



# County Durham Corporate Parenting Panel

**Annual Report**  
April 2019 - March 2020



## What is a Corporate Parent

Local Authorities must provide the care, support and security that young people need if they can't stay at home safely and become the young people's 'corporate parent'.

Being a corporate parent isn't just up to the Corporate Parenting Panel, everyone should be looking out for our children and young people, and every councillor and council employee has a role to play as the eyes and ears of the community.

Being a corporate parent means doing whatever we can to support young people in our care and our care leavers, to help them to achieve their full potential and to have the best possible outcomes.

## Why are children in care?

Young people are looked after for a variety of reasons including neglect and abuse. They could also be in care if their parents are unable to look after them because of their own complex health needs or behaviours. Some young people have no parents to care for them, or they could be unaccompanied asylum seekers.

# Message from the Chair!



Ivan Jewell  
Chair of the CPP

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP). My name is Ivan Jewell and I am a Durham County Council Councillor representing Burnopfield and Dipton.

I take great pleasure in introducing the Corporate Parenting Panel's third annual report.

As you will be aware, the global COVID-19 pandemic affected the delivery of children's services across the whole of England, and in Durham staff, partners and volunteers played a key role in coordinating responses to the outbreak to ensure that our children and young people, and their carers received support and protection during this difficult time.

I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and dedication during the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as their continued commitment over the last year to improve outcomes for our children and young people, which was reflected with the CPP being shortlisted for the LGC awards 2020 in the Children's Services category. Due to the pandemic, we won't find out how we've done until October 2020 but being in the finals is a great achievement.

“  
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”

## Where are children in care?

Children and young people can be in care in a range of settings, including foster care, children's homes, supported lodgings, and secure accommodation – the council is corporate parent to all of them.



## Message from Children in Care Council (CICC) co-opted members

I have been a regular attendee of the Corporate Parenting Panel – representing young people from the CICC and presenting items that the young people want to raise. I have been able to speak freely in the meetings and have a valid input.

As part of our collaboration, there have been some really good changes, for example the language document that the CICC created has now been rolled out across the council and social workers are individualising the language and terms they use with the young people they work with to ensure it includes the young people's personal preferences.

“Overall it has been a great year working with the Corporate Parenting Panel. A lot of positive changes have been made and hopefully there's a lot more to come.”

### **Amber Boyd, Co-opted member**

While I have been on the Corporate Parenting Panel, I have grown higher respect for everyone involved with young people in County Durham. Before I joined, I was very sceptical about what those within Durham County Council did for young people.

I was offered an opportunity to become a co-opted member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and from this I learnt a lot of life changing advice and understanding of what everyone does, how they want to help and improve young people's lives and how they try to achieve this.

The Corporate Parenting Panel encourage young people to talk about what they want, and to share how they think things could change to help others who are in the same boat.

One of the issues I raised was around discount cards for young people who are in care/leaving care, and this has been identified as a priority area of focus for 2020/21.

Another piece of work which I am involved in is the Care Experienced Young Inspectors for Children's Residential Homes, which has also been identified as a priority area of focus for 2020/21. Hopefully we will be the first Council within the North East to do this.

I would like to say a massive thanks to everyone on the Corporate Parenting Panel for believing in every young person out there and without the dedicated staff within Durham County Council, I wouldn't have had the confidence to do what I'm doing today and wouldn't have believed in myself. Without them we would not be able to help as many young people out there and hearing stories of all the work they do in the background is heart-warming.

“I would like to thank Investing in Children and the Corporate Parenting Panel for supporting me on this GREAT JOURNEY.”

### **Ian McLeod, Co-opted member**

You can find more information on the CICC [HERE](#)

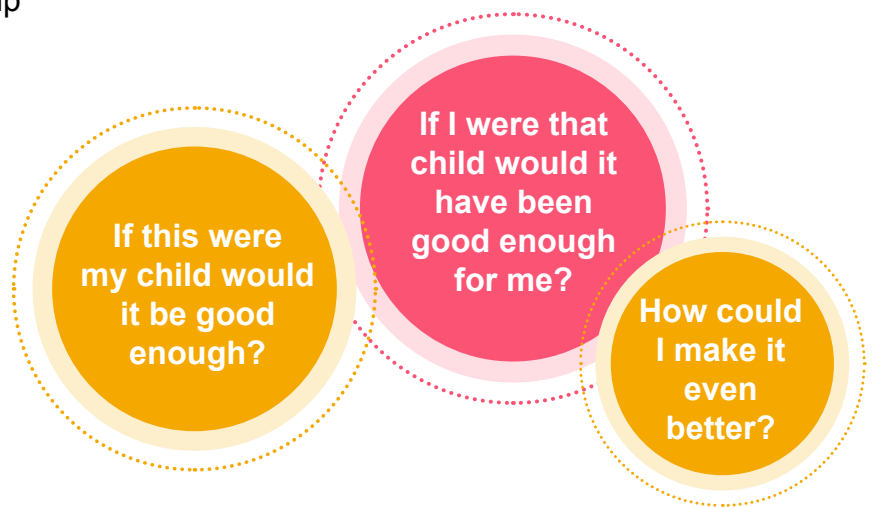


# The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel is a group that is part of the council, which is called a committee.

