

Children
are like boats
they just need
a little bit of
guidance to go
down the right path.

County Durham Corporate Parenting Panel

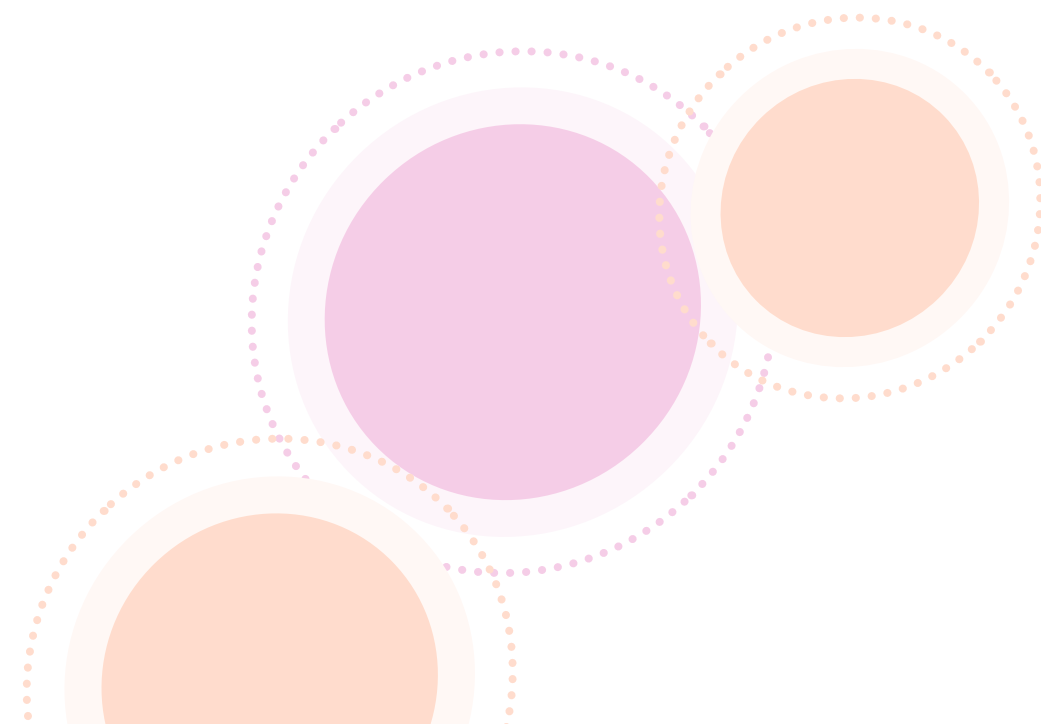
Annual Report
April 2021 - March 2022



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Message from the Children in Care Council (CICC)

representatives

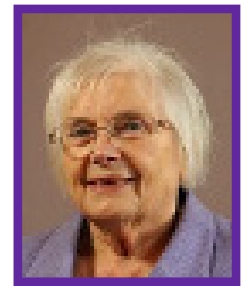
“ I have been a part of the Corporate Parenting Panel for just under a year and it's been one of the many highlights I have achieved with Durham's CICC over the years alongside Investing in Children.

Having the opportunity to be on the panel, has allowed me to build up my confidence by speaking to elected members in County Hall by sharing my own and other care experienced children and young people's thoughts and opinions about what we think needs to be done within the care system, and in Durham. ”

Caitlyn
Co-opted member



Message from the Chair!



Councillor Mamie Simmons
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, I would like to thank everyone for their continued commitment during what has been another very challenging year.

The country was at the height of the pandemic as the financial year commenced and the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic continued to impact on the delivery of services, both in County Durham and across the whole of England.

In Durham, staff, partners and volunteers have worked extremely hard and have adapted so well ensuring we were able to respond to the outbreak and to the changing rules and restrictions to ensure that all children, young people and their carers received the best possible help, advice and support.

The young people themselves have demonstrated tremendous resilience and have adapted, and often kept us right as we got used to new ways of communicating.

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Parenting Panel's fifth annual report, which outlines the work undertaken across the service to help us understand and respond to need, ensuring our young people have the best possible opportunities available to them. **March 2022**



Councillor Michelle Walton
Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

“ Working with the Corporate Parenting Panel has been an honour, me and Caitlyn being chosen as the young people to represent IIC and giving us the opportunity to talk with all the managers that I aspire to, has been great.

Personally it has helped me massively with building confidence in presenting to others and is a unique and great experience to mention in my CV.

Out of everything I have been able to do with IIC, the CPP has definitely pushed me outside of my comfort zone the most and I'm forever grateful to show my passion for the future of young children to make sure their experience of foster care is the best it can be. ”

Luke
Co-opted member

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 achieve their full potential and have the best possible outcomes. This sometimes means being a corporate grandparent too.



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.

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.



Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

The CPP 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's a broad range of experience and knowledge and that children and young people are heard, and actively responded to.

Corporate parents have responsibility to act for the children and young people in our care as a parent would for their own child, and should ask three key questions:






CPP responsibilities




There are a number of things which the CPP must do:


- ✓ 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, foster care and supported lodgings
 - Young people placed for adoption or placed at home under care planning, placement, and case review regulations
 - Young people in secure homes or in custody
- ✓ Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers.
- ✓ Work in partnership with other agencies to make improvements for our children and young people in care.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Oversee Aycliffe Secure Services. Sub-groups have been established to lead on this work.

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

Updates against 2021/22 priorities

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
<p>Transport</p>	<p>Discussions have taken place with colleges about bus pass deductions from care experienced young people's bursaries. New College Durham will no longer deduct these, and further conversations are taking place with the remaining college.</p> <p>Durham County Council have awarded all care experienced young people in County Durham who are in years 12 and 13 an 'all time top up bus pass' to use anytime, not just when they're going to college. Additional money is also available to extend this to young people who attend college outside of County Durham.</p> <p>Further discussions around access to public transport are continuing into 2022/23.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>Young people feel that lots has been done but that this is an important area and there's more to progress</p>
<p>Consistent use of child friendly language</p>	<p>Six monthly language updates have been incorporated into the CPP work programme</p> <p>Staff are using language that young people understand, which is familiar to them for example, if a young person refers to their grandmother as 'nanny' then that term is used in their Care Plan.</p> <p>Other changes include 'family time' as an alternative to 'contact' and 'home' instead of 'placement'</p> <p>It was acknowledged that this is an ongoing exercise and young people continue to challenge and encourage us to use 'young-person friendly' language, where it is appropriate, as an alternative to professional terms.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>The feedback from young people is that these small personalised changes mean a great deal to them</p>
<p>Care Experienced Young Inspectors programme</p>	<p>Unfortunately, due to the impact of the Covid pandemic, and the pressures and developments in residential services, work against this action has not been progressed, however this will be picked up for 2022-23.</p> <p>Discussions have recently taken place about also establishing a young people's scrutiny panel where young people would ask questions, review services and make recommendations for improvements. The internal children's homes and fostering teams as well as commissioned providers would be part of this process.</p> <p>The young people's scrutiny panel will be picked up as a priority area for 2022-23</p>	<p>Unhappy</p>  <p>Young people were disappointed that this project hadn't progressed but look forward to getting involved in both the Young Inspectors programme and the scrutiny panel and suggesting areas of focus for these.</p>

