

## Corporate Parenting Panel

25 October 2024

Mind of My Own



### Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding how Mind of My Own is being used within the Children in Care and Care Leavers Service and the steps that are being taken to increase the usage of Mind of My Own.

#### Executive summary

- 2 Mind of My Own are applications that children and young people can use to express their views, wishes and feelings regarding decisions that are being made about them and other relevant topics. Mind of My Own applications are accessible and enable children and young people to speak out, at a time that suits them. The applications capture the child's true authentic voice as opposed to an interpretation of what they have said.
- 3 Mind of My Own was launched in Durham in 2021 which is when practitioners started to be trained. Since then, Mind of My Own has been used across the service and we are continuing to see the benefits of it.
- 4 We know that Mind of My Own isn't being used as effectively as it could within the Children in Care and Care Leavers teams and additional measures are in place to increase this.

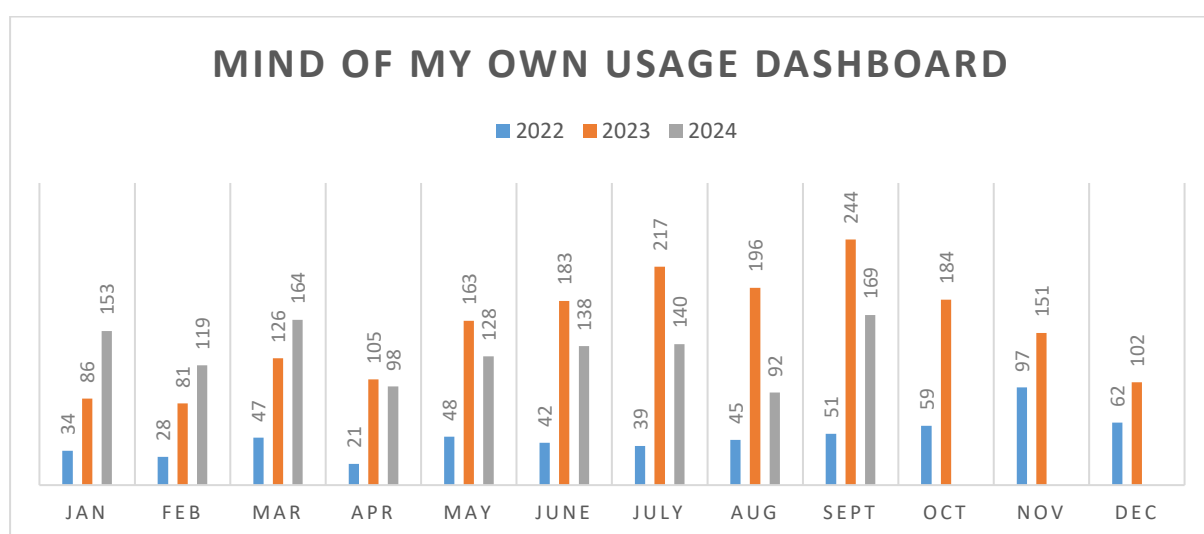
#### Recommendation

- 5 Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:
  - (a) Consider the content and recommendations of this report.

## Background

- 6 Mind of My Own offers a suite of applications that children and young people can use to express their views, wishes and feelings at a time that suits them. Mind of My Own co-produce the applications with children and young people, which ensures they look the way children and young people want them to and include topics that children and young people have said are relevant and useful to them. The applications regularly change and are added to, depending on the feedback of children and young people.
- 7 The applications cater for different ages and needs, Mind of My Own 'One App' is developed for older children, as this application enables children and young people to create their own accounts which can be used on any device at any time. It also includes scenarios such as 'This is Me' and 'Preparing for Adulthood' which are aimed at older young people.
- 8 The 'Express' application is designed for younger children or children with additional support needs. It is a fun and interactive way for children who may struggle to communicate, to express their wishes and feelings. It is colourful and has sensory sounds. Both applications can be used independently but can also be used with support from a practitioner via the practitioner's space.
- 9 A brilliant feature of Mind of My Own is the accessibility feature. This ensures that the applications are accessible to a wide range of children and young people. The applications can be changed into over 100+ different languages which means they are accessible for children/young people who do not use English as their first language.
- 10 Durham Children's Social Care launched Mind of My Own in February 2021 and began training practitioners, initially within Children in Care Teams, Fostering, Residential Children's Homes and with Independent Reviewing Officers. A group of children and young people were also involved in creating posters to help others to understand what Mind of My Own is and how to sign up. Their work with this was nationally recognised by Mind of My Own and they won an award at an awards ceremony, 'Vox Con', for their creativity. From May 2021, training was made available for all Children's Social Care Teams and Early Help.
- 11 There was a refreshed launch of Mind of My Own in June 2023, to celebrate and share more widely the fantastic examples we have of children and young people expressing their views and the impact this

