



**The
Children's
Society**

Children's Rights Annual Report

April 2019 – March 2020

Sue Preston Service Manager
The Children's Society
May 2020

Charity Registration
No. 221124

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Introduction

WHAT DO WE DO – Advocacy and Independent Visiting

The Children's Society delivers the Children's Rights Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service for Cheshire East. This report seeks to provide an overview of the work undertaken from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

We are in the 7th year of delivery and have continued to develop and grow the service over the term of the contract to respond to the changing needs of Children and Young People and the Local Authority. In October 2019, we were successful in winning the contract for a further 5 years up to 2024.

ISSUE BASED ADVOCACY

Criteria:

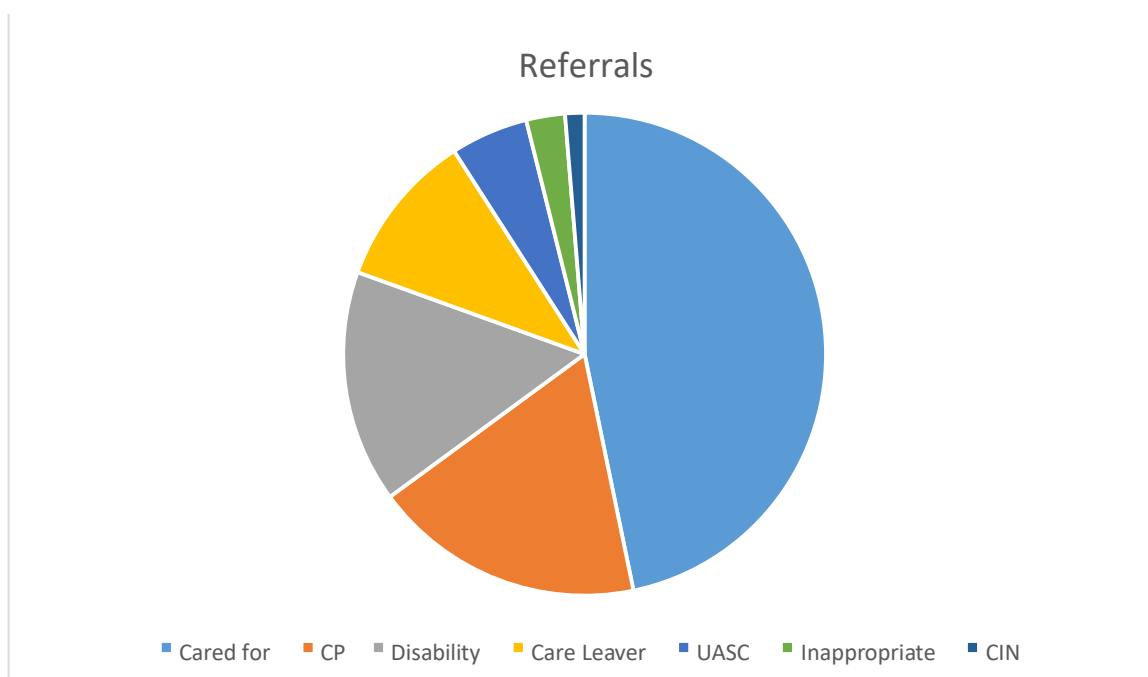
- ❖ Children and young people in care 0-21 years inclusive
- ❖ Children moving on from care to adult life and who are entitled to a service under Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- ❖ Children and young people subject to a child protection plan
- ❖ Young homeless people aged 16/17
- ❖ Children and young people making a complaint about a social work service
- ❖ Disabled children and young people 0-18 years irrespective of whether they have a current service plan
- ❖ Disabled young people after their 18th birthday receiving transition services
- ❖ Children and young people seeking asylum
- ❖ **Private Fostering added to new contract in October 2019**

A recommendation from the Ofsted inspection in 2019 was that Private Fostering and Young Homeless 16/17year olds required a more robust system of support.

