

# Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children’s Rights Team) Quarterly Report April – September 2019



Reporting Period	6 monthly report – 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2019
Report of	Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children’s Rights Team)
Report to	Corporate Parenting Board
Report Originator	Melanie Tiernan
Date of Report	October 2019

## Overview of Service

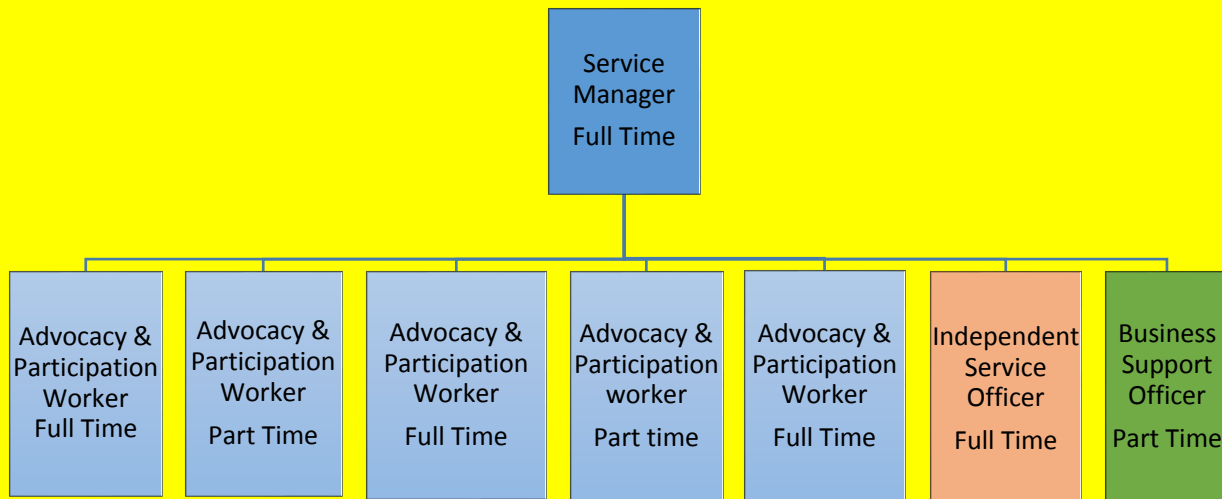
### 1. Introduction

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. The team facilitates the means by which Children’s Services can establish and consider the views and opinions of children in the care of the local authority in respect of policy development and service delivery, and contribute to safeguards for individual children and young people. The service also offers support to children aged 10 years and over who are subject to a Child Protection plan, to help them express their views within the child protection process.

### 2. The aim of the Children’s Rights Team is to:

- To promote and support children’s rights within the current framework of legislation, incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to children and young people looked after by Kirklees.
- Support the empowerment of children and young people looked after by Kirklees so that they can meaningfully participate in decision-making that affects them, both individually and collectively.
- To work with other independent services to provide a quality assurance function for services received by children in care.
- To support the empowerment of young people involved in the child protection process to help them to voice their thoughts, feelings and views.

### 3 Children's Rights Team Structure



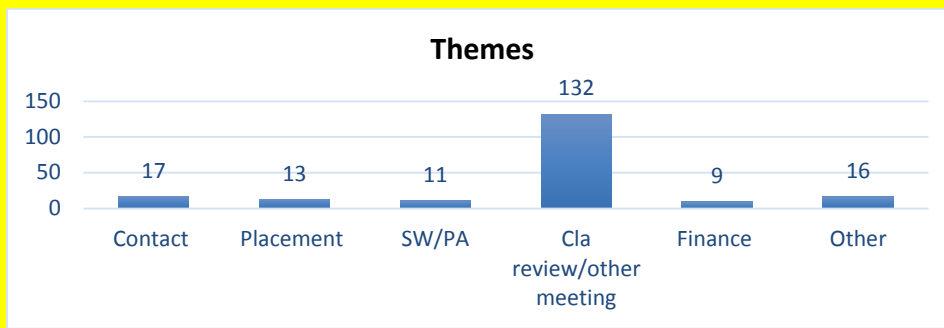
### 4. How much Advocacy did we do and how well have we done?

