



BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST NEWSLETTER



December 2025

Issue #12

2025 - WHAT A YEAR AT THE TRUST

Merry Christmas Councillors and others reading this, our twelfth Children's Trust newsletter.

As we reach the end of 2025 it is time to reflect on some of the remarkable achievements of our staff, our children and young people and families, and our partners and supporters.

We celebrated two of our care-experienced young people being the first to participate in a debate from the Lord Mayor's Rostrum (**see page 3**).

Our Trust 2025 programme has successfully been piloted in Hodge Hill, and we are now delivering the Birmingham Families First programme with partners (**see page 4**)

We won twice at the 2025 Social Worker of the Year Awards (see pages 6 and 7). We have also included a quick guide to Children's Homes and Supported Accommodation (**see page 11**).

And finally, as we near Christmas we hope you will be able to support our Bfriends Charity **'Light up a child's Christmas'** campaign (**see page 5**). Thank you for reading.

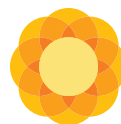
James Thomas
Chief Executive,
Birmingham Children's Trust



Above - (l-r) Nikki Plummer, Andrea Bassi, Adam Birchall and Sophie Gilbert celebrating winning the Social Worker of the Year 2025 and the 'Supportive Employer' award



Above - James Thomas with the winners of 'The best stall' at our 2025 Marketplace - Youth Justice Service



**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.

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Young people take stage at Full Council

For the first time in Birmingham, two care experienced young people, Jasimine and Shannon, spoke from the Lord Mayor's Rostrum at Birmingham City Council's Full Council meeting in December 2025 as part of an item on the 2025 Corporate Parenting Annual Report.

When proposing the report, Cllr Mick Brown, Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Families, gave over most of his speaking time to Shannon and Jasimine who powerfully set out what more they felt the Council and its partners could do to support children in care and care leavers.

We hope that the voices of young people will be heard in the Council Chamber every time corporate parenting is considered and look forward to further progress in 2026.

Jasimine and Shannon's speeches can be re-watched by scanning the QR code below on your mobile phone, and then selecting **'Item 10 - Corporate Parenting Annual Report'**. Jasimine and Shannon begin at around 1:25:35. (QR code below right).

Before the meeting Trust staff including apprentices, met with councillors to share information about United and Unique - the collective name for all the different Rights and Participation groups in the Trust:

- **BIAS (Beauty in All Shades)** - A newly established group for young people of mixed and global majority heritage
- **Care Leavers' Forum** - for care-experienced adults up to 25
- **Children in Care Council** - for young people in care up to the age of 18
- **Don't Dis-Ability** - for disabled young people
- **Junior Children in Care Council** - for children in care up to the age of 13
- **All For One Forum** - for children who identify as LGBTQ+
- **Young Parents** - for young parents of various ages



Pictured above:

Care-experienced speakers Jasimine (front left) and Shannon (front right) with Councillor Esther Rai, Chair of the Education, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (top left) and Councillor Mick Brown, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families (top right).

Scan this QR code to go to the 'Meeting of the City Council' live recording



Birmingham Families First

Birmingham Families First Transformation Group consists of Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, and two NHS services, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health and Birmingham Community Healthcare, with wider support from schools, Integrated Care Board, Police and the voluntary sector.

What is the Birmingham Families First vision?

Our vision is to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and families through integrated services, delivered in partnership, at a district level. A core principle is a passionate belief in providing earlier, more proactive and effective support to children, young people and families (in line with the current national reform direction).

What are the five pillars of the programme?

The programme has five main pillars:

Shared Priority Outcomes - Keeping Families Together, Improving School Attendance and Improving Child Development in Early Years.

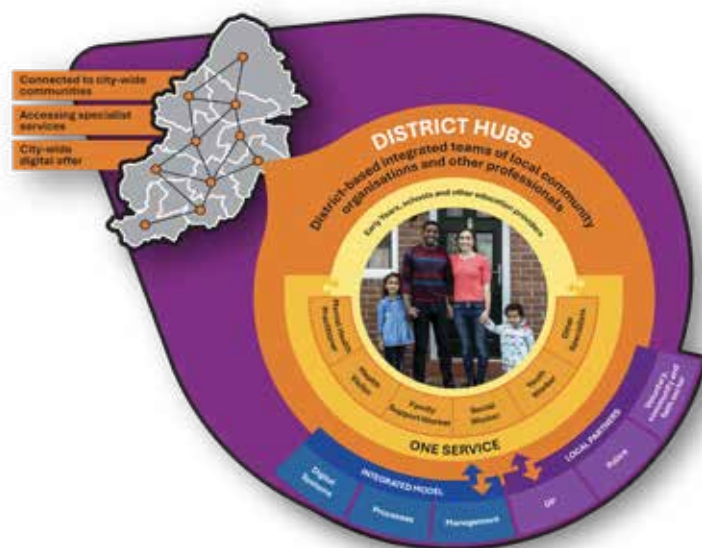
Engagement and Co-Production - Active involvement of children, young people and parents in shaping and improving services, incorporating the voices of children, young people and families to ensure meaningful participation.

