

Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children's Rights Team) Quarterly Report

Reporting Period	6 monthly report – 1 st April 2020 to 30 th September 2020
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 2020

1. Introduction

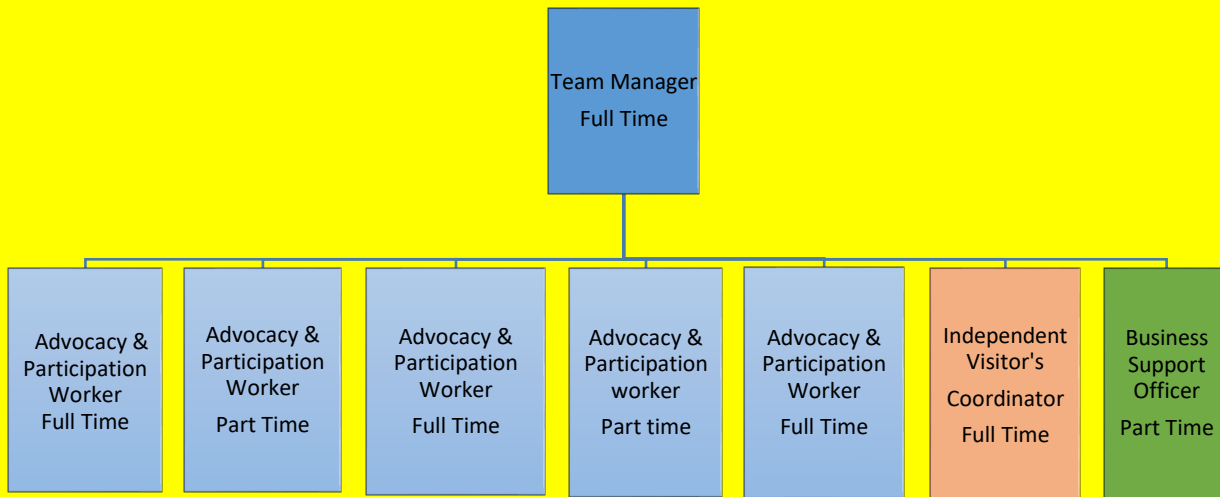
The Kirklees Looked After Children Independent Service (Children's Rights Team) offer advocacy, advice and representation to children and young people who are Looked After by Kirklees within the borough or in external placements. The team supports Children's Services to establish the views and opinions of Children Looked After in respect of policy development and service delivery and contributes to safeguarding individual children and young people.

The service also supports children and young people aged ten and over to express their views when they are subject to a Child Protection plan.

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.
- Support the empowerment of children and young people Looked After to enable them to meaningfully participate in decision-making, which affects them, both individually and collectively.
- To provide a quality assurance function for services received by Children Looked After
- To support the empowerment of children and young people involved in the Child Protection process.

3 Children's Rights Team Structure



4 Overview of the last six months

4.1 Opportunities / Good Practice

- The Children's Rights Team has continued to work with and support children and young people throughout the Covid-19 situation, albeit in a different way. There have been opportunities which the service has taken and built upon such as using 'WhatsApp' which has provided a successful way of keeping in touch with some children and young people and also enabled a young person living out of area to regularly take part in the Care Leavers forum. The Service now plan to develop a virtual Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum specifically for children and young people who live out of area.
- Following the national Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, the Team wrote to all Care Leavers and Looked After children and young people to remind them that the Children's Rights Service could offer them support and provided contact details. For children and young people with whom the team was already working, they were contacted by their Advocate to establish the level of contact they would like; a number asked for a more regular telephone/video call contact, which gave them the opportunity to let their Advocate know if they were struggling in any way. This resulted in building better relationships with some children and young people, including some who live out of the Kirklees area.
- During the national lockdown restrictions, the Children's Rights Team set a weekly challenge for children and young people to take part in with the opportunity to win a High Street Voucher. This was promoted on the Children's Rights Team web page, Twitter, and Facebook accounts and via a new Instagram account. This resulted in the Team having an increased profile on the social media platforms that children and young people use regularly. An end of project report was completed, and a summary article with examples of some of the challenges completed by children and young people, appeared on the Council's intranet site.