was having, and to encourage further usage. An appreciative enquiry was shared where children, young people and practitioners shared their experiences of using Mind of My Own. A 'hearts and minds' video was created which included Rachel Farnham (Head of Children's Social Care) and Martyn Stenton (Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children) talking about the benefits of Mind of My Own and the expectation that all children and young people are offered Mind of My Own, where appropriate. Following the refresh, there was a significant increase in Mind of My Own being used generally across the service (see table below). In May 2024, Durham received an award at Mind of My Own's annual awards 'Vox Con' for 'Standout Organisation.' This award was chosen based on usage, our sentiment towards Mind of My Own and our dedication to making it work within our Local Authority.

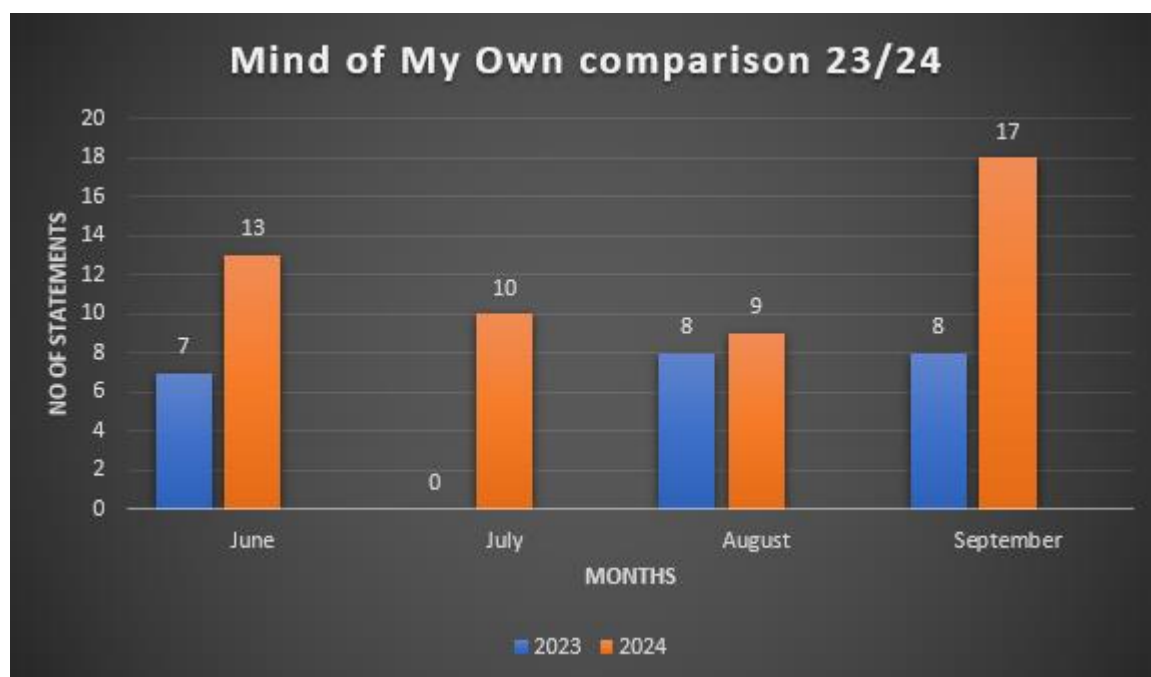


### Update regarding Mind of My Own usage within the Children in Care and Care Leavers Service

- 12 An overview of Mind of My Own was provided to Corporate Parenting Panel in November 2023, which was part of a wider participation and engagement update. It was requested that the next update would be specific to the Children in Care and Care Leavers teams.
- 13 It is important to note that Mind of My Own is just one method used to seek children/young people's views. The service uses a variety of other creative ways to capture the voice of children/young people, depending on their preference and what works best for that child/young person at that time. Such methods include direct work with children/young people, direct conversations, creative play, surveys, participation and engagement groups, independent visitors and through advocates. 69 children are currently accessing independent visitors and 24 children are waiting to be matched with a visitor. There is a recruitment

