

Rights and Participation and Corporate Parenting Annual Report
2023-2024



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1. Introduction

At Birmingham Children's Trust, it is our job to support the most vulnerable children and young people in Birmingham and keep them safe, happy, and healthy. We provide a wide range of services to children, young people and families. It is essential that collectively we are fully committed to being the best parent we can be to our children our children in care and experienced young people. We believe that our children and young people's lives will improve through a strong Corporate Parenting offer where the Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, partners, businesses and the community work closely together to ensure services and support is wrapped around our children in care and care experienced young people.

We also believe it's important to give children and young people a voice across the Trust in the service that shape them. This means a string advocacy and participation offer as well as offering services that support children and allow them to develop and grow.

The following annual report will set out the key activity and outcomes achieved during the year 2023-24.

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

3. Executive Summary

Highlights and Impact

- New Corporate Parenting strategy that was coproduced with children and young people that supports new structure and governance of Agenda for each Board

[Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 - 2026 \(February 2023\) | Birmingham Children's Trust \(birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk\)](#)

- Two takeover Boards a year that form key Asks and Actions – this has included; free prescriptions, free bus travel, care experienced designed and delivered training
- New Social Value Commissioning framework for all tenders was developed and is now live creating jobs, apprentices, volunteering and support to children in care and care experienced young people.
- Corporate Parenting website and video developed and ready for launch in April 2025. [Corporate Parenting | Birmingham Children's Trust \(birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk\)](#)
- £608,533 awarded from the Department of Education for the implementation of mentoring and befriending programme for children in care and care experienced young people aged 16-25. In the first two months of the programme 35 young people were signed up from a target of 60 in total for the whole programme 70% of which are NEET.
- All young people will also receive a Free Ask Jan membership, 12 months free Gym membership, free Broadband and Free Bus Travel.
- In 2023/24 there has been an 80% rise in the number of children and young people matched with an IVs and a 53% rise in the total number of children and young people matched and unmatched. A total of 46 IVs are now matched or awaiting a match
- Mentors have supported young people into work, college courses and programmes to support their next steps
- In 2023/24 689 children and young people have been referred for advocacy this is a rise in the last few years of over 25%.
- All children U16 in unregulated placements get an offer of advocacy and meeting from the service. Children and young people who are 16/17 and need 'care' but are placed in unregulated placements also now receive the same level of service.
- The service is now also providing advocacy to children and young people in placements judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted and/or have compliance/safeguarding issues
- More recently the service will also support children where the home/placement they live in is subject to LADO/Position of Trust issues.
- Young parents presented at the launch of the regional multi-agency Perinatal Pathway that they co-produced, they shared the journey of the work and used their personal experiences to motivate professionals to use the new pathway and change their practice
- Young people took part in a paid consultation on their experiences of advocacy to shape research and the national advocacy standards.
- Following the Takeover Board, our young parents felt support came too late and that they needed earlier support and intervention "why don't you come at the beginning instead of the end". The 'New growth' project (developed from our 'Breaking the Cycle' project is now embedded in practice and forms part of the offer for all children in care and care leavers who are due to have a baby
- Eid Events - young people that celebrate Eid were invited to a 3-course meal with prizes, music and entertainment. We also had a family fun day with over 600 people in attendance.
- Young people have graduated from our apprentice programme achieve L3 and 4 qualifications
- All apprentices completing their programme secured full time job roles
- The success of our apprentice programme is being shared nationally through training with organisations like the Care X Network

- Apprentices successfully bid and deliver a range of HAF programmes to over 100 children in care and care experienced young people

Areas for Development

- Working with Birmingham City Council on implementing their Corporate Parenting responsibilities in areas like commissioning, jobs and apprenticeships
- More robust challenge from the Corporate Parenting Board and better buy in from all partners and agencies
- Better children and young people involvement at each Board, including survey's, interviews, filming and consultation to go alongside each Corporate Parenting Board to gain young people's views on the agenda.
- Improvement in feedback and actions based on young people's feedback 'You said we Did'.
- Need to increase the number of IVs and mentors for our children and young people.
- Targeted volunteer recruitment to get more males and males from different ethnicities.
- Promotion of the advocacy service to increase the number of children and young people accessing independent advocacy
- Development of a regional forum for sharing advocacy data to help share and contrast themes and performance with other Advocacy services in the country
- Development of Eclipse to support data and performance information for Advocacy, IV and Mentoring
- Participation groups will be working on Improved transitions and supporting 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 and connecting with more children and young people
- Creation of more apprenticeships across Birmingham City Council and its partners and business in Birmingham
- Continue to develop more Trust posts that are funded outside of the Birmingham Children's Trust Apprentice Programme

4. Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting Board and Strategy

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

Our **Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and Pledge 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**

Link to Strategy: [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 - 2026 \(February 2023\) | Birmingham Children's Trust \(birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk\)](#)

These key themes that make our board strategy were developed and co-produced with children and young people to ensure our Corporate Parenting responsibilities are delivered in collaboration with our key partners across the city. The board is responsible for making sure that the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Pledge is monitored and delivered upon. We have an action and forward plan, which holds us all to account as Corporate Parents and helps us to understand where we need to develop and improve. Our Pledges are now available on our website and promoted with partners and through the Trust.

