



**Annual Report**  
**Looked After Children Independent Service Children's**  
**Rights Team**  
**April 2021 to March 2022**

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*The Children's Rights Team strives to empower children and young people to have their voice heard in decisions affecting them, raise aspirations and create positive change'*

## **1. Introduction**

The Kirklees Children Looked After Independent Service (Children's Rights Team) offer advocacy, advice and representation to children and young people who are Looked After by Kirklees Local Authority.

Empowerment of children and young people should be central to all we do in advocacy. This underlies the values of the work of an Advocate, including supporting children, being child or young person led, sharing knowledge and information, being empathetic to individual experiences, and listening to the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.

Individual Advocates encourage the empowerment of children and young people by finding out how they feel and what they want, they can also help the child/young person to detangle complex systems to help them understand what is happening and why.

In 2002, the Department of Health released national standards for all advocacy providers and those providers involved in all decision-making processes for children. The Children's Rights Team works in line with these standards:

- Advocacy is led by the views and wishes of children and young people
- Advocacy champions the rights and needs of children and young people
- All advocacy services have clear policies to promote equalities issues and monitor services that ensure no young person is being discriminated against due to age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability, or sexual orientation
- Advocacy is well-publicised, accessible, and easy to use
- Advocacy gives help and advice quickly when they are requested
- Advocacy works exclusively for children and young people
- Advocacy services are confidential
- Advocates to listen to the views and ideas of young people to improve the service provided
- Advocacy services must have an effective and easy to use complaints procedure
- Advocacy services must be well managed and good value for money

## **2.The Aims of the Children's Rights Team**

- Communicate the wishes and feelings of any child or young person 'Looked After' by Kirklees Council
- Attend decision making meetings with the Local Authority or school

- Uphold children and young people’s legal rights and human rights, ensuring that they are fairly treated, current framework of legislation, incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Easily explain information or processes that are happening in a way children and young people understand
- Assist children and young people in making a complaint
- Signpost to relevant services
- Support the empowerment of children and young people looked after to assist them to engage in meaningful participation in respect of decision-making which affects them, both individually and collectively

### 3.Children’s Rights Team Structure



### 4.Children’s Rights Service Overview

**4.1** The service works collaboratively with Children’s Social Care /Children’s Services to ensure that the views, wishes, feelings and opinions of Children Looked After are heard and considered individually and in respect of service delivery and policy development. Additionally, the team supports children and young people to navigate and use the complaints process.

**4.2** Another function of the service is to work with children and young people through training and supporting them to undertake a meaningful role in the recruitment process of professionals. Children and young people also 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.

**4.3** Every child or young person who is new into care (or when they reach the age of 7) receives an ‘Initial Visit’ from an Advocate, the purpose of which is to share information about the service, what support that they can receive, and what participation opportunities they can become involved in.

**4.4** Two Advocacy & Participation Workers co-ordinate and support the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers Forum (CLF). The CiCC and CLF enable children and young people Looked After and care leavers to come together to work on projects, and /or 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 activities undertaken during 2021 to 2022.***

**4.5** The service also offers support to children and young people over the age of ten, subject to the child protection process.

**4.6** The Independent Visitors Scheme sits within the Children's Rights; the scheme matches children and young people who are in the care of the local authority with adult volunteers who spend time with the child or young person they are matched with, supporting, and listening to them, together with undertaking positive activities.

***A separate annual report for the Independent Visitors Scheme can be found at Appendix 2 and 3.***

## **5.The Impact of Covid-19 on Service Delivery**

**5.1** Throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Children's Rights Team continued to provide services and support to children and young people Looked After and Care Leavers.

**5.2** A three-year comparison shows that overall, Covid-19 did not have a significant impact on the total amount of advocacy issues the Children's Rights Team supported children and young people with. During the pre-covid reporting period of 2019-2020, the total of number of issues children and young people were supported with was 506. During Covid, 2020-2021 the total was 494 and in 2021-2022 it was 492. ***See table in the three-year comparison section***

**5.3** Children and young people's participation in the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum was however impacted by Covid-19 with virtual meetings replacing in person meetings. During this period as some children and young people did not wish to participate in virtual meetings membership declined, however, following the easing of restrictions, group membership has increased, and children and young people are again enjoying a range of activities, and are fully involved in consultations and project work.

**5.4** Virtual Children Looked After reviews are preferred by some children and young people, although overall, feedback indicates that most children and young people would rather engage in person meetings. Advocates continue to support children and young people to ensure that they are consulted as to how and where they would like their Looked After reviews to take place.

## **6.Contact with Young People**

**6.1** Advocacy must be easily accessible. This means that every care must be taken to ensure that children and young people are informed about the availability of Advocacy services, and that these services are delivered in places that are 'child or young person friendly' and are convenient, safe, and private. Other access considerations include those

related to disability, language and communication, culture, or access to technology. These should be considered on an individual basis, taking the lead from the child's or young person's wishes and needs wherever possible.

**6.2** Information about the Children's Rights service is provided in a variety of ways and promoted in places that young people use, in addition the team also provides:

- **Link Visits-** Each Advocate is responsible for maintaining links with a specific Residential Children's Home setting. This involves ensuring a presence at least once a month and providing relevant information and literature in respect of the Children's Rights Service.
- **Drop-Ins-** The Children's Rights Team attend Drop-in sessions at No 11 and No 12 on a fortnightly basis. No 11 is situated in Huddersfield Town Centre and No 12 in Dewsbury Town Centre. Both spaces have been designed to provide a place where Care Leavers can access support, guidance, and assistance from the Leaving Care team and partner agencies.
- **Initial Visits-** Every child and young person over 7 years old who is new into care receives an initial visit from an Advocate in the team, a variety of resources are used to aid understanding dependent on the age of the child or young person.
- **Birthday and holiday cards-** Currently children and young people Looked After are sent birthday cards and a card at Christmas, both which contain information about the Children's Rights team and contact details. In addition, the service is introducing a card for Eid, which has been designed by a member of the Children in Care Council.

