children / young people their Advocate will gather information from a range of sources such as parents / carers / professionals, to

assess if the best interests of the child are being considered in any decisions that are made. The Advocate also ensures that the rights of the child are being upheld.

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 Children Looked After Review (CLA Review) or other meetings.

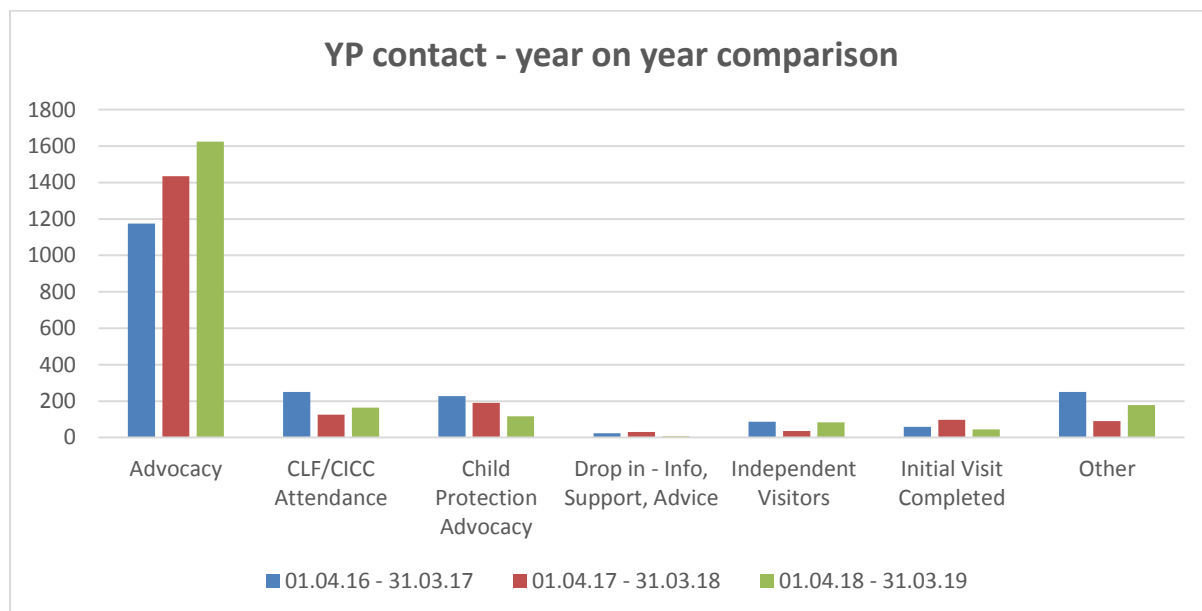
The service continues to receive more requests relating to girls and young women; within this reporting period the service supported 111 girls and young women and 79 boys and young men.

4.2 Comparison over a 3 year period

The demand for Advocacy work with children and young people looked after continues to increase, (as indicated in the graph below). This increased demand coupled with the team holding a vacant post between April 2017 and October 2018 and an unfilled maternity leave from July 2018, resulted in a reduced capacity to support children and young people subject to a child protection plan.