Leadership and Governance - Providing structural oversight through steering groups and Transformation Board, ensures accountability and alignment through formal groups and decision-making boards.

Tiers of Need and Service - Framework for identifying and addressing support levels required by families, outline support levels from universal to targeted interventions.

Ways of Working - Operational practices and cultural norms enabling effective collaboration and service delivery, shared principles and cultural shifts.

What is the District Hubs Model?



The District Hubs Model (pictured above) features district-based integrated teams of local community organisations and other professionals working together to provide services to children, young people and families, that take place earlier than they did in the past.

What are the three priority shared outcomes of Birmingham Families First District Operating Model?

- Keeping more families together
- Improving school attendance
- Improving child development in early years

Quick Summary

We will be working together in partnership in districts to support families better and earlier.

We're piloting this new way of working in Hodge Hill.

As the pilot progresses, we'll continue sharing more information with you in these quarterly newsletters, and you can also read more on the city council website at:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/birminghamfamiliesfirst



Light up a Birmingham child's Christmas in 2025

Scan to buy
a tree light



Bfriends Charity, the official charity of Birmingham Children's Trust is proud to launch its first-ever Virtual Christmas Tree Campaign – **'Light up a Birmingham child's Christmas'**.

Your donations will help us make Christmas Day special for young care leavers who may otherwise be spending the day alone.

We will be hosting a meal and party on Christmas Day for young people and ensuring they have transport to and from the event. Your support will ensure we can give these young people a Christmas to remember.

Explains Pauline Harper-Manby, Fundraising Manager at Bfriends Charity:

"We want our care-experienced young people to have a fantastic Christmas experience, the same as those who will be celebrating with their own families.

"Every light represents hope and helps fund our annual Christmas Day meal and party, creating magical memories for care-experienced children, young adults, and their loved ones."



Make a donation

Scan the QR code to go to the donation page:



A donation of any amount is gratefully received. Your contribution will help us make Christmas Day special for our young people.

- A donation of £30 will light a bulb on our Tree and fund a Christmas meal with all the trimmings for one of our young people
- Individual spikes of the star can be secured for a donation of £500 each.
- You can make your gift even more meaningful by adding a personal message to the tree.

Make Your Donation Go Further with Gift Aid

If you're a UK taxpayer, you can make an even bigger difference at no extra cost. By ticking the Gift Aid box and sharing your name and address (including postcode), we can claim an extra 25p for every £1 you donate from HMRC.

That means your generosity goes further, helping us create magical Christmas memories for care-experienced children and young people.

A big THANK YOU to everyone who has donated towards the campaign.

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 wins two 2025 Social Worker of the Year Awards

It was double delight for Birmingham Children's Trust at the 2025 Social Worker of the Year Awards event as Andrea Bassi won 'Children's Social Worker of the Year' and the Trust scooped the gold for 'Supportive Social Work Employer of the Year'.

The annual awards, which are supported by local authorities, professional bodies, and sponsors across the sector, celebrate social work excellence at every level: from students and newly qualified workers to experienced managers and lifetime achievers.

James Thomas, Birmingham Children's Trust Chief Executive, said:

"Winning two Social Worker of the Year awards is testament to the devotion and dedication of all our staff, from those working with and directly supporting children, young people and families to those who are providing extremely valuable support services to enable practitioners to thrive.

"We take great pride in embedding our 'Connections Count' practice model throughout the Trust through an innovative training programme, and back this up with authentic staff voices being heard and read through targeted blogs and podcasts.



"It is no coincidence that Andrea Bassi, one of our 'Connections Count' podcast hosts has been celebrated as Children's Social Worker of the Year, as Andrea embodies our practice model every day, being

relational, trauma-informed and developmentally sensitive."



For Andrea, **pictured above**, Trust workstream lead for Fostering Sufficiency, it is thoroughly well-deserved recognition for over two decades devoted to supporting children and families in Birmingham.