**4.1** Between 01 April 2019 and 30 September 2019 the Children's Right's Team (CRT) supported children and young people relating to 198 Advocacy issues. 132 of these were involved providing support at Child Looked After (CLA) Reviews or other meetings. Either by supporting young people to attend their CLA review meeting or an Advocate voicing their views on their behalf. Therefore the number of other issues raised was 66.

Young people requesting advocacy are generally allocated a CRT worker within 24 hours of a referral being received. In this reporting period 80 requests for advocacy related to children living out of area. Advocates build up ongoing trusting relationships with these children and young people, by maintaining telephone contact and visiting when needed. The majority of support provided by the team to children and young people living in a host authority was in relation to Looked After reviews. Other issues included:

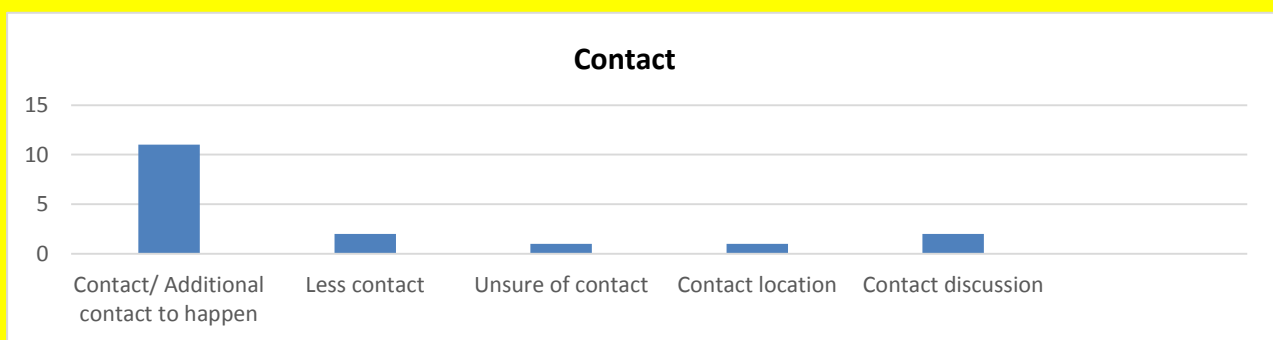
- Contact (8)
- Finance (6)
- Personal belongings (5)
- Placement (3)
- Social Worker / Personal Advisor (4)

**4.2** The following themes were identified during this period: Contact; Placement; child looked after review/other meeting; finance; other (includes education and health). Whilst 'other' may seem a non-descriptive category, for the purposes of reporting, the issues within this group were so individual that they do not provide any meaningful data to help shape service provision, however, more detail of some of these individual issues is covered in this report.