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

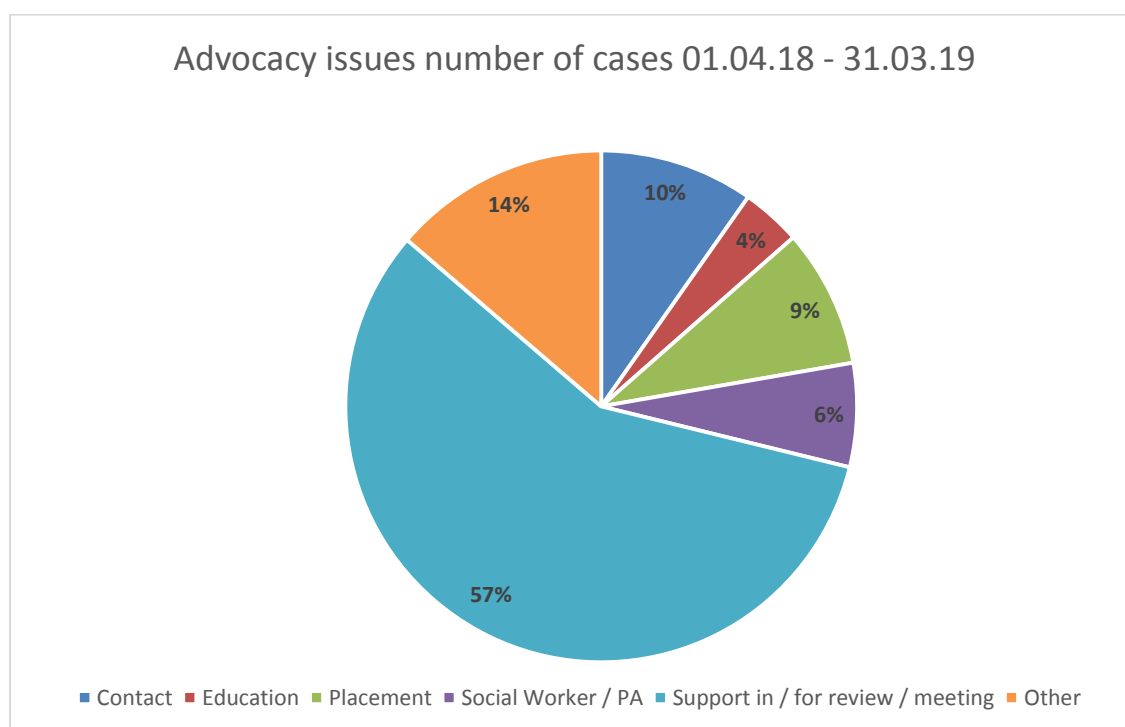
The pie chart below shows that apart from support at their Child Looked After Review or other meetings, the highest number of advocacy issues for children and

young people have related to contact and placement. The 'other' section relates to 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 celebratory allowance issues or requests for additional financial support)

During this reporting year there has been an increase in Advocacy support for children / young people who have experienced issues relating to their savings. These have included children / young people not being clear about the amount of savings that they had, and contact having to be made with previous foster carers (sometimes going back a number of years) in order to access the savings in full, so that they could be transferred to the young person on their 18th birthday.

This issue is being progressed by the Fostering Support Team and other professionals to ensure that money saved for a child / young person is transferred quickly when a child or young person moves home.



In addition to the children and young people who were supported at their Looked After review or other meetings, 179 children and young people fed back that a positive outcome was achieved regarding issues they requested support for, whilst 23 felt that some sort of compromise had been reached. Only 5 children /young people said that they did not feel a positive outcome had been achieved.

Whilst Advocates in the team make every endeavour to resolve issues for young people quickly by using an informal process, there have been occasions when this has not led to an outcome which the young person was happy with, or the young person has said from the outset that they wished to make a formal complaint. It is the right of all young people to make a formal complaint if they wish and they are supported to do so if this is their choice. Overall of the number of advocacy cases

dealt with in this reporting year, 55 involved supporting a child or young person to make a formal complaint. The most common themes of these were:

- **Social Worker / Personal Advisor (16)** – requesting a change or making a complaint about their Social Worker. In one case a child did not have an allocated Social Worker and they utilised the formal complaints process in order to resolve this.
- **Placement (12)** – The majority of young people’s complaints related to carers and / or about the young person being unhappy in their placement, however a small number related to young people experiencing a change of placement at short notice or not being fully aware of their placement planning.

Children and young people Looked After living in another local authority area, are some of our most vulnerable children, and over the last twelve months a total of 82 have received support from the Children’s Rights Team. In the main this related to the child / young person requesting support at their Looked After review meetings, however 27 issues related to contact arrangements, including:

- Contact arrangements being altered without the views of the young person being sought
- Young people feeling their voice was not heard.
- Not receiving correspondence from a family member
- Requests for additional contact
- Request for Skype contact
- Request for the venue for contact to be changed

There were also 19 issues in relation to placements which included the child / young person:

- Being unhappy in their placement and wanting to move
- Wishing to stay in their placement, rather than experiencing a planned move
- Placement move planning

There were 16 issues which related to a young person’s Social Worker most of which related to a request for a change of Social Worker. However, 1 young person requested to keep their allocated Social Worker, 1 requested more visits from their Social Worker and another young person did not want to engage with her Child Sexual Exploitation worker.