It has 21 councillors as well as council officers. There are also 10 other members, including school representatives and young people's representatives to make sure there is a broad range of experience and knowledge and that the voice of children and young people is heard, and actively listened to.

Corporate parents have responsibility to act for the children and young people in our care as a parent would for their own child.



## Corporate Parenting Panel responsibilities








There are a number of things which the Corporate Parenting Panel must do:

1. Make sure the council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers, including:
  - Young people in residential care
  - Children and young people in foster care
  - Children placed for adoption
  - Children placed at home under Care Planning. Placement and Case Review regulations
  - Young people who are living in supported lodgings
  - Young people in secure homes
  - Young people in custody
2. Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers.
3. Work in partnership with other agencies to make improvements for our children and young people in care.
4. Oversee the Virtual School for looked after children and young people. For more information visit <http://www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtuelschool>. A sub group has been established to lead on this work.
5. Oversee Aycliffe Secure Services. A sub group has been established to lead on this work.

More information on the Corporate Parenting Panel can be found in the [Constitution of the Council](#)



## Updates against 2019/20 priorities

What we said we would focus on	What young people think	Where we are now
Working to involve children and young people in completing placement risk assessment forms (for foster care).		We met regularly to review the language and criteria used to describe a young person's individual circumstances, lots of support was given and they were re-written and re-named Safety Plans. The service is now working to ensure that these are in place for every young person.
Review Freedom cards to see if additional offers and discounts can be included.		There are 588 freedom cards currently in use and most are used by young people themselves. From January 2020 the cards are limited to Leisure Centres only, and expiry dates have been extended due to lockdown.
Work with school settings so that they better understand the needs of children who are looked after.		Progress has been made with the virtual head to better promote young people's individual voices about pupil premium funds and personal education plans. There is still further work to be done to hear young people's views in a school setting, which will be supported further.
Create more job opportunities for care leavers.		Lots of work has taken place to look into this, but given the size of County Durham/number of different providers, this is proving very difficult. Support will continue to be provided on an individual basis for young people, and a national covenant will look into this in the future, and hopefully things will improve.
Free leisure activities for care leavers		Care leavers get free access to DCC leisure centres to enable them to swim or go to the gym which promotes a healthy lifestyle and supports their physical and mental wellbeing.
Ringfenced apprenticeship positions within DCC for care leavers 'The Family Firm'.		There are four care leavers in apprenticeship posts across DCC, and in addition to these positions there has been agreement to ring-fence six apprenticeship posts for Care Leavers. Discussions are also taking place to consider alternative work experience placements and sessional work for our care leavers, which will provide more opportunities.
Opening a children's home at Aycliffe Secure Centre to improve transition from secure accommodation into the community.		We have worked over this period to ensure that transition planning is at the forefront of all care planning. Whilst we know that community placements are hard to identify for complex young people, we have continued to drive forward that comprehensive planning around transition is clearly linked to success in the community.

# Care Leavers Challenge



**In February 2020, members of the Children in Care Council challenged Councillors and Officers to live on £57.90 a week, which is what care leavers who are not in employment receive.**

Two Durham County Council Councillors, and two Durham County Council Officers took part in the challenge and all of them agreed that it was a very difficult challenge.

Cllr Tanya Tucker said “I’ve never done anything so hard. It’s impossible to ‘live’ on £57.90 per week. You may manage to ‘exist’ but that’s not living”

Cllr Heather Smith, vice chair of the CPP said “I missed being warm more than a greater variety of food. We were not

hungry, but we were VERY cold. Not just care

leavers, but also many elderly people have to choose between heating and eating. People need to be able to afford both to live healthily”.

Jayne Watson said “I made it to the end of the week with 4p left,

but I was surviving NOT thriving. Had I needed to get the bus anywhere or buy medication etc I would have really struggled.



I missed lots of things, but above all it was heating – being cold at home was unbearable”.