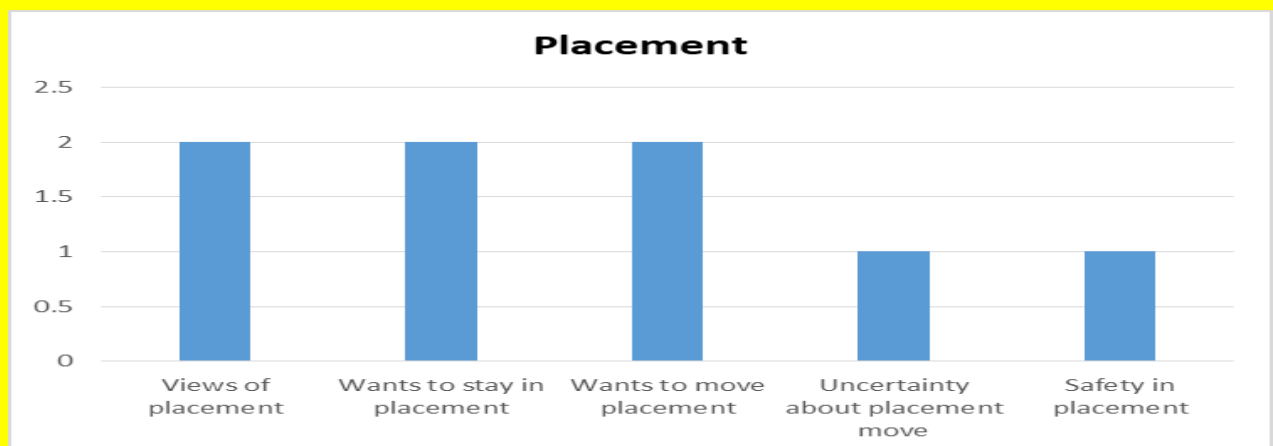


**4.3** The issues of contact and placement continue to be recurring themes, however, if current figures are maintained for the next 6 months these will show an overall annual reduction from 2017 - 2018 for both these categories and of those relating to Social Worker / Personal Advisor.

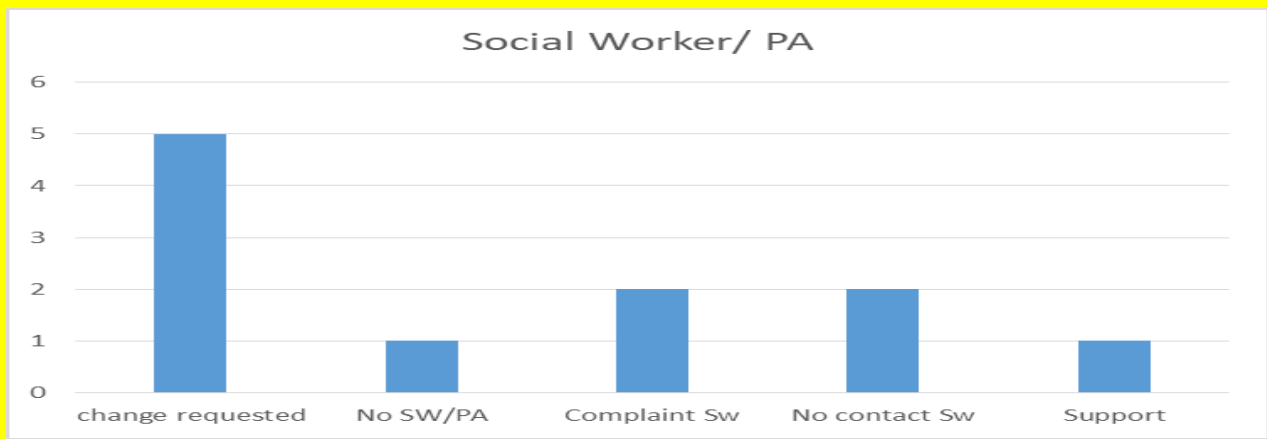
### Summary of issues



**4.4** As the graph above indicates, 9 of the contact issues related to the desire of children and young people for contact to take place as agreed, or to have additional contact. 3 young people were requesting less contact than that which had been agreed.