During 2023-24, our Corporate Parenting board has been represented with key partners and senior representatives from the Trust, Birmingham City Council, the NHS, The Virtual School and business partners. Foster carers and children and young people are also represented 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 pledge themes. We have two Take-Over boards 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. They shape key 'Asks' and actions for the Board.

Overview/Date of Corporate Parenting Boards – 2023/2024:

22/05/2023 – Your Care / Your Relationships and You

Agenda – unregulated placements, Life Story, Volunteering – Mentoring / Independent Visiting, Protected Characteristic update.

24/07/2023 – Your Voice and Participation (Takeover Board)

Agenda – Groups overview, Consultation and research, Previous Asks, groups work. LGBTQ+ and SEND focus

25/09/2023 – Your Housing and Independence

Agenda – Housing, Bfriends charity pathway

27/11/2023 – Your Health and Wellbeing

Agenda – Health, UASC mental health and wellbeing, NHS Team updates, Health summit and young people's feedback.

22/01/2024 – Your Learning, your Future

Agenda – Virtual school update, post 16 employability, training and skills, NHS Universal Family model, Masters research (young person's work)

Asks and Actions Our 'What you said' and 'What we've done' response to children and young peoples can be seen below:

Highlights include:

- Free prescriptions for all children in care and care leavers 16+

- Young people developed their own training and commitment to be a strong feature in the development of future staff training
- Care Leaver Drop ins have been reinstated
- Free Bus Travel for all 16+ across the West Midlands



CPB Ask and
Actions.pdf

Partnership working at Birmingham Children's Trust 2023-24

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.

Employment, work experience and apprenticeships- Case studies

- 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, we are extending this into Waitrose Hall Green.
- We piloted a work experience programme with Jewellery Quarter businesses – OTD, Barques, Hobbs Exchange. Young people got to experience various work fields, with one young person writing a book review that was posted on a social media account with 12,000 followers.
- Lovell Homes have developed (along with us, St Basils, Care Leavers Covenant) the We've Got You programme – the name and logo were designed by our apprentices. The programme gives care experienced young people opportunities in training, employment and supports housing needs.
- We have a direct application link with Amazon for their Warehouse Operative roles - we have had at least 10 young people apply through this link.

Case Studies – Donations, volunteering and fundraising

- As part of the We've Got You project, Lovell Homes have created a fund to support young people in overcoming any barriers into work. So far they have personally donated £20,000
- Lifetime Brands donate household and kitchen items to our care leavers conferences.
- Birmingham City FC Foundation gifted 11,500 Christmas presents for our young people.

Case Studies – Offers and discounts

- We have agreed discounted ticket prices with Drayton Manor for our children, young people and families to enjoy the attraction.

- We have a 50% discount to Think Tank Birmingham
- We have been given multiple free tickets to events at the NEC, Alexander Stadium and Birmingham City FC.

Key highlights 2023-2024

New Social Value Commissioning Model

With care experienced being passed as a protected characteristic in April 2023, we have worked with Birmingham Childrens Trust commissioning colleagues to create a new social value framework for all tenders. All tenders that meet the threshold for social value, will now directly benefit children in care and care experienced young people. All tenders will be weighted and scored against their ability to create jobs, apprenticeships, volunteer, donate, offer work placements, and/or utilise company resources.

The first successful tender we had included:

- 1 job annually for a care experienced young person
- 1 apprentice annually for a care experienced young person
- Staff Volunteer hours to support mentoring and befriending programmes
- Work experience placements
- Donation of laptops and mobile phones

Brunch with Businesses

In February 2023, we were asked to support the next Care Leavers Conference, which we titled 'Brunch with Businesses'. We wanted to keep the employability theme, but wanted to change the format so it was a more intimate experience for the young people where they got to learn more about the organisations and the people within.

For this event, we had 12 businesses and training providers in various work sectors ranging from health care to hospitality. The aim was for the business to showcase an 'offer' to our young people – having a smaller number of businesses helped our young people get to know more about the offer and how they can get involved.

We almost 50 young people in attendance. Based on feedback from the partners, there were 77 opportunities created for our young people, which included site visits, interviews, programmes, work experience and offers of employment.

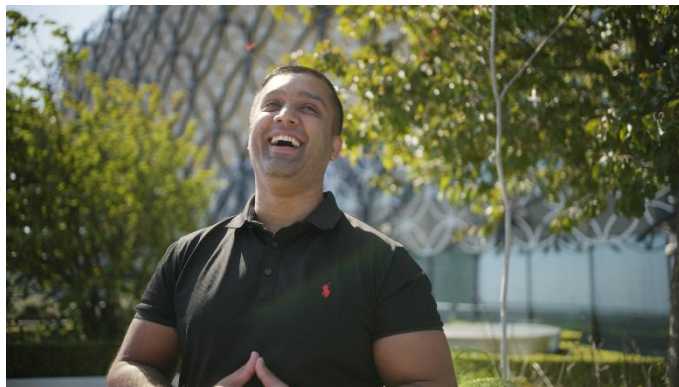
'I enjoyed the quiet time with each organisation'

'Very informative and great connections'

'I have found out about different careers and how to progress to the next step'

Corporate Parenting Website

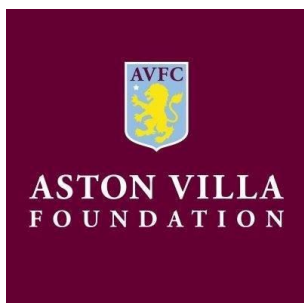
We year we have developed a Corporate Parenting Website to be launched in April 2024/25, which has refined our offer and explains how to get involved. We also produced a video about Corporate Parenting, which can be viewed through the webpage. Our young people, partners, business, Our BFriends Charity and older care experience adults were all involved in the filming.