Therefore, we have strengthened the pathway for referral to advocacy support for young people who are presenting as homeless to ensure this is discussed in every case, and recognise the particular vulnerabilities there may be for children who are identified as being in Private Fostering arrangements. As a result, we have agreed that they would be automatically referred for advocacy as best practice.

Advocacy Referrals

From 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, we had 77 new referrals for advocacy



The numbers on the graph of the 77 new issue based referrals are the following:

Child status	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Cared for child	36	39	34
Care leaver	8	10	13
Child with a disability	12	7	13
Child on a Child Protection plan	14	5	0
Asylum seeking child	4	2	0
Private fostered child	0	0	0
Automatic Referrals to represent child's views at CP conference	NA	NA	54
Child in Need making a complaint	1		
Inappropriate referral	2	1	0
Total	77	64	60(+54)

In 2017, the number 54 indicates when the advocacy service was receiving automatic referrals for representing children and young people within their Child Protection Conferences.

The Children's Society continues to remain available for any child who is subject to a Child Protection plan who require someone independent to help represent their wishes and feelings. Advocates continue to do visual representation to support the reviews, which has been welcomed by the Conference IROs

The focus for 2019 was on improving the quality of the visual representations within the conferences. Therefore, it was agreed that support would be provided to social workers through consultation, development of tools and training and awareness raising in terms of the child's view about the effectiveness/ impact of their safety plan

The LA have has been auditing Child Protection Reviews to ensure that visual representations of the child or young person's view's is consistently captured and shared at conference reviews by the Social Workers.

Reason for Advocacy referral:	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Placement Issue	18	18	20
Representation	12	12	14
Complaint	7	7	2
Legal Issue	1	7	1
Transition	7	6	2
Contact/ legal issue with own child/ren	3	4	2
Contact Issue	5	2	6
Education Issue	5	1	2
Financial Issue	1	0	4
Housing issue	0	0	2
Private Fostering	0	0	0
Age Assessment	2		
Inappropriate referral/ Sign posted	2	2	5
Child Protection representation	14	5	54
Total Issues for advocacy	77	64	60 (54 CP)

What the numbers tell us!

From the numbers placement issue is still one of the main issues that children and young people want advocacy support with

We have worked with 17 children and young people who have a disability or additional needs over the year. In some of these cases, advocates carried out non-instructed advocacy. This entailed; having discussions with the young person's carer, teachers, and placement staff as well as observing the young person in different settings to get an overall view of the young person's views.

Non-instructed advocacy has been crucial for a number of children and young people. In many cases, our advocates have been the consistent person in the child's life. This has enabled the advocate to have a good picture of what child or young person would want if they could tell us.

Children's Commissioner Report June 2019

The Children's Society were very pleased that the Children's Commissioner's did a report in June 2019 which recognised the essential role of advocacy for children and young people and they set recommendations to ensure children and young people get a quality Advocacy service. We responded to the report alongside the LA

[CCO-Advocacy-for-children-June-2019.](#)

here to
HELP



Deep Dive into cases open for over 6 months

We are an Issue based Advocacy Service, which tends to be a short-term piece of work, however and some of our cases had been open for 6 months or more. We decided, along with our commissioners, to carry out a deep dive on these cases; this was carried out in the last quarter January to March 2020.

This was to ensure there was no drift in cases and to look at the reasons why they remained open to advocacy of which is generally a short- term piece of work and to look at any issues that needed to be addressed by the Local Authority or our service.

We had 11 cases that had been open for over 6 months:

- Two of them were Child Protection, which is understandable as the Child Protection process could be for many months.
- One case was due to the young person's mental health needs and him struggling to get back to us the IRO asked us to persevere with him, which we did and he is now engaging with us.
- One case is in regards to young person wanting to move placement and this case has specific complexities and is consequently taking longer to arrange.
- One case was trying to connect with the young person and get him engaged in our service.
- One case was in terms of young person putting in a complaint
- One case was around a legal issue and the young person not agreeing with the Local Authority so it took a long time to resolve the issue for the young person.
- One was in terms of the young person not being happy about her care order and needing an advocate throughout the process to support her to get her views across with social care.
- Then we had three cases that were around transition into adult social care