There were 17 recorded issues relating to finance, these included issues such as:

- Accessing savings
- Using savings for driving lessons
- Allowances for clothing / birthday / celebrations

Positive outcomes achieved for children and young people included:

- Placement stability
- Placement move agreed
- Young people’s views taken into consideration with regard to schooling

- A change of Social Worker agreed
- Keeping the same Social Worker agreed
- Allowances / savings clarified and received by the young people
- Contact / increased, contact agreed and arranged

4.4 Child Protection Conference Advocacy

The Children's Rights team were notified of 216 initial Child Protection conferences and 338 Child Protection review conferences in the period and 51 children / young people were supported in attending a Child Protection conference or having their views heard at conference. As mentioned in point 4.2 above, vacancies in the team led to a reduced number of children and young people being supported, however from June 2019 capacity to support children will increase with a member of staff returning to work and student social workers joining the team for a period of time.

When the team have not been able to visit /offer a child or young person support at their child protection conference, a letter has been sent to the child /young person's parents / carers asking them to contact the team if they wished to access support for their child. This resulted in the team being contacted only on one occasion; to increase the number of children / young people supported at their Child Protection Conference, it is therefore important that the offer of a visit is extended to all children. The Children's Rights team Manager will therefore be investigating what resources would be required to enable an extended offer.

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 by Kirklees Local Authority. This includes ensuring that the voice of the child is heard within care planning and as stated in point 4.1 above, this is particularly important with regard to non-instructed advocacy.

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 (CiCC): The council consists of children and young people Looked After aged between 12 and 16 years old. The children and young people meet to consider issues relevant to being Looked After, and to work with professionals to promote the views of children and young people to inform change and best practice. See appendix 1 for more details.
- The Care Leavers Forum (CLF): is for young people aged 16 and over, in which young people work with professionals to ensure that their views are heard when considering how best to deliver Care Leaver service provision. See appendix 1 for more details.
- Professional Interview Panels: Children and young people have been involved in a high number of recruitment interview panels over the last twelve months.

The majority of these related to Children's Social Work Services Assessment and Intervention teams appointments, other recruitment panels included Social Worker posts for the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Service and Senior Management posts.

- Total Respect training: Two sessions have been delivered by young people to professionals in the past year; both were 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 professionals can improve their daily practice. A challenge remains with regards to attendance; the training is generally held in the school holidays in order not to impact negatively on the young people's attendance at school. Last year an evening session was trialled to seek improved attendance, but this was not successful and evaluation led to the decision that it was not viable to run another evening session.
- Skills to Foster training: Six sessions have been delivered by young people to potential new Foster Carers. Training is held on a weekend; as with the Total Respect training, the Skills to Foster training continues to be well received.

4.7 Quality Assurance

The Children's Rights team continues to work closely with the Child Protection and Review Unit (CPRU) to support positive outcomes for children and young people and to share information, such as trends from Advocacy.

In addition to this, the Children's Rights team manager meets regularly with the Children's Services Complaints Manager(s) to discuss ongoing complaints and cater for joint working to resolve these. The Children's Rights Team Manager also meets regularly with the Head of Corporate Parenting (children Looked After and care leavers' services) to discuss trends in advocacy and / or individual cases as and when required.

The Children's Rights Team Manager is a member of the Corporate Parenting Board and sits on two separate but linked Task & Finish Groups; Voice of the Child and Quality Assurance

5 Young People's Voice

Following the completion of any advocacy provision, children and young people are asked to complete an evaluation feedback form to share their views on what went well, and how or if the service could be improved. Overall feedback received continues to indicate that children and 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 comments to advocates and /or thank you cards, or by what children and young people say about the service to others. Some direct quotes from young people can be seen below:

I have everything I need to understand that there is no change to contact and will no longer need anything

I am so happy that I have such a fantastic foster mom, I am so lucky. Thank you for helping me stay with L

- He's nice
- He really listens to me and "he gets it"
- He listens to me and follows up on my issues with my Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer
- He does what he says he'll do

She came out and met me straight away to listen to the issues I had going on. She stayed with me till everything was sorted. She stayed in touch.

