

BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST NEWSLETTER



September 2025

Issue #11

2025 - A SUMMER TO REMEMBER

Hello to Councillors and others reading this, our eleventh Children's Trust newsletter.

What a remarkable last few months. We have had a highly successful summer activity programme, benefitting children, young people and families through many fun Holiday Activity Fund events, led by our official charity Bfriends and our partners. In addition Bfriends celebrated its first annual celebration event **(see page 5)**.

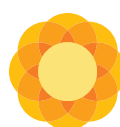
We have seen all five of our residential children's homes be graded as 'Good' at the same time by Ofsted **(see page 3 and pictures on this page)**. Talking of inspections we are happy that Ofsted and CQC recognised the improvements made in Birmingham's support to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) **(see page 7)**.

We also have had good news in our Youth Justice Service **(see page 11)**. We also hope you will support our drive to recruit more incredible foster carers **(see page 8)**. To top off our summer, we have two Social Worker of the Year category finalists **(see page 6)**. We hope to hear great news later in 2025.

James Thomas
Chief Executive,
Birmingham Children's Trust



'All Good' Trust Residential Homes celebration!



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

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Meet our **Trust** Directors

- **James Thomas**
Chief Executive



- **David Stringfellow**
Director of Commissioning and Specialist Services.



- **Lisa Harris**
Director of Help and Protection.



- **Lee Yale-Helms**
Director of Finance and Resources.



- **Marshelene Williams**
Director of Quality Assurance.



- **Lisa Jamieson**
Director of Corporate Parenting.



Contact details for all of our directors can be found below.

Contact our Executive management team

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Trust Residential Children's Homes are all.....



All five of Birmingham Children's Trust's Residential Children's Homes are now rated as 'Good' by Ofsted. This is a major achievement for our homes and a testament to our incredible staff.

To celebrate the collective achievement an event was held at Camborne House in Aston, with four cakes shaped into the letters G O O D, baked by Andrea Ward, Deputy Manager at Camborne House. See the delicious picture above!

Trust Chief Executive **James Thomas** gave a speech to Residential staff and guests, including Lisa Smith, Head of Birmingham Virtual School at Birmingham City Council and Trust Non-Executive Director Lisa Field.

Three members of Residential Staff also spoke, to share their experiences and give credit to their colleagues. **Signija Zelava**, Home Manager, at Camborne House, **Floyd Gittens**, Senior Residential Childcare Officer at Camborne House, and **Rachel Woodward**, Registered Manager, from Edgewood Road Home all spoke from the heart and were all given a rousing round of applause.



Trust 2025 - A quick guide



What is the Trust 2025 Programme?

Trust 2025 is a programme designed to improve support for children, young people, and families in Birmingham. By providing earlier help and prioritising relationship-based approaches, it aims to achieve better outcomes and experiences. We have already been delivering a pilot project in the Hodge Hill area.

What are the programme's goals?

The programme focuses on five key areas:

- Creating a locality-based operating model for closer collaboration between communities, partners, and professionals.
- Reducing caseloads by delivering earlier support.
- Fostering better relationships with fewer handovers between teams.
- Improving care planning to help children achieve timely and permanent homes.
- Expanding foster care availability while improving the quality and value of residential care homes.

What will this mean for Trust staff?

For some teams, this means changes to how, where, and with whom they work. For others, it's about incremental improvements to processes and practice. The ultimate aim is better outcomes for all children, young people, and families.

Where is Trust 2025 focusing its efforts?

The programme has two main focus areas:

- Organising services more effectively at the start of the pathway - covering Early Help, Child Protection, and Child in Care.
- Providing better foster care options and residential support through the "Right Home, Right Time" workstream.

How is our pilot work in Hodge Hill going?

This summer we have had some highly positive feedback from families in our Hodge Hill pilot area. Development work is ongoing in this area.

When asked how well their needs were met, the average was a 4.5 out of 5 rating.

One family member said: *"The worker's professionalism, knowledge of culture and children has made this experience less stressful and unjudgmental."*

Another parent reported: *"You really tried your best to help implement what was best for us and communicated well. I don't think there is anything more you could have done."*



Bfriends annual celebration



Bfriends, our connected charity, held its first annual celebration with Trustees and Committee Members bringing friends from across Birmingham together for a fantastic evening

Bfriends Charity held its first annual celebration on Wednesday 30 July, as Co-Chairs, Trustees and Committee Members welcomed friends from Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust and other partners to 3PB Barristers for a fantastic evening.

Planning of the celebration was led by Co-Chair Abba Loughran, with young adults from across the Trust contributing their ideas. There was also a focus on the Bfriends 2025-2028 Business Plan priorities.