We will continue to monitor cases to ensure that there is no drift for children and young people, whether that is due to our service or whether the Local Authority can speed up their processes for children and young people. This will ensure all children and young people receive a quality service from The Children's Society and the Local Authority

Advocate Case Study

Reason for referral:

Issue Based Advocacy:

Young person was referred for advocacy J was 18 and had been open for an extended period due to his transition and the many changes that have happened in J's life, education and placements. J was initially referred to have an independent advocate to help to oversee his transition. as there were many concerns for J and there had been drift on his plan for the future due to his behaviour, J had a very supportive family who were fully involved in all of J's care and education. Transition needed to happen soon so that J's behaviour did not escalate further.

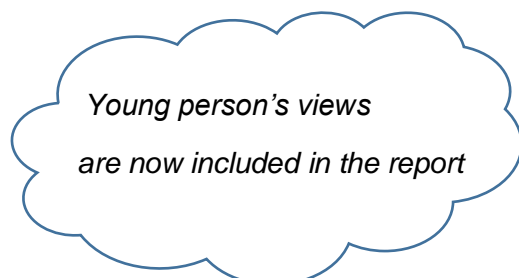
Support given:

Advocate worked with J for a long period and had been able to gain knowledge about him and how he reacts in different settings. He was observed in a variety of settings and with a variety of peers, professionals and family. Advocate attended all of J's meetings and been able to gather all the information needed and was able to feed in her observations of what J would want if he could tell us. All the work the advocate did enabled her to compile a report for adult's services to ensure he got the settled placement that he would want and deserve.

Outcome:

All the work the advocate did enabled her to compile a report for adult's services to ensure he got the settled placement that he would want and deserve. J's wishes were taken into consideration by his transition social worker. Hopefully J will be happy in his long-term placement and will be able to start recovering from his many recent moves

J's parents are feeling better and more hopeful for J's future knowing that he is going to be settled in the right kind of placement



Training Workshops to Social care staff

Social Workers have been doing visual representation at conference reviews and Cheshire East are keen for more social workers to be actively doing the visual representation at every conference review. The Children's Society have been attending Practice and Performance reviews and other meetings to share the tools and resources we use and are in the process of developing a 7 Minute Guide which can be more widely distributed to Cheshire East colleagues

Our Advocates attended Kate Mercer Training in January 2020 delivered by Kate herself to update them on the Care Act.

The Service Manager attended a webinar arranged by Kate Mercer Training on the new Coronavirus Act

We continue to raise awareness of our service at meetings and have sent out a new seven Minute Guide to our service with links to our web site and referral forms. This is also on the Local Authority website.

[7 Minute Guides Advocacy & IV Service 2020.](#)



Independent Visitor Referrals April 2019 – March 2020

Independent Visitors are volunteers who volunteer with a child or young person who are in the care of the Local Authority in residential or foster care. Volunteers usually visit the child/young person once per month, get to know them, go out, do activities, have fun, and are great role models for them, supporting independence skills and generally being there for them.

It is a great opportunity as children, young people like the fact the person they are matched with are not paid to be there and just want to spend time with them, having fun, and forming a good relationship with them, young people are matched with an Independent Visitor for at least 2 years.

In April 2019 to March 2020, we had 10 new referrals for an Independent Visitor

Child status	April 2019 – March 2020	2018	2017
Lives in foster care	9	5	3
Lives in residential	1	2	2
Home & Respite	0	0	0
Inappropriate referral	1	0	1
Total	10	7	6
Out of the total number of referrals those out of borough or with a learning need			
Out of Borough	4	2	2
Disability or learning need	3	4	4

The number of referrals for an Independent Visitor increased in 2019 as we were active in promoting the service amongst Cheshire East colleagues, however nationally referrals for an Independent Visitor remains low. A number of Independent Visitor services are actively promoting the value of independent visiting for children and young people ourselves included.