Andrea, a keen mountain climber, first started working with Birmingham Children's Services in 2004 and worked across the safeguarding, Children in Care, and Court teams, before working with an adoption team in the voluntary sector between 2014 and 2020.

Said Andrea: "It feels surreal. My name was called, people clapped, cameras flashed, and yet part of me still feels like I'm quietly back in a room with a family, listening, thinking, feeling, doing the work.

"I don't do my work for recognition. I believe every child and every parent deserves to feel safe, seen, respected, and valued. And maybe this award is simply a reminder of those small, quiet things. The listening, the slowing down, the noticing, the holding hope. The things that really do matter."

Continued on Page 7.



Award win ctd.

The 'Supportive Social Work Employer' gold award recognised how the Trust has embedded its practice model 'Connections Count' into the heart of practice across the organisation. Judges appreciated how the Trust has provided practice model training to all staff, as well as the regular publication of specific 'Connections Count' themed blogs and podcasts, written by and starring Trust staff from across the organisation.

Adam Birchall, Principal Social Worker at Birmingham Children's Trust, who attended the Awards ceremony, said: "I think it's a real pleasure working at the Trust as we have a culture of supportiveness and respect as well as recognition that carries across the organisation. From individual and group supervisions to our fantastic learning offer and our truly inclusive staff wellbeing offer to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion offer, we value every single employee and want them to develop and thrive in the Trust."

"Winning the 'Supportive Social Work Employer of the Year' Award is further recognition that we are a leading employer that loves to celebrate the achievements of our staff. Whether that is delivering 'Big Thank-You's' for World Social Work Day, or shout outs in our chief executive's weekly blog, every time we say thank you, we know this motivates colleagues who are delivering vital work in ever challenging situations."

The Trust was recognised for its comprehensive training offer, led by the Learning Academy, its drive around supporting staff wellbeing, including delivering the TRiM programme, a trauma-focused peer support system and its investment into services through the Trust 25 programme.

In addition, the Trust's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was highlighted, ranging from celebrating key events such as Eid and Black History Month, to a weekly EDI news broadcast and staff events, giving focused time to explore issues such as micro-aggressions and gender identity.

Marketplace and Big Shout Out

Around 800 staff attended the Trust's third Marketplace event, for teams to network and find out about services and teams they may not work closely with.

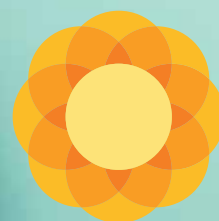
Around 40 stalls were hosted by Trust teams, at Anchor Point, near to the Trust's One Avenue Road office base.

The 2025 event was made extra special with a 'Big Shout Out' section, containing words of thanks from Chief Executive James Thomas (below centre), and directors too, and videos were shown of Trust staff from a range of services, including our Learning Academy and Mental Health First Aiders.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was in full force as Trust staff networks, such as the LGBTQ+ Network and the Wellness Network attended.

Two parents from the Family Advisory Board, Kate Fennel (below left) and Joan Hayden (below right) spoke about their experience representing their families, and encouraged Trust staff to sign up families to their group.





**Foster
Birmingham**
Birmingham's biggest family

Foster Carer Awards 2025

On Friday 21 November, the spotlight shone brightly on our incredible fostering community as we gathered at Birmingham City Football Club for the Foster Carer Awards 2025. This glamorous evening was all about recognising the extraordinary commitment of our foster carers, who make a life-changing difference every single day. With the UK facing a national shortage of foster carers, it has never been more important to celebrate and honour those who open their hearts and homes to children and young people. Their work is not only vital, but also strategic in ensuring that every child has the stability and care they deserve.

Awards were presented in six categories to recognise outstanding contributions:

- Hero Award (x2) - Celebrating those who quietly go above and beyond for the children in their care.
- Supporting Positive Change Award (x2) - Honouring carers who have helped young people achieve significant positive changes in their lives.
- Sons and Daughters Award (x2) - Recognising the vital role birth children play in fostering success.
- Young Person's Choice Award (x2) - A heartfelt award chosen by the young people themselves.
- BFCA Award (x1) - Presented by Birmingham Foster Care Association for contributions that have made a positive difference.
- Foster Carer of the Year Award (x1) - Celebrating a carer whose dedication and skill have made an exceptional impact in 2025.