## **7.Children and Young People who are Looked After**

**7.1** Due to the wide variety of circumstances and complexities encountered in advocacy referrals, it can be difficult to capture the specifics of each individual issue.

**7.2** Every child Looked After by the Local Authority has the right to an independent Advocate. This is defined in the Children Act 1989, which 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, including The Adoption and Children Act 2002, extended this to include Care Leavers, and to children and young people outside of the complaint's procedure, when decisions are being made that affects their lives.

**7.3** There are a wide range of issues which children and young people who are looked after and care leavers approach us with. 133 individual children and young people were supported by the Children's Rights Team within this reporting period with 492 separate pieces of advocacy undertaken. This shows that children and young people may experience multiple issues and that they feel confident to seek support from their Advocate or contact the service on multiple occasions.

**7.4** The chart below illustrates the types of advocacy issues that the Children's Rights Team support children and young people with, the most common being support for Children Looked After (CLA) Reviews and in or for other meetings, for example. supporting care leavers who have children going through Care Proceedings, support at Pre-Birth

Assessments or supporting children /young people at their Personal Education Plan Meetings.



**7.5** Of the advocacy work undertaken 320 pieces related to working with females, 169 with males and 4 for children /young people who identified as 'other'. This would indicate that girls/young women are more likely to contact the service when they are experiencing issues or require advocacy support.

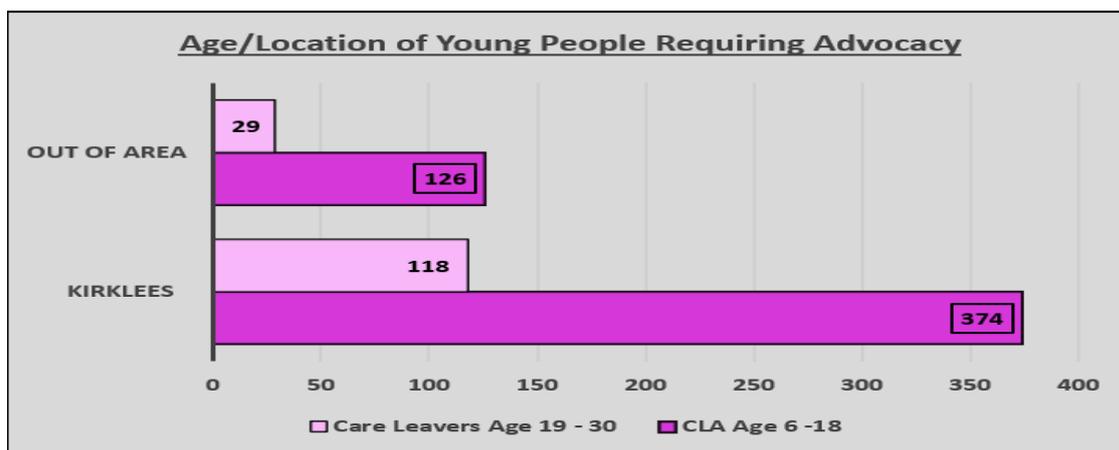
**7.6** There were 15 occurrences of advocacy undertaken relation to issues with Social Workers or Personal Advisors (PA), 34 in relation to placements, and 36 regarding issues in relation to finance, as illustrated in the chart above. Themes and patterns relating to the advocacy issues are explored in section 8.

**7.7 Non-Instructioned Advocacy-** For a small number of children and young people (4 in this period) the support offered was non-instructed advocacy. This is provided when a child or young person does not have the capacity to clearly communicate their wishes or feelings or have an appropriate level of understanding. For these children and young people their Advocate gathers information from a range of sources such as parents, carers, and 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.

**7.8 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children-** There has been an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children accessing support from Children's Rights, together the service receiving requests for Advocates to attend Age Assessments.

**7.9** Of the advocacy work undertaken in this reporting period, in 156 occasions of the total 492, support has been provided to children / young people placed out of area.

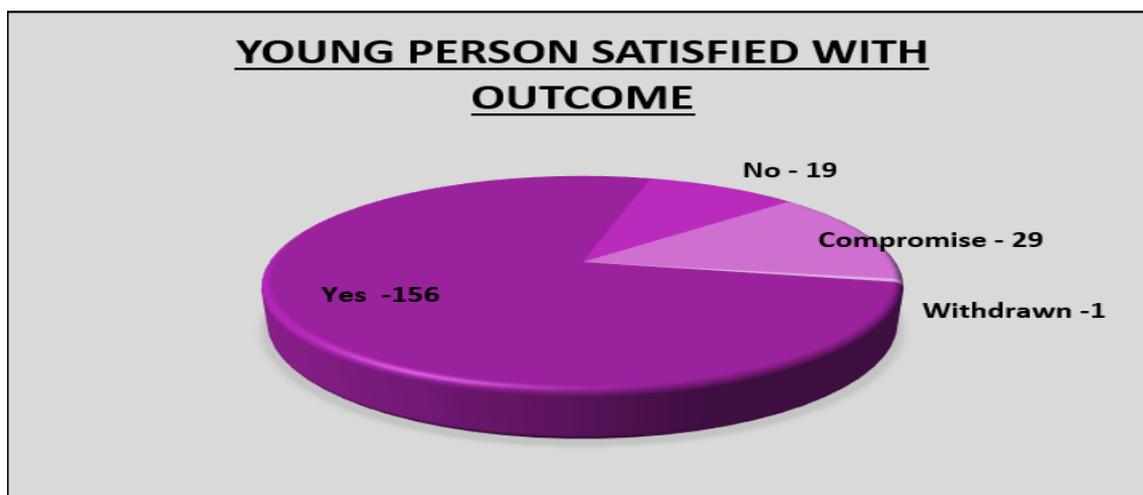
**7.10** The Children's Rights service works closely with the Child Protection and Review Unit and in this period, the services have worked together to revise consultation documentation, seeking to increase the offer and choice for how children and young people can access their Children Protection Conferences and Looked After Reviews.