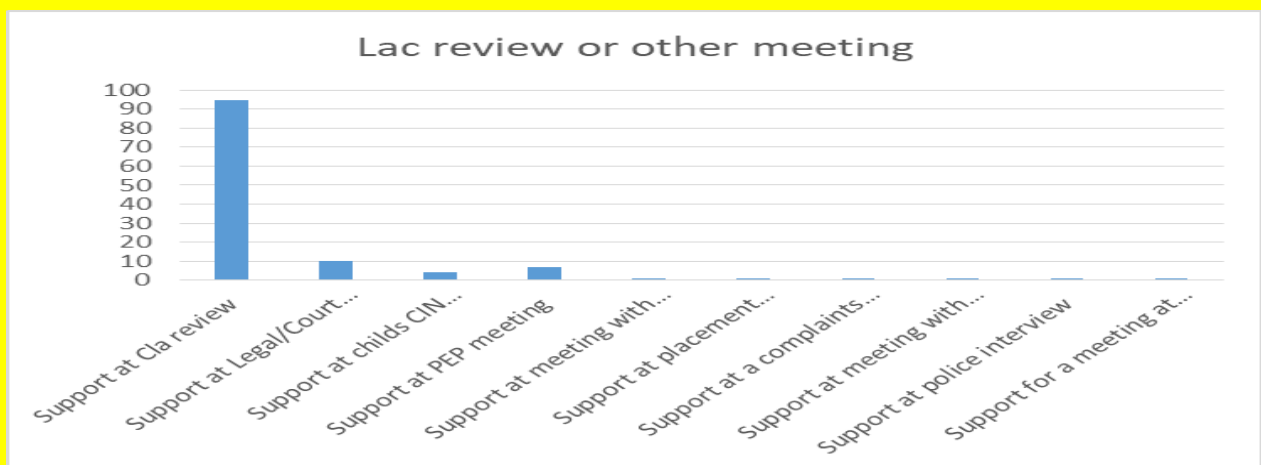


**4.5** The graph above shows the main issues for children and young people with regard to their placement. These included 2 young people who wanted to move, 4 who wanted to remain in their current placement and 1 who was unsure where he wanted to live. Advocates worked with 5 children and young people to find out what their views were about their placements.

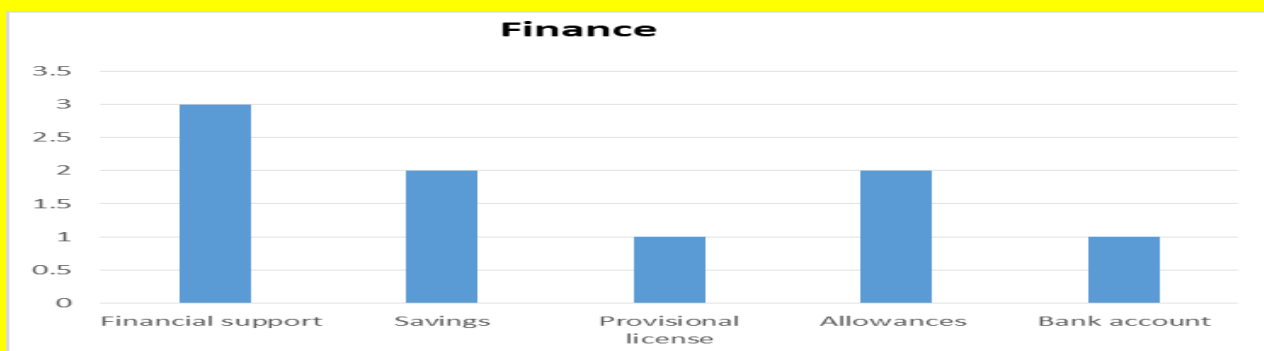


**4.6** During this reporting period 5 children and young people requested a change in Social Worker, whilst 1 young person had not been allocated a Social Worker and 1 wanted a named Personal Advisor whilst their own was on absent from work due to ill health. Again, if the current trend continues, there would be a reduced number of issues for children and young people regarding a Social Worker or Personal Advisor.

**4.7** The CRT team continues to support a number of children and young people at their CLA review. The next highest number of meetings identified at which children /young people are supported are legal meetings (this includes meeting with a Solicitor / Barrister and Court hearings). Some children and young people also ask for support at their Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings.



**4.8** Children and young people were supported with 9 issues relating to finance. In the graph below Allowances includes, 1 request for a clothing allowance and 1 to access holiday allowance. Financial support includes a request for gym membership, payment for driving licence and access to the Leaving Care Grant.