She is very kind and I can trust her, which is good because then I can tell her things and speak to her about what is going on. She also helps take pressure off me when I am in meetings and helps me get my point across to people.

6 Independent Visitors Scheme

Whilst this scheme is one of the functions of the Children's Rights Team a separate annual report prepared by the scheme Co-ordinator is available at appendix 2. In summary, demand for the scheme continues and the number of volunteers who are matched with a young person, has increased during 2018/19.

7 Conclusion

2018/19 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. The majority of issues raised by children and young people are resolved informally, rather than through the formal complaints process. Alongside this the team has continued to support Young People's recruitment interview panels, which has had an influence on the recruitment to the Children's Services workforce.

The team having vacant posts has had an impact on capacity. Although the team have managed to ensure that every child or young person in care or care leaver who has requested support have received a service, the team have not been in a position to provide the same level of support to children and young people at subject to a Child Protection plan/ at Child Protection conferences. This will improve with a substantive post holder returning to work in June 2019.

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum now have more stability due to a dedicated worker who co-ordinates the groups, however membership remains lower than the number of places available. To ensure a more balanced representation of children / young people views, the team will continue work to encourage new young people to join the groups and look at developing other effective mechanisms for gathering the views of other children and young people who do not wish to attend.

Demand for the Independent Visitors Scheme has continued and the recruitment of new volunteers has been successful. However, capacity to develop the scheme further is limited; how to build capacity to meet demand is under review.

8 Key areas of development

8.1: To evaluate the effectiveness of student social work placements (for both students and the team)

8.2: To consider offering an apprenticeship within the service which is ring-fenced to a care leaver (aged 18 plus).

8.3: To continue to develop 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: To increase the membership of the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum, and develop ways to capture the views of children / young people who do not attend the groups, to influence service development and provision.

8.5: To increase the offer of advocacy support to children and young people aged ten and over, subject to a Child Protection plan.

8.6: To consider the implications and the resources required, to extend the offer of advocacy for Child Protection conferences.

8.7: As per the annual report / action plan for the Independent Visitors Scheme, re-write guidance for Independent Visitors who are supporting young people over the age of 18 years old.

8.8: Match newly trained Independent Visitor volunteers to young people on the current waiting list by the end of June 2019

8.9: Consider the viability of further expansion of the Independent Visitor Scheme

Appendix 1

Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers Forum (CLF)

Following a vacancy for the first part of the financial year, an appointment was made in October 2018 for an Advocacy & Participation Worker to take a lead on co-ordinating and supporting the above two groups.

The Children in Care Council meets bi-weekly on a Monday evening and is for children and young people aged 12 to 15 who are in the care of the Local Authority. The aim of the group is to discuss the issues for children and young people who are in care and to work with professionals to try and improve services, to ensure that they meet the needs of those who are in receipt of them.

The Care Leavers Forum is for young people aged 16 to 21 years old (or 25 if still in full time education.) The remit is to discuss the issues that young people face as they prepare to leave care and move into independence. Again, young people work with professionals to try to improve services and ensure that they meet need. This group meets bi-weekly on a Wednesday evening.

Both the CiCC and CLF now have a small number of core members who are working towards a specific action plan. During this reporting period they have been involved in the following pieces of work:

- Developing and designing the Kirklees Pledge which has been produced in two formats, one suitable for younger children (7 – 11) and one for those who are older (12 plus).
- Consultation with Senior Management with regard to the Sufficiency Strategy. The views and opinions of the children and young people have been taken into consideration and have influenced areas such as training for staff and improving the quality assurance process with regard to purchased placements.
- Consultation with the newly appointed Senior Mental Health Practitioner, to consider what services are needed for care leavers.
- Consultation with the Placement Support Team in order to consider how young people can be involved in the recruitment of foster carers at an earlier stage. This led to a review of the young people's questions which are asked at foster carer panels and consideration is being given to other suggestions made, such as, more involvement in Skills to Foster and / or more opportunities for children and young people to talk informally with potential carers, to help them form an opinion which can then be considered in the overall recruitment process.
- Consultation with Management about what young people would want to see in the Local Offer for Care Leavers document (to be known as Kirklees Commitment to Care Leavers).
- Consultation with the Risk and Vulnerability Team about a new name for the team, evaluations to be given to young people when the team have supported them and a leaflet for young people which explains the team's remit.