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Sessional employment -paid opportunities with DCC	<p>We offer Care Leavers the opportunity of paid work experience placements in Durham County Council.</p> <p>To support this, a Sessional Employment Co-ordinator was appointed in July 2021 and joint recruitment processes have been developed.</p> <p>Ten young people have placements agreed and further placements are anticipated.</p> <p>In addition, an agreement is also in place for a 'Benefits Calculator' to be completed by Welfare Rights for each Care Leaver.</p> <p>More information is available in the Employment, Education & Training (EET) section in the annual report.</p>	<p>Happy</p> 
Family time	<p>In response to young people's feedback we have reviewed family time spaces, and all family time plans.</p> <p>As a result we have updated some of the venues we use, and have stopped using some of the venues. We have also made requests for new family time venues.</p> <p>We are also working with a group of young people who are helping us to make some of our venues more 'teenager friendly'.</p> <p>We explained Covid rules as best as we could so that young people knew about and understood social distancing and the rules around this when meeting their families.</p> <p>Across the service we have implemented a renewed focus on making sure that everyone understands their family time plan after Covid implications.</p>	<p>Just ok</p> 
Support for Care Leavers post 16	<p>In response to feedback we have reviewed our Local Offer in comparison with national Care Leavers offers, and have made sure that young people know that our Local Offer to Care Leavers is easily available on the internet.</p> <p>We have reminded young people that the DurhamWorks offer is included in the information given to Care Leavers, including the job interview offer. This has been shared at CICC meetings and with the Corporate Parenting Panel.</p> <p>Our transport offer for college students has improved with the majority of colleges now offering bus passes. In addition, all students in years 12 and 13 have been offered an all time top up bus pass, to use for non-college travel.</p> <p>Care leavers are eligible for Freedom Cards, which offers a range of discounts and free activities, including swim and gym use, and in addition our wider financial offer for care leavers is being reviewed.</p> <p>We have a dedicated Care Leavers team, and have recently opened our first Care leavers hub, offering a safe place for young people to gather, socialise, do laundry, bathe, and access free meals.</p>	<p>Happy</p> 

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
<p>Challenging stigma and discrimination for young people in care</p>	<p>The Art Stops project has been hugely successful, and has helped to increase positive images and reduce stigma of Care Experience young people across the region. Opportunities to expand this project are being considered.</p> <p>At each CPP meeting we celebrate the success of our young people and share 'proud moments'</p> <p>The use of language is a regular agenda item at social work team meetings, and six monthly language updates come to CPP meetings giving the young people an opportunity to share their thoughts on how things are going and what could be improved, as it is acknowledged that this is ever changing, and should be based on young people's personal preferences using language that is familiar to them.</p> <p>Films have been produced by young people, showcasing some of the issues that are important to them. These have and will continue to be shared appropriately to increase awareness.</p> <p>Meetings have taken place with community midwives to discuss how care experienced young people who are parents can be supported, and awareness is being raised about the corporate grandparenting role.</p> <p>Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) training has been undertaken by the CICC to raise awareness of care experienced young people within the Police service, and in addition PCSO 'buddies' have been aligned to our children's homes to build positive relationships between the police and young people.</p> <p>A range of foster care training is delivered by care experienced young people to potential foster carers so that they understand things from the young people's perspective from the outset. We also host the Fostering Stars Awards to showcase success.</p> <p>Some young people met with Josh McAlister, chair of the independent review of children's social care to share their views, and a young person's 'care experience story' was shared with him to feed into the review, as well as the story being shared as part of care day 2022.</p> <p>More information on the independent review can be found HERE</p>	<p>Just ok</p> 

Priorities for 2022-23

Each year, young people choose key priority areas that they would like the service and the Corporate Parenting Panel to focus on. It was agreed that the young people would identify key areas and share these with the CPP members at the six monthly joint CICC / CPP meetings.

It was felt that this would be a good balance, in order to keep things achievable and to enable us to focus on these areas and provide regular updates to the young people.



The following areas were identified by young people for 2022-23:

- Personalised Care
- Staff in Children's Homes and Foster carers
- Family Time

As well as these continuing priorities:

- Broaden and increase attendance at CICC meetings
- Establish a Young Inspectors programme and a Young People's scrutiny panel
- Transport

In order to increase the representative voice of the Children in Care Council all children in care will be given the opportunity to identify from these areas their order of priority and this will direct the plan of work moving forwards.

Children in Care (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. 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, and has recently been split into older and younger groups as there were so many attendees, and the two age groups often had different priorities.

Senior managers from within Children and Young People's Services and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) regularly attend CICC meetings.

More information on the CICC can be found at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/>

Co-opted positions for CICC members

Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions on the CPP providing panel representation from the CICC. They attend each meeting (supported by Investing in Children) to share feedback from the CICC. In addition, the CICC have a standing item on each CPP agenda, where they provide feedback from CICC meetings, ensuring members of the CPP hear real views and feedback directly from the young people. The young people are involved in decision making within the CPP, and this feedback is shared with relevant 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 Investing in Children) host a joint meeting with the CPP every six months.

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

These meetings are less formal than the CPP meeting and provide 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 and have their ideas, suggestions and comments heard.

Feedback from the discussions is collated and key issues are presented 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.



CICC Newsletters

Young people from the CICC produce newsletters, which are shared with partners across the service, with children, young people and their families and with the CPP.

DCC continue to support CICC with the newsletter on a monthly basis and Durham County Council's marketing team helped the young people understand the editorial role and become a 'young editor' for the newsletter.

You can find copies of the CICC newsletters at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters>

CICC catch ups

During 2020, CPP meetings were cancelled due to Covid restrictions so virtual monthly meetings were set up with the CICC, the Chair and Vice Chair of the CPP, the Head of Children's Social Care and some of the senior managers from the service so that young people were still able to have contact with the Panel on a regular basis.

Young people found these meetings really valuable and so when the CPP meetings were re-started a decision was taken to continue these meetings virtually on a bi-monthly basis to maintain regular contact with the CICC and the CPP leads.

Some of the things we discussed at these meetings were:

- IRO work
- Use of language
- Social worker profiles
- Understanding PEPs and the PP+ project
- Apprenticeships and job opportunities
- Brothers and sisters and the importance of staying together or maintaining contact
- Independent review of Children's Social Care
- Police work
- Peer mentoring
- Artstops project
- Bus Pass deductions from College Bursaries

Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's focused inspection of Children's Services, took place remotely on 13 & 14 July 2021, and looked at DCCs arrangements for children in care.

A letter outlining a summary of the findings was received from Ofsted on 23 August, which can be accessed [HERE](#)

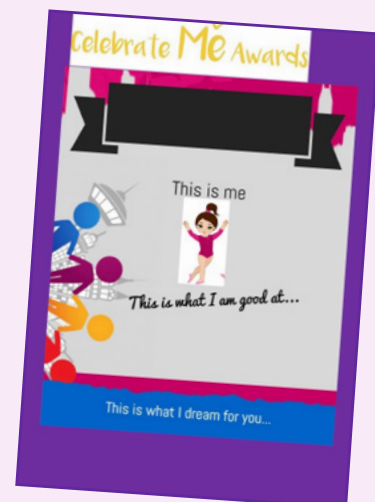
The letter contained lots of positive feedback, including the work of the CICC, and the opportunities young people have to share their experiences, and included two areas for priority action and one area for improvement.

One co-opted member was involved in discussions with the inspectors, and the inspector said that the young person explained to them how much young people felt they had been listened to and how DCC responded really well to their feedback e.g. use of language.