Dawn Barron said “Celebrating special occasions would be almost impossible, as every penny is needed to live” Living on a very limited budget for a week or two, knowing that normal life will resume afterwards, is very different from care leavers having to manage week in, week out, on very little money. The strain this placed on their physical and mental wellbeing must be acknowledged.

We must also take into consideration that young people may never have had the chance to learn the cooking skills that would allow them to eat healthily on a low budget.

Work will take place from this learning to see how we can support young people with some of the issues they face, for example direct debit payments for electricity and gas, and transport issues as transport costs ate up a large proportion of the budget and are a very significant barrier for young people to travel for education, work and any social activities.

“  
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”

# Children in Care Council (CICC)

The CICC is a group for children and young people who are looked after in County Durham and is supported by Investing in Children (IIC). The CICC members meet monthly to talk about issues which are important to them, highlight what works and share stories of the support they have received. This forum is well established, with senior managers and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel, managers from the independent reviewing officer (IRO) services, Virtual School staff, fostering services staff, and looked after children service staff regularly attending CICC meetings.

## Co-opted positions for CICC members:

Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions providing panel representation and attend each meeting (supported by IIC) to share feedback from the CICC. In addition, the CICC have a standing item on each Corporate Parenting Panel agenda, where they provide feedback from CICC meetings, ensuring members of the CPP hear real unfiltered feedback directly from the young people. The young people are involved in decision making within the CPP, which is fed back to leads to influence service decisions and developments as necessary.

## Joint CICC/ CPP meetings

In addition to the formal CPP meetings, children and young people from the CICC (supported by IIC) host a joint meeting with the CPP every 6 months.

The young people set the agenda/venue for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the CICC.

This is less formal than the CPP meeting and provides an opportunity for all of the young people who are part of the CICC to raise issues which are important to them, and have

discussions directly with members and officers of the CPP.

Feedback from the discussions is collated by IIC and key issues are presented by the young people from the CICC at a formal CPP meeting, for further discussion. Work takes place to address these issues within the service, and feedback is provided to the CICC at the next joint meeting.



## Training sessions

Young people from the CICC deliver foster carer training to potential foster families and feedback has been that this is invaluable in informing potential foster families to make informed decisions.

Ten potential foster carers attended a joint training session with the CICC on 12th November. This was facilitated by care experienced young people who are in or have left care. The potential foster carers feedback demonstrates the impact this training has had, and it was felt that the CYP brought a distinctive view to the role of future foster care and it was valued.

**“Absolutely amazing session, so interesting, unbelievable to think children go through these things, without any home comforts, emergency care and hearing how they felt and how we, as foster carers can support these young people and what their needs and wants are”.**

- In total 4 foster carer sessions have been delivered to 48 foster carers.
- Young people from the CICC also deliver training to those on Social Worker courses in the North East, ensuring these students understand what young people want from a social worker from the outset.
- In total, 6 sessions have been delivered to 101 students who study at Durham university, Sunderland university and New College Durham.
- Head of Service training was delivered in 2019 to ensure that senior leaders are aware of the views of children and young people and can use this feedback to shape service delivery.
- Members of the CPP also receive regular training from the CICC on issues which are important to them, and the CPP ask young people to hold them to account if outcomes do not improve over time.

## Panel representation:

The young people also sit on the fostering panel, and supported lodgings panel to provide diverse representation, from a young people's perspective. They have been involved in five fostering and five supported lodgings panels to date.

Young people were involved in the design and roll out of a marketing and recruitment drive for foster carers, coming up with a range of ideas on how some of the myths surrounding this can be dispelled. Young people from CICC fronted this campaign, with a push for placing brothers/sisters together.

## Recruitment and selection:

Where posts are in the Children Looked After / Care Leavers service remit, young people from the CICC are part of the recruitment and selection process to ensure that the new workers are fully aware and signed up to meeting the needs of our young people from the outset.

## Investing in Children Membership:

IiC currently work with 44 Durham County Council teams, who have either achieved the Investing in Children's award or are in the process of going through the award. These teams include Children Looked After Teams, Families First Teams and One Point Centre's.





## Use of language:



Consideration is being given to the language used across Durham County Council as a result of feedback from children and young people.

A language document was co-produced with CICC and a session was held with the Social Care senior management team that was led by young people to re-enforce the importance of this. Further work is scheduled to take place to address this throughout 2020, and the following initial changes have been made:

- Using 'children who are looked after' instead of 'LAC'
- Using 'family, brother/sister' instead of 'siblings'
- Using 'family time' instead of 'contact'

## Children's homes:



At the request of our young people, photographs and profiles of **Regulation 44** visitor are on display in all residential settings so that the young people know who's who before they come to visit their home. This is real information about the members, not their corporate pictures or biographies, but about them as a person, their likes and dislikes etc.