**7.11** The above graph shows that a higher volume of advocacy is provided to Children Looked After (374) as opposed to Care Leavers (118). The graph also illustrates that whilst the service supports children and young people living within the local authority area, those who live outside of the area do access the service.

**7.12** Of all the advocacy provided in the reporting period, in 50 instances, issues were raised by children and young people who lived in a residential setting, whilst 104 were raised by children and young people from a Black and Minority Ethnic Group and in 52 instances advocacy was provided to children with a disability.

**7.13** The pie chart below shows that, not including Child Looked After Review or support at other meetings, 156 young people were satisfied with the outcome achieved in relation to the issue they raised and were supported with, 29 felt they reached a compromise, 1 issue was withdraw, whilst 19 children /young people were not satisfied.



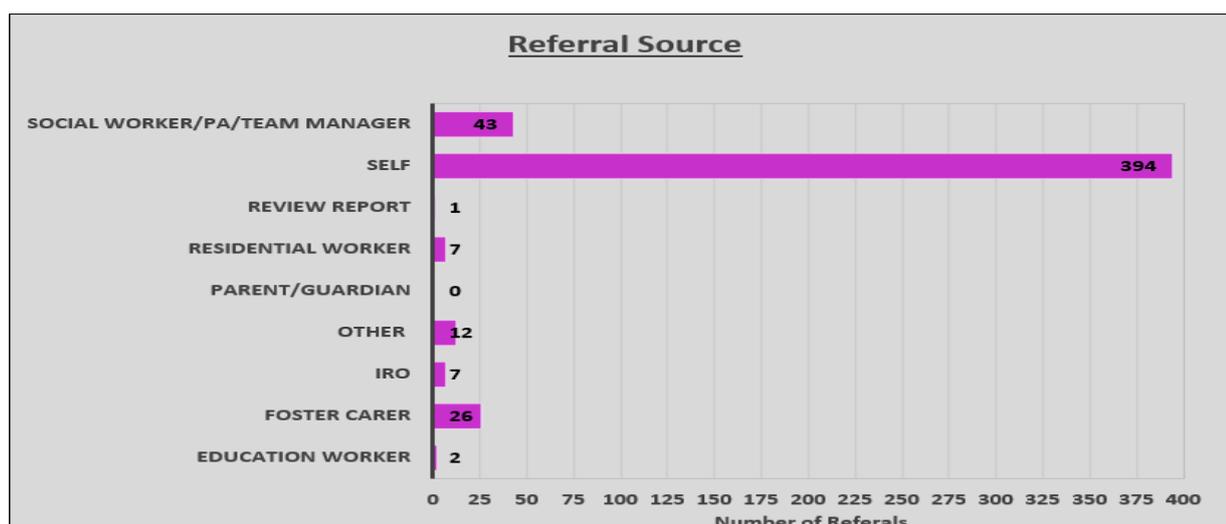
**7.14** There were 9 formal Complaints raised by the Children’s Rights service on behalf of 6 different children and young people in this reporting period. One was addressed outside of the Complaints procedure, 6 by way of a local resolution, and 2 at stage 1 of the Complaints procedure. (Some related to more than one issue) The details of these are outlined below.

Procedure	Number of cases	Issues	Outcomes
Local Resolution	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inaccurate decision making</li> <li>Lack of communication</li> <li>Contact Arrangement Issue</li> <li>Failure to consult /listen /communicate effectively</li> <li>Other (Issues relating to staff)</li> <li>Delay in provision /assessment</li> <li>Financial issue</li> <li>Inaccurate decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not proceed - Advice and support provided by Children's Social Care</li> <li>Not upheld</li> <li>Partially upheld</li> </ul>
Stage 1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact arrangement issue</li> <li>Other (issues relating to staff)</li> <li>Confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partially upheld</li> <li>Upheld</li> </ul>

**7.15** There were 89 advocacy issues raised which by children and young people which were resolved informally, with restorative work with other services/professionals being facilitated by the advocate. This meant that the issue was not then escalated to the Complaints Team.

## 8. Themes and Patterns

**8.1** The graph below highlights that most requests for advocacy work is received through young people self-referring to the service, with the second highest referral source being Social Workers or Personal Advisors, followed by referrals made by Foster Carer's.



**8.2** 48 Many of the issues raised by children and young people related to Family Time, the majority of which was to request sibling contact and/or parental contact. Other areas included contact with extended family and requests for overnight stays.

**8.3** In addition there were 36 issues raised in relation to finance, common themes within this related to driving lessons (4), bank accounts (4), clothing allowances (4), food parcels (4), and requests for bus passes (3).

**8.4** Looked After children and young people often approach Children's Rights with issues around placements, in total there was 34 pieces of advocacy undertaken in relation to this. Of these, 17 were in relation to children and young people living in foster care. 3 issues were raised by young people recorded as living independently, 5 by young people living in children's residential homes. 2 young people were living in semi-independent, whilst 3 were in temporary housing, 1 was living with a parent, 2 were classed as residing in 'other' placement and 1 was living in supported lodgings. Issues included post 18 planning, placement moves and uncertainty in relation to this, and homelessness.

**8.5** In the reporting period advocacy has been provided to support children and young people regarding the need for professional decision making and delay, for example in relation to receiving authorisation to go on a school trip, a sleepover, a holiday. A report by the Children's Commissioner, Children's Social Care – putting children's voices at the heart of reform January 2022, highlighted this issue and recommended - *'The system should be able to empower foster parents or children's home managers to manage everyday decisions for children in long-term and stable placements.'*

**8.6** Requests for advocacy to support young people and care leavers through Pre-Birth Assessments and Care Proceedings in relation to their own children has increased; this is viewed as positive, to help ensure that they receive support to understand and navigate complex systems and processes, and impartial advice.

