



**BIRMINGHAM  
CHILDREN'S TRUST**



# **Corporate Parenting and Rights and Participation Annual Report 2024/25**



# Rights and Participation and Corporate Parenting Annual Report

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## **1. Introduction**

At Birmingham Children’s Trust, our purpose is to support the most vulnerable children and young people in Birmingham, ensuring they are safe, happy, and healthy. We deliver a wide range of services to children, young people, and families, and we are committed to being the best corporate parent we can be for those in our care and those with care experience. We believe their lives are strengthened through a robust Corporate Parenting offer, where Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children’s Trust, partners, businesses, and the wider community work together to provide consistent, wrap-around support.

We also recognise the importance of ensuring that children and young people have a meaningful voice in shaping the services that affect them. This includes a strong advocacy and participation offer, alongside services that help them develop, grow, and thrive.

The following annual report will set out the key activity and outcomes achieved during the year 2024-25.

## **2. Rights and Participation (RAP) and Corporate Parenting Service – Overview**

The Rights, Participation and Corporate Parenting Service is made up of five main areas

- 1. Corporate Parenting** – The team is responsible for overseeing corporate parenting across the Trust, Birmingham City Council and its partner agencies
- 2. Participation** – responsible for developing participation across the Trust and supporting children and young people forums
- 3. Advocacy** – responsible for advocacy for children and young people across the trust
- 4. Independent Visiting (IV)** – provides an IV (befriending) service for children in care across the trust
- 5. Apprenticeship Programme** – responsible for support and development of care experienced apprenticeships both in the trust and externally
- 6. Develop Me** - mentoring programme for children 16-25
- 7. DFE Next Steps Programme** – focused on social isolation, life skills and befriending/mentoring for young people; aged 16-25.

## **3. Executive Summary**

This Annual Report sets out the activity, impact and learning from the Rights and Participation and Corporate Parenting Service at Birmingham Children’s Trust during 2024/25. The Service plays a central role in ensuring children in care, care experienced young people and other vulnerable cohorts are heard, supported and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives, while strengthening Birmingham’s collective responsibilities as a corporate parent.

## **Key Achievements and Impact**

### **Strong Corporate Parenting Governance and Voice**

- A co-produced Corporate Parenting Strategy (2023–2026) continues to shape governance, with six clear pledges forming the basis of each Board agenda.
- Two Takeover Boards were delivered during the year, enabling children and young people to directly influence priorities, actions and system change.
- Over 200 children and young people contributed to Corporate Parenting Board surveys, ensuring lived experience consistently informs decision-making.
- A formal Terms of Reference was agreed in 2025, strengthening the Corporate Parenting Board’s status within Birmingham City Council governance arrangements.

### **Improved Outcomes and Access to Support**

- Advocacy referrals increased to 751, representing a sustained upward trend and reflecting growing awareness and confidence in the service.
- Advocacy support has expanded to include children in unregulated placements, placements judged inadequate, and situations involving safeguarding or position-of-trust concerns.
- Independent Visiting and mentoring continue to demonstrate positive impact, with increased matching activity and clear benefits for young people’s confidence, relationships and stability.
- The Develop Me mentoring and DfE-funded Next Steps programmes have supported young people—many of whom are NEET—into employment, education, training and improved wellbeing.

### **Participation and Co-Production Embedded Across the Trust**

- Children and young people have shaped service redesign, workforce training, quality assurance, safeguarding priorities and strategic programmes including Trust 2025 and the Improvement Board.
- Participation groups such as Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum, Young Parents, All Is One, Don’t DISability and BIAS have influenced both local practice and national policy, including the development of National Advocacy Standards and Frameworks.
- Young people have played an active role in recruitment, training delivery, inspections and peer research, reinforcing a culture of meaningful participation rather than consultation alone.

### **Apprenticeships and Employment Pathways**

- The Care Experienced Apprenticeship Programme continues to expand, with 15 apprentice posts across the Trust and increasing take-up by partner services.
- Apprentices have achieved accredited qualifications, secured sustained employment, and contributed directly to service delivery, research, engagement and digital communications.
- The programme is now being shared as best practice nationally

### **Partnerships and Social Value**

- Strong partnerships with businesses, charities and community organisations have delivered tangible benefits, including employment opportunities, mentoring, discounts, wellbeing support and practical life-skills programmes.
- A **new Social Value Commissioning Framework** is now live, embedding corporate parenting responsibilities into procurement and tendering processes.

## Areas for Development

While progress has been significant, the report identifies clear priorities for further improvement:

- Increasing the recruitment of Independent Visitors and mentors, particularly male volunteers and those from under-represented communities.
- Strengthening BCC and partner accountability and challenge through the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Improving feedback loops to children and young people can clearly see 'You Said – We Did'.
- Enhancing data quality, performance reporting and insight through systems such as Eclipse.
- Expanding access to advocacy for care leavers, children subject to child protection processes and 16–17-year-olds presenting as homeless.
- Further developing independence, transitions and employment pathways in response to young people's feedback.

## Conclusion

Overall, **2024/25** demonstrates a maturing, confident service with a strong foundation, clear governance and growing evidence of impact. Children and young people's voices are increasingly central to decision-making, services are more responsive and inclusive, and Birmingham's corporate parenting responsibilities are strengthening across partners. The priorities identified for **2025/26** provide a clear and credible roadmap for continued improvement and sustained positive outcomes for children and young people across the city.

## 4. Corporate Parenting

### 4.1 Corporate Parenting Board and Strategy

Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, and all our partners in local communities, businesses, the NHS, the Police, schools and colleges and wider partners are working together to give our children in care and care experienced young people the best opportunities and support.

Our Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and Pledge for 2023-2026 has six key pledges set out below that forms each boards' agenda:

- **Your Voice and Participation**
- **Your Learning and Your future**
- **Your Relationships and You**
- **Your Care**
- **Your Housing and Independence**
- **Your Health and Wellbeing**

These key themes that make our board strategy was developed and produced to ensure our Corporate Parenting responsibilities are delivered in collaboration with our key partners across the city. There are also subgroups that work towards each board such as the Health subgroup, led by colleagues in the NHS. We also have an action and forward plan which helps us as Corporate Parents understand where we need to develop and improve, as the board is responsible for making sure that the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Pledge is monitored and delivered upon. Our Pledges are now available on our website and promoted with partners and through the Trust.

During 2024-25, our Corporate Parenting board has been represented with key partners and senior representatives from the Trust, Birmingham City Council, the NHS and health partners, The Virtual School and business partners. Foster carers and children and young people are also presented on the board and have opportunities to feedback and hold the board accountable to against our pledges. The board structure ensures children and young people's voices are central to the discussions and we always hear from young people and this is the first agenda item linked with the Boards' them and Pledge. Our young people's 'Take-Over' board is also now a permanent feature in the meeting cycle and happens twice a year. Children in care and care experienced young people have shared their personal experiences and driven their children in care councils and care leaver forum campaigns at the board.

There are 14 young people ambassadors that take it in turn to sit on each board; there are always 2 to 3 young people at every board. A survey is developed for each board with a focus on that specific pledge – it is then sent out across the Trust to gain a variety of responses from children and young people that we support.

#### **4.2 Some highlights from Our Surveys**

Our Corporate Parenting Board Survey's for children and young people that are designed by one of our Rights and Participation Apprentices have focused on a number of themes. We have had over 200 responses from children and young people. This feedback is heard at the Board and has been essential in shaping key actions and asks.

##### **'All About Me'- Survey (8-18 years of age)**

Children in care on average rated **'has being in care made a positive difference to your life'** as **4 out of 5**.

Young People were asked questions where they lived:

- **86%** felt **safe**, 13% said sometimes
- **75%** felt **loved** 14% said sometimes, 9.5% said not often and 1.5% said never
- **82.5%** felt **settled**, 11% said sometimes, 3.2% said not often and 3.2% said never

- **84%** felt **happy**, 8% said sometimes, 4.8% said not often and 3.2% said never

**44%** said they **didn't have a choice in where they live or have lived** and **41%** said **they did**

**54%** **didn't have a choice in living with family or friends** and **22%** said they **were not sure**

### Your Emotional Well-being (13-25 years of age)

- **3.88 out of 5** - Happiness Scale (94% rated 3 or higher)
- **3.96 out of 5** - Felt Supported with emotional wellbeing
- **Family and friends** followed by **foster carers** were the main people who support their emotional wellbeing
- The **two biggest** things that **supported** emotional wellbeing were
  - talking to someone (friend, family member or carer)
  - sport and exercise
- **Top three** things having a **negative impact**
  - uncertainly about future
  - family
  - school/college/university
  -

### Your Learning Your Future Survey (8-25 years of age)

How well do you feel you are doing in school, education or training?