- The volunteer Independent Visitors have maintained contact with children and young people, utilising a breadth of creative ways such as sending cards / letters / craft activities / books etc through the post, making video calls to catch up and also playing games or quizzes virtually.
- The Annual Achieve Awards to celebrate the achievement of Children Looked After over the age of 16 and care leavers is timetabled for October 2020. The Children's Rights Team Manager has been working with the Leaving Care Team and young people to organise a virtual event, and the event will be delivered as a live stream on YouTube.
- Social Media platforms and the team's webpage of the Web page have been further developed and are updated regularly with information and opportunities of interest to children and young people. Work to further enhance these platforms and encourage children and young people to access them will continue.

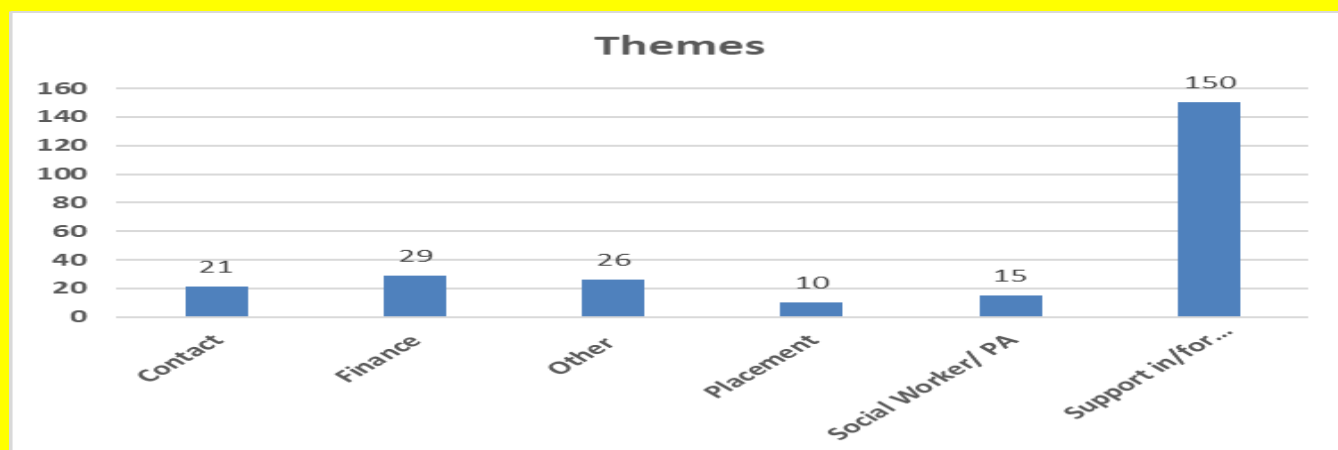
4.2 Challenges

- Over the last six months the main challenge for the service has been adapting in-person service delivery to adopting new ways of engaging children and young people. During the initial lockdown restrictions, the team only undertook in person visits to children and young people in exceptional circumstances, and communication and support mainly took place through telephone calls, and video calls. During this time some children and young people struggled to express their wishes and feelings; this was particularly the case with regard to children and young people who were subject to the Child Protection process and for children and young people who did not have a pre-existing relationship with the Children's Rights Team. When in- person visits were resumed, these children and young people were prioritised.
- Supporting children and young people in virtual meetings has been challenging, particularly in respect of Child Protection Conferences. The team has also experienced a number of children and young people choosing not to attend their Child Looked After review meetings because they struggled with the virtual format; where this was the case, Advocates have attended Review meetings on their behalf, to share their wishes and feelings.
- The team have found that children and young people who have attended virtual Looked After Reviews have overall preferred video calling; however technology has presented some issues when Carers have not had either the appropriate equipment to enable video calls. The team has also experienced occasions where the use of Skype has caused disruption to Review meetings, due to poor quality audio or connection problems.
- Using technology for facilitating the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum group meetings has also been challenging and the members have shared that they would like to resume in person meetings as soon as is practically possible. The use of Skype as a platform for these meetings has been a barrier, as Zoom is the preferred option for children and young people however, this has not been possible to facilitate.
- Covid-19 restrictions have had an impact on how the Independent Visitors Scheme has operated, however there have been examples of innovate practice utilised by the volunteers to help maintain relationships with children and young people, as outlined above.