Young people requested **comments boxes** to be in place in some residential settings in case they are not on site whilst the Regulation 44 visits are taking place, therefore still enabling them to share their views with the inspectors and visiting members. These were implemented and are in operation in some of our homes.

Young people also said they would like to know who their **local Councillors** are, so information has been shared with young people and hosted on the Children in care Council website for easy access.



## Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Changes:

In November the CICC were invited to a Team Development day whereby the IRO Service were reviewing their annual team plan. Young people attended and facilitated conversations to provoke conversations and changes to take forwards. These changes have been incorporated into the IRO team plan. One of the changes was to create an IRO Profile to be shared with children and young people to know who is going to be visiting them before their meetings.

## Council Tax:



Exemptions and concessions help care-leavers under our Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. This came on the back of our Care Leavers Challenge and to date approx. 230 care leavers have benefitted from this.

## Winter fuel allowance:



Payments are made to care leavers on a discretionary basis to help tackle fuel poverty and to date, 32 young people have received this payment.



# Local offer for Care Leavers

We continue to develop our Local Offer for care Leavers, click [here](#) for more information on the services available, and to find out what young people can expect from us . . .

Last year, feedback from the CICC indicated that they did not like how the Local Offer was hosted on the council's website. Unfortunately, we are not able to change the style and design within the Durham County Council website, so we will continue to make this offer information as easily accessible and relevant to its audience by working closely with communications and marketing team.

## Promise

**Durham County Council's promise launched officially on Friday 26 October 2018.**

Young People from CiCC have been involved in supporting the council with the creation of the promise and regularly review it to make sure it is fit for purpose, and that we are doing what we have said we will do. If we are not, the young people can raise this at a CICC meeting and this will be fed into the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## Christmas lunch

Members of the CPP donated money from their own budgets to pay for our care leavers to go out for a Xmas meal 2019. Word of this spread, and members right across DCC said they would like to contribute as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities. The service received enough money to take young people out for a meal (and all young people were able to get drinks for themselves at the bar), to buy them all a box of chocolates, and where necessary a gift for their children too, to encompass corporate grandparenting responsibilities. Enough money was secured to repeat this in 2020.

The young people chose a Chinese buffet in "In Shanghai" in Durham city as the venue. We bought Xmas crackers and decorated the tables. 31 YP attended the Xmas meal, and 2 young people brought along their own children. They were supported by 14 staff from the Young People's Service. In addition, 12 Durham young people who are living out of county and were unable to make it to the meal received a £20 supermarket voucher.







21 young people  
have passed their  
practical driving  
tests to date

## Drive Project

This project supports 15 young people a year, providing up to the value of £500 for driving lessons. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on.

The project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for looked after young people 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

The driving schools are contacted regularly by IIC for a progress update. If the project has been fully allocated young people will be placed on a waiting list until a space becomes available.

Funding is renewed from Durham County Council annually. 21 young people have passed their practical driving tests to date:

- 2017/18: 6 passes
- 2018/19: 9 passes
- 2019/20: 5 passes to date

There are 25 Young People currently learning to drive, 10 of which are carried forward from 2018/19. Two young people from 2019/20 who received the initial funding are continuing with their driving lessons and funding themselves. There are 53 Young people on the waiting list to join this initiative.

## LGC Awards

LGO Awards  
2020

In November 2019, the CPP were shortlisted for the LGC awards 2020 in the Children's Services category. This was a huge achievement for the Panel as a record number of entries were submitted, so to be shortlisted was an absolutely outstanding achievement in itself.

The awards ceremony was due to take place in March 2020, however this was postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic, so we have to wait until 28 October 2020 to see if we have won – watch this space.



## 400,000 step challenge

An officer from DCC undertook the step challenge and raised £108.50 to go towards fun activities for the CICC.



**Subsidised Transport:** Discussions are taking place to see how subsidised transport can be offered to our young people; however this is difficult given the geographies within County Durham and the different providers serving these communities.

**Extension of the Freedom Card for Care Leavers:** Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have requested exploration into the expansion of the Freedom Cards to establish a discount scheme for care leavers, following feedback from young people at the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting and at their meeting with Terry Collins, Chief Executive Officer. Work is taking place to develop this, and discussions will take place with the CICC to ensure that the discounts are offered in places where they shop.

Young people now have access to the Durham County Council staff scheme, and work has taken place to contact some other companies who provide discounts for Durham County Council staff to see if they could provide discounts for care leavers.