- **3.82** out of 5 **Children in Care**
- **3.04** out of 5 **Care Leavers**

How happy are you currently in your school, education, training or employment?

- **3.55** out of 5 **Children in Care**
- **3.11** out of 5 **Care Leavers**

How supported do you feel you are doing in school, education or training?

- **3.91** out of 5 **Children in Care**
- **3.57** out of 5 **Care Leavers**

Support with education, training and employment

- **82%** of **Care Leavers** felt supported by PA's
- **83%** of **Children in Care** living in foster care felt supported by their foster carers this dropped to **44%** when children left care
- **63%** of **children in care** felt supported by teachers

*“I have faced some challenges in my employment journey, including personal difficulties and family circumstances, which have made it harder to stay in work. However, I am actively applying for jobs and looking for opportunities to improve my skills. In the future, I would like to gain further training or qualifications to help me secure stable employment. Any support or guidance in this area would be greatly appreciated.”* Care Leaver, aged 21

76% of care leavers want more support with employment, placement, work experience or Apprenticeship/internships. 48% of care leavers who completed the survey were not in education, employment or training.

#### **4.3 Overview/Date of Corporate Parenting Boards – 2024/2025:**

##### **22/07/2024 – Your Care**

Agenda – Pledge data, All about me survey, Family and Friends, QA role and Young Inspectors, Sufficiency and Unregulated Placements.

##### **23/09/2024 – Your Housing and Independence**

Agenda – Housing and Independence survey, Pathway Plans, Housing.

##### **25/11/2024 – Your Voice and Participation (Takeover Board)**

Agenda – Improved Transitions and Supporting our Independence, Ensuring young people understand their plans and what is happening to them, Hearing from young people who are often unheard and experience multiple forms of disadvantage, Peer Support Opportunities and Training, Connecting with more children and young people.

##### **27/01/2025 – Your Health and Wellbeing**

Agenda – Your Emotional Wellbeing Survey, TESS, SDQ and UASC update, FTB Update, ICB-Primary Care, General system updates, IROC feedback

##### **24/03/2025 – Your learning, your future**

Agenda – Birmingham Virtual School update, post 16 Employment and Skills (BCC), Children in Care update, Care Leavers Education, Employment and Training.

In 2025, a terms of reference has been produced, and Birmingham City Council have committed to a more formal recognition of the Corporate Parenting Board as part of their Governance Strategy. This is a big step forward as it hasn't featured previously in the constitution prior; therefore, the Board becomes a formal part of the Birmingham City Councils' responsibilities following on from the passing of Care Experienced as a protected characteristic.

#### **4.4 Progress on our Pledges**

## Your Voice and Participation

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham Children's Trust</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>David Stringfellow (Birmingham Children's Trust)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Trust Participation Forum</b>

Key

### Progresses for 2024/2025

**At least 90% of children and young people will participate in their Children in Care reviews** - In April 2025, the timeliness of reviews was at 91%.

**Numbers of children in care and care leavers who have accessed Advocacy will increase by 20% from the figure of 225 in 2021/22** - Numbers of children in care and care leavers/those on CP plans who have accessed Advocacy has increased by over 20% from the figure of 689 in 2023/24 to 751 in 2024/25. (In previous years 2021/22 the figure was 458, in 2022/23 612). So from 2021 we have seen an increase of take up of advocacy each year.

**Every member of Trust staff will be aware of a child's statutory right to access independent advocacy from the Rights and Participation Service** - delivering training every 6 months to AYSE and training to social work teams, around children's rights and the advocacy offer as well as attending care leavers conferences every 6 months and ensuring we hold an information stall promoting advocacy to care leavers. Advocacy information is also offered at annual foster carers events, residential homes, child protection teams (as well as attending 6 monthly review meeting with Child Protection team HOS and team managers regards ICPC advocacy offer).

### Developments for 2025/2026

- Working with Child protection teams to look at how we increased number of CP CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE accessing advocacy, to attend their ICPC and CP review meetings (as often they may not attend and ask the advocate to do so on their behalf).
- **There will be a rise in the numbers of Mind of My Own statements from 30-50 a month to 150-200** – Currently had 239 statements from April 2024 to March 2025, so promotion to staff on this is needed in 2025/2026.

## Your learning and your future

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham City Council, Children and Families Directorate</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>Cllr Mick Brown (Birmingham City Council)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Virtual School Board of Governors</b>

### Key progresses for 2024/2025

**Virtual School Child in Care attainment reports will show year on year academic progress** - Above national and regional figures CIC Attainment 8 (23.2%) and EBAC

**All Children in care will have a school place in line with their PEP and EHCP (where appropriate)** - We currently have 37 young people without a school place. This changes weekly dependent on newly arrived into the country, change of care placement out of the city and waiting on 3 weeks SEND consultation. This is 13 young people less than this time last year 23/24.

**School attendance will be at least 90%** - Attendance at school for children in the care of Birmingham has improved over the last two academic years and is currently 91.8% for all Children in Care and those 12 months+ in care is below the national average.

**% of Children with 5+ GCSE 5-9 inc English and Maths to double to 30% by 2026** - Above national and regional figures for CIC for 12 months+ achieving GCSE 5-9 with English, with maths, and with English and Maths combined (10.4%).

**At least 80% of young people between 16-21 will be in education, training, or employment** - 17-18 = 64% / 19 - 21 = 59%

**At least 10% of young people will be in higher education** - we have 146 in HE which is around 12% of our full cohort

#### Developments for 2025/2026

**We will increase the number of children in apprenticeship programmes to at least 50** - Currently have 32 young people in apprenticeship programmes, so we will be exploring external organisations to support with hiring a care experienced apprentice.

**Reduction to 20% of Children in Care who are NEET 16-18** - In 2024, current % of 16-18 NEET is 30%.

#### **Your relationships and you**

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham Children's Trust</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>Lisa Jamieson (Birmingham Children's Trust)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Children in Care Practice Forum</b>

#### Key

#### progresses for 2024/2025

**We will have developed a perinatal pathway and offer to our young parents co-designed with young people** - developed for maternity and the tools and training videos are available on the ICB website (can be shared with BCT if required).

**10% of young people will have access to the Life-long Links scheme** - Since 2020, Lifelong Links has been offered to nearly 400 children and young people in care - now includes young people from 8 years old and above.

#### Development for 2025/2026

**There will in a rise in Independent Visitors from 1% to 10% by 2026** – Currently 61 Independent Visitors, with 43 currently being matched.

**We will ensure all young parents are invited to join our young parents group and increase membership by 50% by 2026** - 13 consistently attending in 24/25. First male parent attended. Promoted around the Trust to increase memberships; plans to develop a Corporate Grandparenting offer.

**By 2026 there will be 150 mentors ‘Develop Me’ relationships per year** – In January 2025, there are 46 young people and 26 ‘Develop Me’ mentors and 25 ‘Next Steps’ Mentors. Capacity has been an issue but plans to add more capacity to increase this number.

<b>Your Care</b>	
<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham Children’s Trust</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>David Stringfellow (Birmingham Children’s Trust)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Children in Care Practice Forum</b>

Key

progresses for 2024/2025

**Less than 10% of children will have had 3 or more placements in previous 12 months** – In April 2025, this is currently at 7%.

**All children in unregulated placements will be visited by an Advocate and offered a service** 21 children and young people were referred for advocacy in 2025. Almost all have been offered advocacy and have met with an advocate.

Developments for 2025/2026

**The Young Person ‘This is Me’ Profile will be on every child’s file** – review of Mind of My Own to take place. Not many children have an ‘All About Me Profile’.

**90% of children in care will have been in the same placement for 2.5 years or more** - Currently 71% and rarely moves more than 3% living with their family network. We have a high target and this is our ambition.

**20% of children in care will be living with family or friends** - April 25 we have 8% living with their family network and we will continue to drive towards increasing this percentage.

**There will be no children living within unregulated arrangements** – numbers have significantly reduced and we are striving to get this down to ‘no children’.

## **Your housing and independence**

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham City Council</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>Cllr Jayne Francis (Birmingham City Council)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member Meeting</b>

### Key progresses for 2024/2025

**Care leavers will be receiving Band 1 priority when they are ready for independent living** - the Allocation Policy for the Housing Register gives a Band A, the top award to households who are Care Leavers and ready for independent living.