Independent Visitor Matches


In April 2019 to March 2020, we had nine new active face-to-face matches

Independent Visitor Matches	2019	2018	2017
New matches,	9 1 of which was a re match	6 2 of which were re matches	7 2 of which were re matches
Continued to support matches	7	10	11
Total	16	16	18

We have three long-term matches two were matched in March and October 2016 and one has been matched since December 2017, which is fantastic.


The volunteers have again been fantastic again this year, one young person did her first ever charity walk alongside her Independent visitor which gave her an interest in future volunteering and raising money for good causes.

Volunteers




Hello!


My name is William and I am an Independent Visitor




I live in Cheshire




Things I like




Snooker & pool



Big Parks



Music



Museums

Good Listener

Kind




Reliable


Jokey

Easy Going

Things about myself

Places & things we can do



You choose?

William our volunteer from last year who was already and waiting volunteer is now matched and the match is going extremely well, the young person moved placement during the match and William continued to be his Independent Visitor through this transition which was great.

Independent Visitor Case Study

Reason for referral:

Referral came in for an Independent visitor in January 2018. K requested an independent visitor during her cared for review. K wanted someone who is separate from social care and foster carers to help and support her through her change of circumstances.

K was matched in April 2018 to a female Independent Visitor

Support given:

K and volunteer made a good relationship very soon and have done various visits together to the cinema, Waterworld, Trafford centre and K has experienced doing a marathon with her IV which she really enjoyed and now knows about fundraising for a charity.

IV was told by foster carer that K had been self-harming, this being from contact with family. Volunteer was able to support K and offer her suggested techniques when stress triggers and the need to self-harm. Such as writing down, try to keep exercising, (volunteer is a keen mental health advocate, practising yoga and mindfulness)

In September 2019, K was taken into emergency foster care and now lives with another foster carer luckily the Independent visitor was able to still volunteer with K so the relationship was able to continue.

During the move to other foster carers, we also supported K with an advocate who supported her during the disruption meetings

Outcome:

K chats to the volunteer about the Art Therapy she attends and she says she enjoys it and had said she was going to do the race for life with her foster carer. The match

The match lasted for nearly two years until K moved to another placement; however, we felt this was a good piece of work as the volunteer had been able to continue her visits to K despite moving placements, which had a huge benefit to K and she benefited from an advocate from our service as well.

Recruitment of Independent Visitors

We recognise that a number of volunteers find our opportunities through online platforms. This year we have advertised on a number of online websites such as Charity Job, the Children's Society website, Manchester CVS, Cheshire East and West CVS. We have contacted a number of educational providers to ask to advertise online to their students including Chester University, Staffordshire University, Macclesfield College and Derby University (Buxton Campus).

In September 2019, the Service Manager attended the Corporate Parenting Meeting and asked members if they could promote and encourage anyone they knew to come forward to be an Independent Visitor.

We have redeveloped our posters and leaflets, and circulated them at colleges, businesses and faith organisations. We are liaising with The Children's Society relationship managers who collaborate with the Church of England, to distribute these resources and promote awareness of Independent Visiting. We would really like more male volunteers to come forward and have amended some of our leaflets to incorporate more male images to we hope encourage males to come forward to volunteer.



Developments

In 2019 we were successful in recruiting two Administration volunteers to support all the administration of the service and to add some extra value to the work.

One such development was a list of activities and venues compiled from different areas that we were able to send to our matched volunteers to help them with the many free activities that they could talk to their young person with and decide where to visit on the next visit. This proved very successful as it shown many places that the volunteers would not have thought of to suggest to the young person also the young people felt more in control of planning the next visit with their independent visitor

Walton Hall Gardens Warrington



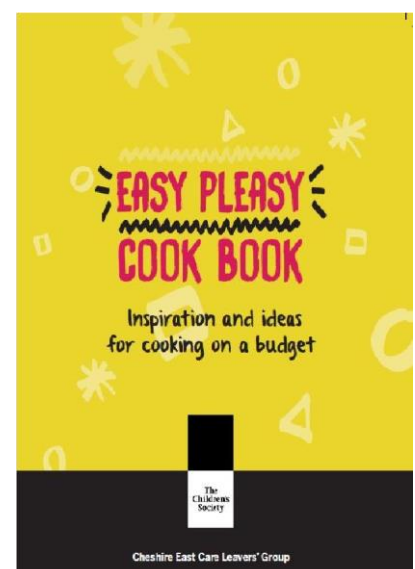
See Cheshire
list:
[Activities In
Cheshire](#)