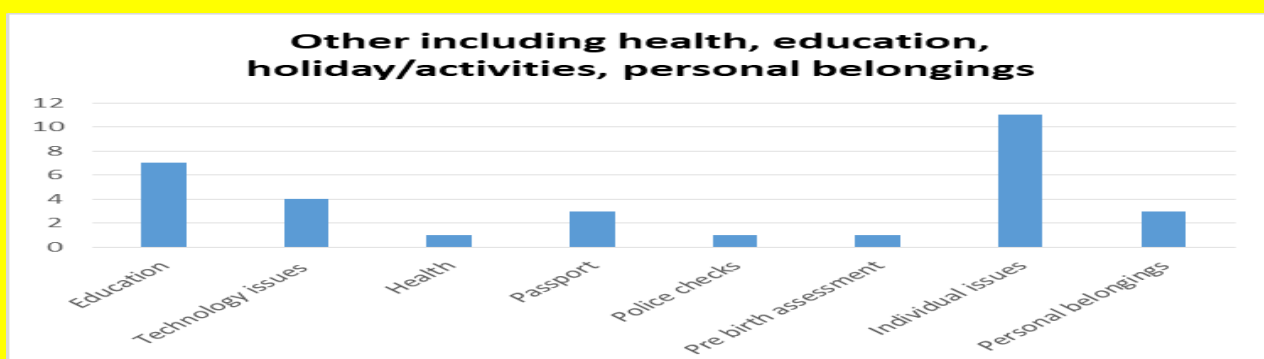


**4.9** Below the graph highlights the categories of a further 31 issues. Education includes the following issues raised:

- Request to change school (2)
- Query regarding support if attending College post 21.
- Support for a smooth transition
- Support with funding for Open University
- Support with obtaining a laptop
- Support with university fees

Three of the four issues relating to technology were about rules i.e. confiscation or time limitation of phone / TV use, another related to a young person wanting to download Snapchat on their phone. Under the category of 'other' issues such as the following are included:

- Access to records
- Support regarding settled status
- Missing Memory box and bike
- Missing necklace
- Support with filling in forms
- Obtaining a Passport / driving licence
- Obtaining an acknowledgement of permanency
- Obtaining a copy of birth certificate



## 5. Summary

**5.1** Whilst there were a number of individual cases with no overarching theme, the issues which continue to be most relevant to a number of children and young people related to:

- Placement

- Contact
- Education

Although if the current trend continues then by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there would be a reduction from the last financial year reporting period (approximately one third less).

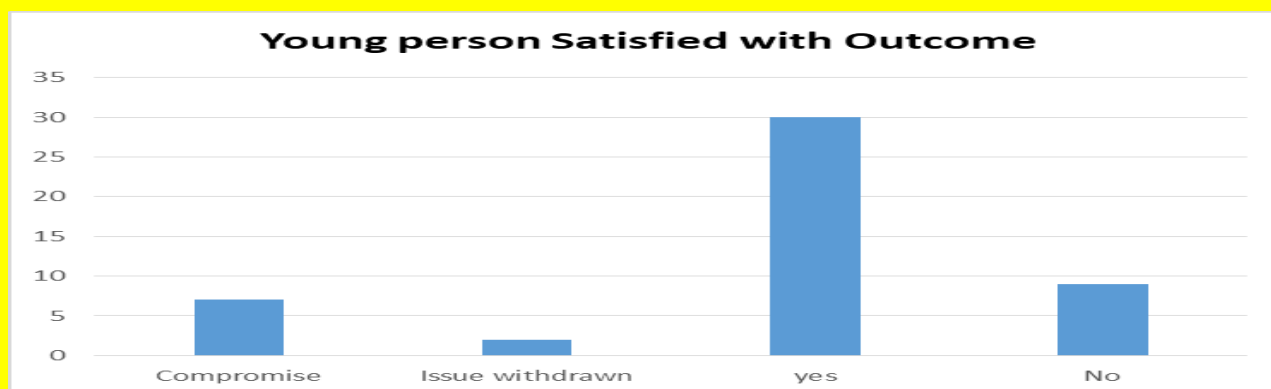
Of the issues raised by young people in this reporting period, 7 were dealt with through the formal complaints process. These related to:

- Request for a Social Worker (1)
- Change of Personal Advisor (1)
- Issue of how the Local Authority handled a request for access to records (1)
- Communication (2)
- Savings (1)
- Requesting a 'freeze' on an impending placement move (1)

All the others were dealt with through informal resolution, such as discussion with Social Workers / Managers. Of the 7 dealt with through the formal complaints process:

- 2 young people were satisfied with the outcome (placement freeze agreed and savings received)
- 1 was not satisfied (change of Personal Advisor was not arranged)
- 1 felt there had been a compromise (allocation of a Social Worker but young person was still unhappy about the amount of time it had taken)
- 1 young person would not discuss with their advocate if they was satisfied with the response received.
- 2 issues remain unresolved.