**All care leavers will be accessing Choice Based Lettings (CBL) so there is a choice in the properties bid for** - through the Housing Register, Care Leavers have access to the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) process, this enables Care Leavers to select and bid for properties according to their wishes, offers are made in line with the Allocation Policy. In addition, the Allocation Policy allows for a direct award where there is exceptional need for Care Leavers and the Allocation Policy allows for a quota to ensure a direct award is possible if required. This process is managed through the relevant panel.

### Developments for 2025/2026

**The quality of accommodation allocated will be governed by the current void standard** – Is the current void standard good enough for our young people? A bespoke ‘Care Leavers’ void standard will be explored in 2025/2026 with housing colleagues and will be a key focus at the Housing Board.

**Your Local Offer will be online and up-to-date and will have current opportunities, support and access to services, as well as financial support, discounts and savings** – Local offer is up to date on Birmingham Children’s Trust website, but needs developing and re-wording to make it more accessible for our young people to access and understand what they are entitled to.

## **Your Health and Wellbeing**

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>Birmingham ICB</b>
<b>Executive Sponsor:</b>	<b>Katy Willitts (ICB)</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Children in Care Health and Wellbeing Forum</b>

Key

### progresses for 2024/2025

**Free private swimming lesson scheme to be piloted in 2023 for 300 children in care** - Out of 200 funded spaces, 159 ten week blocks have been issued

**All children in care will have a Health Assessment annually** – In April 2025, 78% had a completed initial health assessment.

**New Primary care access cards for children in care and care leavers will be given to all children and young people to ensure fast track access within GP practices** - 85% of GP s have agreed to support the role out of the priority Health cards they are being designed and will be given out as a blanket offer to all children from 14 years.

**All children in care and care leavers (16-25) will be eligible for free prescriptions** - This is embedded and has been agreed for a further 12 months the ICB process has been accessed by both LA's.

#### Developments for 2025/2026

**At least 75% of children will have an Initial Health review within 20 days by 2023** – In April it was at 61% with an average of 48 days to complete. We know we still have work to do but progress is being made.

#### **4.5 Partnership working at Birmingham Children's Trust 2024-25**

Under the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between relevant partners. 'Guidance on the Act highlights that corporate parenting is a task that must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies.'

The team works with and supports the Trust's network of partners, businesses, and the community to ensure the delivery of a successful range of projects, programmes, and events for children in care, care leavers and other young people and adults known to the Children's Trust. Birmingham Children's Trust has developed this offer to underpin an extra layer of corporate parenting opportunities and experiences linked to education, wellbeing, sport, health, volunteering, employment pathways and life skills.

We try to work with partners and discuss sustainable offers, so that more and more young people can benefit from the agreed programme. In 24/25, Corporate Parenting are working closely with Bfriends to create an informal membership by confirming the areas of focus for the partner based on the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Bfriends' areas of focus.

#### Employment, work experience and apprenticeships

- We have had young people achieve employment with John Lewis and Partners at their Solihull store through their Building Happier Futures programme. In July 2024, this was extended into Waitrose stores and have had young people achieve work experience and interviews. This in an ongoing process, whereby the contact at John Lewis sends availability at their stores monthly.
- The partnership with Lovell Homes and St Basil's through the We've Got You project has developed. Lovell have donated over £10,000 to the Trust to support care experienced young people into employment and to sustain it.
- Through the We've Got You young people have been offered interviews for certain roles.
- New tenders are coming through the BCT Commissioning model to offer ringfenced work opportunities to care experienced young people. This has been developed by including more qualitative data in responses and evidence by the provider.

- Discussions have taken place with Birmingham City Council about opportunities within and ringfenced employment. This is starting with the Parks department.
- We have presented at Social Value masterclasses to employers on ways they can get involved in supporting our young people.
- In our last Corporate Parenting Board, our survey was based around interests and opportunities. We were able to get responses from young people on areas they would like to explore in terms of employment and/or training. This helps us shape the offers with partners based on the most popular areas.
- OTD worked with other businesses in the Jewellery Quarter to offer multiple days of work experience and employability sessions for a group of our young people. This led young people to experience different areas of work from printing, coaching and social media.

Corporate Parenting have directly engaged with 48 for jobs (including interviews, applications, assessment centres), 20 young people on work experience, and 25 young people on specific projects. The numbers of offers and links shared are in excess of this but currently hard to track.

#### Donations, volunteering and fundraising

- RSS Infrastructure / Auctus Management donated 100 Comfort Cases to our young people through the Early Help and Prevention Service.
- Funding through the Department of Education for the Next Steps programme has been extended for 25/26.
- Corporate Parenting coordinated the partners involvement for the May and October Care leavers Conferences. We relied on our strong relationships with external partners so that our young people had a range of offers.
- Our Develop Me lead has conducted a whole business approach for volunteering. Most recently presenting and conducting interviews at Global Banking School. The next stage will be to support with the promotion to further businesses.
- As part of the We've Got You project, Lovell produced a Charity Walk to raise funds for the project. Trust staff members took part in the walk to support.

#### Offers, discounts and opportunities

- We have launched the Big Difference Scheme with Severn Trent Water that gives eligible care leavers up to a 70% discount off their water bill. Care leavers are actively engaging in this offer, with names being sent every month to Severn Trent Water. Since launching in December 2024, we have had 29 young people sign up directly through our network. Reminders go our monthly, and young people have individually applied through the Care Leavers Covenant with their Personal Advisor.
- Stepnell led an independence workshop around support when moving into your own home. We had rewiring, painting, plumbing and budgeting.
- Along with our Apprenticeship Manager we have partnered with GMI, South and City to design weekly football sessions for our UASC. This has led to the aspiration to have a

structured football team so that we can play against other Local Authorities. Trials have taken place with the first matches planned for June 2025.

- We were invited by Arcadis to speak at their Constructing Excellence Social Value masterclass, to present ways to get involved with Birmingham Children’s Trust. This is an ongoing offer around partner engagement.
- Due to our relationship with Drayton Manor, we were able to obtain discounted tickets for young people to attend, with the hope of this becoming a regular offer. This follows on from the agreed 50% discount for the ThinkTank Museum.

#### 4.6 Key highlights 2024-2025

##### Care Leavers Christmas Day 2024

In December 2024, we continued our Care Leavers Xmas Meal, but this year was the first year we solely hosted this on our own at our venue. This year we took over The Lighthouse Young People’s Centre, with over 90 young people were in attendance. Each young person had a home cooked meal provided by 2 Much Passion and a sack full of presents donated by partners and our charity Bfriends.

There were a group of amazing volunteers who were there on the day, supported with the preparation, driving young people too and from, with a volunteer even become Father Christmas!

Some of the feedback from young people said this was the best year yet!

##### RSS Infrastructure, Auctus Management, GMI Construction Fundraising Football Match for Comfort Cases UK and Birmingham Children’s Trust

###### A Fantastic Evening for a Worthy Cause

On 17 April, the RSS Infrastructure Ltd team took to the pitch at Sportsco Football Club for a charity football match against GMI Construction Group PLC – and what a night it was!

After a closely contested game, RSS Infrastructure came out on top with a 5–2 win, with two late goals sealing the result.

It wasn’t just about the football – with entertainment from Perry the Bull, exciting stalls, and a popular inflatable slide, the event was packed with fun for all ages.

So far, Auctus and RSS Infrastructure have raised £2,850 through the GoFundMe and the match itself, to support children in care with comfort cases.



The relationship with Auctus started in October 2024, when they reached out wanting to donate Comfort Cases to our young people in Birmingham. Alex Hillman and Dawn Crooks from Corporate Parenting, Rights and Participation went down to say thanks and help pack over 100 backpacks which went to our Early Help and Prevention Service. Another packing event is due to take place in July 2025.



#### Stepnell DIY workshops leading to independence programme

##### Empowering Care Experienced Young People with Essential DIY Skills!

We worked with Stepnell Construction on their social value, with Eight Stepnell volunteers partnered with us to deliver a hands-on DIY workshop for young people preparing to live independently.

From building flat-pack furniture and painting to finding the electric distribution board and emergency water stop tap, we covered the practical skills needed to confidently maintain a home. We also shared basic tool skills, how to put up a shelf, and even provided careers advice and guidance to help set them up for success. The impact of this workshop goes beyond the day itself—these young people now have lifelong skills to navigate their journey into independent living. This was the start of our Independence programme planning, with a creative planning meeting taking place in April 2025. This will be a session made up of Trust staff, external partners, BCC and NHS colleagues.



#### **4.7 Areas for Development for Corporate Parenting**

- Extending the commissioning model to Birmingham City Council.