Successful Department of Education funding – Befriending and Mentoring

In December 2023, Birmingham Children’s Trust were awarded £608,533 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 ROCUP, Making the Change, Journal to Dream and the Aston Villa foundation.



Journal to DREAMS



The programme also offers workshops in life skills for our children young people including DIY finance and cooking which can be done alongside a mentor. In the first two months of the programme 35 young people were signed up from a target of 60 in total for the whole programme. There are 12 months still left of the programme, which March 2025. Around 70% of

the young people accessing the programme were NEET, figures for our Care leavers is around 40% so the programme has been successful in enrolling young people who can benefit most from the opportunity.

The aim of the programme will help lead support 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, free Broadband and Free Bus Travel.

Feedback from one of the workshops – ROCUP:

“ROCUP has been the catalyst for change I needed to feel a part of a special community and help me manage my physical wellbeing.”

“ROCUP is a pure representation of community, and an inspiration and acceptance of self and each other. We are a family using fitness for not just our development but to bring people together as well. Birmingham is coming together but the ROCUP force is bigger than us and will touch many others globally. ROCUP for life 🙏”

Areas for Development for Corporate Parenting:

- Working with Birmingham City Council on implementing their Corporate Parenting responsibilities in areas like commissioning, jobs and apprenticeships
- More robust challenge from the Corporate Parenting Board and better buy in from all partners and agencies
- Clear focus on key impact measures at each Board
- Better children and young people involvement at each Board, including survey's, interviews, filming and consultation to go alongside each Corporate Parenting Board to gain young people's views on the agenda.
- Improvement in feedback and actions based on young people's feedback 'You said we Did'.
- Working with new elected members on their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- The use of Mail Jet so that we can tailor news to individual young people based on interests
- Developments on the Corporate Parenting offers from Businesses and partners on Birmingham Children's Trusts' webpage.
- Working with partners to create offers, discounts and experiences for our young people

- An independence and information app for our young people to be rolled out

5. Independent visitor

Introduction to Independent Visitors

“A local authority looking after a child must appoint an independent person to be the child’s visitor if – (a) the child falls within a description prescribed in regulations made by the appropriate national authority; or (b) in any other case, it appears to them that it would be in the child’s interests to do so.

(2) “A person appointed under this section must visit, befriend and advise the child.”
Childrens Act 1989

An Independent Visitor (IV) is a volunteer who is there to visit and befriend a child in care. IV’s aim to be a consistent and constant person in their life, even if where they live or professionals supporting them may change. IV’s are not paid and aim to build a safe and trusting relationship and friendship over time.

“Me and my IV have so much fun; we have been bowling, climbing and to the Sea Life Centre. My best times are when we go for a walk and just chat.”

“My IV is so cool I get the chance to try new activities and spend time together.”

Children and Young People

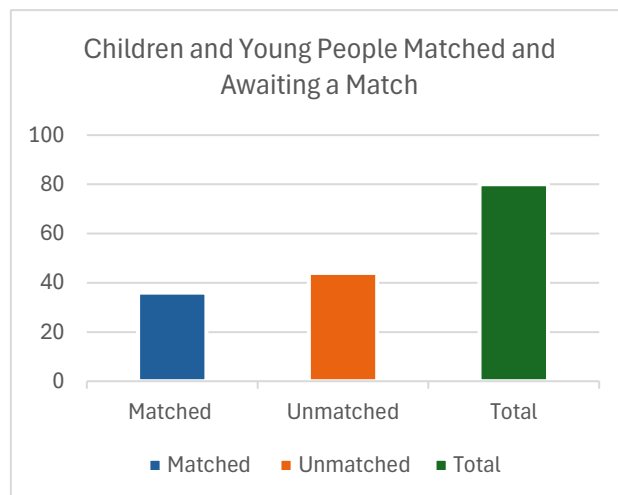
Referrals

Throughout 2023-2024 we received 25 completed referrals for Children and Young People. The majority of referrals are made by social workers although a small number of referrals to the programme are received from foster carers and residential workers.

Matched and Awaiting a Match

At the end of 2023/24 we had 36 children and young people matched to an Independent Visitor. These young people are all active and engaging in positive experiences and opportunities.

Throughout 2023-2024 another 44 children and young people have been involved in the project but are not yet matched and do not have an IV.