The inspectors talked to the Head of Children's Social Care about how empowered the young people were, and shared really positive feedback that the work of the CICC was exceptional. The inspectors were really impressed with all of the young people they met.

Celebrate Me event

On Thursday 21 October 2021 – a Halloween themed celebration event took place virtually. Young people helped to plan the event, and chose the music and entertainment, and picked the Halloween theme and insisted all attendees dressed up. Although young people appreciate the challenges that covid brings, and enjoyed the virtual event and the diversity it brought, they still like face to face events.



Care day 2022



We hosted virtual events to celebrate Care Day 2022 with a variety of activities and communications on Friday 18 February and Monday 21 February, including:

- A play about the importance of promoting relationships with brothers and sisters
- Young people sharing their stories, poems, achievement and experiences.
- Virtual quiz: Young People v Staff
- Virtual session about the importance of life story work.

All of the young people has a great day and look forward to next years event.



Children's Social Care Teams

Children's Social Care Teams won a Mind of My Own award for a children's launch event, when young people designed the poster.



Independent Visitors

Did you know that any person in care (from primary school age, until you turn 18 years old) is entitled to an independent visitor. An independent visitor is a volunteer who can help with your mental health and wellbeing, help with social anxiety, and you can also plan trips and activities to do together. Ask your social worker for more information.

During 2021-22 the service received 68 referrals, which is a significant increase on the previous year (17 referrals), and 59 young people were matched with an Independent Visitor. Of these, 24 matches ended due to the young people becoming 18, not wanting Independent Visitor any more, or the Independent Visitor leaving the role – leaving 35 active matches.

The main impact of having an Independent Visitor is reported as an increase in confidence and self-esteem amongst young people. Developing independent skills is also reported as a significant impact. Feedback from users of the Independent Visitor service is ...



“Did you know that any person in care (from primary school age, until you turn 18 years old) is entitled to an independent visitor.”

“‘The work done with ‘A’ has seen him develop so much as in individual and his behaviour has improved so much’ (Social Worker)

‘B’ is a completely different person. Once upon a time he would not even talk to us. His confidence has increased so much’ (Foster carer)

‘I love going out with my Independent Visitor and doing different activities. I also get to choose which is great!’ (Young person)

‘It is like having a relative that cares’ (Young person)

‘The work that ‘C’ has completed with their Independent Visitor has allowed him to transition from foster care to independent living with vital skills to survive when lots of other support has gone’ (Social Worker)

‘The relationship between the Independent Visitor and ‘D’ is very strong. This is helping to support her through some very tough periods in her life and give her someone independent to talk to’ (Foster Carer)

Children with disabilities

There have been significant changes to services for children and young people with disabilities since 2019 which includes additional investment in front line staff as well as a remodelling of the service to create a 0-18 children's service and a 14-25 navigation service within adult social care services, focused on supporting the transition from children's to adults services.

We also work with partners to ensure that where appropriate, children are signposted to other services and sources of support.

Work has developed with a wide range of partner agencies to support these practice improvements to ensure the needs of our children and young people are met and they are in receipt of high-quality support and services.

A Governance Improvement Board for disabled children has been created which has oversight from a children's and adults services perspective and includes commissioning colleagues who are key to service development and innovation for children and young people with disabilities. The board is jointly chaired by Heads of Service in CYPS and ASC.

We have strengthened the voice of our children so they along with their parent/carers are informing their care plans, reviews. This means they influence the development of the services they receive and can be more confident that they are the right services for the child.

Our procedures and guidance have been updated and will be reviewed annually, and all of our children have up to date assessments which are also reviewed annually, and we see the children who receive our services regularly.

We have managed some of the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic by reviewing services and working with our commissioning colleagues to think differently about service delivery for families. As a result, improvements in the service can be evidenced by the increase in compliments from families and professionals and a reduction in complaints.



Young people have told us what they want from us:

Making our services be the best they can be for all children and young people:

- Specialist community hubs (short breaks)
- CICC development
- MOMO feedback
- Family Satisfaction Surveys
- Governance Group
- Disability Steering Board

That we know them well, and when we can't help we find someone who can

- Ensure that team culture promotes building good relationships with young people, their families and carers.
- That where possible, young people have the same social worker throughout their childhood.
- When you cannot help or when the criteria is not met, you will endeavor to provide advice, support and guidance to help meet young people's needs.

'My social worker is very fun' (young person)

'The team are kind and caring, giving the right information at the right time, even when the child doesn't meet their eligibility criteria'. (Carers)

Ensure needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know the young people best

- Young people are visited regularly by their named social worker.
- Annual assessments focusing on what's working well for young people, their families/carers, what they are worried about and what needs to happen to meet their needs.
- Ensuring young people have a robust plan to meet needs and/or keep them safe. That these are reviewed and updated regularly by young people, their families and carers.
- Parents/carers have access to carers assessments.
- When young people are ready to move into the Navigation team it is done in a timely manner and their transition to adulthood is really well planned.



'it means we get to see the same people and know what is going to happen next' (young person)

'The support, that I'm getting my own independence but I'm already independent. When I'm at the Metrocentre the workers let me go and do bus spotting on my own, they are always upstairs [in the Metrocentre]. I would like them to 'Take me out more often and have more quality time' (young person)

Supporting Solutions Service

Supporting Solutions Service offers:

- Edge of care support, offering intensive interventions where there has been a relationship breakdown
- Family Group conferences to support families to put in place a sustainable plan to support the young people
- Missing from home work
- Child Exploitation support and interventions
- Access to an out of hours bed for one night where there is a crisis situation

During 2021-22, 198 young people received support from the SSS service, 138 of these were referred in 2021/22, whilst the other 60 had been referred prior to this.

- 130 young people who received support from Supporting Solutions were able to remain in the care of their family and 6 young people were able to return to the care of their family after a period in care. 10 young people were supported to remain in their long-term placement.

- The crisis bed at The Nest was used on 59 occasions, for a total of 73 nights.
- 231 initial Family Group Conferences were completed in 2021/22; for 197 of these the plan supported the child/young person to remain with or return to the care of their family.
- The Erase child exploitation workers have supported 92 young people who were identified as high risk of criminal or sexual exploitation in 2021/22. When reviewed in April 2022 43 young people remained high risk, but for 49 young people their risks had reduced (26 to medium risk and 23 to low risk).
- 683 young people were reported missing in 2021/22, a total of 1992 missing episodes. This is an increase of over 80% on the previous year. Of the 1910 occasions where a Return Home Interview was offered 1417 were completed, and information shared with partners to inform risk reduction planning.

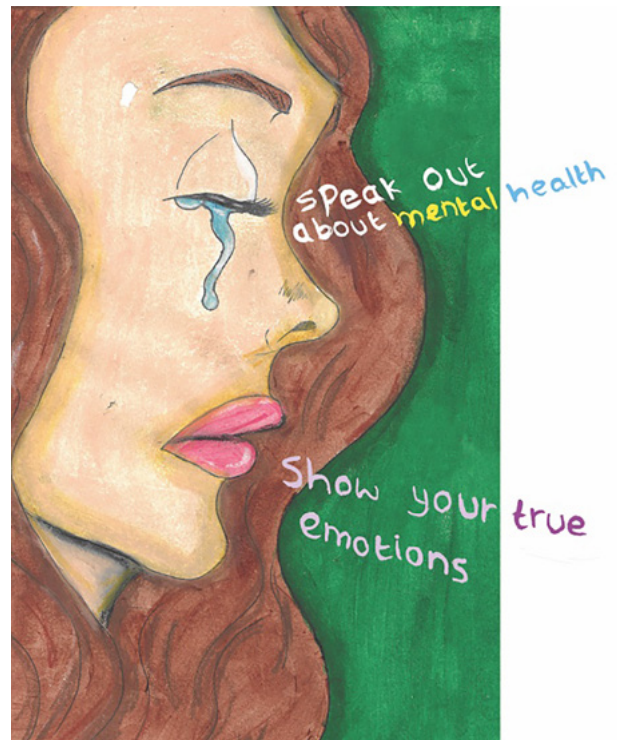
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Durham Children's services works with the national scheme for the dispersal of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and has done for some time. The scheme became mandatory around 6 months ago and since that time an increasing number of children who are seeking asylum alone have moved into the care of Durham Children's services.