## **9. Child Protection Advocacy**

**9.1** In the reporting period the service received 153 notifications of Initial Child Protection Conferences, in relation to these, there were 76 Social Worker referrals to the service, 21 children and young people were contacted and 16 were supported at their Conference. Additionally, the service received 223 notifications Child Protection Reviews; 50 children and young people were contacted, and of these 44 were supported at their review. Whilst the Children's Rights Team are informed of all Child Protection review meetings, children who received advocacy representation at their Initial Child Protection Review Conference and/or children where an advocacy referral was received are prioritised for support.

**9.2** There are various reasons as all Child Protection conference and review notifications, do not led to advocacy support, these include, late referrals, previously declined, parents decline, unable to contact parents, cancelled/rearranged conferences / meetings, service capacity and /or young people decline or there is difficulty in contacting them. However, during the reporting period there has been an increase in advocacy capacity in the service, and the aim is to utilise this to enhance support to children and young people subject to Child Protection plans

## 10.Three-year Comparison

**10.1** The table below shows the level and issues related to advocacy support between the years of 2019 and 2022 and the year-on-year similarities. As previously outlined above, most advocacy support is provided to children Looked After in relation to their Review meetings, and other meetings, whilst support requested and provided relating to placements, contact, and finance issues, accounts for other significant areas of service provision. Advocacy support relating specifically to Age Assessments has only been captured from 2021-2022 and will be monitored by the service.

	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020
Age Assessment	12	0	0
Contact	48	34	40
Education	23	9	16
Finance	36	60	27
Foster Carer	1	2	1
Health	15	7	6
Holiday/ activities	14	5	6
Personal belongings	16	9	13
Placement	34	21	32
Residential day to day issue	4	4	2
Social worker/ PA	15	25	18
Support at other meeting	41	80	96
Support for CLA review	171	192	205
Other	62	46	44

## 11.Participation Opportunities

**11.1** The Children's Rights service works with children and young people to support participation opportunities, this includes:

**11.2** Children in Care Council (CiCC): The council is for children and young people Looked After aged between 12 and 16. The council meets 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.**

**11.3** The Care Leavers Forum (CLF): is for young people aged 16 and over to support young people to work with professionals, to help ensure that their views are heard regarding Care Leaver service delivery and provision. **See appendix 1 for more details.**

**11.4** Professional Recruitment Panels: The Children's Rights team supports service areas to meaningfully involve children and young people in the recruitment of professionals, i.e., Social Workers, team, Service or Senior managers and Independent Reviewing Officers.

**11.5** Total Respect training: Following the easing of Covid restrictions, arrangements have now been finalised for this training is to be delivered in person, from June 2022.

**11.6 Skills to Foster training:** In person delivery input by young people did not occur during this reporting period. However, a video was made by children and young people who shared their experiences of being in care for a commissioned company who delivered the training package virtually, due to the Pandemic. The plan is to return to in-house and Kirklees led delivery, and this is being progressed.

**11.7** The Annual Achieve Awards which celebrates the achievements of Children Looked After over the age of 16 and Care Leavers took place in October 2021. The Children's Rights Service is represented in the working group, overseeing the planning for the 2022 event.

## **12. Quality Assurance**

**12.1** The Children's Right Service works closely with the Child Protection and Review Unit to share information, including themes from advocacy, to support positive outcomes and service delivery improvement. The team manager also works closely with the Children's Complaints team to discuss ongoing complaints and cater for joint working to resolve these at the earliest opportunity.

**12.2** A Childrens Rights monthly report is completed regarding data, including themes and patterns relating to advocacy issues, to highlight themes and patterns and support service delivery.

**12.3** On a quarterly basis the Childrens Rights Team seek feedback from children and young people who have received advocacy to inform continuous improvement of the service.

## **13. Young people's voice**

**13.1** When a matter is resolved and/or advocacy support ends, 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 can be improved. Young people have shared that they do not want to receive lots of paper forms or information, so in response to this an electronic feedback form is sent directly to their phone or e-mail address. This has been extended to the children and young people's participation groups, with feedback forms being sent after each group session. Feedback is gathered and analysed on a quarterly basis.

**13.2** In addition to 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. Examples of feedback received are highlighted below,



*Direct quotes from children and young people gathered from feedback forms in relation to service provision.*

## **14. Conclusion**

**14.1** Overall the take up of advocacy within Kirklees remained consistent during 2021-2022 despite Covid restrictions being in place for most of this reporting period.

**14.2** During the pandemic Covid restrictions influenced the membership of the CiCC and CLF, as virtual meetings were held and membership decreased during this period, however membership has since increased steadily.

**14.3** Total Respect Training has returned to being held in person; 16 people attended the first session and with positive feedback was received.

**14.4** In comparison with last year, the number of formal complaints initiated decreased significantly, 31 complaints were processed during 2020-2021 with only 9 reaching the Complaints Team in the period of 2021-2022; this has involved the team working to help resolve issues for children and young people quickly using an informal process and restorative practice.

**14.5** The demand for Young Person's Interview Panels has continued in this reporting period with the team endeavouring to facilitate all requests received.

**14.6** Home visits to children and young people in respect of advocacy took place during lockdown providing a risk assessment was completed including a rationale as to why the visit needed to be in person, such as identified communication difficulties. Face to face group work resumed in June 2021, and pre pandemic service delivery is fully resumed.

**14.7** During this period a new team manager started with the service and additional Advocacy capacity, it is envisaged that this will enable the service to fulfil our ambition to offer more consistent Child Protection Advocacy.