- Continue to work with Birmingham City Council on implementing their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, based on the passing of care experience as a protected characteristic.
- An updated communication tool through 6 monthly survey's so that we can tailor opportunities to individual young people based on interests. Pilot started with the Your Learning and Your Future Corporate Parenting Board.
- Ongoing partner conversations to solidify offers, discounts and experiences for our young people.
- Working with new elected members on their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Developments on the Corporate Parenting offers from Businesses and partners on Birmingham Children's Trusts' webpage.
- Implement the new Corporate Parenting Strategy from 2026 onwards.
- Continuing the Develop Me whole business approach when it comes to becoming a volunteer mentor.
- Working with Bfriends, strategic plan and execute a Partner Roadshow, where we showcase what is on offer for a partner to get involved in supporting our young people.
- Solidify the Independence and Transitions programme, following on from the creative planning session including the DIY workshops.

## **5. Independent Visiting**

[Independent Visitors Annual report 2024/2025 : simplebooklet.com](https://www.simplebooklet.com)

## **6. Advocacy**

Rights and Participation (RAP) provide advocacy to Birmingham children in care, care experienced young people, children subject to a child protection plan, children and young people aged 15-17 yrs subject to an Initial Child Protection Meeting (ICPC) and 16-17yr olds presenting homeless.

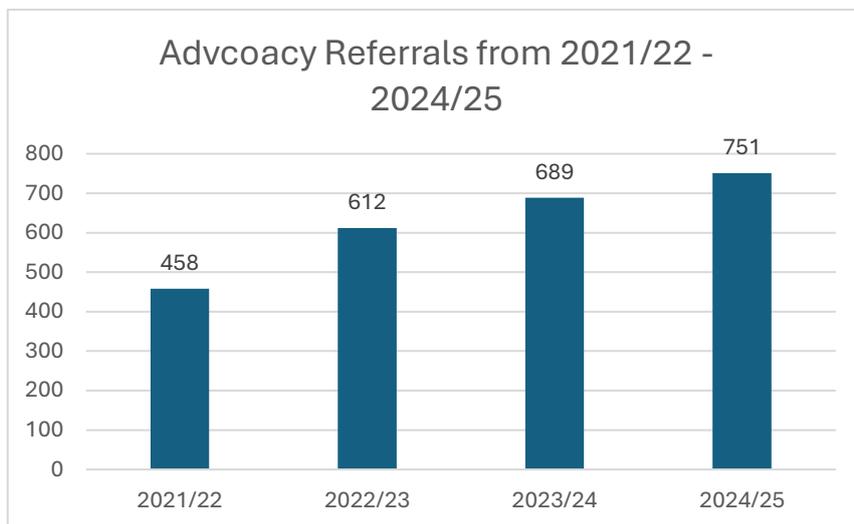
RAP also provides a six weekly advocacy visiting service to Disabled Children homes: Charles House, Cambourne House, Edgewood Road, Warwick House and Mainstream home Bridgeland's.

Advocates support children and young people to share their views and engage in their plans, assessments and decision making forums that affect them, ensuring their voices are heard and that they understand their rights. Often, by empowering children and young people to engage with professionals, they gain a better understanding of why decisions are being made and feel more involved in the decision-making processes.

The service currently has 5 advocates and one Childrens Rights Officer who manages the service and the team of advocates.

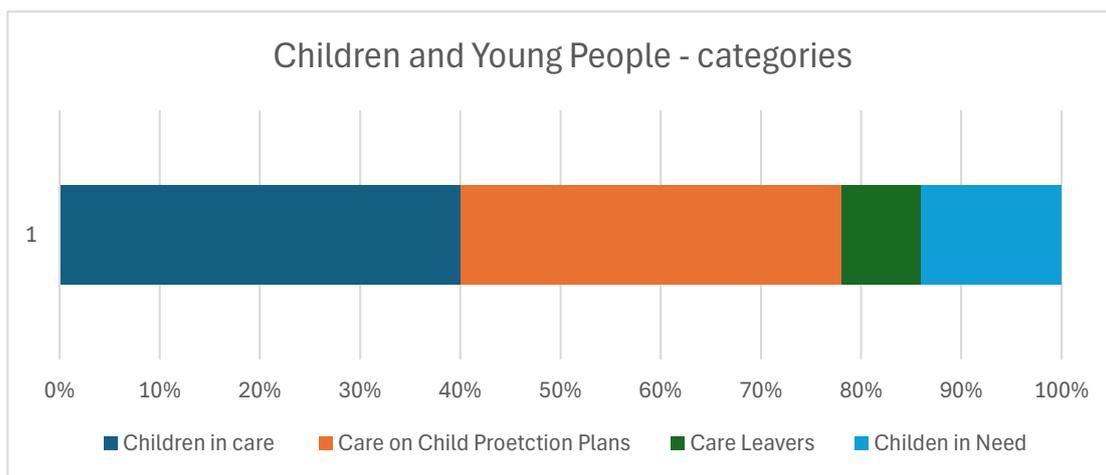
### Numbers of children and young people

Referrals have increased in comparison to previous years. The service received 751 referrals for the period April 2024 to March 2025. This is an increase of 62 referrals compared to the same period between last year. In the last four years, we have seen over a 64% rise in children and young people who have been referred for advocacy.



Of the 751 children and young people referred in 2024/25

- 300 (44%) were Children in Care
- 284 (38%) were Children on Child Protection Plans
- 103 (14%) were Children in Need
- 64 (8%) were Care leavers



Approx 11% of children and young people referred had some form of disability. The most reported form of disability was Autism and ADHD. These figures do not include the number of children and young people that the advocate visit and meet at disabled children’s homes and Bridgelands. This

figure is likely to be higher based on underreporting and those without a diagnosis. It's also a drop from 40% in last years reporting.

**Referral Sources** - 50% are from social work teams, 40% of advocacy referrals are from the Family Group Conferencing Team (the majority of these are now children in care referrals including those with a plan to return home), 10% other (including self-referrals from children and young people, referrals from IROs, CPOs, St Basil's, children's residential homes, carers, parents, other Trust services, National advocacy services: NYAS and Coram Voice)

**Top two advocacy issues for this reporting period:**



**Support at meetings** – this has been the highest number as an issue/s for which children and young people accessed advocacy support over the year. this year the highest uptake for advocacy support for meeting type was for family group conferences followed by support at CIC reviews.

Family Group Conferences. Children in Care Reviews, Child Protection Conference and review meetings, Initial Child Protection Meetings, Complaints process, Other (core group, professionals' meetings, meetings regard education issues)

Advocates support children and young people to participate and share their views and lead where possible in their meetings. children and young people are also supported to use Mind Of My Own or Mind One and Express Apps to share their views in advance of the meeting.

**Types of meeting were children and young people are supported by an advocate:**

Children and young people that are parents and are in care/care leavers are supported at their Childs Core group meetings/CP review/CIC review/ and any other meetings that they are invited to in relation to these matters. Support provided at Education related meetings (PEP) and meetings around placement issues. In some occasions we support at initial education disciplinary hearings. Advocates support with complaints which can be resolved informally, or progress through all stages of the formal complaint's procedure.

Initial Child Protection Conferences- Children in Need aged between 15-17yrs supported to attend and share their views at these meetings. Advocacy support for this issue has been offered since January 2023 as an 'opt out'. Over 90% of children and young people referred have accessed advocacy support for their ICPCs. As a result, we are working with the Child Protection team to consult with all age groups on child protection plans/ subject to ICPCs to see how they can be encouraged to attend their meetings in person.

Advocates support 16-17yr olds presenting homeless regards understanding their rights and supporting them at their complaint meetings.

**Placements** -Issues around placement matters have been the second highest reason for children and young people accessing advocacy support.

Ideal placement, placement move, unregulated settings,  
consultation

Issues can be where children and young people are worried about or disagree with the planning and decision making about where they live, or they don't feel their current placement is working and want to be moved. Advocates can support to make a complaint to freeze a placement move pending outcome of the investigation of the complaint.

All children (under 16) in unregulated placements get an offer and meeting from the service (unregulated settings standards 2022/2023 – Standard 5 Rights of the Child).

The service is also providing advocacy to children and young people in placements judged as inadequate by Ofsted and where there are LADO issues.

#### **What difference/impact are we making to the lives of children and young people?**

- More young people are now accessing advocacy
- **751** children and young people were referred to the service between the period April 2024 to March 2025
- **300** children in care received advocacy
- **284** children subject to child protection were seen
- **64%** increase in referrals in the last four year
- Children and young people get **dedicated support** to achieve a **positive outcome**
- We have worked with our participation groups, the Homeless Team and St Basils to produce information for 16-17yr olds homeless regards their rights and access to advocacy support.
- **Training** provided around **Childrens Rights** and the **Advocacy** offer to AYSE social workers (during their induction weeks)/care leavers team, fostering team, Child Protection teams.