## 6. What difference did we make for Children?



**6.1** When reviewing the 66 issues raised, of these 30 young people were satisfied with the outcome they achieved through advocacy. 9 said they were not satisfied, 7 that a compromise had been reached and 2 issues were withdrawn. Advocates are still working with children and young people on the remaining issues. Positive examples of outcomes for young people include:

- Young person being able to move schools
- Successful transition achieved
- Confirmation of support from the Leaving Care Team post 21
- Confirmation of financial support during a 12 week university break

- Personal belongings being found / replaced
- Contact being arranged in line with young people's wishes
- Mental health support being reinstated

Young people who felt they had not had a positive outcome from advocacy related to the following:

- Contact not being agreed as per young person's wishes
- Request for a change of Personal Advisor not fulfilled
- Young person's request to move from residential care to foster care not agreed

Compromises included:

- Negotiation of time watching TV
- Young person was allocated a Social Worker but felt the wait was unfair
- Young person decided to move to different accommodation

## 7. Advocacy at Child Protection conferences

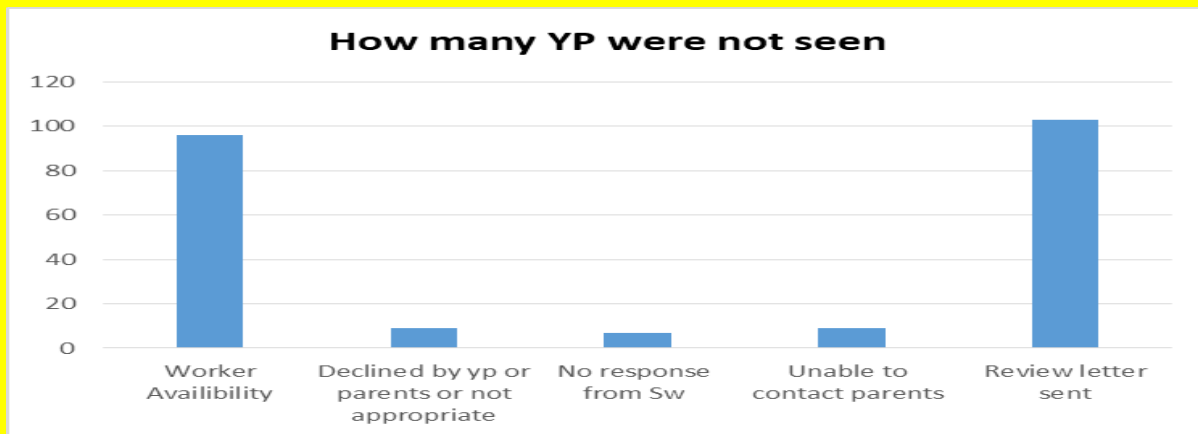
**7.1** Children and young people aged 10 or over who are subject to a child protection conference have the opportunity to speak with an Advocate to ensure that their wishes and feelings are heard within the process and that they are taken into consideration in planning.

This service is highly appreciated by professionals, and many parents and children and young people, who feel they are able to share their views with someone who is independent of the processes. Due to capacity issues it is not possible for the CRT see every child or young person for whom a referral is received. To develop the offer and support all children and young people over the age of 10 years old, the CRT Manager is preparing a report outlining how this could be achieved.



**7.2** The CRT visited 45 young people during this reporting period, 36 visits were in relation to an initial child protection conference. The graphs below shows that 96 young people were unable to be seen because of worker availability. The CRT had two Student Social Workers during this period, however this did not increase capacity, partly due to how the placements were organised. This has been reviewed and alternative arrangements have been organised for next year.