The children come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, with the majority having been trafficked into the country and have then been detained by border control through the South of England Counties.

The needs of these children are significant, and services are developing and responding to their needs in terms of safe places to live, education physical and emotional health services along with opportunities to enjoy life.

A social work consultant from the children in care teams leads much of the practice in this work and has established a football group with a number of young people that meets and plays weekly. The language of football is assisting the young people to reduce feelings of isolation, build networks and have fun together. It is hoped this can develop into a regional group where young people will be able to meet others from their home communities and build supportive networks for their adult lives.



Fostering Friendly Award

The Designated Nurse for Children in Care was successful in their application for the Fostering Friendly Award. Fostering Friendly Employer status was gained in April 2021 following review of policies within the CCG to ensure that they provided flexibility for employees who were or were considering being foster carers. The subsequent Fostering Excellence Award was gained in November 2021. This achievement highlighted the support the CCG provided to foster carers / potential foster carers in their role so encouraging the uptake of foster parents for our most vulnerable children across County Durham. The Designated Professionals support and take part in fostering friendly fortnight – led by the local authority, to encourage people to consider the role but also highlight the excellent although often challenging work our foster carers do. County Durham CCG were the first NHS organisation to have received this accolade. The Designated Professionals will continue to champion foster cares both at place and across the ICB and as such will be committed to being able to make a difference for the people and children within our communities.

Fostering Services



The fostering service in Durham has 252 fostering households offering around 460 fostering beds to children. The service is well recognised, and the work of foster carers is valued throughout the Council and with partners.

The fostering community is under significant pressure to meet the needs of children and the demand for fostering beds significantly outstrips the capacity.

The fostering team is split into 6 teams to organise the work and to support the ability to recruit and train carers, match them to the right carers and to support the carers in their fostering role across the county.

The fostering team also support connected carers with dedicated fostering social work support. Around 15% of children in foster care live with connected person carers. Many of these children leave care under a legal order to these carers if they are not able to safely return home

Foster Care Review

In early 2022, a Service Manager was appointed to undertake a review of the support and recognition of foster carers and the work that they do. This includes a review of the criteria for foster carer skill levels, as well as reviewing foster carer payments known as 'payment for skills' (PFS) to ensure they have enough money to support and care for their foster children.

Foster carers were asked to share their thoughts around what we do well, or what we could do differently so that we can ensure Durham's core offer to its foster carers is as good as it can be and acknowledges the hard work that they do.

Mockingbird Family Model

The Service Manager also led on the implementation and roll out of the Mockingbird Model, which is a project committed

to increasing and retaining our foster carers which is critical to stabilising fostering placement. The model also increased the level of support offered to foster carers and children.

TV Advert

A number of targeted campaigns take place across the year to increase the number of foster carers. We recently launched our first TV advert, watch it [HERE](#)

Did you know... ? ?

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.



Mind of My Own App

To ensure all we do has children's voices at the centre, we have several ways that we engage and in addition to our direct work, all young people are supported to access the Mind of My Own app. This enables young people to share their views, successes and any challenges with their social workers ahead of their Looked After Reviews or Foster Carer Reviews. The app also allows young people to contact their social worker if they have any worries or queries about anything at any time.

You can find out more about the app in this presentation: [Mind of my own](#)

'Fostering Friendly Employer Award'

The County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group have worked with the Fostering Network to achieve the 'Fostering Friendly Employer' Award, which will help staff who are, or who wish to become foster carers.

Foster care training

Feedback from the training is so good, there have been requests to make the sessions even longer so that more can be discussed.

Foster Care awards

Because of Covid restrictions, the 2021 awards were postponed as we were not able to have any in person celebrations, so for the 2022 awards we decided to go all out!!

We hosted the Foster Care Star Awards on Wednesday 9 March 2022 at the Gala Theatre, Durham to recognise the outstanding achievements of foster carers, as well as their families who have welcomed children and young people into their homes and lives.

Over 100 carers and their families received awards for long-service, outstanding achievements, sons and daughters of carers and all-round support. As the 2021 event was postponed, even more carers were recognised this year for their efforts to help young people reach their full potential.

A new, publicly nominated award was also given to the foster family seen by local communities as having gone 'above and beyond' in making a child feel comfortable, safe and secure in their new family home. It was an excellent event, and there were lots of very proud staff and elected members.



Did you know... ? ?

Staying Put arrangements means that if a young person and their foster carer agree, the young person can continue to stay with their foster carers when they turn 18, even though they become a care leaver. This may be something a young person wants to do because they want support while they finish their education, or they might just want more time to make the transition to independence. They can stay with their foster carer until they are 21.

The Annual report of the Fostering Service 2021-22 is available on request.

Children's homes



We currently have nine registered Children's Homes across the County (with a 10th being registered) offering residential care to children and young people. This could be support and care for young people who cannot live at home, or short respite breaks when children and young people with disabilities need to have a little time away from their family or carer. Many developments are taking place within residential services including new systems, new peripatetic staff teams, deputy managers being introduced in all homes and physical works being undertaken on the buildings to ensure they are homely and fit for purpose.

Sufficiency

A number of new children's homes are being developed to ensure that as many children as possible live within County Durham and are able to maintain links with their schools, friends, families and hobbies. The new homes are different sizes (ranging from 1 to 3 places) so that children and young people with more complex needs can be cared for. An Edge of Care home is also being planned; this will offer short breaks and wider support to young people and their families to help them to remain living at home.

Staying Close

This is similar to the staying put principles, when young people leave our children's homes they may not feel ready to be fully independent, so we will look for accommodation options that are close to their former children's home so that they are able to pop in for advice and support, or to use laundry facilities, have a meal etc when they need to.






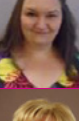






NYAS

All children in Care have access to independent advocacy services through the National Youth Advocacy Service.

Regulation 44 / elected members

Some of our elected members attend the Regulation 44 inspection visits alongside the NYAS inspectors on a quarterly basis ([more information on Reg 44 visits can be found here](#)). Posters of the inspectors are on display in the home, so that young people know who is visiting, and can identify them easily:

Home/Councillor	
Framwellgate Moor, Durham Cllr Mamie Simmons	
New Lea House, Stanley Cllr Michelle Walton	
Park House, Sherburn Village Cllr Stacey Deinali	
Coxhoe Cllr Chris Varty	
West Rainton Cllr Bev Coult	
High Etherley Cllr Samantha Townsend	
Hickstead, Newton Aycliffe Cllr Joyce Charlton	
Orchard House, Sacriston Cllr Cathy Hunt	
Moorside, Spennymoor Cllr Beaty Bainbridge	
Walworth, Aycliffe Secure Centre Cllr Ken Robson	
Barnard and Durham, Aycliffe Secure Centre Cllr Jake Miller	
Lumley, Aycliffe Secure Centre Cllr Chris Hood	

Adoption



Adopt Coast to Coast was established as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), and the launched virtually on 1 April 2021 as the go to agency for those who are interested in adoption. Adopt Coast to Coast is a partnership RAA, and is made up of the following three partners (spokes):

- Cumbria County Council
- Durham County Council
- Together for Children who deliver children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council

Adopt Coast to Coast is working with partners to embed models of early permanence in Durham, for example 'Fostering for Adoption', and work across the partnership to develop the post adoption support offer.