The evening was opened by Chair of the Trust, Andy Couldrick, who shared some of his highlights of Bfriends Charity to date.

Abba then gave an inspirational speech reflecting on the eight years she has devoted to volunteering roles for the Trust and as Co-Chair for the charity.

Sabina Begum, Bfriends Ambassador for Young Adults, did an incredible job as compère, along with sharing her own personal journey and employment pathway, leading to successes with Jacobs Engineering.

Sabina ended her talk with a powerful call to action for more businesses and organisations across the city to provide placements and work opportunities for our care leavers.

Bfriends then welcomed a young adult and mentor from the Trust's Next Steps mentoring programme. The close relationship between Michael and Sarah was evident the moment they took to the stage as the duo laughed, shared jokes and explained how their relationship has developed over the years.

The final presentation was on social entrepreneurship, with Jamil and Alfie sharing an exciting jacket potato business they are creating from scratch with other young people. They shared a detailed project plan and their eloquence, confidence and professionalism completely wowed the audience. The project is in partnership with our partners: BCFC Foundation, South and City College, Let's Feed Brum and BLESST.

To close, Lee Yale Helms, our other Co-Chair, paid tribute to Abba (pictured below) and shared a special film from leaders, colleagues, partners and young adults to celebrate her endless dedication to the Trust and Bfriends.



Abba Loughran said of the event: "A huge thank you to each and every person who came along, it really made me thankful for everyone who has supported us through this journey. I was so moved by the messages from you all and will be sad to no longer be acting as Co-Chair."

There are so many ways to get involved and support our charity so please email the team at **bfriends@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk** or

Visit the Bfriends website

Trust has two Social Worker of the Year Awards 2025 finalists



Birmingham Children's Trust has been named as a finalist for the **Supportive Social Work Employer of the Year** at the **Social Worker of the Year Awards 2025**.

To top it off, our **Trust 2025 Workstream Lead, Andrea Bassi**, has also made the shortlist for **Children's Social Worker of the Year**.

Congratulations Andrea!

The awards ceremony will be held at The Midland Hotel in Manchester, on Friday 17th October, with the eventual winners in each of the 18 categories revealed.

For both the Trust and Andrea to be named as finalists in England's biggest social worker awards is an incredible achievement and one we should all be proud of.

Adam Birchall, Principal Social Worker at Birmingham Children's Trust, said:

"We are doubly delighted to have Birmingham Children's Trust make the finals of two Social Worker of the Year Award 2025 categories. We did submit several applications to different categories this year, and whilst sadly not all were not shortlisted, we know the Trust is a great place to work at and staff across all services are delivering tremendous and innovative work in supporting and improving the lives of children and families.

"Andrea Bassi thoroughly deserves to be shortlisted for 'Children's Social Worker of the Year' as she is the embodiment of our Connections Count practice model, not only as a workstream lead in our Trust 2025 transformation programme but also as a podcast host. Andrea also does a fantastic job in her role in Breathe, Trust, Connect (formerly Breaking the Cycle) - a specialist service for people who have lost a child to adoption and want to access therapeutic support, ensuring a trauma-informed response in all her work.

"Our second shortlist is as an organisation in the 'Supportive Social Work Employer Award' category, which demonstrates excellent practice as an employer in supporting, leading, and championing its social work employees. To be one of the six finalists, and the only children's trust, is testament to our leadership across the organisation, our belief in one another, and the way we both support and champion the achievements of our staff.

"Whether this is listening to staff and acting upon feedback using mechanisms like our 'Your Voice: We did' survey, innovative social media activity including videos and podcasts, our Chief Executive weekly shout outs, or our ever expanding training offer, being recognised as a finalist by the Social Worker of the Year Awards judging panel is a huge positive.

"We all look forward to the awards event in October, and fingers-crossed we end up winning both categories we have finalists in. We know the importance of making 'connections count', and hopefully this is recognised in a few months' time by people outside of the Trust."

Read about all of the Social Worker of the Year 2025 finalists

SEND INSPECTION MILESTONE

By James Thomas, Trust Chief Executive

What a huge milestone for Birmingham and our children and young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities and their families!

The shortfalls that there have been in our SEND system have been well recognised in recent years, including both in inspection outcomes and in the first appointment of a SEND Commissioner – and now the evidence of the hard-earned improvement has convinced inspectors to recognise this with an improved judgement in their report published in August.

Thanks to the hard work, dedication and commitment of teams across education, health, care, and the voluntary sector, as well as the vital voices of children and their families, Birmingham is making progress resulting in better experiences for some children.