- Meetings with various Managers and Senior Practitioners to discuss the issues for young people in care or leaving care and how improvements can be achieved Some of the people they met with were: Lead Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Head of Service, CPRU, the Social Work Practice Lead, a Social Worker and an Advanced Practitioner.
- Using art work to express views and feelings about the issues for children and young people in care and leaving care.
- A meeting with a representative from Huddersfield University to discuss a sound workshop.
- Discussed the use and design of leaflets for children and young people who are involved with Children's Social Care Services.
- Looking at the language that professionals use and whether there are alternative words and phrases that children and young people would like to use for things such as 'contact', 'placement', 'carer', 'being looked after' etc. to help shape the way professionals talk to and about children and young people and work towards embedding 'child friendly' speaking throughout services.

What do we want to improve?

- To increase the membership of both the Council and the Forum, to ensure that both are representative of all groups of children and young people.
- Links with managers of services, to ensure that there is an effective mechanism for communication and the development of services which are led by children and young people, whilst also providing a forum for managers to consult children and young people.
- Links with the Regional Children in Care Council meetings, in order to share ideas and priorities and also increase the voice and influence of children and young people on issues which affect young people across the region.

Appendix 2

Kirklees Independent Visitor Scheme (IV)

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. The scheme is coordinated by an Independent Service Officer and day to day administration is provided through Business Support within the team.

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 and guidance and support from and have fun with, in an informal setting.

Volunteers undergo a rigorous recruitment and selection programme, which includes submitting a formal volunteer's application, an adult and young person interview panel and a bespoke training package, tailored to equip and inform volunteers for the role of an Independent Visitor. Enhanced DBS checks are carried out, 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 child or young persons' Looked After review. Children /young people are also encouraged to express an interest in having an Independent Visitor, and can discuss this directly with the scheme's Coordinator, their Social Worker, key worker or carer.

1.2 Current position

There are currently 41 trained volunteers, all of whom are currently matched with a young person. 3 of the more experienced Independent Visitors have chosen to each support two young people, who they see separately. The total number of young people currently benefiting from the support of an Independent Visitor is therefore 44.

Retention of Independent visitors this year has reduced, with 9 leaving the scheme in the past 12 months. Independent Visitors who have chosen to leave are encouraged to have an exit discussion. An analysis of the reasons does not show any pattern which can be influenced through development of the scheme or support. The main reasons for leaving were, work pressures, change of employment and moving area.

A reasonably successful recruitment campaign was undertaken between November 2018 and January 2019, resulting in 11 volunteers selected to undergo training.

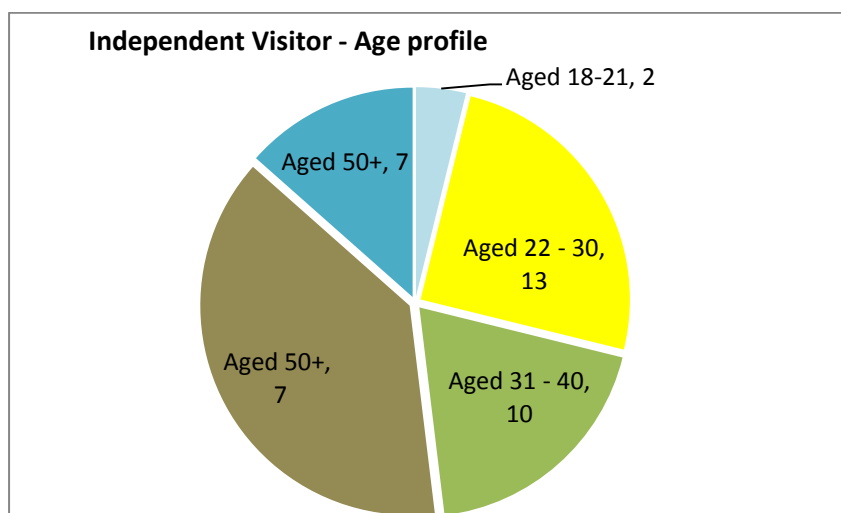
There are currently 13 young people referred by their Social Worker waiting to be matched. 5 of these young people live in Kirklees and 8 reside in a host Local Authority. It is anticipated that that the 5 young people who live in Kirklees will be matched with a newly trained Independent Visitor, as will a number of the young people living in neighbouring local authorities.