#### **Service Development this year:**

- Regular service updates provided via Articles in care leavers letter and fostering newsletter.
- Annual updates provided regards advocacy offer to the NYAS and Coram Voice National Advocacy databases
- We attended networking events (Trust marketplace, Fostering annual event, 6 monthly care leavers conferences, Annual National Advocacy conference, quarterly Article 39 Advocacy Network meetings and any other events where we can promote and showcase our advocacy offer)
- We have 6 monthly joint RAP advocacy and FGC team meetings to share practise and identify ways of improving working across the teams for better service delivery to children and young people.

- We have 6 monthly meetings with CP team and HOS to discuss data for ICPC referrals and review of advocacy offer.
- We have 6 weekly advocacy team meetings to discuss changes in policy/law and share good practise.

### **Spotlight on Eclipse Recording**

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 the service has access to Eclipse for recording advocacy information, and case recordings. Access to Eclipse to record referral information will also enable ease of access to data information and processing. We have also sent in a request for our first data report to be built. Due to other service priorities this work was delayed but we are pleased we now have this information within Eclipse, which will allow better data and information including numbers of young people, trends, referrers, issues raised, outcomes, workload of advocates, timeliness and length of work. We have also been able to evidence an increase in take up of advocacy support from CIN aged 15-17yrs for their ICPC meetings and we can spot more easily a drop in referrals for young people like our care leavers.

Data collation and analysis has enabled us already to understand advocacy themes i.e. 'support at meetings' which has led to our children and young people participation groups delivering training to professionals chairing meetings (social workers/IROs) and second theme 'placements' to further develop our knowledge on regulations (through training from Childrens Commissioner office) and ensure children and young people are consulted and understand their rights when a placement move is being explored for them by the Trust.

### **Advocacy Good Practise Framework (2004) - The Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE)**

The Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University worked with our advocacy service and children and young people that had accessed advocacy support, and created an Advocacy Good Practise Framework which was published in October 2024.

### **Next steps**

- To continue to promote the advocacy offer and increase number of children and young people accessing independent advocacy across teams
- To ensure we get more referrals from social work teams and ensure processes embedded within FGC are shared across services.
- To develop a regional forum for sharing advocacy data (within GDPR) and themes and practices with other Advocacy services in the country
- Continue to deliver training to teams in the Trust and to AYSE social workers around advocacy and rights
- To have a slot at the National annual advocacy conference to deliver training to all professionals attending regards advocacy and Childrens rights

- To be able to generate reports on Eclipse to enable all services to see performance and themes for children and young people in this area. This will also allow children and young people, any social worker, audit or Ofsted to see the Advocacy footprint on each child's file.
- We are working in conjunction with the Child Protection team and participation groups to look at ways of improving children and young people's attendance at Child protection and ICPC meetings
- We are developing or accessing specific advocacy training for our advocates in conjunction with the Trust Learning and Development Team.
- Referrals for care leavers are lower than last year. Data recording on Eclipse will enable us to track and evidence this more and work with the service to see where referrals are coming and not coming from.
- 16-17yr olds homeless accessing advocacy is also a small number for this period. Only 8 of 751. We are working with the Homeless team to ensure they refer all children and young people that access their service so that we can offer them advocacy. There have been times young people have not understood their rights and wanted to challenge decisions made. Will hold 6 monthly review meeting with the team to check progress.

### **Individual Children and Young People and the Impact of Advocacy**

Young Person 1: A young person was being moved from his placement without a placement disruption meeting or consultation. He is nonverbal and is unable to communicate his views in any other way. His current placement was with his younger sibling. Not only were processes of placement move followed accordingly but also an issue of sibling separation. The advocate supported the young person through non instructed advocacy with a formal complaint to freeze the placement move whilst proper practices and processes/consultation took place. The Customer relations team refused to accept the complaint on behalf of the young person, challenging whether our advocates were skilled to provide non instructed advocacy. Case law was cited and with the involvement of the Childrens Commissioner of England (instructed by the young person's placement), the advocate was able to have the complaint addressed and escalated to stage 2 with a plan in the interim being explored to reunite the siblings in a new placement.

Young Person 2: A young person was informed that they had an ICPC meeting. They were not aware what this was, or why they had a social worker and did not understand the process. They decided not to engage with their social worker or the Initial child protection process. The involvement of an advocate enabled them to understand what an ICPC was, why they were subject to an ICPC and to have a voice in the meeting and attend the same with the support of the advocate. The young person informed the advocate that they never trusted children's services. This was the first time they felt listened to. They felt empowered. They wanted the advocate to support them with the child protection process if they became subject to a CP plan. The advocacy intervention also helped to establish a trust for the young person in the social work system. Later the young person asked their new social worker if a referral could be made for the advocate to support them through their CP process.

Young person feedback: ***"My advocate helped me understand what my meeting was about. I am very satisfied with my advocate & the advocacy service"***.

Young Person 3: We worked closely with a care leaver aged 22 suffering from anxiety, who professionals were struggling to engage and support. The young person was referred by TESS. The advocate rebuilt relationships with care leavers team, accessed support for debt counselling, and support to understand health and personal care issues.

Young person feedback: ***“You've been amazing and very invested in my growth and transition into becoming more independent and making sure I receive the right support. Never forget the day you came to my flat and helped me clean and tidy and spoke to the staff to ensure they supported me properly 😊”***

Young Person 4: An Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Child (UASC) young person aged 17 was supported to access information on their care plan and progress support at their child in care review. They also were supported to join participation group and events. The advocate also ensured that carers acknowledged and supported him with Ramadan and Eid.

Young persons feedback: ***“Hello, amazing soul! Thank you so much for your support and help. Honestly, yesterday’s party was truly unique and fascinating for me. I am so happy because of you. You are like my father, mother, brother, and sister. When you support me, I feel as if my mother or sister is with me. It makes me feel like I have a family here, and that means a lot to me.”***

## **7. Participation**

The Trust has a strong and growing emphasis on co-production and participation within service redesign, strategic developments, service delivery and practice.

Some examples include:

**Trust 2025** Child, young person and family/carer feedback has helped T25 in their discovery phase and ensuring redesign principles are shaped around feedback included themes around locality-based working, reduced transitions and handovers, strengthening of relationship-based practice. Children, young people and family/carer feedback is a standing item on every steering group and Board meeting. Workstream leads have engaged with groups and forums to help shape service design. Questionnaire and more qualitative focus groups are being used to continually

### **Executive Equalities Group**

This group also seeks feedback from children and young people and has heard recently from our LGBTQ+ Group ‘All is One and our SEND group (Don’t Dis Ability)

### **Learning and Development – design and delivery**

We have appointed to a care experienced L&D lead to support the voice of children and young people within our training and development offer.

### **Young People Inspectors**

We ring fenced a full-time permanent role in our commissioning team whose role is to develop our young inspector's group to quality assure and support the commissioning of placements. The post has been appointed to and work is now underway.

### **Corporate Parenting Board**

Our Board has two takeover Board a year and our Rights and Participation Apprentices support children and young people Ambassadors involvement and feedback to the Board. At every Board young people are represented and the Board starts with young people feedback and views on the Boards Pledge Theme.

In the last 6-9 months they have collated feedback in questionnaires from over 200 young people on themes around housing, being in care, and education training and employment.

We are also recruiting for a young person to be the vice chair.

Our Pledges and Action Plan are a direct result of feedback from our children and young people.

The Board has also been key in ensuring the Council fulfil its Corporate Parenting Responsibilities and we are already seeing traction in terms of developments in a wide range of areas including housing, health and wellbeing, jobs and apprenticeships.

### **Improvement Board (IB)**

Since February 2025 the IB now has a standing item monthly focused on children, young people and parent/care feedback and a 12-month forward plan has been endorsed that is service area specific. The following 12 months will focus on specific themes across the trust in areas like EDI/protected characteristics. This will look at areas like youth justice, child protection and children in care and the over representation of groups within the service.

### **Family Advisory Board (FAB)**

We have now have a Family Advisory Board (FAB) to ensure that we listen to the views of parents in relation to the work that we do with them. This brings together parents who have experienced our child protection system, who are bringing further insight into how we can better meet the needs of our children and family through an extremely challenging time in their lives.

### **Business Case**

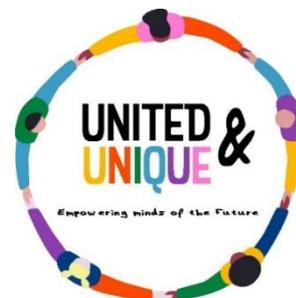
Our Right and Participation Team have submitted a Business Case to expand the work of the team and support more parental feedback in line with the Trusts ambitions and focus on Coproduction and participation.