While there is still more to do, the inspection recognises that the foundations for sustainable improvement are now in place and beginning to make a difference.

It has been a real team and whole system effort with particular strength coming from our close working relationship with the Parent Carer Forum and shared commitment to Co-Production.

I want to give particular thanks to our Children with Disabilities and Early Help teams and all those who met the inspectors when we hosted them all at our Lifford House office base.

What Ofsted said:

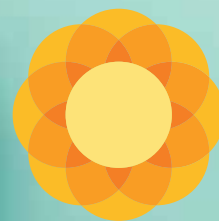
“Early help practitioners provide a wealth of inclusive support to children and young people with SEND. Strong partnership working, both with commissioned and voluntary services, enhance the ethos that early help is everyone’s business.”

“Social workers and social care practitioners have the skills and knowledge to provide effective support. They build trusting relationships with children and young people with SEND.”

“Social workers within the Children with Disabilities Team prepare children and young people with SEND for their next steps well. Social workers diligently create plans to avoid delay for children seeking permanency or for those transitioning to adulthood.”

[Read the full report here](#)





**Foster
Birmingham**
Birmingham's biggest family

Help to recruit more **Foster Carers**

As is the national picture, there is currently a shortage of foster families to look after the city's most vulnerable children.

Whilst Foster Birmingham has a comprehensive recruitment strategy including bi-monthly information events both face-to-face and online, Foster Carer Recruitment Ambassadors, a Recommend a Friend scheme, and an integrated advertising schedule to name but a few, we need your help!

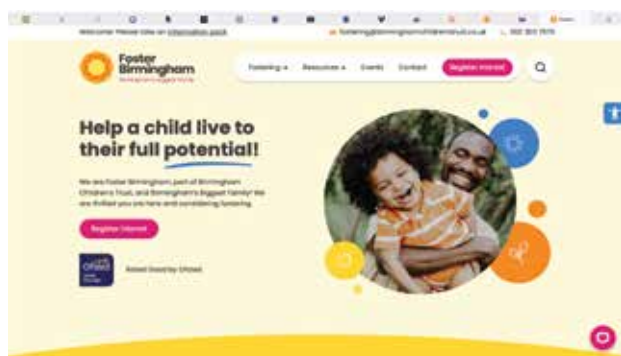
Every fostering household recruited makes a real positive difference to the life of a child.

Therefore, we are asking you to please actively promote and support Birmingham Children's Trust's Fostering Service, Foster Birmingham by:

- Positively promoting fostering in your local area via any communications with your constituents e.g. newsletters, social media platforms etc. particularly our bi-monthly information events and any specific recruitment needs at any given time
- Giving out Foster Birmingham literature
- Liaising with the Fostering Marketing Manager about any opportunities for recruiting more foster carers i.e. stalls / events in your local area etc. that the service can tap into

For more information on how you can help, and to discuss further, please contact Pip Gagliano-Ransom, Marketing Manager (Fostering) on **07510 369961** or email **Pip.Gagliano-Ransom@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk**

We welcome any ideas you have and look forward to hearing from you!



You can find out about the latest Foster Birmingham information events and drop-in sessions by visiting the **Foster Birmingham website**.

Scan the QR code below on your smartphone to go to the Foster Birmingham website events page.





We've been **out and about!**

We've had a great start to the year with lots of recruitment activities taking place, as well as some events for our existing foster families, including:

Our **Annual Welcome to Fostering Event** – During Foster Care Fortnight we officially welcomed carers who had been approved in the past 12 months to Birmingham's Biggest Family. There was a short certificate presentation followed by time for the carers to mingle in the Service Marketplace to see how different services such as TESS, The Virtual School, and BFCA can support them in their roles as foster carers.

A **Foster Walk** – our first ever Foster Walk was also held during Foster Care Fortnight! We had a great time with our foster families down at Cannon Hill Park on our walk and treasure hunt.

A **Foster Birmingham Mascot Competition** – a really exciting and creative opportunity for our Children in Care to create the Foster Birmingham Mascot who will be brought to life to attend our recruitment events and help us spread awareness and the word about fostering. The winner has now been picked and we will announce more details soon!

Upcoming key Foster Birmingham dates

- Fostering Family Fun Day (7 September)
- 'The Run' - Local Authority Joint Film Launch (9 October)
- Foster Carer Awards (21 November)



(l-r) Annual event, Foster Walk, Mascot competition

HR ROUND-UP

EDI Networks and Groups

The Trust has been making significant Equality, Diversity and Inclusion progress through the recent creation of networks and groups to support the needs of a diverse workforce.