When the existing pool of available volunteers are matched with a child /young person, the waiting times for children /young people will inevitably increase as the scheme at present, does not have sufficient capacity to support additional volunteers.

Volunteers and Young People's Profiles

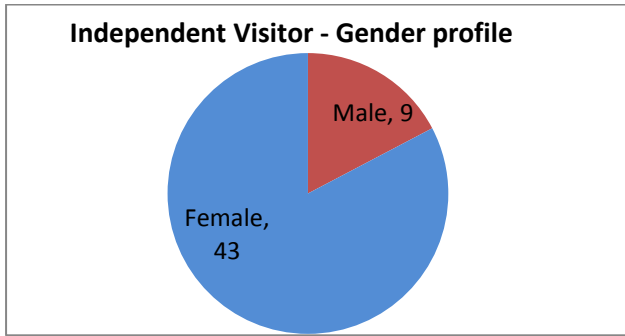
2.1 Volunteer profile (including those in training)

The current IV scheme has a diverse range of volunteers. To be an Independent Visitor, volunteers must be aged 18 or over and there has to be at least a 5 year age gap between the adult volunteer and the young person they are matched with.

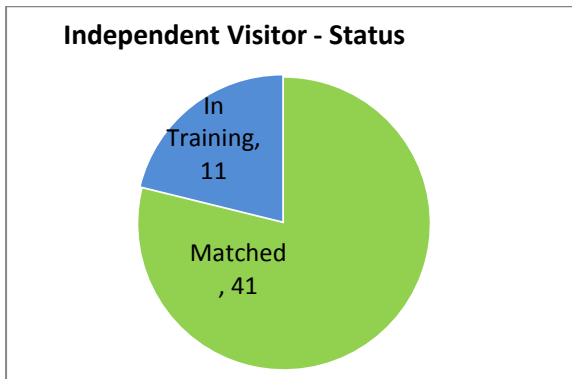


Currently 83% (43) of the Independent Visitor volunteers are female and 17% (9) male. This is broadly the same as seen in other regional schemes. Attempts have been made to specifically identify and recruit more male volunteers, with advertisements being placed in traditional male dominated work and leisure places, but this has resulted in limited success.

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 sustained.



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

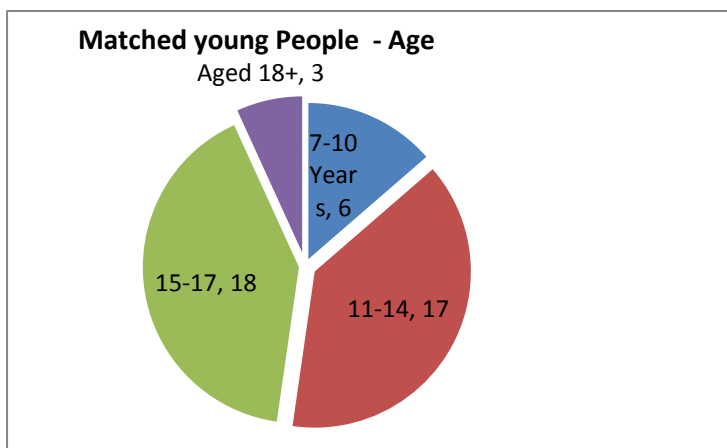


2.2 Children and Young People’s Profile

There are currently 44 young people matched with an Independent Visitor. There are slightly more girls (59%) than boys (41%) benefitting from the scheme.