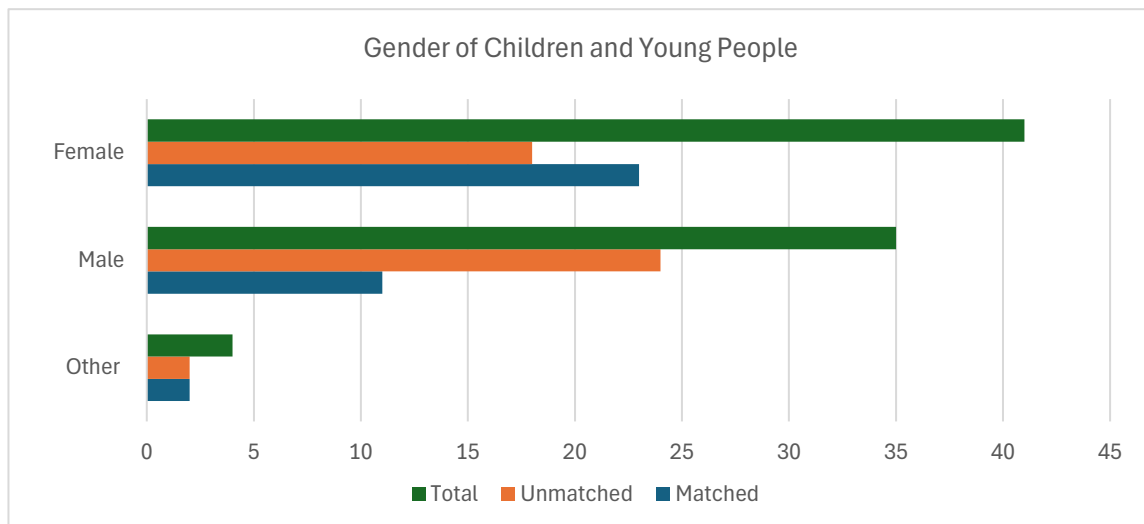


Ages of children and young people

Children and young people between the ages of 8 to 18 can access an Independent Visitor. During 2023-2024 those 15+ make up 62% of young people engaged in the programme, with 38% of children and young people 14 and under. During 2023-2024 children and young people aged between 12 and 18 make up the majority (72%) of the young people linked with the programme.

Gender

The gender of children and young people matched with an Independent Visitor shows a 63% to 30% of female to males. However, when looking children and young people unmatched, the figures show a reverse in trend with 55% male and 41% female. This may highlight the fact that most IVs recruited and matched are female and we struggle to recruit male IVs in the same numbers.



Culture and Ethnicity

Children and young people who have matched with an IV are from a diverse cultural background, which is a reflection of our children from our city and this is also reflected in the wider group of children and young people engaged in the programme.

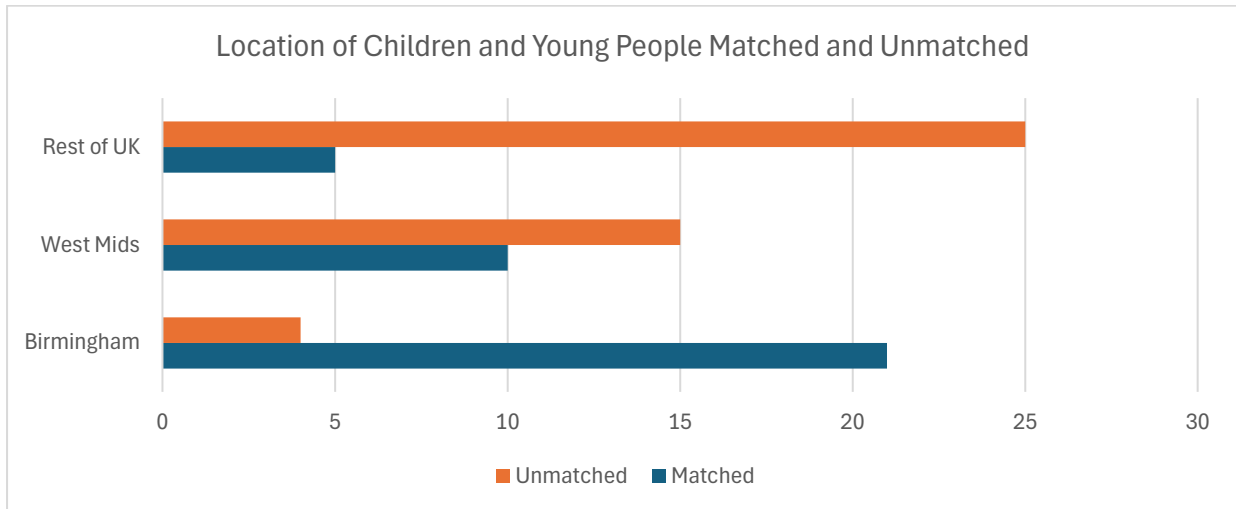
Children and Young People with a Disability

At the end of 23/24 55% of children and young people matched with an Independent Visitor had some form of disability, ASD/ADHD or mental health disorder. Two young people have life limited conditions and have been supported and matched for over two years with their Independent Visitors.

Location of Children and Young People

Currently 58% of children matched are living in Birmingham compared to 9% of children unmatched. 27% of children and young people matched live in the West Midlands compared to