Adopt Coast to Coast's marketing activity for 2021-22 was all about brand recognition, and getting the name out as far and wide as possible. This was impacted by the pandemic as we were unable to use some of the traditional methods, so we focused on the following:

- Public relations – stories about our launch, appeals, events, campaigns and more ...
- Internal communications – amongst our three partners
- A radio campaign in April during the launch month, and a further two campaigns in October and March

- A TV advert to celebrate the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast which can be viewed [HERE](#)
- Google advertising, making sure Adopt Coast to Coast appears highly when searched for
- Facebook and Instagram advertising to raise awareness and promote events
- Display advertising on key websites to raise awareness of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Third party campaigns e.g. joining in with activity for National Adoption week

Adopt Coast to Coast's marketing activity for 2022-23 will focus on:

- Potential enquirers for groups of brothers and sisters, children with additional health needs and/or developmental uncertainty.
- An initiative with neighbouring regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) to increase opportunities for children to be adopted by families living in the North East and Cumbria.
- Reviewing and developing marketing activity and recruitment practice across the spokes, being mindful of the lived experience of children and their adoptive families and the findings from the national mystery shopper activity.





Katie and James were one of six couples to have started their journey with Adopt Coast to Coast and had a child placed with them before the services' first anniversary. Katie said:

“What was clear from the start was that you don’t have to be a certain way to adopt, you don’t need lots of money just time and love. “We’d had so many years to prepare for adoption and we always knew it would be our route to parenthood so we accepted it and knowing him has been the best four weeks of our lives – he’s just amazing. I was worried before we started all of this that we wouldn’t have a connection but he’s our whole world - he 100% feels like our son already.”

DCC Adoption/Service

This has been a really busy year for Durham’s Adoption Team in all areas of the service. The post adoption service has helped to secure funding through the Adoption Support Fund to the value of almost £376000.115, and adopted children have benefitted from therapeutic support as a result of this.

The numbers of enquiries from people considering adoption have risen hugely and the team have responded to 216 enquiries, whereas in the previous year 100 enquiries were received.

Across the year, 30 information sharing events have been held for people in the enquiry stage to attend, and feedback from these has been very positive. One attendee said

‘It was all very positive and information was provided in an easy to understand way.’

- Information, counselling and preparation courses have been held monthly for those moving along the assessment process. These have been held jointly with our Regional Adoption Agency partners in Together For Children and Cumbria.

- A total of 40 adoptive households were approved in this time frame. This was a combination of single adopters, heterosexual and same sex couples.

- 65 children were matched with their adoptive families, with a further 6 being placed under Fostering for Adoption. Again, these figures are increased on previous years.

- We continue to be proactive in responding to enquiries, and provide a wealth of information and support at all stages on their journey to becoming adopters.

Care Leavers

The Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers has been developed, covering January 2022 to December 2024. It outlines our vision, and areas for action.

The strategy has a strong focus on learning from those who are care experienced to drive forward practice improvements in County Durham and help our young people to build strong relationships that will endure.

Local Offer to Care Leavers

The Local Offer has been published on our website and gives details of how DCC will support young people with:

- Options about where they live
- Helping with money, benefits, and financial advice
- Looking after their health (physical, mental, and sexual); drug, alcohol and smoking cessation support; support about relationships.
- Education, Employment & Training

Care experienced young people have undertaken a research project to look at Durham's local offer, which included a trip to York Council to look at their care leavers offer. The research project benchmarked Durham against other regional and national local authorities local offers.

Moving forward, colleagues and young people from ten other Care Leavers services will visit Durham and vice versa. The ten Local Authorities will provide feedback on Durham's services in June 2022. Consideration is being given to hosting a conference to share this feedback, and what it means for us in Durham.

Durham compares well to other areas, however plans have been put in place to make our local offer even better, and the proposals will be presented to the Chief Executive Officer and DCCs Corporate Management Team.

We will include an update in next year's annual report, but some of the key things in the local offer are:

- Improving the quality of pathway plans
- Strengthening our corporate commitment to our care leavers
- Making sure our young people have a variety of suitable accommodation options
- Improving the health outcome of care leavers, following the impact of Covid
- Helping prepare our young people for adulthood, which does not mean 'independence' as we recognise that everyone needs support throughout their lives
- Improved coproduction

An action plan has also been developed for 2022/23 which outlines how we will do what we say we are going to do, and by when.



Midwifery offer to care experienced young people

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.

Supported lodgings

Supported lodgings provides a safe, supportive and friendly home environment for young people, aged between 16 and 25 years old, who are leaving care and do not want to live independently. Supported lodgings providers give young people a key to their home, their own room, access to a bathroom, kitchen and laundry facilities.

Each young person is different, but many need practical support and help with things like learning to cook, doing laundry, budgeting, attending appointments, or even to help them find a job, or access education and training.

Supported lodgings can be short term, or for up to two years, and in Durham we have several supported lodgings providers and always seek to recruit more.

Care Leavers hub

The care leavers hub was officially launched on 28 February 2022, by our care leavers. The hub is a safe space to engage with services and each other, and just a welcoming place to hang out, get warm, clean and fed. A programme of events has been developed for the hub for the year ahead, and some further ideas for the hub include a monthly Sunday dinner club with a yorkshire pudding making competition.



Drive project



The project supports young people by providing driving lessons, up to the value of £500. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on then the project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for looked after young people aged 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic restrictions the project was on hold during 2020-21 and we are still seeing the impact of this as the pandemic has impacted on the availability of driving lessons nationally.

We are working with the DCC procurement team to consider options, ensuring that lessons are secured with reputable instructors.

Health

It is the responsibility of Durham County Council, County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and commissioned health services to identify and address the unmet health needs of children who become looked after.

Physical health

The CCG commission County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) to:

- Provide medical services
- Undertake initial health assessments (IHAs)
- Undertake review health assessments (RHAs) for those living out of the Local Authority boundary but within a 20-mile radius.
- Complete health passports for those children aged 15½ years old and above.

Public Health commission Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT) to undertake RHAs for young people living within the Local Authority boundary.

These health assessments result in individual health plans being developed which form, part of the young person's overall care plan.

The CGG has recruited a Designated Nurse for children in care, and 'children in care' is now a key focus within training offered by primary care professionals.

Year on year there have been increasing numbers of young people entering care, which has posed some challenges to the CCG in responding to the increasing numbers, especially on the back of the existing Covid pressures.

Moving forward, the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and potentially children from Ukraine will also bring challenges, especially as these young people will come to us with no or limited medical and / or mental health history or differing systems of health care.

Mental Health

At present the CCG commission Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) to provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to support young people with mental health difficulties (Tier 1-3).

NHS England provide in patient mental health services (Tier 4).