### **Research and Quality Assurance Specialists in our Learning and Development**

Our research specialist now has another postholder in the team. This has improved our offer in supporting feedback processes across the service to influence future whole system service delivery. The work has ensured services have tailored support to gain feedback that is measurable and shows impact. Our team work closely together.

### **United and Unique - Children and Young People Groups and Forums**

United and Unique represents 7 groups and forums for children and young people allowing their voice to shape services and give important feedback on things that need to change. They have influenced a range of services in the Trust and wider and work closely with service leads, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Principle Social Worker. Co-production work has been linked to a range of areas and projects including the Safeguarding Partnership, Coming into Care, Bfriends Charity, Pathway plans, the House project and Independence preparation and support.



- The Groups and Forums have also done work to recruit more young people and since November have had 43 referrals to join.
- New leaflets branding and QR codes to sign up have been designed our Digital Media and Marketing Degree Apprentice, alongside our children and young people.
- Recruitment The groups have been very active in supporting interviews and over 50 young people have been trained in the last 12 months. From Jan 25 – May 25 they have supported the equivalent of 33 days of interviews for a range of posts including AD's, Heads of Service, IRO's and AYSE's.
- The Trust has four Rights and Participation Apprentices posts that ensure services reflect and change in the way they listen to children and young people. Our Apprentices deliver training, undertaken peer research, lead service days focused on participation.

### **National Influence**

National Advocacy Standards and the National Advocacy Framework. Our groups also influence national policies. Having supported the production of the National Advocacy Standards. They are now supporting the co-production of the National Advocacy Framework Guidance alongside the DFE and Cascade. The framework has been produced and is now being designed into a comic strip.

### **Coming Into Care Leaflet and Pathway Planning**

Adam Birchall our Principle Social Worker spoke with about care experienced children and young people

Some of the key points they wanted included in information about coming into care were:

- The message that coming into care is not their fault.
- That they are not alone

- Why they came into care
- A breakdown of key language
- What services they can access. Several said they heard about the Rights an Participation Service from a sibling or someone else in care, not through their SW/ Carer.

Young people have also shaped the new pathway plan and ensure that its much more focused on the things that young people have said they need to support them. There language used has also been looked at to avoid excluding people through professionalised language, which doesn't mean anything to anyone who reads it.

### **Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership**

Graham Tilby supported consultation on how safe children feel. The workshop, entitled 'All Together, Working Together'

#### **Key Messages:**

- There was a strong emphasis on issues that most children & young people raise, safety in public spaces such as streets, parks and on public transport.
- Young people wanted more safe spaces for them
- some care leavers said they felt more unsafe when they left care and there was assumption that the older you got the less supported you needed
- Young people were open to safeguarding leaders engaging directly with them, although less of a consensus about whether this should be within their own 'space' or somewhere different.
- There was some support for getting different groups of young people together who have different experiences to 'care'.
- Whilst some of their lived experience relates more specifically to care and their transition to leaving care, other views relate to growing up in the city as young people and young adults

### **Transitions**

Supported by Our Training Department (OTD) we had over 20 people take part in a co-produced session to map out how best to support young people with transitions including young people, professionals, business owners, therapeutic social workers, the virtual school, Money Ready, children in care social workers and managers and PA's. The Plan is to create an independence pathway and training for young people with partners and the Trust.

This will shape the work and support for our young people going forward. Themes related to

- A lack of preparation
- Preparation needs to start earlier
- Social isolation and cost of living are big factors affecting young people

- Housing and safety can be an issue
- We have a range of partners who can and are willing to support in developing a planned independence pathway that includes training, workshops, information and support for young people
- Befrienders and mentors and developing a strong community network are important

### Our Groups and Forum feedback

All is One group have shared some concerns that young people have experienced:

- Lack of care and understanding
- Refusal to use chosen name and referring to their “deadname”
- Not respecting their pronouns and calling them by their biological gender
- Being outed without permission
- Sharing personal information with other agencies and professionals
- Lack of information and support with transitioning



Our Don't DISability group have shared:

- Communication needs of young people to be considered and improved (Makaton, sign language)
- Better support for our Independence
- Support into employment and apprenticeships/internships
- Completion of SEND Health passports



BIAS (Beauty in All Shades)

- New group now set up and they have had their first meeting
- More information and work will be seen in 2025/26
- The group are working with Coventry University Research team and Barnardo's designing 'safe spaces' for black children and young people in care with an emphasis on identity and voice



Our Care Leavers Forum

- More support is needed with Independence planning and support (social isolation, independence skills, starting sooner)
- Supporting our CICC 'Coming into Care' work by creating more information on a 'Day in the Life' of key roles – for a better shared understanding of what everyone does
- Apprenticeships, jobs and training – more support is needed 16+ for children and young people
- Care Leaver Drop in Hub – we want a central location and to be consulted



Children in Care Council have been involved in Trust 2025 work:

- Some of us think that as soon as a social worker is involved and care proceedings take place, the aim is to keep them in care.
- We understand that this is complex and situations are different for each family.
- Not all Social Worker's are the same, and the standard varies significantly.
- All young people overwhelmingly believe that if they were to return home, social work intervention is really important, and value the work needed from our social workers



Young Parents

- Development of a Post-25 Group to be supported by our Bfriends charity
- Developing strong links with the REES foundation (to access wellbeing sessions and support they offer to care experienced young people)
- 'Start for Life Campaign' – Young Parents have contributed to the work being done and accessed support to navigate the joys and challenges of parenting, manage stress and boost self-esteem.
- Work Placements and Apprenticeships with local employers is a theme and young parents want opportunities to work and develop themselves.



## 8. Apprenticeship Programme

Roles and Posts

The Care Experienced Apprenticeship Programme in Birmingham has 13 funded apprentice posts, led by an Apprentice Co-ordinator Manager post. We continue to have a range of opportunities and posts that include:

- Music Programme Youth Worker in YOS
- Rights and Participation - Participation Workers
- Rights and Participation – Advocates
- Social Media and Marketing
- ICT Support
- Mind of My Own trainer and champion
- Business Support roles that support teams like commissioning and fostering.

The success of the Programme has seen other services have commissioned their own apprentice roles this includes two Social Media and Marketing roles within YOS and Early Help, making the total number of posts 15. We also have legal, finance, TESS, IRO service, Learning and Development, Care leaving service and the Children in Care team looking at bespoke roles.

Our programme offers a number of initiatives and benefits that include:

- a wide variety of roles across the Trust
- guaranteed interviews and feedback
- unsuccessful applicants all receive an offer of support and feedback into other opportunities
- 2-week central apprentice induction for all new cohorts – covering areas of practice are covered like sending emails, accessing calendars, setting up online meetings. This allows young people to be employer ready and confident before moving into their roles
- training and support focussing on wellbeing and transitioning to the professional working world environment
- Dedicated Apprentice Manager and their own line manager in their team to support
- Support and sign up for all apprentices within the REES foundations 'Ask Jan' scheme (which has a number of benefits including free financial, debt and legal advice, a MAX discount card and access to counselling and therapeutic support)
- The programme is designed to support apprentices into their next role through mentoring, support at interviews and sign posting to internal and external vacancies
- Apprentice are supported to receive their "Care leaver bursary" of £3,000 if it is their first apprenticeship.