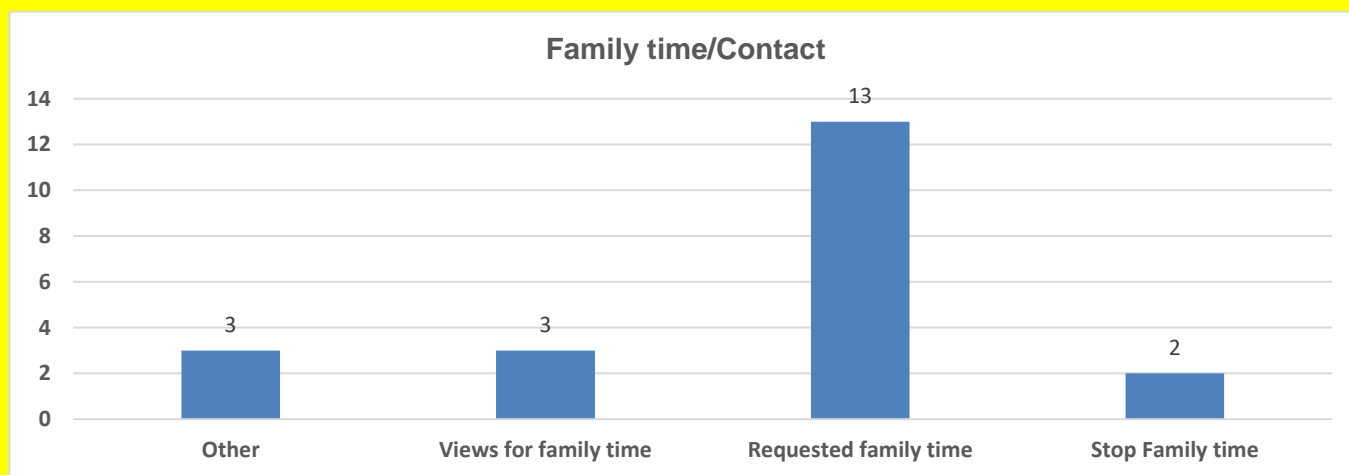
5. Advocacy

5.1 Between 01 April 2020 and 30 September 2020, the team has worked on 271 advocacy issues, 149 of which were to provide support at Child Looked After (CLA) Reviews or other meetings. Requests for advocacy from children and young people who are Looked After are allocated to a worker within 24 hours of a referral being received. 108 of the cases for this reporting period were for children who are placed out of area. In addition to support at Looked After reviews, the information below highlights other issues for which children and young people requested advocacy support:

- Finance – 29 (16 living in a host local authority)
- Family time (previously contact) – 21 (10 living in a host local authority)
- Social Worker / Personal Advisor – 13 (4 living in a host local authority)
- Placement – 10 (4 living in a host local authority)



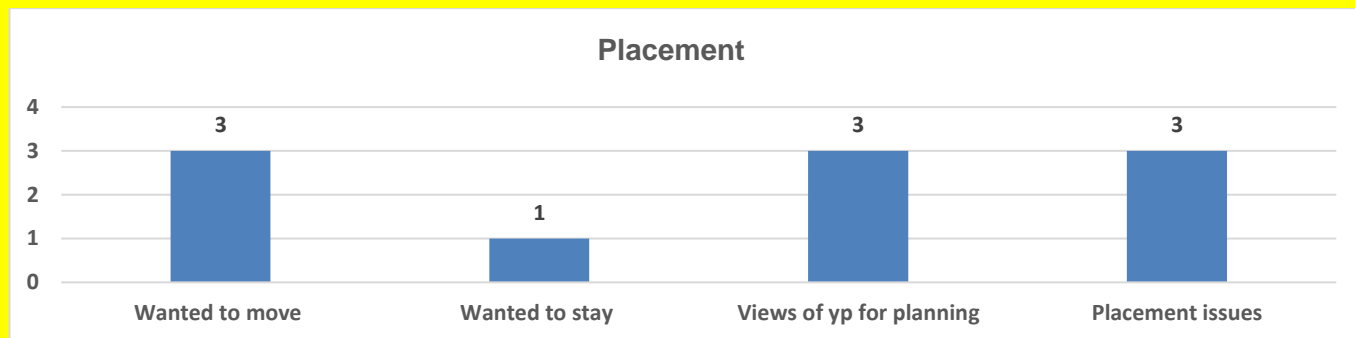
5.2 Summary of the most common issues



5.3 13 of the issues relating to family time were related to children and young people wanting support regarding family time, i.e. for it to either take place as agreed or to have some additional contact. Of the 21 issues raised overall:

- 7 young people were happy with the outcome

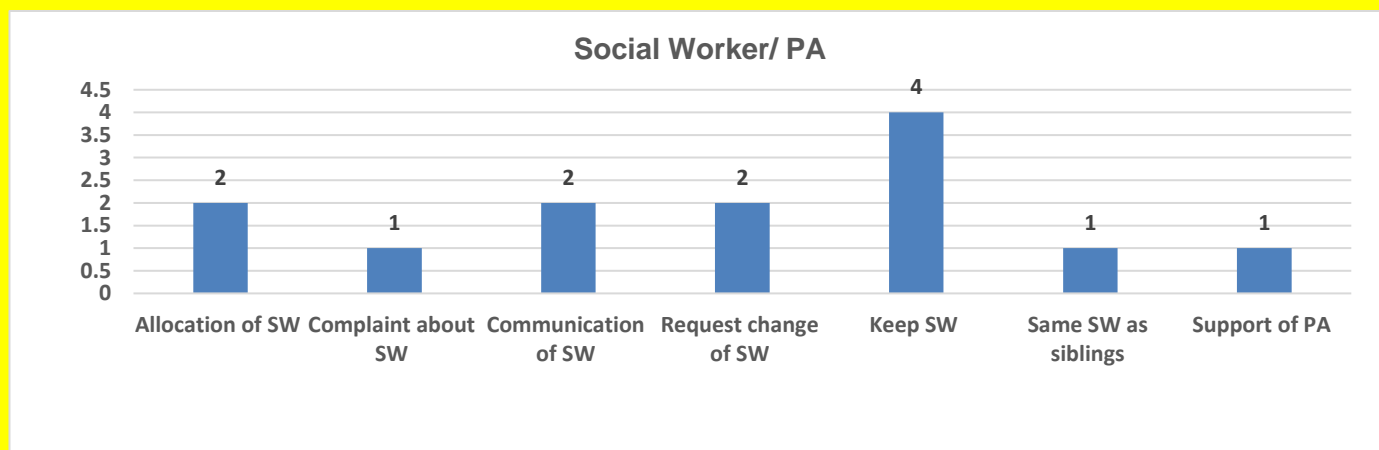
- 2 young people felt that a compromise had been reached with face time calls being arranged and risk assessments being undertaken so that family time could be reinstated as soon as Covid restrictions allowed.
- 2 young people were unhappy with the outcome, due to being advised they could not see their family as they had wished.



5.4 The graph above highlights issues raised by children and young people regarding their placement. These included:

- 3 young people who wanted a move
- 1 young person who wanted to remain in their current placement and
- 3 who experienced some issues within their placements.

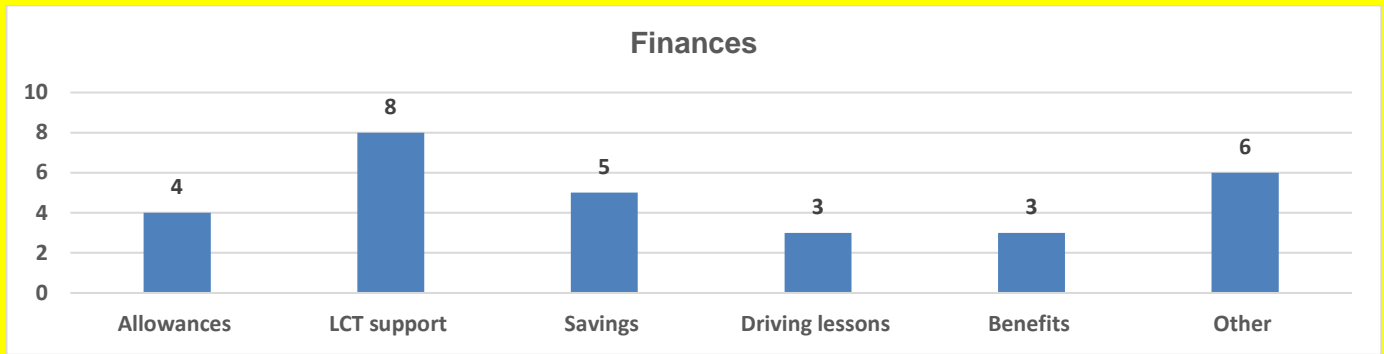
5.5 Advocates worked with 3 children and young people to find out their views about placement planning. Of the 10 issues raised, 7 young people felt that they had achieved a positive outcome, such as moving or staying in the placement of their choice, or their views being taken into consideration for planning.