18 older young people (15-17 years old) and 17 young people aged 11-14 currently have an Independent Visitor and 6 children under the age of 11, and 3 young adults over the age of 18, are being supported.

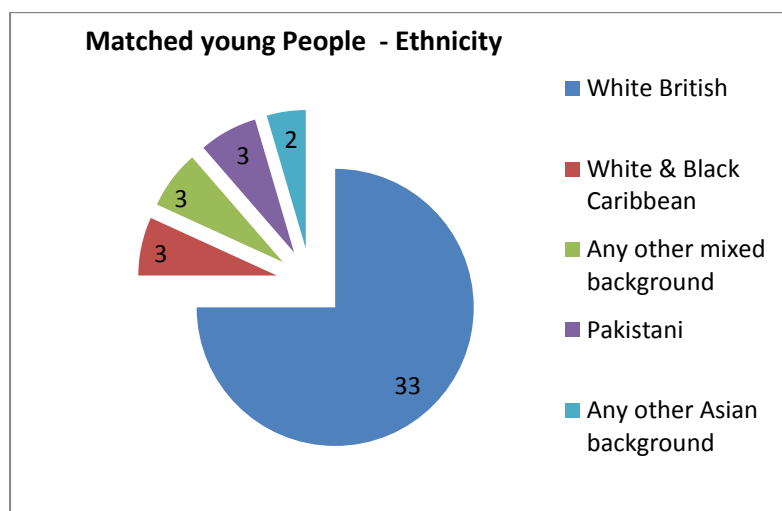
Whilst some volunteer / young person relationships have ended shortly after the young persons’ 18th birthday, the 3 young adults over 18 have each had their Independent Visitor for a number of years and continue to benefit from the support and guidance offered.



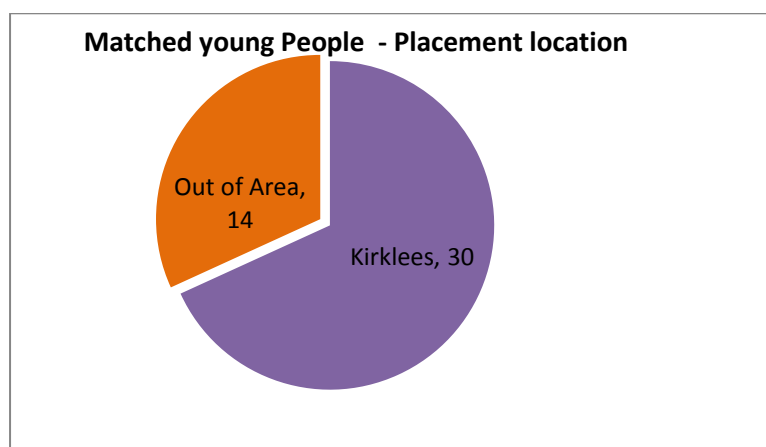
Of the 44 young people matched:

- 59% are male
- 41% are female
- 18 young people are aged 15-17 years old
- 17 are aged 11-14 years old
- 6 children are under age of 11 years old
- 3 young people are over 18 years old

The ethnic background of children / young people who have an Independent Visitor is broadly representative of the wider Kirklees community.¹