We have three thriving networks:

- **Women's Network**
- **Wellness Network**
- **LGBTQ+ Network**

And two newly added working groups:

- **Race Equality Working Group**
- **Accessibility Working Group**

We are committed to expanding our networks and groups, and already we have had events and activities led by the leaders of each forum.



During summer we celebrated South Asian Heritage Month. Colleagues shared their personal stories about their heritage, and Preet Kaur Gill MP was a special guest on a staff webinar. Other events have included Wellness Walks, Fika time (a Swedish social concept involving coffee and sweet treats), and our new Sewing Bee.

If you would like to support any of the networks or working groups, by speaking in person or online, or if you would like to recommend any upcoming events or activities we can participate in, please email:

EDI@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk



Wellbeing Week recap

Our Summer Wellbeing Week was our biggest and best ever, providing opportunities for staff in the Trust to participate in fun activities

Events included:

- **Yoga**
- **Health checks with a nurse**
- **Chess Club**
- **Book Club**
- **Sleep Hygiene**
- **Reiki**
- **Retro video games**
- **Walking football**
- **Boxercise**
- **Self-defence**
- **Jazz vinyl hour**
- **Crafts making**
- **Escape Room**
- **Mindfulness, and much more.**

Most events took place face-to-face, and feedback from staff has been highly positive.

Due to popular demand plans are already in place for a Winter Wellbeing Week, to be packed with events and activities aimed at mind, body and soul.

Youth Justice Service recognition

We are delighted to share the news that the Birmingham Youth Justice Service has officially been awarded Registered Service Provider status by the Restorative Justice Council. This recognition marks a significant milestone in the Youth Justice Service's ongoing commitment to delivering high-quality restorative practices across the city.

The decision to pursue registration was driven by a determination to enhance our learning and strengthen the service we provide.

The team recognised the process as an opportunity to:

- **Prepare for future inspections**

The registration serves as a valuable learning exercise, equipping the team for prospective evaluations.

- **Empower career progression**

By engaging in this process, staff members can further their professional growth and development.

- **Reflect and improve**

The registration journey prompts a thorough review of our restorative approach, ensuring it continues to meet the highest standards in practice.

By compiling a portfolio and engaging in professional discussions, the team were able to establish and fine-tune critical processes, scrutinise their current strengths and identify areas for further focus and development.

As part of the assessment, our Restorative Support Specialists were also separately assessed and awarded Advanced Practitioner Status. Congratulations to Sandra Coyne, Beatrix Coleman, Sacha Johnson and Laura Shurrock. They will now continue their good work by regularly delivering Restorative Approaches training, which is available for all staff across the Trust to book via the Learning Pool: Restorative Approaches.



Kate Hyett, Restorative Practice and Victim Manager, encapsulated the achievement, stating: "We're chuffed to bits to have achieved the Service Provider status. The team has worked tirelessly to enhance our restorative service offer, and their commitment to personal and professional development is truly inspirational."

Jim Simon, Chief Executive Officer of the Restorative Justice Council, expressed his excitement in awarding Birmingham Youth Justice Service this esteemed status, celebrating their exemplary commitment to high-quality restorative justice.

He said: "I am thrilled to congratulate the Birmingham Youth Justice Service and their dedicated practitioners on this remarkable achievement. Their commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of young people and victims is truly inspiring!"

As the service moves forward, we remain committed to evolving our restorative practices, ensuring they provide the best support to those they serve and create meaningful change for the lives of the young people, victims and broader community. This new status not only celebrates our past achievements but also paves the way for a brighter future in restorative justice.

ARE **YOU** LOOKING AFTER SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD?



If you have been caring for someone else's child for over 28 days, and you are NOT a close relative (such as a grandparent, uncle or aunt, brother or sister, or step-parent by marriage) this is called '**Private Fostering**'.

Here at **Birmingham Children's Trust** we need to be made aware of these arrangements. We are here to help you, and any children you are caring for.

Please phone: 0121 303 1888 (Mon to Fri office hours)

Please email: CASS@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

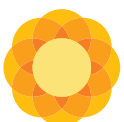
Website: birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/privatefostering



BRING FGM OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Female Genital Mutilation
(FGM) is **illegal** and a
form of **child abuse**.
It has **serious health**
consequences and can
cause **psychological**
damage.

If you, or someone you
know is **at risk of FGM**, or
has experienced FGM and
needs support, you can
confidentially report it to the
NSPCC: 0800 028 3550.



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Safeguarding
Children
PARTNERSHIP