Easy Pleasy Cook Book

If anyone can remember 2014 when Cheshire East Care Leavers alongside staff from The Children's Society and the Local Authority did a £21 pound challenge where young people and staff cooked food for £3.00. The recipes were written down and we published the Easy Pleasy Cook Book, which was a great book with some lovely easy recipes. In April 2019 another Local Authority asked us if we could share the book with their care leavers

We amended the publication and took young people's photographs and names out so it could be shared more widely to other young people in lots of different authorities which is great that Cheshire East young people have helped to share their good work with hundred's more young people

[TCS The Easy Pleasy Cook Book.WEB 2019](#)



National Work

In August 2019 we welcomed our new Chief Executive Mark Russell who is committed to disrupting the disadvantage that many of our children and young people face Mark has a passion and determination to protect, support and speak up for children and young people



As a national organisation we are able to share some of our research and publications with the local authority so whenever we are in meetings or when the organisation publishes anything we pass this onto our Cheshire East Colleagues which has been greatly received.

Please see the publications we have shared over the year:

[*The Good Childhood Report 2019*](#)

[Good Childhood Report-2019-youth-summary](#)

[Bright-Light-Guide-for-Care-Leavers.](#)

[*CCE Toolkit.*](#)

[You are not on your own.](#)

[Loneliness.in .childhood.2019](#)

[*Recruitment Stages CCE*](#)

[*Counting-lives-report July 19.*](#)

[*TACT-Language-that-cares-2019*](#)

In January 2020 we moved offices from Warrington to Greater Manchester which was a saving to us in terms of office use.

Covid 19

In March 2020 all, our worked changed due to the Covid 19 restrictions, meaning all face-to-face work was no longer happening. However, this did not stop our staff or volunteers who continued to have contact with the children and young people remotely following all the safe guidelines from the Children's Society.

We regularly update our commissioner on any changes to the work, following any Government announcements and are looking into April 2020 to develop the service to ensure children and young people continue to receive a quality service in whatever ways the future holds for us all. A challenge like Coronavirus means young people may need support in new and different ways. We will do everything in our power to make sure we can be there and give them the support they need.

We continue to receive referrals for independent visitors, and we are recruiting virtually to ensure there is a limited delay for children and young people.

Volunteers are sending cards to their young person and calling them on the phone during the lock down in order to continue the match virtually.

Managing IV matches safely during the Coronavirus pandemic



We are members of the National Independent Visitor network, which gives us the opportunity to find out what is happening nationally in terms of volunteering as well as sharing good practice and receiving up to date information

They are working on a document with information drawn from Network members like ourselves, the National Volunteer Standards and Net-Aware. To develop a resource on managing Independent Visitor matches during the Coronavirus pandemic

We hope the document to be published in April 2020 so we can make use of it as we look to the future.

Our plans for the future

Continue to grow and develop Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service responding to emerging Best Practice, the requirements of Cheshire East Council and The Children's Society

Continue to share our national work amongst both CE colleagues and the wider partnerships

Create more tools and resources to share with Cheshire East colleagues in terms of children's rights and the voice of the child

Develop creative ways of working with children and young people during the Covid 19 restrictions and beyond

Recruit volunteer ambassadors to visit the Local Authorities Children's Homes and offer low-level advocacy support

Develop safe and creative approaches to a blended method of both face-to-face and virtual contact for our Independent Visitor matches

Work with the Local authority in ensuring all children and young people who are subject to a Private Fostering Arrangement have the opportunity of an advocate if they choose to

Work with the Local authority in ensuring all 16 & 17 years olds declared homeless have the opportunity of an advocate if they choose to.