The evening wasn't just about awards; it was also packed with excitement and joy! We unveiled our brand-new mascot, Trusty Bear, designed by a young person in care and voted for by one of our very own Children in Care groups

The highlight? Watching the young designer meet Trusty in person and present him with a giant chocolate bar - a truly heart-warming moment!



You can Foster

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 smart-phone to go to the Foster Birmingham website events page.



The Giving HOPE Project

Adopt Birmingham, alongside our birth parent support service Breathe Trust Connect, are pleased to have supported the Hope Box Project.

The Giving HOPE Project is a not-for-profit community interest company dedicated to minimising trauma for families separated at birth due to safeguarding concerns.

Together with our lived experience group, the HOPE Mothers, we created HOPE Boxes, a therapeutic resource that helps maintain connection between mother and baby until court decisions are made.

It will also supports the mother with loss and grief while helping the baby and their new family with identity and life-story work as they grow.

Hope Boxes are being given to any baby open to Birmingham Children's Trust with a potential adoption plan.

Whilst birth mothers involved in the project have thought carefully about the baby's HOPE Box, it was recognised the importance of hearing directly from adopted persons and adopters and to try and ensure the HOPE Boxes offer is as impactful and supportive as possible.

The project leads met with adopters and adoptees from the Birmingham area, and it's been a pleasure to see our families contributing to this important work.

For more information about **Adopt Birmingham** visit: **AdoptBirmingham.co.uk**



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 four thriving networks:

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

And two newly added working groups:

- **Race Equity 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.

Our newest group is the Corporate Giving Network, that has now met twice this year.

The Network is supporting the logistics around Christmas donations, ensuring toys and gifts will get to children and families in need.

Our Wellbeing Network has had an incredibly busy year, and events have included Wellness Walks, FIKA time (a Swedish social concept involving coffee and sweet treats), and our new Sewing Bee.

Supporting our Networks and Working Groups

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



Winter Wellbeing Week recap

Our Winter Wellbeing Week was our biggest and best ever, as staff had five days of webinars and face-to-face activities.

Activities included:

- Virtual Reality (VR) sessions
- Walk-in appointments with nurses
- Meditation
- Self defence classes
- Healthy Eating Workshop
- Winter Craft Workshop
- My Money Matters
- Hot Stone Massage
- Bracelet Making Workshop
- Book Club
- Yoga

Trust staff embraced the week, which also included an indoor football match, a virtual treasure hunt and a team effort to complete a 1,000 piece jigsaw.

Webinar topics included Makaton, Mental Health First Aiders, Co-Pilot for beginners and hormones and the menopause.

If you would like to be part of our Wellbeing Week events in 2026 please email:
trustcomms@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Children's Homes and Supported Accommodation

Birmingham Context

In Birmingham there are currently **2,382** children in care. Of these **246** are in residential children's homes and **277** are in supported accommodation. We don't have any internal supported accommodation and we externally commission the majority of the places in residential children's homes. Plans are in development for an increase in our internal (Trust operated) residential capacity. Reflecting our diverse city, our children come from a range of backgrounds and have varying journeys and needs. All councillors are Corporate Parents to Birmingham's children in care and care leavers which is a statutory duty from the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Children's homes facts:

- Provide full-time care and supervision for children under 18.
- Have staff in the home at all times, unless the staff & children are out of the home.
- The ratio of staff in the home should be assessed by the provider and can change.
- Must be registered with Ofsted.
- Some are operated by the Trust, but mainly independent.
- Requires C2 planning permission.
- Children can leave (unless subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Order).

The official regulator of children's homes and supported accommodation is Ofsted who are responsible for the monitoring, reviewing and registering this provision.

We meet regularly with Ofsted and will flag issues that relate to children's homes or supported accommodation that may require investigation or action.

Scan the QR code to watch a short video starring Savannah, who lives in Supported Accommodation:



Supported accommodation facts:

- Aimed at older teenagers (16-17) and young adults, focusing on helping them to transition to independence to prepare for adulthood.
- May have fewer staff than a children's home.
- They do not have to be supported 24/7 but some supported accommodation will have this level of support (dependent on category).
- Must be registered with Ofsted.
- Doesn't require planning permission.
- Children can leave.

What is it like to live in supported accommodation?

We recently asked a sample of 15 young people who live in supported accommodation what it is like:

- 14 out of 15 responded that the provision cares about them lots.
- 15 out of 15 are happy with where they live.
- 14 out of 15 get on with others they live with.
- 15 out of 15 receive adequate guidance and support.

For more information about Children's Homes or Supported Accommodation please email:

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