campaign currently with a plan to have 100 children matched by early 2025. 12 new volunteers are currently being inducted.

- 14 Whilst there has been some progress evident in recent months with regards to usage of Mind of My Own, this continues to be at a much slower pace than we would expect.
- 15 The below table compares usage of Mind of My Own from June, July, August and September 2023 to those same months within 2024. This includes usage across the Children in Care and Care Leavers teams including the Permanence team and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) team. The data also includes where Mind of My Own has been used within children's homes as the children residing in those homes have a social worker from the Children in Care teams. The data does not include fostering who primarily have used Mind of My Own to capture children's views for foster carers reviews. This data does not include children in care open to Families First Teams.



- 16 Whilst the data shows progress from the previous year, the number of statements received within this service compared to the number of children is significantly low. It is expected that only a small number of statements would be received by the Permanence team as they primarily work with much younger children who have a plan of adoption.
- 17 Data regarding Mind of My Own usage has recently started to be included in monthly performance meetings to drive increased usage across the Children in Care and Care Leaver's teams.

## **Support**

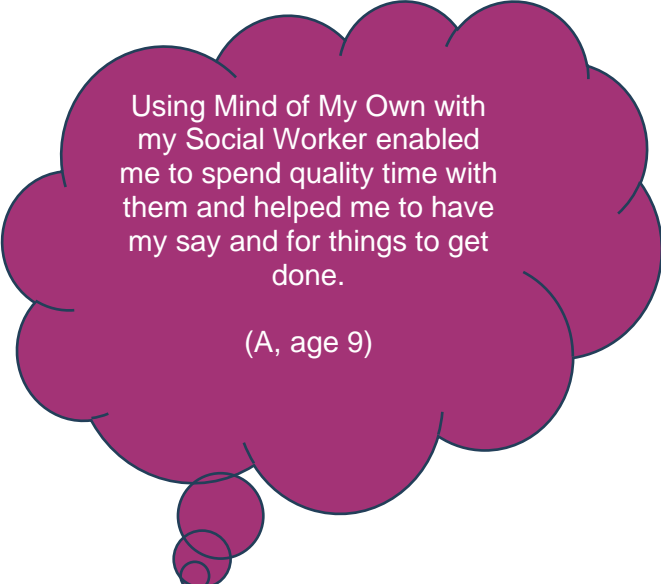
- 18 Each team throughout Children's Social Care has a Voice and Change Champion. Champions play an important role in ensuring that the children and young people we are working with have every opportunity to be listened to and their voices heard. Champions are expected to attend monthly Mind of My Own Project Groups and quarterly Voice and Change Champions Meetings. The focus of these meetings is to share learning, work together to overcome any barriers and take learning back to their teams to drive practice.
- 19 Due to staff turnover, there have not been consistent champions throughout the Children in Care teams, and this has impacted on increasing the use of Mind of My Own. More recently, champions have been identified for most teams. Since having champions in most teams, it was recognised that full Project Groups weren't having the desired impact, therefore, this year, these groups have been held in addition to targeted Project Groups that have focused on a specific service area. Three targeted Project Groups have been held for the Children in Care and Care Leavers teams this year; Mind of My Own recognise this approach as good practice.
- 20 Each team has been offered a refresher Mind of My Own demonstration and are aware of the support available for Mind of My Own.

## **Training**

- 21 A 90-minute online Mind of My Own training session is offered to all practitioners. Following completion, practitioners are signed up to their own practitioners' space to support children and young people to use the applications. They will also be able to support children and young people to sign up independently where age appropriate.
- 22 Due to staff turnover within Children in Care Teams it has been difficult to maintain a full complement of trained practitioners. This is currently being closely monitored and practitioners within this service are automatically booked onto training.