**14.8** The service has implemented new monitoring system in April to provide more detailed information and analysis in terms of specific issues, patterns and trends relating to Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

**14.9** Currently a modernisation of the service is being reviewed, the principles of which are:

- To ensure the voice of the child is at the centre of all our work and needs to be heard and captured
- To develop appropriate, enabling structure(s) for children and young people to have a voice that shapes and improves their lives and our services across Kirklees
- To design accessible and appropriate services and provision across Kirklees

**14.10** The recommendations in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) final report regarding advocacy may impact in the future on the Children's Rights Team and the current service offer.

## **15.Key Areas of Development from Previous Year 2021-2022**

- **To promote and improve children and young people's participation in their Looked After Reviews.**

Regular links with nominated Independent Reviewing Officers have been maintained, a Voice of the Child group to promote child friendly Children Looked After Reviews resulted in refreshed and updated paperwork, ensuring feedback is obtained from children and young people.

- **To promote and improve children and young people's participation at Child Protection conferences.**

A Voice of the Child group with Child Protection Conference Chairs was implemented to improve ways of and tools for gathering and presenting children's wishes and feelings in relation to risks and measuring progress when children are subject to Child Protection Plans.

- **To ensure the Independent Visitor Scheme is robust and provides a high-quality consistent service for children, young people, and volunteers.**

A virtual training package for new Independent Visitors was created alongside an annual timetable of support groups to ensure Independent Visitors are well supported and are kept informed of current developments.

- **To develop the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers forum; including increased membership and improved accessibility, to ensure the voice and influence of children and young people informs service delivery and design**

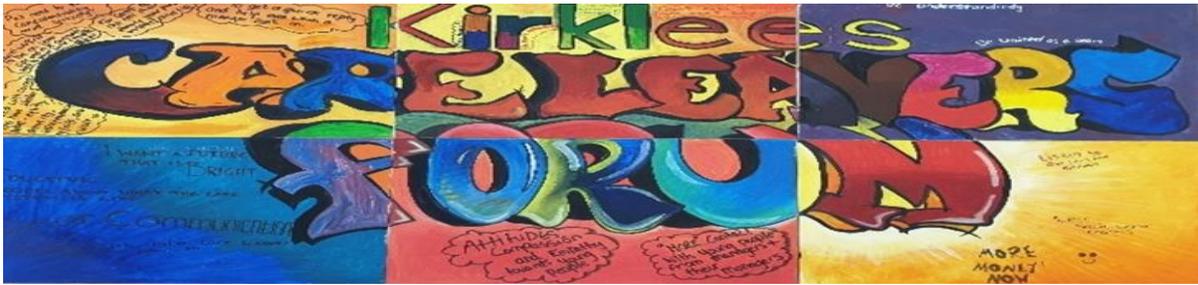
Memberships has increased with short-, medium- and long-term young person led planning in place. Feedback Forms are utilised to inform and improve service delivery.

- **To work with others across Children's services to capture children's voices, experiences, and help support participation and inform service development.**

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum invites senior managers from various service areas in Children's Services to attend the groups which provides opportunities for consultation regarding service delivery planning, delivery, and improvement.

## **16.Key Areas of Development for the Next 12 Months**

- Introduction of improved quality assurance mechanisms, to support further development of the service and provide assurance that a consistent and high-quality service is provided.
- To review and develop advocacy support to Care Leavers and Children Looked After who are going through Care Proceedings in relation to their own children.
- Further develop the Child Protection advocacy offer, to provide a more consistent offer to children and young people.
- To create stronger links with strategic groups and Boards.
- To continue to work with others across Children's Services to capture children's voices, experiences, and help support participation and inform service development
- To review the service against the new Advocacy Standards which are due to be published.
- To ensure key links and relationships are developed and maintained with Magdale House, the new Kirklees Children's home.



## **16. Appendix 1-Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers Forum (CLF)**

**16.1** The Children in Care Council meets bi-weekly. 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 improve services to best meet the needs of children and young people.

**16.2** The Care Leavers Forum is for young people aged 16 to 21 (or 25 if still in full time education) and the remit is to discuss the issues that young people face as they prepare to leave care and move into independence. Young people work with professionals with the aim to improve services and ensure that these meet their needs. The group meets bi-weekly.

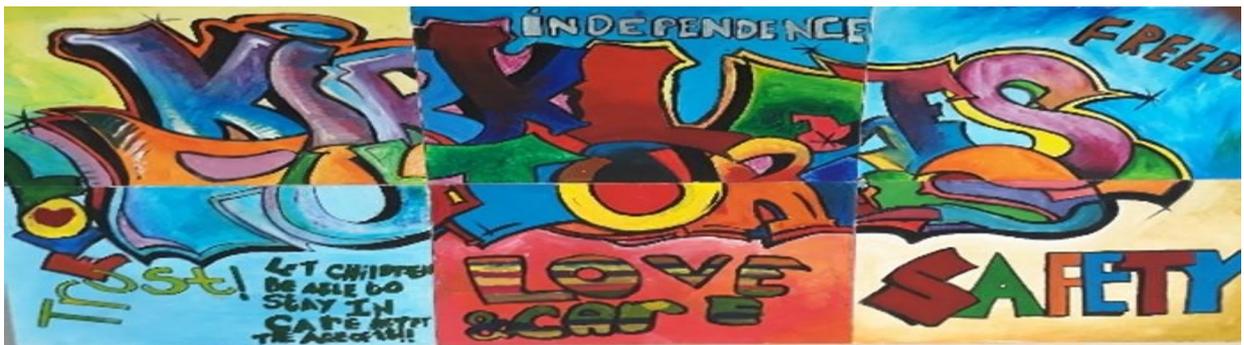
**16.3** The groups were merged due to the impact of Covid-19 on the number of attendees, children and young people have been consulted about separating the groups, however they chose to stay together in the short term. As membership continues to increase steadily and due to the differing issues that children in care and care leavers experience, the groups will be reformed as separate groups in September 2022. This will enable focus on important issues relevant to each of the groups.