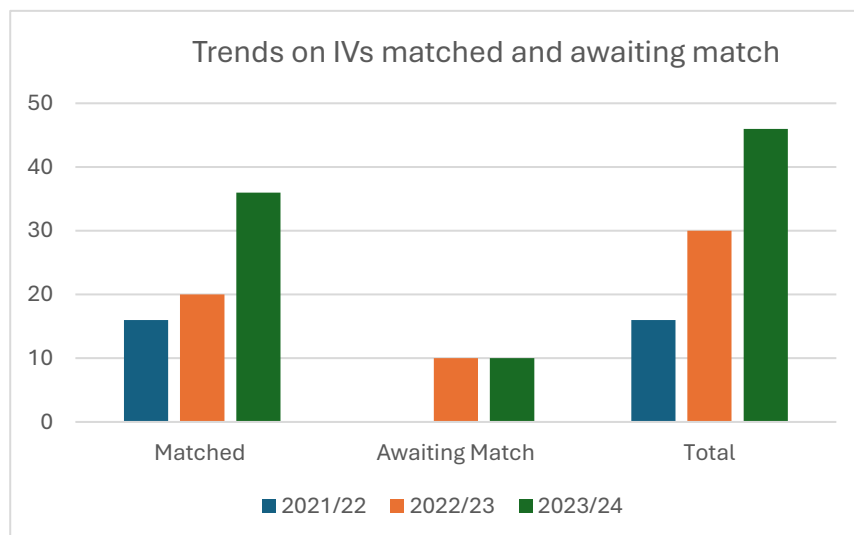
34% unmatched and 13% of children matched live elsewhere in the UK compared to 57% of children unmatched. The complete reversal in data trends between the two sets of children and young people highlights the difficulty in recruiting volunteers who will travel or are based across the UK, which is something that is being picked up as of our targeted recruitment for 2024/25.



Section 3: Independent Visitors

Number of IVs

In 2023/24 there has been an 80% rise in the number of IVs matched and a 53% rise in the total number of IVs matched and unmatched. Whilst the numbers are small, we now have a total of 46 IVs compared to 30 in the previous financial year.



Recruitment and Training

The recruitment of Independent Visitors has been through a range of mediums although the trust website has had the most success in recruiting volunteers. The opportunity to have a regular advertisement on the Trust Website has generated regular interest and applications to the wider volunteering opportunities across the Trust.

We have been slow to recruit volunteers and get them through all checks and vetting. We have now commissioned a Volunteer Recruitment portal called Assemble, which will go live in 2024/25.

All volunteers undertake a robust safer-recruitment process that includes an in-depth Safeguarding Interview, based on Warner style interview questions that look to find out more about the individual coming to volunteer with our children and young people and expose areas like their motivation and how they use power authority and control.

Independent Visitors training includes Safeguarding, Data Protection, Equality and Diversity and it follows the National Standards for Independent Visitors, as well following the same recruitment a staff member would go through in the Trust.

We currently have 46 Volunteers from diverse ethnicities, social and socio- economic background, gender and disabilities. We are successful in attracting those with a wide-ranging of experiences including students, lecturers, barristers, local Government officers, retired professional and a number care experienced adults. Our volunteer's range between 24 years and 79 years of age. Only 10% are male and we need to improve our ability to recruit male volunteers. This is a national challenge across the Independent Visitors Network. We are now able to target individual adverts through our Assemble system specifically for male volunteers.

Our IV's have created engaged in promotion and publicity in raising the profile of Independent Visitors as well as the Corporate Parenting 100 Days Campaign.

Matching

All Independent Visitors matched with children and young people based on profiles that children, young people and IVs complete. Matching is also done individually, in small groups and in larger group activities and events. There is no formula to finding a good match and opposites can often attract. We find that allowing IVs and children and young people to meet informally helps develop a greater understanding of each other and matches form more naturally as a result.

Added Value and Support for Independent Visitors

The role of Independent Visitors can be isolating for our volunteers', which is why we have quarterly catch- up sessions both face to face and virtually available for any IV to participate. An ongoing open-door policy ensures IVs feel confident and supported in their role as a befriender.

Once matched Independent Visitors have reviews at 6 monthly intervals, which includes the offer of additional training and opportunities to support and add value to their befriending journey.

Those waiting for a match are invited to matching sessions enabling them to meet potential IV matches as well as other Independent Visitors thus building positive relationships and share experiences.

Impact

- In 2023/24 there has been an 80% rise in the number of children and young people matched with an IVs and a 53% rise in the total number of children and young people matched and unmatched.
- We now have a total of 36 of these are matched compared to just 20 the year before.
- A total of 46 IVs are now matched or awaiting a match
- The IV service has been able to match children and young people with complex needs and various disabilities and health conditions.
- IVs have supported children and young people with a range of challenges and behavioural difficulties

Areas for development

- Need to increase the number of IVs to befriend our children and young people.
- Increase speed of our internal recruitment process and utilise our recruitment portal Assemble from 2024/24
- Increase awareness of the programme and increase referrals
- New marketing and targeting of volunteers who are based around the UK
- Targeted recruitment to get more males and males from different ethnicities.
- Increase the quality and speed of matching children and young people with an IV.

6. 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.

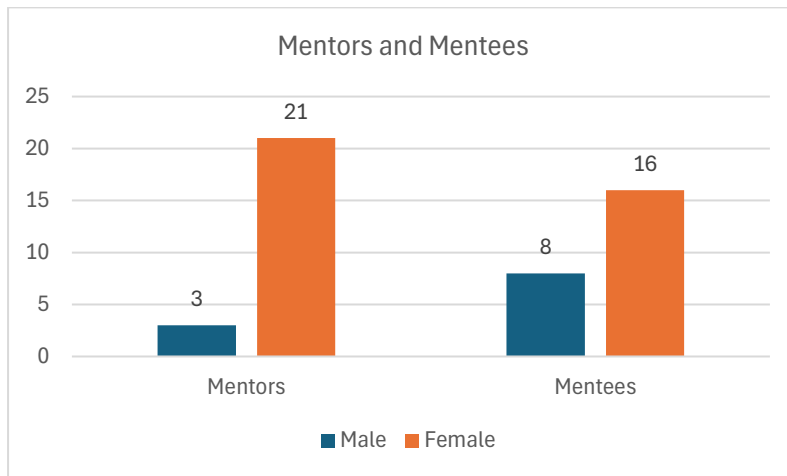
Highlights of the programme

- 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. I 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