Further discussions and developments will need to take place once companies are able to reassess their economic position after the Covid-19 pandemic and see if/what they are able to offer.

### Teacher training

This is scheduled to be delivered by the CICC to teachers and designated teachers in schools across County Durham by May 2020.















### Care Experienced Young Inspectors for Children's Residential Homes

Young Inspectors would help us to shape the services we provide in Durham County Council Children's Residential homes.

The Inspectors will be developing a framework and toolkit, accessing training and support to allow them to carry out the role of a Young Inspector. The role would involve them visiting homes and sharing their views and observations on the services provided to the young people and their home.



## Councillors who do Reg 44 inspections

Home	Memeber	
<b>Tow Law</b>		Cllr Anne Reed
<b>Park House</b>		Cllr Ivan Jewell
<b>High Etherley</b>		Cllr Christine Wilson
<b>West Rainton</b>		Cllr Jude Considine
<b>9 Cedar Drive</b>		Cllr Pauline Crathorne
<b>Coxhoe</b>		Cllr Liz Maddison
<b>Moorside</b>		Cllr Beaty Bainbridge
<b>New Lea House</b>		Cllr Jude Considine
<b>Framwellgate Moor</b>		Cllr Mamie Simmons
<b>(Auckland - secure)</b>		Cllr George Richardson
<b>(Barnard - secure)</b>		Cllr Ivan Jewell
<b>(Lumely - secure)</b>		Cllr Eunice Huntington
<b>(Walworth - secure)</b>		Cllr Joe Makepeace
<b>(Durham House - secure)</b>		Cllr Elizabeth Scott

## Key performance data

- Our number of children in care increased from 2016 and then stabilised but began to increase again during 2019/20.
- **414 became looked after and 339 children ceased to be looked after.**
- 55 children were adopted in 2019/20. This equates to 16% of all children who left care. This is higher than in England (12%) and in line with our statistical neighbours (16%).
- **Around eight in ten of our children in care are placed in foster care or with friends and family (45% DCC foster carers, 18% independent fostering agency carers and 14% friends and family).**
- 9% (80) of our children in care live over 20 miles from their home address, outside of the County Durham boundary. This is lower than in England (15%).
- **68 children in care went missing, accounting for a total of 315 missing incidents. Seven in ten children completed a return to home interview (RTHI), however the child/young person can refuse this.**
- 94% of our children who had been in care for at least 12 months had an up-to-date health assessment and 87% had a dental check in the last 12 months.
- **68% of our care leavers aged 17-18 were in education, employment and training (EET), in comparison to the England average of 64% and the statistical neighbour rates of 63%.**
- 54% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in education, employment and training (EET), in comparison to the England average of 52% and the statistical neighbour rates of 52%.
- **93% of our care leavers aged 17-18 were in suitable accommodation, above the national rate of 88% and above our statistical neighbour rates of 91%.**
- 83% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation, below the national rate of 85% and the statistical neighbour rate of 87%.
- **At KS2, Durham children looked after achieved better outcomes than their peers regionally and nationally at all headline measures (Reading, Writing, Maths, GPS and in combined RWM). The gap between Children Looked After and all Durham children significantly narrowed across the board, but particularly in reading.**
- At KS4, young people in the care of Durham County Council achieved a significantly better A8 score than their peers regionally and nationally and they had better outcomes in English and Maths (grade 9-5).
- **7% more Durham children Looked After achieved 5 high grades including English and Maths than the same cohort nationally. Durham Children Looked After made better progress than children in care nationally and regionally with a higher progress 8 score. They made better progress in English, Maths, Ebac subjects and across all other subject areas, with English standing out as a real strength.**



## Work with Further Education providers

Durham Works and the Young People's Service have strong links with local colleges. Meetings with those links take place throughout the year to support transition events and activities; to share information and ensure early identification of young people with care experience; and to prevent disengagement of vulnerable students. Employment, Education and Training meetings are held monthly and have representation from the further education and regional higher education sector.

## Transition Support

During year 11, a number of activities are undertaken in order to ensure that Looked After young people and Care Leavers make an effective sustained transition into post-16 education, employment and training. For example, every Looked After young person was offered a careers guidance interview from a Specialist Progression Adviser, in order to explore their options and to develop an action plan (often through attendance at Transition PEP meetings to provide IAG support).

## Post-16 Support

Looked After young people and Care Leavers receive wrap-a-round support from their named Specialist Progression Adviser in order to sustain their progression into education, employment or training or to re-engage them in learning if they are NEET.