Durham County Council commissioning additional mental health support from Full Circle which is a therapeutic service dedicated to working with care experienced young people. The Full Circle have an important role in responding to mental health needs of children in care and adopted children. Full Circle is a social work led team, made up of Therapeutic Social Workers employed by the Local Authority, including a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, who are employed via and have links with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service within Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

Full Circle utilise a trauma informed approach to assist placement stability by supporting the children's foster carers and adopters, social workers, residential staff, educational staff and the child's care team to support the child's recovery from complex trauma and abuse.

The availability of suitable in-patient services is also a challenge for the service.



Self-Care & Mental Health for Kids



Share your own feelings to encourage self-awareness.



Set aside time for low-stress or solo activities.



Find social groups that help them feel like they belong.



Practice self-care for yourself to set the standard.



Focus on articulating feelings.
"I am angry."
"I am sad."

Encourage journaling and diaries.

Encourage your child to focus on the moment.




Establish a self-care routine.

Recognize toxic stress events.

BlessingManifesting

Cultivate interests and hobbies.

Priorities for health moving forward include:

- Continued support for the recruitment of foster carers
- Improved data collection
- Working with local authorities to augment information sharing processes
- Improving mental health outcomes for young people - the number of Children in Care accessing CAMHS services and their needs are fully understood

Joint work continues with Local Authority partners to:

- Facilitate the date of the first Looked After Review being communicated to the Foundation Trust to expedite a timely IHA appointment – this is a longstanding challenge for the LA to meet the statutory 5 day timeframe.
- Augment the information sharing pathways following a child entering care and relevant documentation is distributed to the Foundation Trust in a contemporaneous manner.

Health outcomes for children in care and those care experienced continue to improve:

- Health Needs Analysis to be complete to inform future service delivery
- Continue to liaise with NHS England colleagues to ensure children in care are prioritised by dental practices across the region
- Immunisation campaign to be promoted
- Recognising the needs of Children in Care who are reported missing.
- Improving terminology used for Children in Care health assessments by working with the Children in Care Council.



As of July 2021, there were 573 Durham looked after children of statutory school age:

- 48% primary / 52% secondary.
- 46% female / 54% male.
- 81% County Durham schools / 19% out of County schools, which is an increase of 3.6% from the previous year.
- School attendance for the whole looked after cohort was 89.3%
- Fixed term exclusions remain low at 5.6% (22 children)
- 49% had an identified special educational need (SEN), which is an increase of 6% from the previous year.
 - 21% are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
 - 28% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 4% from the previous year
 - Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) were the primary need for 39% of primary aged children and 51% of secondary aged children.

The Virtual School are proactive with SEN to ensure young people are known, and that interventions are available for schools to access as early as possible. If a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is moved out of the Local Authority area to have their care needs met, it is important that Durham retain the plan for that child until an appropriate setting has been found. In Durham, every child who is looked after who has an EHCP now has an identified SEND Caseworker as well as their PEP Caseworker.

Language

Following on from discussions with young people about the language we use, the Virtual School has raised this at network meetings, so schools are aware that this is a priority for CLA. We have also developed the use of the Clear Cut Communication Tool at the entry into care and at the personal education plan (PEP) meeting to support young people by understanding their communication needs. This helps everyone involved in the child's life to provide the right support which should then lead to better outcomes.

- For 2020/21 centre assessed grades were used as there were no formal examinations due to Covid. Our young people performed well with some young people achieving strong sets of results.
- For 2021/22 children will sit their Key Stage 2 SAT's and formal exams for GCSE will take place for young people in Year 11. This will bring additional challenges for our CLA

Virtual School Sub group

Agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel to bring two new reps onto the Virtual School sub groups to ensure representation from maintained nurseries and post 16 education.

Education fun fund

Given that schools were not operating in the usual way during 2021-22 due to Covid, there was an underspend in the Pupil Premium Plus money, which is allocated from Government. The Virtual School transferred £3,000 PP+ money to the CICC for an Education Fun Fund project.

Within schools, PP+ money must be spent on educational resources whereas this project could be more flexible around purchasing non education equipment.

Young people from the CICC set up the project, and developed an application process whereby young people can apply for up to £150 for non-educational items, which would not typically be funded in this way for example, sport and exercise equipment, boxing lessons, art and craft supplies, instruments and music lessons etc.

Post 16 young people attending further education colleges have been involved in a government pilot where they have received PP+ funding for one financial year. This has supported them to access the wider college life and has encouraged good attendance. A Mentor was employed to provide additional pastoral support.

Education/Employment & Training

A range of support continues to be available for care leavers to enable and support them to progress into education, employment and training (EET).

DurhamWorks programme for schools

This programme provides support for young people aged 15 and 16 to help them to make a successful progression from Year 11 into to post 16 learning.

During the 2021-22 academic year, a total of 800 young people who were identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) were supported, including 34 Looked After Children. Of these, 28 Looked After Children (82.4%) progressed into a positive post-16 learning destination.

DurhamWorks

DurhamWorks provides care leavers with wrap around support to enable them to progress into and remain in Education, Employment and Training.

Since its inception in 2016, 665 young people supported by DurhamWorks have identified themselves as being Looked After or a Care Leaver. Of these, 599 young people have completed the programme, with 417 (69.9%) young people progressing into a positive Education, Employment or Training destination.

DurhamEnable

This is a new supported employment service available for our Care Leavers, aged 18 plus who have learning, physical and/or mental health barriers to employment. Overall, DurhamEnable aims to support over 900 County Durham residents between now and December 2023.

Durham County Council Pathway for Young People

The pathway continues to be embedded to provide more opportunities for care leavers within Durham County Council 'The Family Business'. As part of this, a sessional employment programme offers care leavers opportunities to undertake paid work experience which align to their talents, interests and aspirations.

A sessional employment Coordinator was appointed in July 2021 to facilitate the programme and they are actively engaging with Care Leavers, Young People's Advisers, Durham County Council Human Resources staff, as well as Service Managers. Joint recruitment processes have been developed in conjunction with Durham County Council

Human Resources staff, a programme has been designed and delivered to support Care Leavers and staff, and an agreement is in place for a "Benefits Calculator" to be completed by Welfare Rights for each Care Leaver.

At present, ten Care Leavers are currently undertaking Sessional Employment and placements have been agreed in the following areas: Construction, Farming and Protective Landscapes, Motor Vehicle, Human Resources, DurhamWorks and Catering. Further placements are anticipated in Quantity Surveying as well as with CYPS Young People's Service.

Apprenticeships

Further action was undertaken to support more Care Leavers into Durham County Council Apprenticeships. This included the ring-fencing of Apprenticeship opportunities specifically for Care Leavers, as well as delivery of bespoke training to support Care Leavers with their applications and to prepare them for the interview stage. There are currently seven Care Leavers undertaking Apprenticeships within Durham County Council.



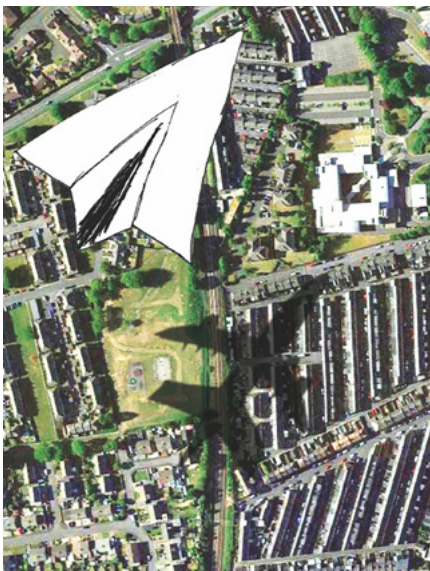
Youth Hubs

DurhamWorks has liaised with the Department for Work and Pensions to set up 'Youth Hubs' across County Durham. These are spaces where unemployed young people can access a range of intensive support and provision to enable them to find a job. Youth Hubs are operating in Stanley and Peterlee, and an exciting new Youth Hub opened in Bishop Auckland in March 2022.