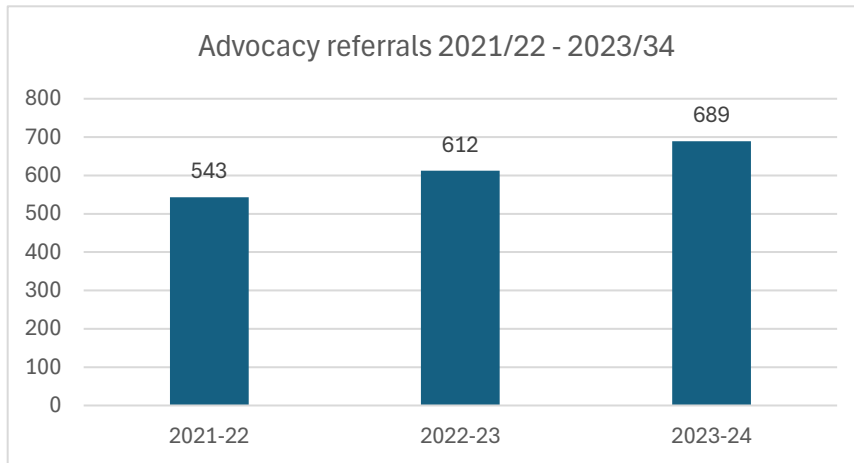
7. Advocacy

The RAP advocacy service helps children and young people to share their views and engage with the Trusts processes and decision making, 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. As a result, better decisions are made for the child or young person.

The service has 5 advocates who support Birmingham CIC, Care leavers, those subject to CP plans and CIN subject to ICPCs or presenting homeless.

Numbers of children and young people

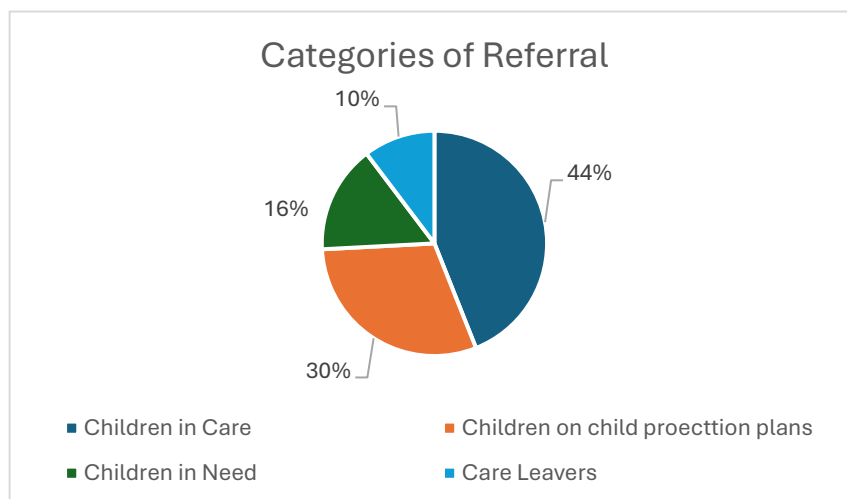
Referrals have increased in comparison to previous years. The service received 689 referrals for the period April 2023 to March 2024. This is an increase of 77 referrals compared to the same period between 2022-2023. In the last few years, we have seen over a 25% rise in children and young people who have been referred for advocacy.



Of the 689 children and young people referred in 2023/24

- 44% were Children in Care
- 30% were Children on Child Protection Plans
- 16% were Children in Need
- 10% were Care leavers

Approx 40% of these referrals were for children and young people who have 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 visits and supports informally through disabled children’s home visits.



Referral Sources -About **50%** of advocacy referrals are from the FGC team, **25%** from social work teams, **25%** other including self-referrals from children and young people, referrals from

IROs, CPOs, St Basil's, Childrens private residential homes, carers, parents, other Trust services.

Top two advocacy issues



Support at meetings

This has been the highest number of an issues for which children and young people access advocacy support.

Impact

- Advocates support children and young to participate and share their views and lead where possible in their meetings. Support provided at Child In Care reviews, Family Group Conferences, FGC review meetings, Child Protection reviews.
- For children and young people that are parents and are in care and care experienced, we support at their child's Core group meetings, Child Protection reviews, Children in Care reviews and any other meetings that they are invited to in relation to these matters. Support has been provided at education related meetings (PEP) and meetings around education/placement issues.
- Advocates support at meetings regards complaints, which can be resolved informally or progress through different stages of the formal complaint's procedure. Advocates also support children to take their complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- We have been supporting a pilot, which has become built into practice, where we support young people aged between 15-17yrs at initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC). This was an identified age group whose views were underrepresented in this forum. Young people have been supported to attend and share their views at these meetings.
- Since December 2022 Advocates support 16-17yr olds in presenting homeless regards understanding their rights and attending any complaints meetings.

Placements

Issues around placement matters have been the second highest reason for children and young people accessing advocacy support. 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 have supported children and young people to make a complaint and freeze a placement move pending an outcome of the investigation of the complaint. Although this happens rarely the advocacy service does act swiftly to ensure children are not moved without additional oversight and consideration being made.