## Apprenticeships

Durham County Council's ambition to appoint a minimum of 6 Apprentices to ring-fenced positions during the recruitment programme 2020-2021 is well under way. In preparation for the resumption of the recruitment process 15 care leavers have been identified as interested in an apprenticeship position within Durham county Council.

Supporting more Looked After young people and Care Leavers into sustained post-16 education, employment and training is a key priority for Durham County Council and is a recognition of its importance on improving the life chances of Looked After young people and Care Leavers in terms of their future income, health, sense of wellbeing and purpose.

## DurhamWorks

Additional support is provided to Looked After young people and Care Leavers through the DurhamWorks programme. Further details can be found [HERE](#). This is a European funded, Durham County Council led partnership project that supports young people aged 16-24 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) and resident in County Durham to progress into education, employment or training. The current funding is available until July 2021. Further details of DurhamWorks can be found [HERE](#).

# Celebrations

## Care Day 2020

Care day is the world's largest international celebration of children and young people with care experiences. This year, our 2020 care day event, which was planned by young people from the CICC, was attended by 82 people from across the care community, including 16 young people.

The event was themed around dreams and hopes for future, and young people were given an opportunity to attend a workshop with music artist Ric Flow, who himself has care and mental health experience.

The session focused on the stigma of mental health when young people are in care and as care leavers. A song was created and was performed on the day.

Young people's dreams and hopes for the future were hung on the Dream Tree branches.

## Foster Carer Awards

Unfortunately, our foster carer awards event was cancelled due to Covid-19, a decision on when it will be held will be taken as soon as possible but we continue to recognise and appreciate the exceptional work of our foster carers throughout the year.

## Winter Wonderland

Durham Children in Care Council (CICC) and Durham County Council Fostering Service jointly supported a Winter Wonderland experience to celebrate the festive season in 2019. Young people from CICC received £1000 from the Key Fund after presenting to a key fund panel about how funds would be used to develop an experience for the care community. The event was very successful with over 170 attendees and festive activities ranging from a silent disco to a Santa's Grotto.

My dream  
to be successful  
in what I choose to do and  
to make good change or  
difference to everyone's  
life.



My dream  
is to have  
stable mental  
health and  
achieve the  
job of becoming  
a make-up  
artist.





# Epic Awards

The Children Looked After EPIC Awards (Exceptional People in Care) took place on 6 November 2019 at the Durham Indoor Bowling Club. It was a festival themed event to celebrate the achievements of looked after young people and care leavers. The event was aimed at young people who were aged between 15 to 25 years old.

The categories for the awards were:

Higher Education Achievement

Educational Achievement

Amazing Young Person Achievement

Outstanding Achievement

IIC Award (Investing in Children)

The winners received a certificate and £50 voucher. Those who were shortlisted for each category also received a certificate.

Entertainment and food was provided on the night with dancing, singing (by staff and young people), fire-eating, photo booth, a variety of stalls, games, festival make-up and a group Spice Girls dance was performed by staff from the Young People's Service at the end.



## Digital Voice Project

In June 2019 the Corporate Parenting Panel received an update on the Digital Voice project, which produced video profiles of children in care, using media and animation enabling the young people to speak honestly and openly about themselves and their experiences of social workers, whilst remaining anonymous. The work also enabled a summary of key messages to be pulled together for social workers from the young people.

**The films were very powerful and contained moving messages. The project was showcased at a 'movie night' themed event hosted at Durham Town Hall, and the final film is hosted on you tube, a link can be found [HERE](#).**





## Virtual School



Melanie Stubbs took up the post of Virtual Head in January 2020 and has responsibility for vulnerable groups, safeguarding and Children Looked After. Melanie is looking forward to working with all schools who have Children Looked After on their role and believes she has joined Durham County Council at an exciting time, when the Virtual School service offer is being reviewed ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved to support our children and young people.

In Durham, school attendance is good for our children in care, and there have been no permanent exclusions since 2014.

The introduction of Welfare Call in September to complete the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has been met favourably by all who use it and has enabled the virtual school caseworkers to monitor the progress of children and young people and champion for the best outcomes. This process allows the PEP's to move with the child electronically as they move through each Key Stage. Training has been offered to Designated Teachers and Governors to support the implementation of the new PEP system.

Caseworkers work with schools to identify what is best for the child and can advise them

about the range of interventions we can put in place to best meet the needs of the child. Schools have previously had training on Attachment and Trauma which is a key area for many of our children. Designated teacher networks have focused on this area again this year and teachers participated in a session led by Michael Bettencourt, NNECL (National Network for the Education of Care Leavers) who has over 15 years experience working as a Virtual School Head.