PP+ Pilot

A 'Keep In College' incentive payment of £20 per week is in place for care leavers who achieve over 80% authorised attendance. There are currently 52 Young People attending 14 different Further Education Colleges, who are receiving this.

All information is available on the [DurhamWorks website](#)



Key performance data

- There were 982 children in care at the end of March 2022. This is higher than last year, however our rate of children in care per 10,000 children in County Durham remains lower than in the North East and our Statistical Neighbours.
- Our number of children in care has fluctuated during the year following an increase in children leaving care once Family Courts reopened, but also a reduction in children coming into care in through most of 2021. Children becoming looked after has returned to similar pre-COVID levels but we have experienced another recent reduction in children leaving care. This is a direct impact of the Somerset Judgment, with 30 children who are currently placed for adoption experiencing a delay. If these delays had not occurred, we would be at a similar number of CLA to last year (949).
- The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has also started in year and the first young people have started to arrive in Durham. This will also lead to an increase in children who come into our care throughout the year.
- 62 children were adopted in 2021/22. This equates to 18% of all children leaving care which is higher than in England and the North East in 2019/20.
- A higher proportion of children in care in Durham are in a foster placement than in our comparators (74% compared to 71% in England and 72% in our statistical neighbours in 2020-21).
- Around a quarter of our children in care are placed outside of County Durham, but the vast majority are within neighbouring local authority areas. Often closer to their home than if placed in other areas of the county. This continues to be consistently lower than in our comparators.
- We have experienced significant placement pressures during, and following, COVID which has led to an increase in children having 3 or more placement moves and long-term stability for some of our children aged under 16 who have been in care for more than 2 1.2 years.
- We have seen an increase in the number of children in care reported as missing alongside the number of missing episodes, with some children regularly reported as 'missing'. This is a potential impact from lockdowns during COVID. Multi-agency work is ongoing with Police and other partner agencies to monitor, understand and address this.
- Performance in relation to our care leavers remains positive in relation to accommodation suitability and education, employment and training remains above or at benchmarks
- Educational attainment data is included in Virtual School and EET sections.

Aycliffe Secure Centre

In April 2021
ASC had its full
unannounced
Inspection and
was judged as
Outstanding
Overall.

In November 2021
ASC had an
interim inspection
and was awarded
Sustained
Effectiveness.



“ Our mission statement: **“Through developing and investing in our staff and infrastructure, Aycliffe secure centre will continue to provide each young person with a safe, secure, caring home and school. Encouraging and motivating each young person to be the best they can be in an environment they can enjoy.”** ”

Aycliffe Secure Centre provides secure homes and onsite school for up to 38 young people, eight of whom are sentenced or remanded by the Youth Custody Service. In addition, there are places for 30 young people who are looked after for their own safety, under section 25 of the Children’s Act 1989, commission by Local Authorities. Over the last year, we reduced our occupancy levels due to the impact of Covid19, so we only had 4 out of the 5 houses in use.

The philosophy of the centre is that of Exceptional Parenting underpinned by Trauma informed care. We have been an active part of the National SECURE STAIRS framework and received an annual review last Autumn which highlighted the exceptional work and support offered to young people and staff alike. Through this trauma informed care young people understand their journey and

work to build confidence, positive self-esteem, and resilience. Young people have enhanced multi-agency care and support and have been encouraged to have a significant voice and have been part of the mantra “no decision about me without me.”

Over this last year, living with the impact of the Covid19 pandemic we have continued to follow the centres recovery road map, and followed both national and local guidance in order to keep everyone as safe and well as possible. Ensuring the use of PPE, effective testing and effective measure of Infection control are in place has taken a whole centre approach which has been challenging, particularly in ensuring staffing levels are kept conducive to individuals and groups of young people and helping everyone’s mental health and wellbeing was at the forefront of our minds.

Highlights over the year include:

- School has remained open throughout the pandemic.
- The horticultural and park area is being actively used in both the curriculum and for leisure.
- Health and Social Care is now part of the curriculum.
- Several of our young people have been entered and achieved success in the national Koestler Awards
- Our first young person to achieve their CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme)
- Young people have been able to keep contact and connected to those who are important to them through technology in particular Teams.
- Since the roll out ,135 multi-agency staff have participated in the 5x day Trauma informed care

- Psychological formulation and reformulations are undertaken with and for all of our young people.
- Reflective practice is embedded into the whole centre
- We have developed and Enhanced Practitioner role to up skill workers and help with succession planning
- We have launched the new radio system which will also reduce air wave noise pollution
- Stage one of the electronic case management systems ClearCare roll out has been achieved
- Refurbishments of the catering and music classrooms
- Significant improvements have been made to the infrastructure
- Hybrid working has been implemented within the support services.
- Face to face meeting with Investing in Children have recommenced

We also work with our catering company to ensure that food is both nutritious and meets the tastes and needs of all our young people, and one of the suggestions they made was to have a themed night where food from different countries and cultures is tried. This has been established on Wednesday nights - so far, the Indian curry night has been the favourite! These activities have been embraced and enjoyed.



Involving the young people in their care is vital to their success and one young person's Social Worker said:

"We have just completed the formulation/ transition meeting. (Young person) did a presentation to at least 16 people (professionals) including the new service provider about what she has gained from therapy and general interventions from the multi-agency team at Aycliffe and how she can carry this on into independence. It was outstanding and testimony to the work that has been undertaken with her in the nine months she has been at Aycliffe. I was blown away by it. The care and intervention they have received at Aycliffe is second to none and now she has a fighting chance of success in the community with good, continued support."

Young people said:

"G is the kindest interventions worker I have ever had."

"K is a good little umperlumper. He is a great negotiator he is also a role model to other staff and should be entitled to a pay rise."

"I can see the difference in myself since I first came here. It has helped me being here and I will stay in touch with H and C."

We continue to promote engagement, leisure and hobbies including,

- Celebrating events including, birthday, religious and faith days and leaving meals and mobility
- Animal care, having regular pets and small animal care visiting
- BBQ's and pool parties
- Centre wide quizzes and competitions
- Pampering sessions
- Sporting activities and pastimes, including football, trampolining, the gym, and dancing and mindfulness
- Gaming, Lego, board games and crafting

Future developments at Aycliffe includes the building and registering of the Transitions Home, which will offer up to four young people a steppingstone from living in secure accommodation to moving into the community in a safe and sequential way. The building work commenced in February 2022 and is set to be completed by October 2022. We are beginning the registering process and have recruited the Homes Manager who will be with us soon.

Proud moments

In response to young people telling us that they sometimes faced stigma and discrimination, agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel that proud moments would be shared at each meeting to highlight young people's achievements and successes - no matter how big or small.