- All children U16 in unregulated placements get an offer of advocacy and meeting from the service. Children and young people who are 16/17 and need 'care' but are placed in unregulated placements also now receive the same level of service.
- The service is now also providing advocacy to children and young people in placements judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted and/or have compliance/safeguarding issues. A notification is received from both BCT placements and commissioning and separately from The Childrens Commissioner of England Office regards BCT children and young people placed in such placements. Advocacy offered to children and young people and feedback provided to commissioning and CCE office to confirm this has happened.
- More recently the service will also support children where the home/placement they live in is subject to LADO/Position of Trust issues.

Additional ways we are impacting on the lives of children and young people and best practice examples

- The service has seen an increase by 25% in the number of children and young people accessing advocacy support in the last two financial years.
- We provide regular advocacy visits all Birmingham Childrens Trust Children's home and now have added Bridgeland's to this service.
- 50% of children and young people aged 15yrs -17yrs who were referred at their ICPC have accessed advocacy support. Previously this age group of young people were not being represented.
- In August 2023 the service was involved in a data audit from the Childrens Commissioner of England team whereby information was requested for the 2022-2023 period regards number for children and young people accessing advocacy support from the service.
- Childrens Rights Training focused on Participation, Advocacy and Corporate Parenting was delivered to AYSE social workers during their induction weeks
- We have been using data more to identify gaps and trends. For example, a drop in referrals for Care leavers has led to an increase in referrals from previous years following work with the 18+ team. This consisted of features in the care leavers newsletter, attendance at team and service meetings and networking with care leavers at the two annual Care leavers conferences.
- Our children and young people's participation groups as a result of the main themes have delivered training on 'support at meetings' to professionals chairing meetings (social workers/IROs).
- Our staff have received Training from the Childrens Commissioner office to better support children and young people and ensure they understand their rights when a placement move is being considered or planned.
- We now 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.
- 6 monthly meetings with CP team and HOS to discuss data for ICPC referrals and review of advocacy offer.
- 6 weekly advocacy team meetings to discuss changes in policy/law and share good practise

Individual Young People and the Impact of Advocacy

1. A young person was being removed from his placement without a placement disruption meeting or consultation. He was informed he would be moving the next day. His current placement was with his younger sibling. Not only were processes of placement moves not followed accordingly but there was also an issue of sibling separation. The advocate was able to support the young person with a formal complaint to freeze the placement move whilst proper practices and processes/consultation were followed.
2. A young person was informed that they had an ICPC meeting only a few days before this was to take place. 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 initially. 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 with the support of the advocate. The children and young people informed the advocate that they never trusted children's services. They said this was the first time they felt listened to and 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 established a trust in the young person in the social work system also.

Quote from young person: ***"My advocate helped me understand what my meeting was about. I was able to share my views for the meeting. It's the first time it felt like someone is listening to me, and making sure I was being listened to by others."***

3. A young person was subject to a Child Protection plan and process. During the advocacy intervention they disclosed to the advocate that they needed support to share with their family that they were gay. The advocate supported them to discuss this with their family and in the presence of their social worker too.

Quote from young person: ***"I am so happy you are my advocate as you helped me to share with my family and my social worker my views on my sexual orientation"***

4. A care experienced young person was supported by their advocate to understand what the care leaver offer was, their rights as a care leaver and how to access savings they had in previous care placements. For the latter, the advocate supported them to make a complaint and have the issue investigated. They were able to access their savings.

Quote from young person: ***"I felt listened to and if it weren't for you I don't think things will be getting done at the speed they are so I am really grateful for all the work you have done for me you don't know how much this means for me so thank you for everything"***

Areas of Development

- To promote the service more and increase the number of children and young people accessing independent advocacy
- To develop a regional forum for sharing advocacy data to help share and contrast themes and performance with other Advocacy services in the country

- Continue to deliver training to ASYE social workers around advocacy and children's rights
- To have a slot at the National annual advocacy conference to deliver training to all professionals attending regards advocacy and children's rights
- Review service provision based on feedback form children and young people
- In conjunction with CASCADE develop a framework for Advocacy model, using learning and best practice from our RAP advocacy service
- The service is in the process of having access to the Trust social care record Eclipse for recording advocacy referrals and case recordings. This will also enable easier access to data and reporting information.
- We have been we working with the Homeless Team and St Basils to produce information for 16-17yr olds homeless regards their rights and access to advocacy support. This piece of work is in consultation with the Participation groups such as the Children In Care Council and Care Leavers Forum.

8. Participation

New name and identity for our groups and forums

We are proud to show the new name and logo that all our groups created. Our Digital Marketing Apprentice helped put our children and young people's ideas into a design. 'United and Unique' reflects our expanding participation groups that include our Junior Children in Care Council (Junior CIC), Children in Care Council (CICC), Care Leavers Forum, Don't Disability, LGBTQ+ and Young Parent's Project. There are plans for two more groups in 2024/25.



Work and Impact

Recruitment

- Young people have interviewed and influence recruitment of staff in the trust including all our ASYE cohort throughout the year, this has totalled more than four weeks of interviews from our trained pool of young people. Other interviews included the Assistant Head of the IRO Service, the Head of Service for Early Help and new IRO's.