**16.5** During this reporting period the groups have been involved in the following:

- Preventative work around Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing including a presentation from 'Kooth', (Kooth is an online mental healthcare service which aims to provide mental health service to individuals under the age of 21), and a session with a practitioner from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- The opportunity to become a 'Children's Rights Champion', this is a course aimed at care experienced children and young people to help them learn about their rights, being heard and respected, and how Advocates help protect rights. So far one member has completed the online course and was presented with a certificate during one of the CiCC meetings to celebrate this achievement.
- Consultation with a Service Manager from Corporate Parenting regarding the changes to the Placement Support Service seeking their views and suggestions about accessing emotional well-being/mental health as a child in care/care leaver.
- Ongoing art project to decorate the young people's room at Brian Jackson House. Young people will also be designing a new logo for the CiCC.
- The group was involved in and contributed toward the Total Respect Training which the Children's Rights Team delivers in conjunction with young people.
- Consultation on the new Financial Policy, Commitment to Care Leavers and Staying Put Policy.
- Discussion and consultation about the planning of the 2022 Achieve Awards

## 16.5. 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.
- Continue to develop links with the 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.
- To identify alternative ways to facilitate sharing the wider views of children and young people who are Looked After and those leaving Care to the Corporate Parenting Board- suggestions include
  - A video or PowerPoint created by the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum being shared with the Corporate Parenting Board perhaps two or three times a year which outlines the work they have been doing.
  - The Corporate Parenting Board members attending an activity day with the groups.
  - Individual members of the Corporate Parenting Board to be invited to visit the groups periodically throughout the year.



## **17. Appendix 2 -Independent Visitors Scheme Report**

### **Kirklees Independent Visitors Scheme (IV)**

#### **Children Act 1989 Section 23ZB requires that:**

(1) A local authority looking after a child must appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor if—

(a) the child falls within a description prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State

or

(b) in any other case, it appears to them that it would be in the child's interests to do so.

#### **17.1 Introduction**

Kirklees Independent Visitors Scheme, also known as Care2Listen. The scheme was established in its current format nine years ago; it is coordinated by an Independent Service Officer.

The scheme provides independent adult volunteers who befriend children / young people in the care of the local authority; to spend time with them on a one-to-one basis, undertake activities and develop a positive relationship with a trusted, responsible adult. Volunteers provide children / young people with the opportunity to talk to someone independent, seek advice, guidance, and support from and have fun with, in an informal setting.

Volunteers undergo a 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 undertaken, together with employment checks and two references.

Children and 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's / young person's Looked After Review. Young people are also encouraged to express an interest themselves in having an Independent Visitor and can apply through the Children's Rights webpage or they can discuss it directly with the Scheme Coordinator, their Social Worker, key worker, or carer. However, a formal referral document needs to be completed and submitted by the child's Social Worker.

Since September 2021, the scheme has been managed by the previous Children's Rights team Manger on a part time basis. During this time, a review of the service has been undertaken. This involved a review of the Independent Visitors and their contact with children and young people alongside the oversight and quality assurance of the scheme.

A successful recruitment campaign has been undertaken during the last financial year and new matches have been facilitated.

## **17.2 Current position**

There are currently 27 trained and available volunteers. 21 Independent Visitors are matched with a child / young person on a one-to-one basis. Work is ongoing to ensure appropriate matches are made for the remaining volunteers. 3 additional volunteers have undertaken the training to become an Independent Visitor and are awaiting their DBS certificate and / or completion of other forms. There continues to be interest in the scheme although not all enquiries result in an application being received. The scheme coordinator endeavours to contact non respondents to gain an understanding of why they have decided not to pursue volunteering with the Scheme but there is no overarching reason why this is the case and includes a change of circumstances or looking into multiple opportunities to decide which is right for them. 1 person has recently been interviewed and will be undertaking virtual training with a one to one follow up with the scheme coordinator to check and supplement learning.

9 Independent Visitors have left the scheme in the past 12 months. 5 of these were due to issues during the Covid period affecting contact between them and their young person. This led to young people not wanting to continue seeing an Independent Visitor when face to face visits resumed and the volunteers decided not to continue with their role. 1 volunteer retired from the scheme when their young person no longer wished to see him regularly.

A recruitment campaign was undertaken in October 2021 which resulted in 10 volunteers completing training in February 2022.

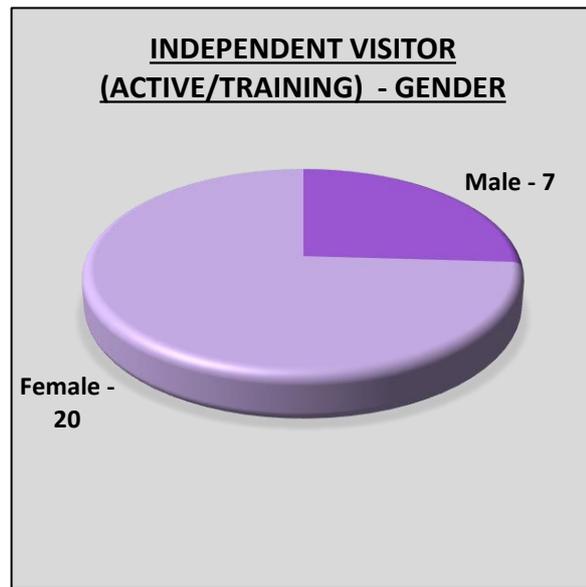
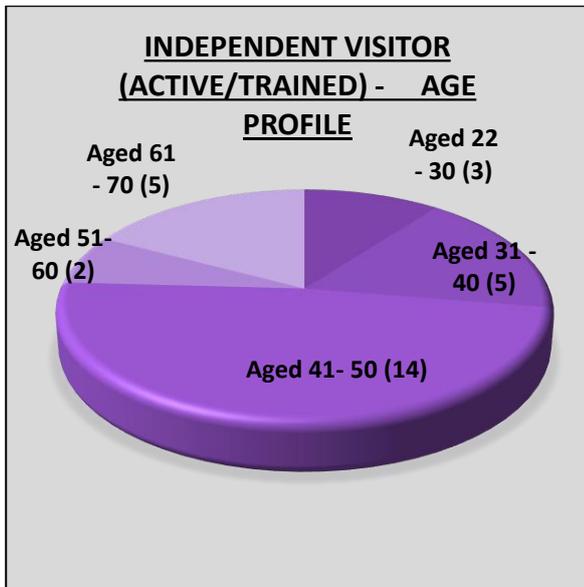
There are 30 children / young people waiting for a match with an Independent Visitor of these, 16 currently live in a host local authority and 14 live in Kirklees. The waiting list is reviewed regularly to ensure the referrals remain appropriate and contact is made with Social Workers to check continued suitability.