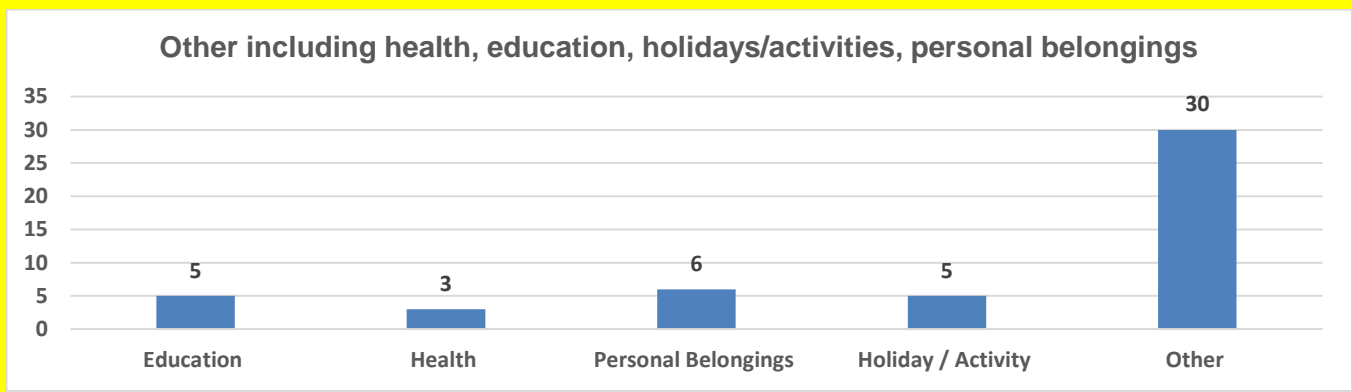
5.6 During this reporting period:

- 2 children / young people wanted to know who their newly allocated Social Worker was
- 2 requested a change of Social Worker, and
- 4 wanted to keep their current Social Worker or have the same one as their siblings.

5.7 7 young people were happy with the outcome achieved, 5 felt that they had received a compromise, such as agreeing to try to develop a relationship with the Social Worker; 1 young person withdrew their issue.



5.8 Of the 29 issues relating to finance, 17 young people were happy with the outcome achieved which included receiving of allowances / access to savings and clarity about support from the Leaving Care Team. Of the 3 who achieved a compromise 2 received some partial funding and 1 was supported by their foster carer to purchase an item. 2 young people did not achieve the outcome they were seeking.



5.9 The graph above shows the categories of the further 49 issues raised during this reporting period. There was no main theme for the area of education which included the impact of Covid-19, acquiring a laptop and arrangements for meetings. 4 of the issues regarding personal belongings related to when a young person moved placements, 1 of the issues related to a request for funding and 1 clarifying what support was available for moving placement.

5.10 Of the issues relating to holiday / activity, 2 related to requesting permission to go on a holiday, and 3 were related to undertaking activities. The 30 issues shown in the 'other' category were varied with no apparent theme, including issues such as, seeking support and outcomes of housing applications.

6. Summary

6.1 Whilst the range of issues for which children and young people seek advocacy support is wide and varied, there are recurring themes, such as:

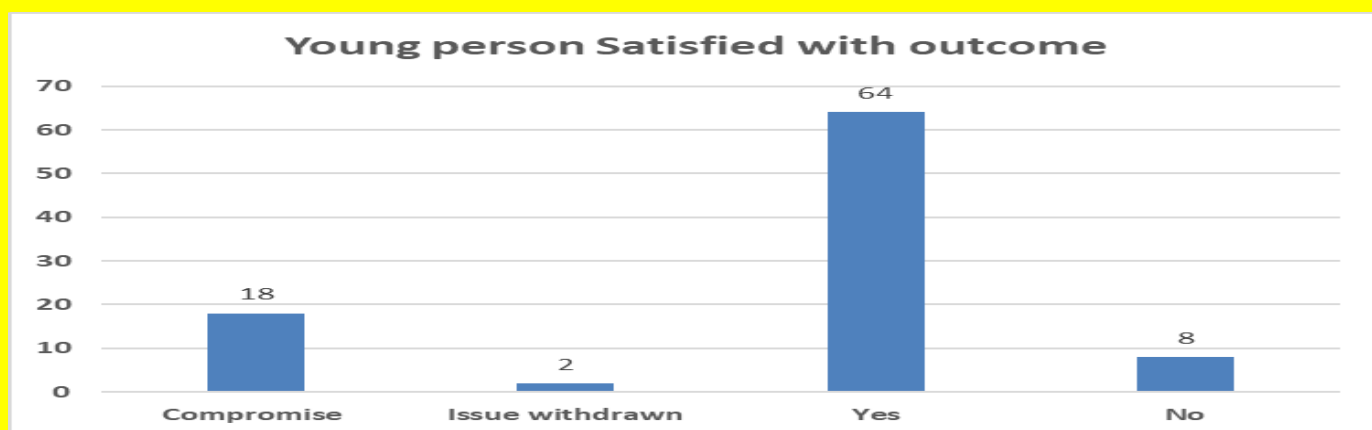
- Placements
- Family time
- Social Worker / Personal Advisor

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

- Finance (8)
- Family Time (contact) (1)
- Communication with foster carer (1)
- Social Worker (5)

Of these, the majority of young people felt they achieved a positive outcome and a number were happy with a compromise achieved, only one young person did not achieve their desired outcome, this was due to compliance with Covid-19 restrictions.

7. What difference did we make for Children?



7.1 Where young people received Advocacy support, other than support at their Looked After reviews, overall 64 young people were satisfied with the outcome they achieved, 18 felt that a compromise had been reached, 2 issues were withdrawn and only 8 felt that they had not achieved a positive outcome. Some positive examples of outcomes for young people included:

- Face to face family time agreed
- Life story work being completed
- Financial support received
- Social Worker stability
- Staying / moving to a different placement

Compromises included:

- Video calls agreed
- Meeting with the allocated Social Worker and try to develop a positive relationship
- Partial financial support awarded

For young people who felt they had not achieved a positive outcome, issues related to

- Family time not being able to be arranged as requested due to Covid-19
- Council tax payment

8. Advocacy at Child Protection Conferences

8.1 Children and young people aged 10 or over who are subject to a Child Protection conference can speak to an Advocate to ensure that their wishes and feelings are heard and taken into consideration. Due to capacity in the Service, currently it is not possible to represent every child or young person for whom a referral is received. Following an audit of the voice of the child within the child protection process by the Child Protection and Review Unit (CPRU) a

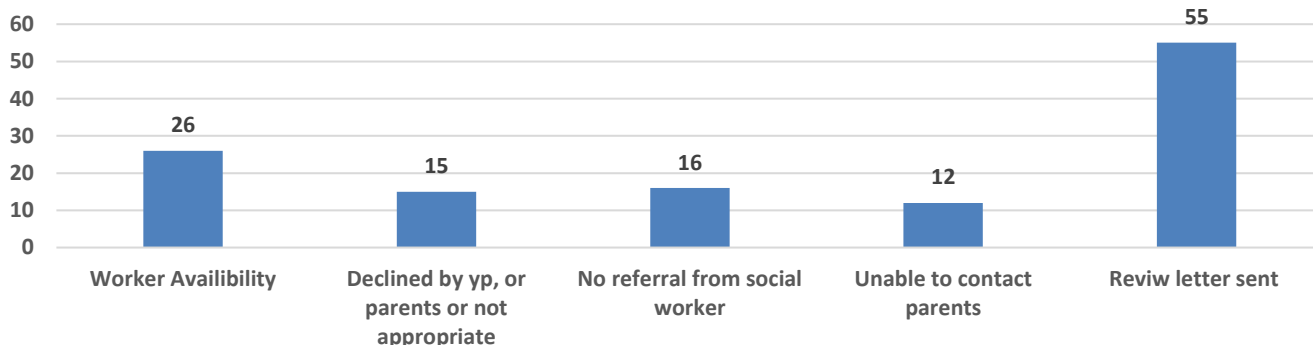
task and finish group is being established to develop how children and young people influence their planning; the Childrens Rights Team will form part of this working group.