**Summary of the Programme and it highlights:**

- 15 Apprenticeships posts have been created
- All apprentices are studying for an accredited Level 2, Level 3 and 4 award
- strong relationships with our college and course providers that has provided excellent support to our young people
- Young people have had a range of professional and service specific training including safeguarding, coaching and advocacy
- Young people on course to complete and achieve qualifications and graduate from apprenticeship programme
- Emotional Well Being Support is provided on a group and 1:1 basis
- Manager and supervisor group formed – opportunity to share experience, learning and support that has been successful.
- Other services in the Trust are seeing the impact of having a care experienced apprentice in their own area, and our apprentice manager is being approached by many areas wishing to fund their own apprentices.
- External Partners - we have a growing presence with our corporate partners. These discussions have led to businesses offering work experience, support, and jobs to our young people.
- End Point Assessments (EPA) - last year, three of our apprentices have successfully come to the end of their apprenticeship's. date, all our apprentices from the 2023-2024 cohort have successfully completed their EPAs with three receiving a distinction!
- Our apprentices were rewarded with a graduation ceremony to celebrate all their hard work and accomplishments, Our Chief Executive and Director were both in attendance and gave out awards.
- The impact of the apprenticeship scheme has given young people the opportunity to gain new skills both professionally and personally.
- Young people are more financially independent and feel supported in all aspects of their work. Our apprentices agree with the above sentiment, with one saying it has been ***“life changing”***.
- Our three apprentices all secured full time roles and chose different paths, two leaving the Trust for roles in sales and pharmacy and one apprentice applied and was successful in attaining a business support role in the Trust.
- Our digital marketing and social media apprentices have had work experience with Tinker Tailor an award-winning film making company based in Digbeth. This was greatly received by our apprentices, as they were able to pick up new skills and techniques by working in a film and marketing agency.
- Our digital marketing and social media apprentices also got to work with an advertising agency called Social on a campaign for care experienced young people with Lovell.
- Sharing best practice - our apprentice manager has been approached by several local authorities and the Care X Network to share how we recruit and take care of our apprentices

Apprentice feedback:

***“During my time at my apprenticeship, I've worked on so many amazing things, such as developing training packages, supporting young people's HAF events, being part of peer***

*research and also supporting young peoples events. But the best thing I have worked on is myself, I have been able to develop personally and professionally, I have met so many wonderful people and I have had so many opportunities I never would have had."*

**National Apprenticeship Week and New recruits:** We celebrated National Apprenticeship Week 2024 by advertising for new apprenticeship roles! We recruited for roles in:

- Business support
- Digital marketing and social media
- Rights and participation workers
- ICT
- Studio music project worker

We were able to offer interviews to over 40 young people! We successfully recruited to 6 roles.

**DfE Holiday and Food (HAF) Programme Bids and Activities:** Apprentices have worked closely with the Birmingham City Council, Street Games the Trust's Commonwealth Games (CWG) Programme and Commonwealth Games Organising Committee to successfully bid and deliver a range of programmes to children in care, care experienced young people and programmes specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC). During the summer of 2023, our apprentice HAF and CWG events have reached over 100 young people and included a two-day football tournament, a Lazer quest and Ninja Warrior activity. All activities were requested by the young people, where they attended a fun physical activity where children in care could come together, have time away from their home, set themselves a challenge, grow in confidence, make new friends and have fun.

### **Areas for development**

- Creation of more apprenticeships across partners Birmingham City Council and business in Birmingham (our new Trust social value measures for tenders will also ensure more are created for our young people)
- Better understanding of our young people and what they would like to study, learn and areas they want to work in
- Continue to develop more Trust posts that are funded outside of the Birmingham Children's Trust Apprentice Programme
- Improved links with Trust apprentice programmes ensuing workshops, guaranteed interviews, and support for young people through the recruitment process
- Develop best practice with network of partners developed

- Development of child and young people content and different channels of social media communication

**Things we are working on:**

- Working on launch of Connect App with the Care Leaver Covenant and presentation to the Care Leaver Service on the app and sign up for young people working with a business partner to incentivise sign up for young people
- Working on a database with the Care Leavers Service to include all young people's interests, areas of employment and training so we can target, and match opportunities based on your people preferences
- Early Help and YOS have recruited an apprentice outside of the funded programme. Finance, legal, children in care service and leaving care service are looking at progressing bespoke roles for their areas of service.
- A key objective of the service is showcasing the apprenticeship scheme on larger scale, where we aim for the apprenticeship scheme to be doubled by 2026. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has a target of 50 ring fenced apprenticeships annually across the Trust and partners by 2026.
- We are also strengthening our links with Birmingham City Council, to find more opportunities for our young people, and our overall ambition is for our apprenticeship scheme to be the blueprint to offer more sustainable opportunities for our young people in the council.
- We work closely with the Corporate Parenting team, and we are developing offers with our partners so that they too will have care experienced young people as apprentices.

**9. Next Steps - Befriending and Mentoring**

Birmingham Children's Trust were successful in securing a second year of funding awarded funding from the Department of Education for the implementation of a mentoring and befriending programme for children in care and care experienced young people aged 16-25.

This programme connects young people to mentoring in a range of different ways including fitness, music production and podcasting, well-being sessions and football, sports and nutrition. We are working with a range of providers from local community providers like Making the Change, Journal to Dream, Life Transforming Fitness and the Aston Villa foundation.



*Journal to* DREAMS



The programme also offers workshops in life skills for our children young people including finance and cooking which can be done alongside a mentor. In 2024/25 we worked with approx. 53 children in care aged 16-17 and 103 care leavers aged 18-24. A large percentage of young people accessing the programme were NEET approx. 65%, figures for our Care leavers is around 40% so the programme has continued to be successful in enrolling young people who can benefit most from the opportunity.

The aim of the programme is to support care experience young people with:

- Loneliness and Isolation
- Confidence self-esteem
- Development of independence and life skills

Young people who enrol on this programme will also get a mentor/befriender as part of the offer with the aim of building positive relationships, support and direction to achieve their own goals.

All young people will also receive a Free Ask Jan membership, 12 months free Gym membership and Free Bus Travel.

### **Education, Employment and Training Support**

Funding was used to support the delivery of meaningful, accredited, and practical opportunities for young people to explore and progress their pathways.

This included:

- **AQA Unit Awards** in topics such as communication, independent living, personal finance, and teamwork.
- **Future Planning:** 1:1 sessions to help young people create structured, achievable plans towards independence and Employment, Education and Training (EET) goals.
- **NCASS Level 1 and 2 Food Safety Certificates**, preparing participants for hospitality or catering roles and supporting independence.
- **Work Readiness Skills**, including CV building, mock interviews, and direct links to opportunities.
- **Vocational Taster Opportunities**, providing firsthand experiences to explore career interests and build aspirations.

## Mentoring Support and Empowerment Programmes

The programme delivered a non-traditional mentoring model shaped by young people themselves. Rather than formal, office-based mentoring, young people requested support that was social, physical, and active, with mentoring embedded into engaging group settings.

This included:

- **Group-based activities**, such as sports, team-building, and creative workshops, which created safe, informal spaces for trust and connection.
- **Embedded 1:1 mentoring**, with mentoring relationships developing naturally through activities that provided guidance and emotional support in informal settings.
- **Empowerment sessions** focused on identity, resilience, confidence building, and life skills.
- Mentors attending group sessions alongside mentees, helping young people feel more confident and connected.
- **Social events** for mentors and mentees to build upon trusted relationships, celebrate progress, and create positive shared experiences.
- Mentors participating in social events with mentees, providing consistent, trusted adult support beyond formal programme delivery.

To ensure long-term impact and sustainability, a volunteer recruitment and retention model was embedded beyond the funded programme. Volunteers were recruited, trained, and matched with young people in a way that supports ongoing, trauma-informed relationships. Crucially, the model was designed to allow mentors and mentees to continue their connection beyond the programme timeline. This approach supports continuity of care, prevents isolation at programme endings, and keeps young people engaged with positive role models and informal networks.

## Wellbeing and Mindfulness Activities

Holistic wellbeing support was delivered to meet emotional and mental health needs, including:

- Group mindfulness and relaxation sessions.
- Therapy and creative expression.
- Self-care and mental health awareness workshops.
- Movement, yoga, and body-based wellbeing approaches.
- **Ask Jan membership** (via the REEs Foundation), providing access to 24/7 telephone support, up to eight counselling sessions, financial assistance, legal guidance, and other care-experienced-friendly services.
- **Bus passes** to reduce barriers to participation and incentivise regular engagement.
- **Gym memberships** to support physical and mental health, encouraging routine, stress relief, and positive habits.

## Evaluation and Research

Independent evaluation ensured the programme remained responsive and impactful. This included:

- Young people's feedback gathered through surveys, interviews, and participation groups.
- Outcomes tracked against key indicators such as confidence, wellbeing, and progression.
- Development of case studies to evidence individual journeys.
- Learning shared internally and with partners to inform future delivery models.
- Evidence gathered to support future investment.

### **Food Costs and Equipment**

Funding supported:

- Provision of meals and refreshments during all sessions to ensure accessibility and engagement.
- Ingredients and resources for cooking and life-skills workshops.
- Equipment to support direct learning, sports, and group activity sessions.

### **Key Outcomes**

- Peer relationships and trusted adult connections were strengthened, reducing isolation and fostering a sense of belonging.
- Mental wellbeing improved through creative, physical, and therapeutic sessions.
- Volunteer mentors played a vital role in engagement, consistency, and celebrating success.
- Reported improvements in confidence, motivation, and social skills, particularly for those furthest from EET pathways.
- Young people gained accredited qualifications (AQA and NCASS) and developed realistic, aspirational plans.
- The programme remained youth-led, with activities shaped by young people's voices throughout.
- Practical support such as bus passes, gym access, and Ask Jan membership removed barriers and provided wraparound wellbeing and crisis support.