## **The Impact of Mind of My Own**

23 We have some brilliant examples of how Mind of My Own is making a difference to children and young people that are using the applications. Feedback from children and young people in our care has been included below. This includes feedback from a young person who uses Mind of My Own regularly and resides outside of County Durham.



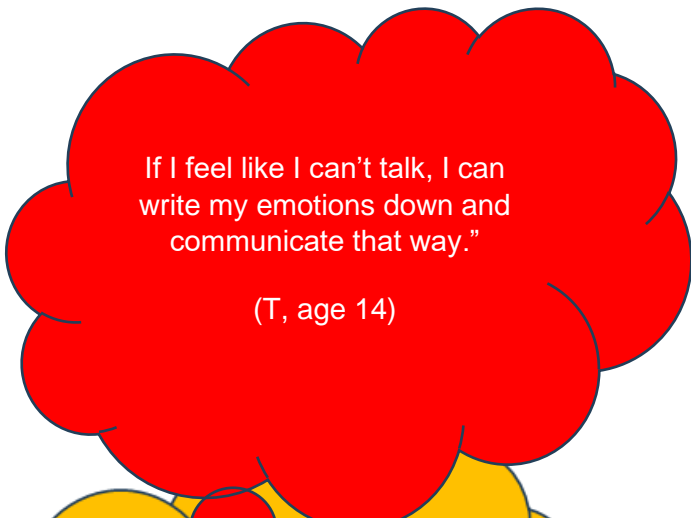
Using Mind of My Own with my Social Worker enabled me to spend quality time with them and helped me to have my say and for things to get done.

(A, age 9)



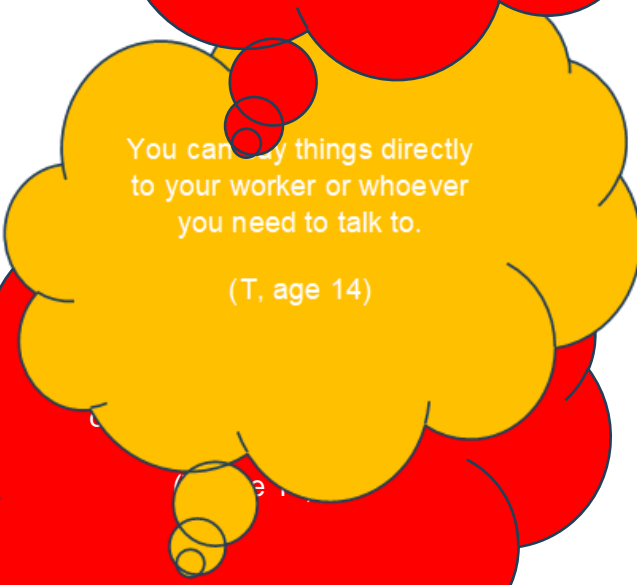
I like the pictures as it helps me to understand things better.

(C, age 10)



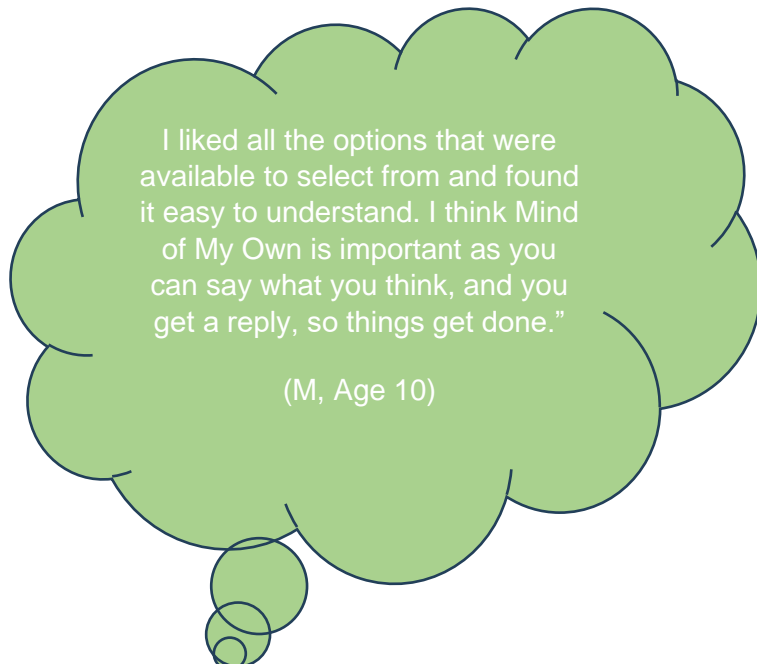
If I feel like I can't talk, I can write my emotions down and communicate that way."