Training and Conferences

- Young parents presented at the launch of the regional multi-agency Perinatal Pathway that they co-produced, they shared the journey of the work and used their personal experiences to motivate professionals to use the new pathway and change their practice
- Our Young Parents have helped to produce training material (including video) for the Perinatal Pathway they co-produced. This now form parts of midwives training.
- Young People provided content and supported training to the new cohort of Trust ASYE's.

- 'Be Present' is a care experience training for professionals, apprentice designed and delivered by our apprentices. This was piloted and is now being rolled out across the Trust.
- Our young people attended the National Advocacy Conference where they ran a workshop helping people to understand how to hear children's voices in situations where it is especially difficult for them to be heard.

Shaping Practice

- Our Young Parents continued their journey to change practice with their experiences and learning points shared with the Pre-Birth Service team at their team meeting.
- A group of our care experienced young people were invited to attend the Council House to speak the Mental Health scrutiny panel. They shared their views and experiences of mental health support with councillors to help them evaluate current services and make the changes that are needed
- The children and young people from our group shared what makes good participation to produce and support our Participation standards.
- Young people took part in a paid consultation on their experiences of advocacy to shape research and the national advocacy standards.
- Over 30 young people were involved in a consultation event with Lovell to shape the programme in three key areas training, employment and housing. Their feedback has now shaped the content of the final programme.
- Our social media and marketing apprentices designed Lovell's 'We Got You' programme to support care leavers and homeless young people from St Basils.
- Young people shared experiences of the Health Assessments with Children in Care Nurses.
- Our Care Leavers Forum was relaunched and is now chaired by a care experienced young person who has turned 25. This forms part of the services improved offer to support opportunities for Care Leavers post 25.
- Our Don't Disability group drew attention to how their additional needs (communication needs and physical access) create additional barriers. The CIC nurses & lead GPs met together with the participation lead, to plan on increasing their support and consultation with children and young people in 2024.

Corporate Parenting Board and our Takeover Board

- NHS colleagues were also part of the Takeover Board meeting and were keen to hear from our young people to shape what originally was a prenatal pathway, following feedback from our young parents this moved into a perinatal pathway to ensure support does not stop and this extends post pregnancy. The Perinatal Pathway was coproduced

and this year our Young Parents have helped to produce training material that includes a video. This now form parts of midwives training.

- Our young parents felt support came too late and that they needed earlier support and intervention “why don’t you come at the beginning instead of the end”. The ‘New growth’ project (developed from our ‘Breaking the Cycle’ project is now embedded in practice and forms part of the offer for all children in care and care leavers who are due to have a baby
- Our groups and forums hosted two in person takeover boards this is now influencing training across the Trust in a number of areas LGBTQ+ and disability. It is also shaping changes to Pathway Planning and transitions post 16. Our ‘All as One’ (LGBTQ+) group have started to design content for new training in the Trust.
- Young people also delivered to the Health themed Corporate Parenting Board helping professionals to understand the barriers they have when accessing physical & mental health services.
- Young people were part of the Corporate Parenting filming. This has now launched on our website and provided some great content and material showcasing our young people and ways to support them. [Corporate Parenting | Birmingham Children's Trust \(birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk\)](https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/corporate-parenting)

Some of Our Events

- Young Parents Retreat The aim of the session was to ensure every woman had a safe space to restore, retreat and re-energise for life when feeling depleted. It enabled the group to look at ways to develop and strengthen their bond with other members of the group to enable them to grow through sharing their lived experiences.
- Young Parents Mother’s Day Event The Bfriends Charity kindly paid for all the young parents to attend Clayton Hotel and have a 3-course dining experience for Mother’s Day. This was received very well by the young parents, as they felt special and cared for.

Eid Events Young people that celebrate Eid were invited to a 3-course meal with prizes, music and entertainment. The event was great opportunity for young people to make new friends and spend a special time in the company of other young people. A few social workers/personal advisors attended too, which the young people really liked as they were able to share their culture and show their supporters how much fun they were having! Young people really appreciated the experience and left with smiles on their faces. We also had a family fun day with over 600 people in attendance.

All together days Every half term throughout the year our forums/young people meet as a collective. They have shared that when they meet, they would like a more “youth group” approach. We listened to what they that wanted and we have offered lots of different activities such as PS4, snooker, table tennis, creative arts, bouncy castle, biscuit decorating, easter egg hunts, bonnet making, making healthy noodles to take home and more! The children and young people have said this is a great way to relax and spend time with their friends.

The Year Ahead

Children and young people are strengthening their participation work and planning a range of co-production, consultations, training, interviewing of staff (including all of our ASYE cohort) and still finding time for their own campaigns.

Areas for Development

- Improved transitions and supporting 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
- Development of young people voice at the Corporate Parenting Board and looking at Ambassador type role for young people
- Improved support, planning and delivery of Take Over Boards
- Looking at bank/paid expert by experience roles
- Development of QA and Young Inspectors
- Looking at how Participation broadens across other areas of the Trust
- Exploring the widening of support to parent/carers
- Maximizing Rights and Participation Apprentice roles

This year we are really keen to reach as many children in care and care experience young people as possible, so more views are represented. Our Social Media and Marketing Apprentice has created our new social media pages. We want people to follow these and promote them so that children and young people can communicate with us and give feedback in different ways. If you want to join a group or find out more email advocacy@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk or connect through Instagram, Twitter or TikTok.



@unitedunique_



@UnitedUnique_



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9. 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.