Some of our proud moments include:

- A young person who won a competition with posters and leaflets they had created. The young person had been grateful for the opportunity to showcase their talent and the praise they received had increased their confidence, improved their schooling and relationships and had also led them to decide to pursue art as a future career.
- A young person who lives in one of our children's homes volunteers with a local community allotment project, and worked hard to support the project's activities and raise awareness of environmental issues. This led to a commendation from the volunteer lead and the project is now supporting the young person to achieve the John Muir award for raising awareness of the natural environment.
- A young person who had been finding life particularly difficult, received help and support from specialist services to overcome their difficulties and as a result, developed such empathy for other young people in similar positions, that they are now leading activities and providing help and support to others. The young person is helping others to live their lives to the full and realise that they are valued and can make positive contributions.
- One young person had suffered numerous traumas which had a long-lasting impact, resulting in them missing much of their education. With support, the young person had grown stronger and secured a trial day for a job. On their first day at work, the employers were so impressed, they offered them the job at the end of the day. This was a well-deserved achievement for the young person, who had shown great strength and determination to succeed.
- A young person whose past experiences had led to them finding it difficult to form relationships and to share thoughts, feelings and fears with others, discovered their talent for baking. The young person enjoyed making and decorating cupcakes, and one day, decided to make a special cupcake as a 'thank you' for a teacher who had provided support through some particularly difficult times. This gesture was a very brave step for the young person who was acknowledging the trust and attachment that had been formed.
- A young person living in shared care arrangements had experienced difficulties and disruption in their life, however they are now making remarkable progress, attending school regularly and achieving new goals both at school and in their personal life. Staff and their family had noted the changes and said how proud they were to see their progress and the kindness shown when caring for their younger sibling who has additional needs.
- One young person who has disabilities completed a sponsored walk for the Dogs Trust and raised over £100. Everyone was really proud of their achievements.
- Young people living at one of our children's homes became aware of a 'toilet-twinning' project and set about fundraising for this to help make a difference to children who are living in difficult circumstances. They raised £100 of donations to provide a toilet for a family in Afghanistan, and their positive proactive work was recognised and praised.

- A young person who was preparing to move into supported living arrangements had been reflecting on the past whilst preparing for the future. They explained that they felt loved and prepared for the next phase of life, knowing that their family will continue to support them, just as they had done throughout the years. Their carers spoke of how proud they are and how they were pleased to see such a positive outcome for this young person.
- Young people living at one of our children's homes were so happy with their new bathroom facilities that they arranged an official opening event to celebrate. The event included a ceremonial ribbon-cutting, handing over of the ceremonial 'toilet roll' and a tea party. Staff were proud at the effort the young people had made and were pleased to see how much they value their home, which emphasised just how important it is that young people are provided with high quality facilities.
- A year 11 student with an Education Health and Care Plan moved out of Durham to access specialist provision. They produced an outstanding piece of descriptive writing, expressing their thoughts and feelings about their new surroundings which had provoked an emotional response from staff, who were so impressed that they sent a message to the young person to congratulate their good work, and encouraging them to continue writing.

- The Head of the Virtual School had supported a young person during their transition into year 7, and they met again several years later at a Children in Care Council meeting. The young person had done well through school and acknowledge how valuable the support from the Virtual School had been to them at the time.
- One of our older young people stood as an independent candidate in their local election in May 2021. Although they were not elected, we were very proud that they had the confidence to do this and to take the next steps in their lives, knowing they have the support they need around them.
- Finally, the young people are proud of the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, who donates 'corporate grandparent' gifts of hand-knitted baby clothes, to be given to our care leavers who have children of their own. The young people are appreciative of the kind gesture.



Achievements

PCSO training

In late 2020, the Children's Commissioner for England asked for the CICC to get involved in some focus groups to inform the National Police Chiefs Council's work in updating their strategy in relation to police and children. The aim of this was to influence how police interact with children, and they specifically wanted to include voices of children, particularly those with care experience.

Following completion of this work with the NPCC, the CICC approached Durham Constabulary to discuss their thoughts on the interventions they have received from police regarding care interventions or in relation to crime.

As a result, the CICC have delivered training sessions to highlight the importance of child focused, and child sensitive work, and this is being shared to a broader group of officers in Durham Constabulary to ensure that better relations are established with the police.

In addition, police will form links with our children's homes with 'police buddies', so that they are visiting the young people in a positive capacity – not just when there are problems or concerns.

Government's Independent Review of Children's Social Care

In March 2021, Government commissioned an independent review of Children's Social Care, chaired by Josh McAllister - a link to the review can be found [HERE](#)



A report was commissioned by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ACDS) in the North East on Children's Social Care, which will feed into the review to highlight the picture in Durham to influence national policy, and to share sector led improvements.

In addition, one of our young people attended a national event hosted by Josh McAllister, to discuss their views on children's social care, and another young person wrote about their thoughts on the review, which have also been shared. This young person's story was also shared in a variety of ways, including a film and podcast as part of the Care Day celebrations.



IIC Membership Award

The membership award gives organisations national recognition for the good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue that results in change.

At present, 18 Durham County Council Services have an active IIC Membership Award, which recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice across Children's Services.

Artstops - creative images in public spaces

#artstops #durhamartstops

Twelve care experienced young people connected with this project to produce and designed a range of images which have been put on display in bus stops across the Durham and Chester-Le-Street area. Use this [interactive map](#) to see exactly where they are.

Following the success of this project, further discussions are taking place to see how this project can be implemented in other areas of County Durham.

The young people's artwork, poems etc can be viewed here: [HERE](#).

Peer mentoring

Seven young people have undertaken the training to become peer mentors. IIC and the CICC are working with DCC staff to ensure that the young people taking part in the programme have the support that they need to make sure they feel safe and know what to do with any information that is shared or disclosed during these sessions.

The peer mentor programme is being developed and implemented slowly to ensure all plans and support are in place.

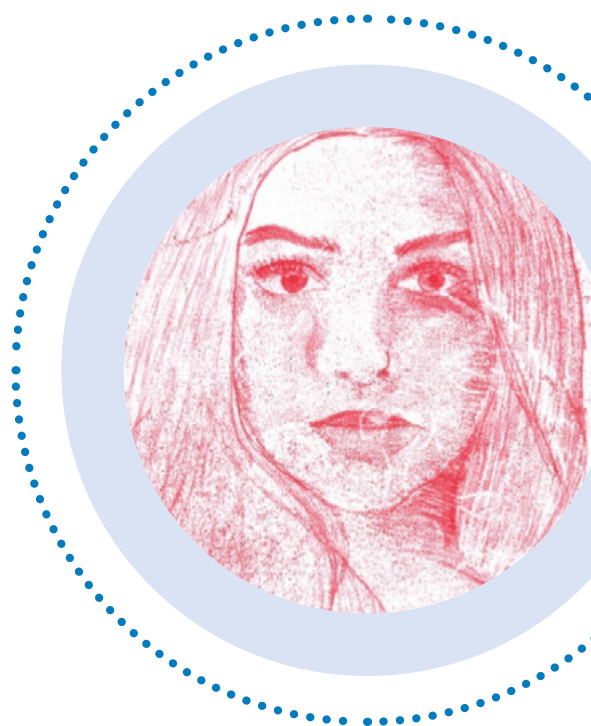
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) work

An IRO document has been developed with young people from the CICC. This will be sent out with the invites for the review meeting so that young people know what will happen and who they will meet.

They young people have also developed this animation which explains the role of an IRO <https://www.youtube.com/embed/GEM-w-x7xtc>

Social worker profiles

It was suggested by young people that social workers (and Full Circle/CAMHS workers) provide profiles of themselves so that young people know a little bit about them e.g. if they have children, favourite foods, movies they like etc as well as their work contacts and a picture of themselves.



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