## **17.3 Volunteers and Young Person Profile**

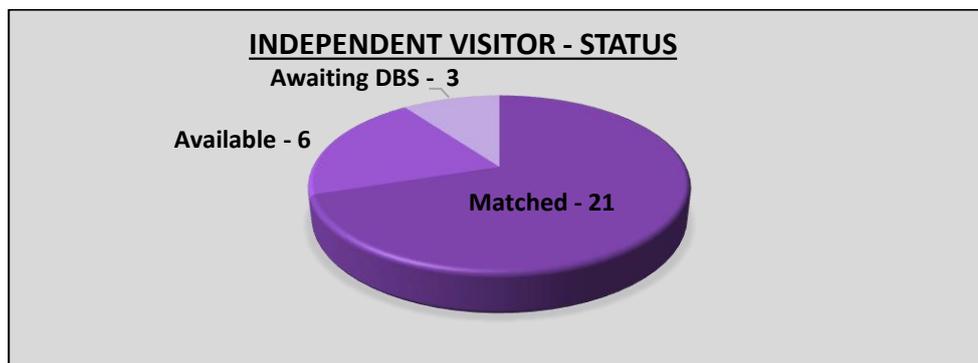
### **Volunteer profile**

The Independent Visitors Scheme has a diverse range of volunteers. Volunteers must be aged 18 or over, with a minimum 5-year age gap between the adult volunteer and the young person they are matched to. Volunteers in the youngest age range are accepted only if they can demonstrate a degree of maturity appropriate to managing the challenges which young people may present. The graphs below shows that 14 volunteers are aged between 41 and 50 which taken with 8 volunteers in the other younger age groups evidence's that the majority of volunteers are undertaking this role alongside work or study. 24 volunteers are of white ethnicity with 6 being from 'other' ethnicity.

74% (20) of the current volunteers are female and 26% (7) male. This is a similar cohort as seen in other regional schemes. Although some young people have specified that they would like a male volunteer, many have been matched with a female volunteer and these relationships have been sustained. The next recruitment campaign will be more targeted to recruit male volunteers.



The scheme seeks to match a volunteer with a child / young person who meets their preference in terms of placement, location, age, and gender within 8 weeks of being classed as available. It can take longer to ensure that the match is appropriate and likely to be successful. Following the recruitment drive in October, 4 new matches were made.

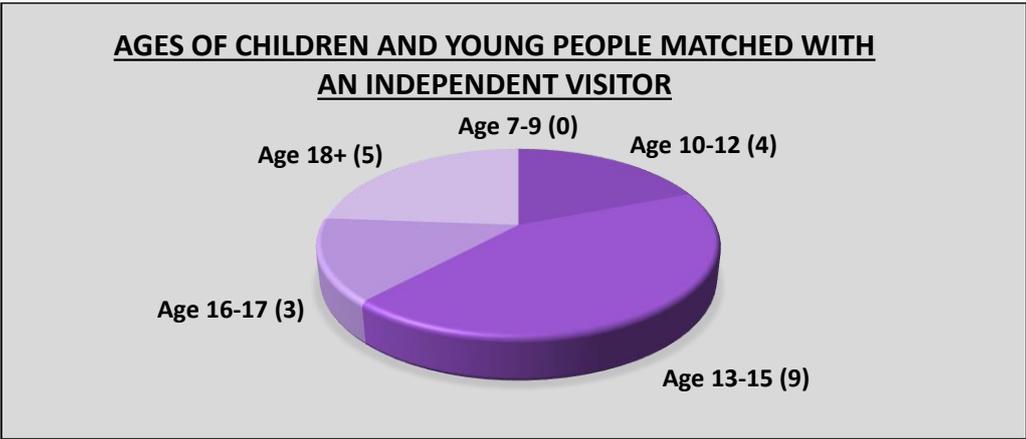


#### 17.4 Profile of children and young people

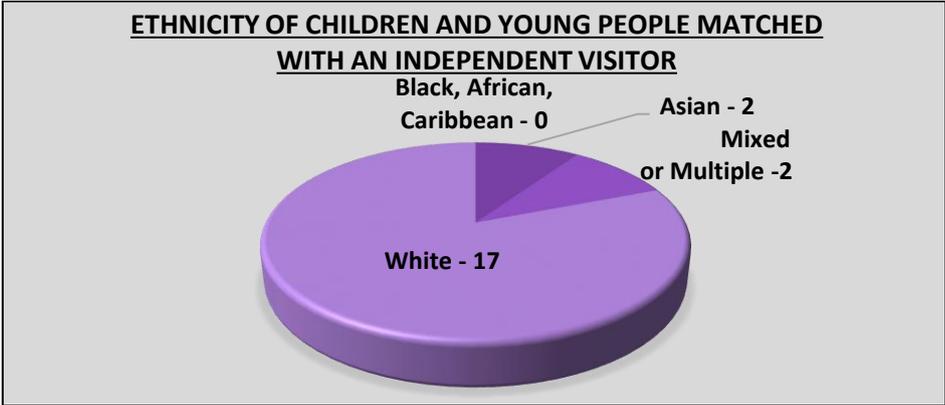
There are currently 21 young people matched with an Independent Visitor. There are more girls (57%) than boys (43%) benefitting from the scheme.