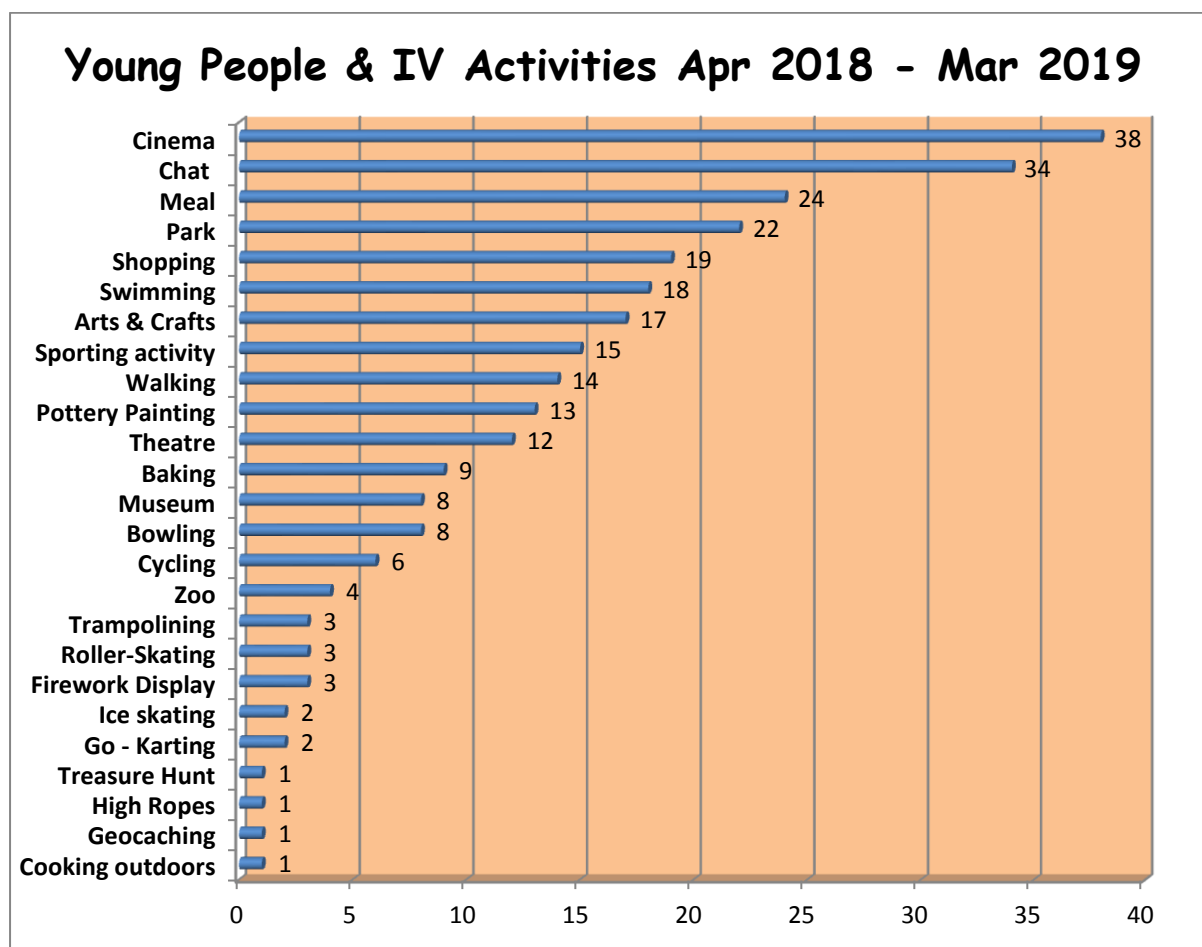
32% of children / young people matched with an Independent Visitor reside in a host Local Authority. A high proportion live in neighbouring authorities, i.e. Leeds, Calderdale and Bradford. There are 2 young people placed further afield (Doncaster and Sheffield), who also benefit from regular outings and activities with their Independent Visitor.



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

3 Making a difference.

Independent Visitors are encouraged to submit a short feedback form following each visit. An analysis of these shows a total of 890 volunteering hours with young people during the year and a range of activities which can be seen in the graph below.



Challenges and Priorities

A number of key challenges for the Independent Visitor Scheme have been identified, these are:

- To reduce waiting times for children /young people from referral to matching with an Independent Visitor.

Once the new Independent Visitors have completed their training and all necessary checks have been conducted, the priority is to match the new Independent Visitors with children /young people already on the waiting list. A realistic timescale for this is 8 weeks

- **18+ Care Leaver Independent Visitor Offer**

If a young person already has an Independent Visitor before they reach the age of 18, and it is evident that the young person would benefit from the continuation of this relationship, this can continue beyond their 18th birthday.

Separate guidance is being written for Independent Visitors supporting those over 18 to take into account the differences in the relationship once the young person is classed technically as an adult.

Currently there is no offer of an Independent Visitor for anyone over the age of 18 who is not already matched with a volunteer prior to their 18th birthday. Monitoring and evaluation will continue to assess if there is a need to consider extending access to the scheme.