Number of Child Protection Conferences



8.1 Of the 82 young people who were represented at their Child Protection Conference during this reporting period, 28 related to an initial Child Protection Conference. The Children’s Rights Service send letters to the parents / Carers of young people who have not been previously supported and have a review Child Protection conference due, asking them to make contact with the Service if they would like their child to receive support; whilst take up is limited requests are received from Social Worker’s and /or Conference Chair’s. The graph below show that 26 young people were unable to be seen because of worker availability

How many yp were not represented



9. Ways in which young people influence service provision

Interview Panels

9.1 Young people continue to be involved in the recruitment process for roles which involve working directly with or managing teams who work directly with children and young people. They provide valuable insight into how they 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 children and young people. Due to Covid-19 how this has been undertaken has been adapted, however from October young people will be conducting virtual interviews with some candidates.

9.2 How consistency of the involvement of children and young people within recruitment is achieved is a recognised area for further development.

Total Respect Training

9.3 Total Respect Training is mandatory for all staff who are new to Kirklees in a role which involves working directly with or managing services which are delivered to children and young people, including new Foster Carers, refresher training should also be every three years. Currently due to Covid-19 planning is underway to develop the training to enable it to be delivered virtually.

Skills to foster

9.4 This is a session delivered by children and young people as part of the overall Skills to Foster training. This virtual training now includes a video clip made by young people, talking about what are the positive and not so positive aspects about living in care. Attendees watch the video and are then asked some associated questions to undertake as homework. The team is giving further consideration to the Skills to Foster training which can be delivered by young people.

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

9.5 During Covid-19 the two groups have continued to meet fortnightly using Skype. There have been some new members to both groups although core members remain low and as indicated above running the groups has been challenging because of technology issues and the meetings being virtual. A music project with The Basement remains underway with the CLF and CiCC although its progression has been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions. Endeavours are being undertaken to complete this project which will see the making of a CD with a rap that the groups have created around their care experiences and a visual DVD. The groups have also taken part in some virtual regional events including a short training session which one of the young people then cascaded down to other members of the group.

10. Other work of the team

10.1 Exit Questionnaires

These are undertaken on behalf of the Leaving Care Team with young people six months before they reach the age of 21 to establish any issues / support needs that young people may have before they fully leave care, and to gain their views about what kind of service they feel they have received. The Children's Rights Team undertake the Exit questionnaires, to enable young people to speak freely to someone independent. Due to Covid-19 these are not currently being held in person and this has impacted on capturing the views of young people. The service is exploring how to resume Exit Questionnaires in person, giving full consideration to Covid-19.

10.2 Link visits

Monthly visits are usually made to each of the Kirklees owned Children's Homes and Ruby Lodge which is a contracted home but has Kirklees children placed there. This gives the opportunity for young people to see someone from the service monthly and raise any personal or collective concerns that they may have. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, children's homes have not been accommodating visitors and as a result, Advocates have continued to make regular contact by telephone.

10.3 Initial visits

Every young person who comes into care (or when they reach the age of 7) receives information about the Children's Rights Team. Covid-19 restrictions have impacted on these being able to be undertaken in person and consequently information packs have been sent out to children and young people, followed up by a telephone call. Due to the team assessing that this was impacting on building positive relationships with children and young people, where possible and assessed as safe, in person visits have now been reinstated

11. What do we want to Improve

The priorities for the next six months are:

- Develop the virtual offer for the CiCC and CLF groups, with a view to reinstating in person meetings when it is safe to do so.
- Explore establishing a virtual CiCC and CLF group for children and young people who live outside of the Kirklees district
- Work with the CPRU to develop how the voice of the child is captured within the Child Protection process.
- Update literature (My Review pack) which is given to children and young people when they first come into care.
- Re-introduce the 'Rate My Review' card for children and young people to support them to provide feedback about their Looked After reviews; to assist with developing child friendly review meetings.
- To develop the current service offer to enable an Advocate to be with a child or young person when they are attending a virtual review.