In January 2020, the Virtual School Head attended the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting, and answered questions from the young people from the CICC. This was a very informative event and we were able to answer their questions about the processes behind PEP meetings and how their information is shared. We are looking forward to the group leading one of our training sessions for designated teachers and launching the work they have completed around working with the designated teacher. This has come together in the form of an information leaflet for schools.



In Durham, school attendance is good for our children in care, and there have been no permanent exclusions since 2014.



- **Review the education model to ensure the individual needs of every child and young person are met;** Through carefully planned and ongoing multi-agency work to support individuals with a higher level of presenting need, staffing has been adapted to provide bespoke timetables for individual young people. This ensures the holistic needs of every child are met as part of this wider picture. Whilst retaining the core model, which replicates the model's young people are familiar with and will hopefully transition back into, staff have been utilised very effectively to ensure that the needs of those for whom this model presents any challenges, are met to an equal level.
- **Increase opportunities for learners to practice and develop their reading and writing skills in every lesson.** Provide clear and specific intervention for young people who are not yet functional readers; This has been a focus of staff training and development, led by the two curriculum leaders. The existing Curriculum Group meeting structure has been utilised, as well as specific CPD sessions, to focus on enabling teachers to reflect on the opportunities they could offer to young people within their lessons to further practice their reading and writing skills. The template for work scrutiny exercises and learning walks have been adapted to ensure observers/reviewers home in on this specifically to provide further guidance to staff. Initial assessments able swift identification of each young person's strengths and deficits in basic skills, meaning that once reading age is established on entry, any young person who is not a functional reader can be supported through a reading recovery programme without delay. Where young people are functional, but not yet fluent, their reading is prioritised as part of their English programme.
- **Ensure attendance remains a focus throughout the academic year for groups and individuals;** Attendance continues to be monitored weekly and monthly and this remains very high. Given that on average, each young person spends less than a tenth of their secondary school career with us, attendance is absolutely critical. This is particularly important given that the majority of young people have had poor school attendance prior to arriving in the centre. Attendance at a subject by subject level is reviewed prior to every MATAC, with any pattern of concern being referred to the lead teacher overseeing inclusion. This is part of a wider project aimed at identifying and proactively overcoming any barrier to progress and achievement.
- **Motivate all children and young people to achieve accredited certificates and qualifications and promote an accredited curriculum;** Focus remains on ensuring that every child achieves Functional Skills qualifications in English and Maths as a minimum, as this is absolutely critical in terms of enabling them to progress beyond Aycliffe. As the majority of learners continue to be KS4 and 5 education staff actively seek to link their accreditation to their career aspirations so that there can be a clear pathway into further education identified. The qualifications that young people achieve at Aycliffe continue to enable this progress. Outcomes in these subjects are testament to the hard work of skilled teaching staff who motivate young people to achieve more and more over time. The wider curriculum is accredited through ASDAN, specifically chosen because of the skills embedded within this; working independently, working together, problem solving, and the use of functional maths, English and ICT.





## Community

ASC strives to promote pro-social behaviour wherever possible, helping young people reconnect with society and the communities they live in. Through national charity initiatives the centre aims to help young people help other young people also going through traumatic life experiences. Young people amaze staff with their efforts and generosity in fund raising and donations towards these initiatives. Recently a non-school uniform day was held, a staff vs young people football match and an interhouse badminton tournament to raise funds for Sports Relief. The efforts and attitudes of the young people involved were exemplary, young people were proud of their achievements. At Christmas time young people at Aycliffe learned about the scale of the use of foodbanks in our country. Although Christmas time was going to be difficult for them, they knew that other people in their communities would be struggling too and decided to create food parcels to donate to our local foodbank. Young people donated some of their pocket money and care staff went to the local supermarket to buy items from the food shortages lists obtained from the local foodbanks. In addition to this, discussions were had with the director at the local foodbank about attending and volunteering opportunities.

## Practice Development:

Target work around obesity and poor relationships with food, exercise and sleep. Over the last six months several initiatives have been implemented within the children's homes and school. Including controlled portion size, understanding the nutrition in food and making healthy choices. There has been a concerted effort to encourage young people to be more active by undertaking exercise both in school and within their leisure time.

We have continued to try and look at sleeping patterns of young people and take remedial action where concerns are identified. In order to promote better sleep, we continue to have an earlier Sunday to Thursday television cut off and alongside this encourage wind down activities for example reading, colouring, Lego building and jigsaws.