With regards to age, 5 young people over the age of 18 are still receiving support from their Independent Visitor. Continuation over the age of 18 is in line with Government recommendations and is based on the needs of the young person, however the frequency tends to be less than monthly. All matches for over young people over 18 are reviewed annually.

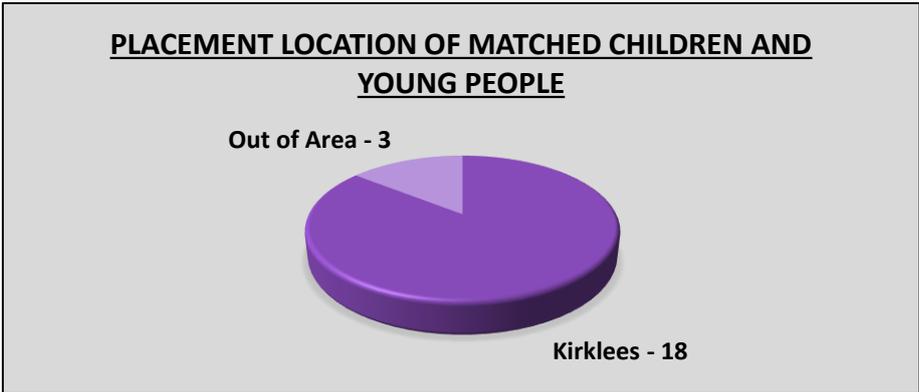
3 older teenagers (16-17), 10 young people aged between 13 and 15 and 4 aged between 10 and 12 years old currently have an Independent Visitor.



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



Most matched children/young people (86%) live within Kirklees with 14% living in a host local authority area such as Bradford, Leeds, Calderdale.



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

## **17.5 Making a difference.**

Independent Visitors are required to submit a short feedback form following each visit or contact with the child / young person they are matched with. Regular quality assurance ensures all Independent Visitors are having contact with their young people a minimum of 3 monthly, however contact is recommended once a month.

During this reporting period contact continued to be virtual during periods of Covid restrictions. In person visits resumed in line with government guidelines. During of Covid lockdown periods there was evidence of Independent Visitors maintaining their relationships in creative and engaging ways including; regular video calls where young people and their volunteer undertook challenges; craft activities / and cards being sent in the post; One young person made a scrap book of all the time she has been seeing her Independent Visitor which is for over 3 years (an example page is shown below).



Many relationships with children / young people have been re-established and both parties have been keen to resume the contact and activities together. The value and impact of the relationship is evidenced within feedback received from children / young people.

Referrals continue to be made for new children / young people to be allocated an Independent Visitor which indicates the demand for and value of the scheme.

## **17.6 Feedback from young people**

Young people are spoken to at the time of the Annual Review for an Independent Visitor Volunteer. General feedback is they value a relationship 'just for them' and they do not have to share their time with other family members or children / young people with whom they live. The following are direct comments from young people:

*"I really enjoy seeing my Independent Visitor. I like that I can talk to her, she takes me places, we do new things that I didn't think I would ever get to do. We have been to a vintage clothes shop, to the cinema, we go for meals and shopping. I like that I can get out of the house, meet new people, and it is something just for me and not with parents. It gives me freedom. I want to continue with my Independent Visitor. I love her, she's the best. We always have a laugh; it is just good to be with her."*

*“I’m really happy seeing my Independent Visitor. She’s someone I can talk to outside of the household, she’s reliable, reassuring and generally a lovely person. She takes the pressure off me and shares an outside look on things, she gives me amazing advice. She’s like part of my family – what I would want.”*

*“My Independent Visitor has done so many wonderful, thoughtful things for me. She is the best human being ever!”*

## **17.7 The impact of Covid-19**

Clear guidance was issued to Independent Visitors throughout the Covid-19 restrictions to ensure that Independent Visitors worked within the guidelines.

Throughout Covid-19 lockdown periods Independent Visitors were asked to keep in touch with young people through letters / cards and / or virtually through using social media applications such as Skype/WhatsApp/Zoom/telephone calls. A very small number of young people did not wish to have virtual contact with their Independent Visitor and instead preferred to wait until in person visits could resume. This led to some relationships breaking down and children / young people deciding that they no longer wanted to meet with their Independent Visitor, in the main, these volunteers decided to leave the scheme rather than be matched with another child / young person.

### **Priorities for the scheme**

- Match existing trained and available volunteers with young people on the waiting list
- Review the current waiting list and amend as appropriate
- Ensure that every Independent Visitor has an annual review with the Scheme coordinator
- Undertake a full recruitment campaign in October 2022
- Introduction of enhanced quality assurance processes to identify areas of strength and those of challenge. To include mechanisms to capture feedback from children and young people more regularly to support continuous practice and service delivery improvements.
- To review the scheme against the National Independent Visitor Scheme Standards
- To undertake a further Quality Assurance Audit of the Scheme during the financial year 2022 / 2023

## **18. Appendix 2- Updated Independent Visitor Position as of 01.08.2022**

**18.1** There are now 32 trained Independent Visitors. 29 children and young people are matched with 28 volunteers (1 volunteer is double matched).

There are 4 Independent Visitors without a child or young person matched to them, 3 are female and 1 male. There are 11 young people on the waiting list, 3 of these are within Kirklees and 7 are out of area. However, due to matching requirements some Independent

Visitors may not be suitably matched to a young person in the short term, and new referrals to the scheme are being sought.