All funding was applied directly to benefit children in care and care-experienced young people, delivering high-impact outcomes across education, wellbeing, social connection, and personal development.

The programme was strengthened through partnership working with trusted delivery partners, including Journal 2 Dreams, Aston Villa Foundation, Making Change Studios, and 2much Passion. Their expertise ensured tailored, high-quality, and meaningful experiences aligned to young people's needs.

## **Journal 2 Dreams**

Young people participating in the Journal 2 Dreams *Me First* programme reported significant personal growth and increased self-awareness. Feedback demonstrated improved self-expression and a strong sense of belonging.

Key feedback included:

- “We have been able to deliver a consistent programme each week for a 12-month period, with participants feeling a sense of community and belonging.”
- “Participants felt less lonely and isolated as they were part of a community that came together each week.”
- One young person with cerebral palsy shared that this was the first time they had not felt isolated and felt understood and supported.

Additional outcomes included:

- Participants building relationships outside weekly sessions, reducing isolation.
- Inclusive delivery following individual needs analysis (including parenting responsibilities, disability, health conditions, and anxiety).
- Delivery of two cohorts due to demand.
- Positive endings and transition planning, with friendships continuing beyond the programme.

## **Feedback from Young People**

- “Because of the programme I feel like people care about my care-experienced journey.”
- “I didn’t have this much confidence at the beginning of the programme.”
- “This programme taught me it’s okay to talk about hard things.”
- “I don’t know what I’m going to do after the programme ends.”

## **Making Change Studios – Key Achievements and Outcomes**

### **Empowering Young People**

Participants demonstrated increased self-confidence, communication skills, and leadership. Many expressed renewed belief in their potential due to positive mentoring and creative opportunities.

### **Skill Development**

Young people engaged in video editing, photography, animation, podcasting, and visual arts, completing personal and group projects showcased at the final exhibition.

### **Building a Supportive Community**

An inclusive environment was created where young people felt safe, respected, and encouraged. Lasting friendships and mentoring relationships developed.

## **Recognition and Celebration**

The end-of-programme showcase was well attended by families, mentors, and partners, with participants proudly sharing their work and receiving certificates.

Overall, the programme had a significant positive impact, with young people feeling heard, empowered, and better equipped to manage real-life challenges.

## **Aston Villa Foundation**

This cohort demonstrated consistent engagement, with participants attending weekly. Most group members knew each other well, and many travelled together from shared accommodation.

Highlights included:

- One participant engaging regularly in Friday evening football sessions and developing a CV.
- Another reconnecting with football interests and being supported to explore local clubs.
- The youngest participant showing exceptional dedication and pursuing additional qualifications.
- All participants completing AQA-accredited workshops added to their CVs.

## **2much Passion Cooking School**

The Cooking School project successfully equipped young people with foundational cooking skills, increased confidence, and fostered a positive learning environment.

### **Key Achievements**

- Cooking confidence increased significantly, with 64% rating confidence between 8–10 after the course.
- High satisfaction with teaching quality, resources, and chef engagement.
- Strong enjoyment and re-engagement interest.
- Positive feedback on venue quality.

## **Young People's Voices**

Feedback consistently highlighted supportive staff, enjoyable sessions, and confidence growth.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- Improved visibility of demonstrations (e.g. screen use).
- Increased frequency or expansion of sessions.

## **Conclusion**

The programme delivered empowering, practical outcomes and demonstrated strong potential for future expansion.

## **10. Develop Me Mentoring**

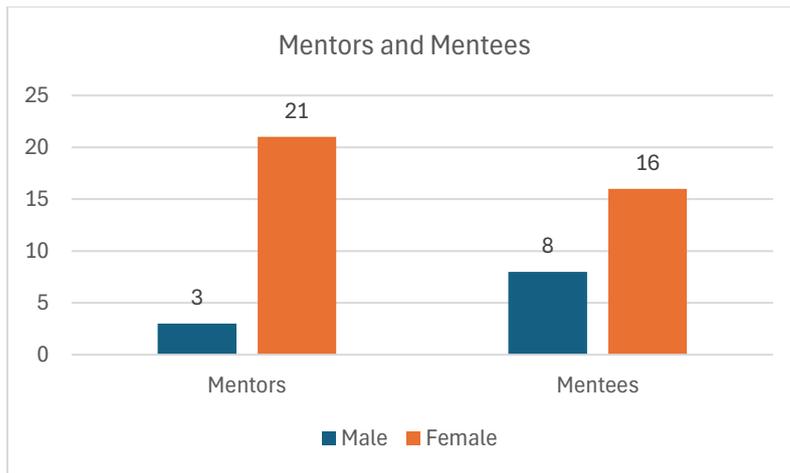
Develop Me is our Birmingham Children Trust mentoring programme that supports young people in care and care leavers, aged 16-25. A mentor can be life changing for a child in care and someone with care experience. Mentors help young people to set and achieve their goals and reach their potential. Mentors can also be a consistent and supportive person in their life, helping them build trust, confidence and self-esteem.

### **Highlights of the programme**

- There are currently 24 young people and 24 mentors matched and actively engaging on the programme.
- The programme is creating relationships with key businesses in Birmingham like PWC, who are keen to support our Corporate Parenting offer
- The programme held a recruitment workshop for over 40 staff at PWC, 9 staff were interviewed and 7 are matched on the programme
- Amazing outcomes being achieved for our young people
- Great set of mentors and mentees engaged in the programme
- 121's and support with mentees and mentors
- Mentors & mentees are contacted monthly sometimes mentees contact me several times through the month depending on issues.

### **Mentors and Mentees**

In looking at the graph below you can see we have 24 mentors and 24 mentees. In addition, we have 2 young people are awaiting a mentor. The majority of mentors and mentees are female. 67% of mentees and 88% of mentors are female. 33% of mentees are male compared to only 12% of mentors are male. This shows that we need to recruit more male mentors, which is a bit of a gap when a mentee would prefer a male as a mentor.



### Impact of the Programme

- We have seen young people grow in confidence and self-esteem.
- Young people have felt less socially isolated and met new friends and people.
- Young people have been developing healthier lifestyles.
- 5 young people are now in work and paid employment.
- Young people have accessed college courses or programmes to support their next steps
- Mentors and mentees have spent some fun times together, this has included days out and trips one mentor took their mentee to see West Bromwich Albion Football club pla

### Impact on individual Young People

- Young person who struggled with anxiety and depression has started a music course and is overcoming some of these challenges. The young person was not previously engaging with any services.
- Our longest standing mentee has most recently got a new job, moved to a new city and developed a lot more confidence since being on the programme.
- One young person was matched with a PWC mentor and since recently gone into employment and developed confidence.
- One young person has improved their confidence and self-esteem. Her mentor supported her with CV Writing and interview techniques. They are now successfully in employment.
- One young person was matched with a local businessman and gained confidence and support around business, accountancy and taking his next steps.

Feedback from Mentor

***“It is going well and I think H has grown in confidence in a short space of time and I think is now comfortable talking to me. I’m proud of her progress.”***

Feedback form social workers

***“I referred a young mom who was struggling with confidence, trusting people, anxiety, and relationships to the mentoring service. J finds having R as a person separate from social workers really beneficial. She feels that she can open up and talk about every aspect of her life without being judged. I have really noticed her confidence improve and she is starting to look at her future and what she wants.”***

***“I think having a mentor has really helped her to cope with professionals, she has rarely engaged in the past but is engaging well now. I only wish all of my young people would work with a mentor***

***too. I know they also offer group sessions and activities which helps young people to interact positively with others in a similar position and encourage them to build their own support network. It is a very beneficial service to help to break down any barriers young people face and guide them to reach their goals."***

Feedback from a young person

***"I was very lucky to be introduced to the mentor program which I have learned and achieved some things that I didn't think were possible. I have got more confidence, gained a full time job as a support worker and now working on my driving, without the help that I had got I wouldn't of managed to achieve but this is where you have to put your mind to it otherwise your gonna struggle."***

#### **Areas for Development and plans for 2024/45**

- Graduation to celebrate our young people and mentors, which will be funded by PWC
- Greater focus and measures on supporting young people into education and employment
- Increase recruitment of mentors
- Focused recruitment of male mentors
- End of programme evaluations and data on outcomes
- In 2024/25 we aim to create more links with businesses in the city recreating more recruitment workshops
- Work is planned with Arcadis, ARUP & 3PB
- We need to do more active promotion with children in care service, 18+ service, fostering, placement and commissioning
- Improved access/referral route to young people accessing a PA where they have a range of needs that require support