# Young People's Involvement at ASC

- Young people continue to be heavily involved in the recruitment of staff based at Aycliffe Secure Centre. This process has also been used in the appointment of Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust staff who provide the community adolescent forensic service ([The Kolvin Service](#)).
- MySpace meetings continue to offer young people the opportunity to share their views and contribute to decision making within the centre. This forum is also utilised for specific pieces of work including collecting views on 'What makes a good residential worker' to aid the recruitment process, re-decoration of the admissions garage and choice of music channels are just some of the examples.
- In response to several negative comments regarding food, mechanisms have been put in place to seek the opinions of young people and make change. Food logs continue to be used for daily feedback and in addition to this feedback sheets to gather young people's views on their food 'likes', 'dislikes' and suggestions have been introduced. Information gathered from these sources forms the basis of monthly discussions with Creative Management (procured catering provider).
- A Coram voice worker has recently joined.

The process of seeking young people's views (My View) for their Multi-agency team around the child meeting is fully embedded. In future, where deemed appropriate it is envisaged that some young people will be able to attend their own meetings.

Exit surveys continue to be utilised as a way of collecting a broad range of feedback from young people prior to their discharge. In the main, comments continue to be positive:

"When I first came to Aycliffe I was scared to death, I thought I was coming to a prison where I'd be beaten up every day, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Since I've been here I have learned a lot about who I am and what I am capable of. I've learned that no matter how bad it is you can always ask for help. If it wasn't for the staff here I don't know what I would have done. I want to thank every single staff member of Lumley House for helping me and turning my life around. You helped me learn how to trust people and for that I will be forever grateful. Every single staff member helped me in their own individual way and I think that's what helped most. Thank you to all the education staff for believing in me, I wouldn't have passed my functional exams without you. More than anything thank you for not treating me like a child who knows no better! Thank you every single staff member at Aycliffe secure! x"

"Aycliffe has done everything we hoped for C and he has made tremendous progress during his time with you. Thank you for the work that you have completed with him, the care provided and the quality of the relationships that he has developed with staff especially his key workers. I hope this has helped C turn a big corner in his life and have a much happier future."

"I believe the support that K has received is outstanding and we have definitely felt that she has improved her attitude and behaviour over the duration she has been there. We believe she has matured and listened to everything you and the team have done in helping her. We are truly grateful for all the support everyone has given her."

"To all staff, especially those who looked after my grandson J. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. I don't know where J would have ended up if it hadn't have been for this Unit and the people who run it. People on the front dealing with it all and the people on the back burners making it all possible. I just wanted to say thank you and keep up your excellent work. These kids that are in your unit are exactly that, kids and have had a tough time in life. They need a bit of time, patience and sometimes tough love, but you know with all the support and help you give them they will get there and grow up responsible adults. Once again thank you so much."

## Residential Services for Children and Young People

Durham County Council currently has nine children's homes, one of which is a disability short break care service for children and young people, with a tenth home planned to open in 2020.

The service has also explored the option of developing and opening an eleventh home and an options appraisal has been conducted. Our young people are also excited about the house move for one of our current homes from the old Aycliffe site to a new home in Aycliffe later this year. The young people have been putting together some great design ideas for their bedrooms and the living areas.

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Nine of our homes are rated as good by Ofsted with one being rated as requires improvement to be good in their last inspection.

These homes support between three and five young people with complex behaviours who require a period with support from their care team to reduce risk taking behaviours and support how they will achieve their outcomes.

The homes are all located in across Durham to ensure the young people are living as close to their families and schools as possible.

All our homes benefit from a stable care team which is made up of a Registered Manager, Senior Residential staff and residential staff. The young people who live here benefit from one to one time with their key worker who ensures their views, wishes and feelings are shared, whilst this is not the only time our young people get to share their thoughts with us, it is something which the young people talk positively about.

The teams within the homes work hard to ensure the young people have access to a range of educational, social and fun activities to do, ensuring their talents and interest are recognised, valued and harnessed. There are many achievements from building an allotment and growing their own veg, to playing guitars, to a champion footballer for a local club, to singing and a lot more. Our care teams know and understand our young people, providing a good level of care and support.

Our homes are reviewed on a monthly basis by an independent visitor (Regulation 44) and every three months the independent visitor is joined by an Elected Member from the Corporate Parenting Committee.

The Regulation 45 reports provides Ofsted with an analysis of the quality of safeguarding across the home through the eyes of the Registered Manager. These reports are a statutory requirement and an area which we plan on doing some focused development work in preparation for the October and November submission.

This will ensure we are supporting the development of the managers with their analytical skills, bringing in new ideas and tools for measuring and evidencing practice and interventions, alongside triangulating the findings with the regulations and quality standards which in turn supports the content of the statutory workforce plan for the home and the quality assurance process.