Letters are sent to parents / carers of young people who have not been previously seen by the CRT who have a review conference due, inviting them to contact the CRT if they feel that their child /children would like a visit /support. As a result of these letters one young person was visited.



## 8. Ways in which young people influence service provision

### 8.1 Interview Panels

Young people have continued to be heavily involved in providing a young people's panel as part of the recruitment process. This has included panels for Social Worker posts, Independent Reviewing Officers and Service Managers. The young people provide valuable input as to what a young person would be looking for in a worker and how confident they would feel that candidates would be able to undertake their role keeping young people at the heart of what they do, being able to communicate well and build good relationships with young people.

Demand for young people's recruitment panels has been high and current capacity means that the CRT cannot fully meet this demand along with its other functions. Therefore new guidance is due to be launched to help services facilitate this element of the recruitment process, with the CRT offering support regarding contacting young people and seeking their availability.

### 8.4 Total Respect Training

This training is mandatory for all staff who are new to working for the local authority in a role which involves working directly with or managing services which are delivered to children and young people. This includes foster carers accessing the training and it should also be attended by staff every three years as a refresher.

The training session is delivered by young people and aims to help staff consider their views and possible prejudices, the barriers to communicating effectively with young people and the importance of listening to what they say. The half-day session is due to next be delivered in late October, when a session is also available for Council Members. The session for Council Members will include more information about children and young people who are in care and what it is like for them.

### 8.5 Skills to foster

This is a session also delivered by children and young people and follows a similar theme to the Total Respect Training but it also focusses on what makes a good foster carer. Children and young people have delivered 3 of these sessions during this reporting period.



## **Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum**

**8.6** These two groups continue to meet bi weekly. Following a number of changes, for just under 12 months there has been a dedicated worker in post to coordinate these groups. Membership numbers remain lower than hoped for; the Children in Care Council has 5 members and the Care Leavers Forum 7. To hopefully address this, an activity day is being held shortly to try to encourage other children and young people to join the groups.

The two groups do not meet in the summer months but prior to the summer both groups worked on a piece of graffiti art for a number of weeks. This was presented to Corporate Parents in July and the issues highlighted in the art work were discussed. It is planned to use the art work for literature for children and young people and also to display it in a Council building.

## **9. Other work of the team**

### **9.1 Exit questionnaires**

These are offered to care leavers six months before they are due to leave care. The CRT undertake these to enable young people to speak freely to someone independent rather than any conflict of interest which could arise from completing the interview with their Personal Advisor.

Exit interviews provide young people with the opportunity to talk about the service they have received, what could be done better and what if any support they need in the final months before they leave care or when they are fully independent. Completed questionnaires are shared with the Leaving Care team management.

### **9.2 Link visits**

Monthly visits are made to each of the Local Authority Children's homes and a contracted home that Kirklees children looked after live in. The visits provide young people with an opportunity to raise any personal or collective concerns that they may have.

### **9.3 Initial visits**

Every young person who comes into care (or when they reach the age of 7) is visited by an Advocate from the CRT to tell them about the work of the team and how they can be supported. In this reporting period 25 children and young people have been visited. For those who are living out of area, an information pack is sent to the child /young person which is followed up with a telephone call. Contact on this basis has been made with 6 young people during this reporting period.

## **10. What do we want to improve?**

**10.1** The priorities for the CRT over the next six months are to:

- Increase the membership of the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum
- Improve opportunities for children and young people who are not part of the above groups to give their views and opinions to effect service delivery and in relation to

Update report

their own plans. The development of an APP is being looked into in order to provide an alternative platform for children and young people to communicate and share their views.

- Increase advocacy support for children aged 10 and over at Child Protection conferences.
- Ensure that feedback from children and young people in relation to services and issues are linked into the wider quality assurance framework, to inform learning and/or service provision.
- Further develop working with the Child Protection and Review Unit and Independent Reviewing Officers, to promote more child friendly reviews.
- Update the literature which is provided to children and young people when they first come into care.