(T, age 14)



You can say things directly to your worker or whoever you need to talk to.

(T, age 14)



I liked all the options that were available to select from and found it easy to understand. I think Mind of My Own is important as you can say what you think, and you get a reply, so things get done."

(M, Age 10)

- 24 Some children who have used Mind of My Own who reside in children's homes have also provided some feedback (see Appendix 2)
- 25 Where children and young people use Mind of My Own, they are benefitting from it, and it is having a positive impact. However, some children and young people don't wish to use it due to feeling they can communicate with their worker using other means such as telephone or text message. Some young people feel it is immature for them and some have reported that their carer advocates on their behalf. County Durham is working with Mind of My Own to ensure our children/young people are involved in Mind of My Own coproduction sessions so our children/young people can feedback their views directly to Mind of My Own regarding the applications. Children and young people who don't wish to use it will also be encouraged to share their views so that Mind of My Own can hear about some of the barriers and potential solutions.

### **Next Steps**

- 26 Service wide Mind of My Own briefing to be held.
- 27 Ensure all practitioners are trained throughout the service.
- 28 Continue targeted Project Groups within this service area.
- 29 Include Mind of My Own data in performance reporting.
- 30 Continue to progress and review the Mind of My Own action plan which has been developed by the Children in Care Service in collaboration with Fostering and Independent Reviewing Officers.

### **Conclusion**

- 31 Mind of My Own applications are a fantastic addition to ensure that children and young people can express their views, wishes and feelings regarding things that are important to them.
- 32 We know that for a number of reasons, Mind of My Own isn't being used as well as it could be within Children in Care and Care Leaver teams. To improve this area of practice and increase future usage, there is a refreshed tailored training and support offer, and Mind of My

Own usage data will be included in monthly performance reporting to monitor progress at a team and service level and provide assurance of impact and improvement to the leadership team.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

**Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child-** “Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”

**The Children Act 1989** places a legal duty on Local Authorities to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings.

### **Finance**

The contract with Mind of My Own was renewed in 2023, therefore, there are no additional financial implications.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

Consultation with children and young people has been included within this report.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Mind of My Own prides itself on equality and diversity and has brilliant accessibility features and language support.

### **Climate Change**

Not applicable.

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable.

### **Staffing**

Staffing to manage assigning Mind of My Own statements is currently in place.

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable.

### **Risk**

Should a child identify that they feel ‘unsafe’ ‘scared’ or ‘unhappy’ this triggers a safety link which identifies that the statement may need to be responded to much more quickly. It is expected that children are advised that Mind of My Own is not an emergency service.

### **Procurement**

Not applicable.

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## **Appendix 2: Mind of My Own feedback from children residing in residential children's homes.**

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### **How did you find out about Mind of My Own?**

*A – "I found out about Mind of My Own from my key worker after a keyworker session with him. I use it because I enjoy the noises, the photo it takes of me and talking about my feelings."*

*C- "Because A was doing it."*

*M- "Staff told me."*

### **What do you use it for?**

*A- "To be good."*

*C- "To tell H things."*

*M- "Just for fun and to answer about my life."*

### **What do you like about it?**

*A- "That it takes my photo."*

*C- "There are activities on it."*

*M- "I like the pictures."*

### **Do you think Mind of My Own gives you the chance to have your opinions heard?**

*A- "Yes."*

*C- "I can choose the answers."*

*M- "Yes."*

### **What would you say to anyone who's considering using Mind of My Own? –**

*A- "It's good."*

*C- "I like doing it and its good."*

*M- "That it is a good thing to use to learn."*